

## BOOKS

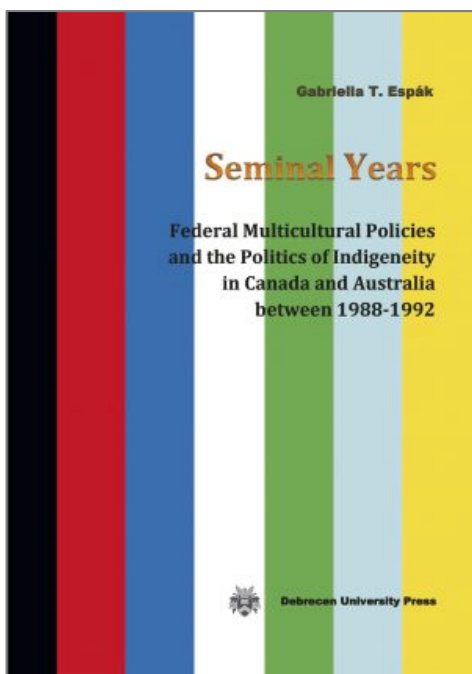
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**Gabriella T. Espak, *Seminal Years. Federal Multicultural Policies and the Politics of Indigeneity in Canada and Australia between 1988-1992*, Debrecen: Debrecen University Press, 2020, 170 p.**

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As any common sense person knows all too well there is no pure society from the ethnic, religious, or cultural point of view. The problem is, on one hand, to manage this diversity in such a way as to give as few frustrations as possible to all the members of society, on the other hand, to establish the steps that turn principles from theoretical frames into guiding doctrines in the social, political, and cultural practice.

In this context, the book of Gabriella T. Espak brings a very challenging comparison. The intellectual territory on which the Hungarian scholar treads is



quite interesting and thought provoking. Comparisons between Canada and Australia, two Anglophone countries, have already been made by such researchers as Louis Hartz<sup>1</sup>, Freda Hawkins<sup>2</sup>, Lisa Chiton<sup>3</sup> or Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel<sup>4</sup>. Espak's new point is her ability to connect multiculturalism and indigeneity. Canada and Australia are very well-chosen samples, as they are countries, cultures whose founding

myths are immigration and the newcomers' encounter with the indigenous populations. The author chose a very relevant span of time (1988-1992) in order to

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<sup>1</sup> Hartz, Louis. 1969. *The founding of new societies: studies in the history of the United States, Latin America, South Africa, Canada, and Australia*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

<sup>2</sup> Hawkins, Freda. 1991. *Critical years in immigration: Canada and Australia compared*. McGill-Queen's Press-MQUP.

<sup>3</sup> Chilton, Lisa. 2007. *Agents of empire: British female migration to Canada and Australia, 1860-1930*. University of Toronto Press.

<sup>4</sup> Swain, Shurlee, and Margot Hillel. 2017. "Child, nation, race and empire: Child rescue discourse, England, Canada and Australia, 1850-1915." *Child, nation, race and empire*. Manchester University Press.

explore the evolution of multiculturalism as well as the conflict between the Indigenous minority nationhood and the majority nationhood. These years have amply proven that the problem of multiculturalism cannot miss in any political, historical, or cultural discussion of a society. Nowadays multiculturalism is more topical than ever. In Canada the ideological combat between different understandings of nationhood led to a re-examination of the constitution, in Australia the ideological combat turned into a re-examination of the notion of Australian land and its history. This created a crisis of national identity because the plight of the Aboriginal Natives had been wiped out or neglected from the national narrative. The history of the (Australian) land was to be re-examined.

Espak's book has a very balanced and symmetrical structure alternating the discussion of the Canadian and the Australian multiculturalism. The study begins with the presentation of the circumstances and the significance of the Meech Lake Accord, a series of proposed amendments to the Constitution of Canada negotiated in 1987 by Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and the ten Canadian provincial premiers. The problem that Mulroney tried to solve was to give satisfaction to Quebec and the French-Canadian minority as a founding ethnic group of Canada. In 1988 the Canadian Parliament passed the Canadian Multicultural Act. Canada was the first country in the world to tackle the problem of preserving and enhancing multiculturalism. The basis of this Act was the individual's inherent right to his/her culture and language. But the Multicultural Act only did not actually solve the problem; it just stirred up a hornet's nest. Certain Canadians felt they had

been left out of the constitutional discussions and reforms, others felt that their individual or collective rights would be jeopardized. In fact, the problems of the First Nations, the Indigenous of Canada, as well as the integration of the immigrants from Third World countries (especially from the Caribbean islands), were neglected. In fact, the focus was on appeasing the discontent of Quebec and its inhabitants.

Espak insists on a prominent political figure of those years. Elijah Harper (1949-2013), a Canadian Ojibwe politician and member of the Canadian Parliament, who was very vocal and influential at the time of the Meech Lake Accord. Harper protested because the Accord had been negotiated without taking into account the existence of the native peoples as if the European colonizers had found *terra nullius* when they came to Canada.

In 1992, Prime Minister Brian Mulroney negotiated the Charlottetown Accord with ten other provincial premiers to amend the Canadian Constitution. The goal was to obtain Quebec's consent to the Constitution Act of 1982. Espak concludes very efficiently that this text "tried to satisfy all parties, including Indigenous peoples" (110), but it ignored a new reality. In the meantime, numerous immigrants from the Caribbean had come to Canada. The syntagm "in Canada's interest" was no longer unanimously interpretable" (111) because the structure of the ethno-cultural groups that make up Canada had changed. Espak considers that it is very useful to compare this Accord with the views on ethnic groups' rights of the Canadian scholar, Will Kymlicka. Efforts have been made to satisfy both group and individual demands but the problem of multiculturalism still haunts the political life of Canada. It is a work in progress and since

1992 the intelligentsia and the courts have contributed a lot to the public opinion formation in this respect.

Half of Gabriella T. Espak's survey is dedicated to the analysis of Australian approaches to multiculturalism from 1988 till 1992. After World War II masses of poor British people as well as immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe came to Australia encouraged by the local authorities' efforts to maintain Australia white. In 1966 the White Australia Policy was repelled and the number of migrants from Asia and South America increased. Multicultural policies became more than necessary. Still, the first inhabitants of Australia, the Native Aboriginal populations were forgotten by the establishment. The first Australians themselves made their political claims known. In 1988, a Festival of the Aboriginal peoples was organized at Barunga. The Aboriginal elders took advantage of this opportunity and presented the then Prime Minister Bob Hawke a document called *The Barunga Statement* which called for a treaty that would recognize the Aboriginal rights to land. Prime Minister Hawke signed the statement during his visit to the Festival but unfortunately, it was never brought before Parliament.

It was only on 3 June 1992 that the High Court of Australia ruled that *terra nullius* should not have been applied to Australia. This decision – known as the Mabo decision – recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have rights to the land – rights that existed before the British arrived and can and must

still exist today. The Mabo decision made possible an agreement that had been demanded by the Aboriginal elders already in 1988. The Barunga Agreement signed in 2018 at the same Barunga Festival already mentioned above enforced the new Australian paradigm of understanding land rights.

The conclusion is that after 1992 multiculturalism got consolidated both in Canada and in Australia. Ruminating on the differences between Canada and Australia in terms of history of immigration and political evolution is an excellent occasion to prove that the diversity of multicultural situations should not lead to neglecting basic and fundamental respect for humans, for all humans. Gabriella T. Espak's study is a very well documented research of multiculturalism (in Australia and Canada), which convinces the reader of the importance of multiculturalism as a public policy. Of course, multiculturalism can have different meanings and even more diverse political enforcements but its most important merit is that it relies on the principle of equality between the different ethno-cultural groups that make up a certain society. That these groups differ in needs and demands, that they may change in composition, is very true but neglecting their particular situation, levelling them is not in the interest of anybody. Based on a rich and very well-chosen bibliography, Gabriella T. Espak's book is an excellent contribution to the international scholarship on multiculturalism.

**MIHAELA MUDURE**

*Professor Emerita, Babeş-Bolyai University*

*Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

*Email: michaela.mudure@ubbcluj.ro*

