

## Book Review

Will. C. van den Hoonaard. *Silent Ethnicity: The Dutch in New Brunswick*. Fredericton: New Ireland Press, 1991, 100 pp. Paperback.

Canada is a land of immigrants, and multiculturalism has become an accepted fact in this country. But has multiculturalism not too often been perceived in terms of "visible" minorities, those easily distinguishable by skin colour or facial features, or in terms of traditional costumes, food and music?

Not all ethnic minorities in this country are so clearly "visible" or recognizable. Nor are their contributions necessarily of a traditional material kind. Yet what they bring to Canadian culture is nonetheless real, albeit more intangible and "invisible".

Will van den Hoonaard, professor of Sociology at the University of New Brunswick, introduces the term "silent ethnicity" as a way of speaking about immigrants who are largely "invisible" and whose contributions are ideological rather than material. He asserts that Dutch Canadians in New Brunswick represent "that category of ethnic groups where the tangible expressions of culture are weak or absent, but where silent ethnicity continues to live on." (13) He argues that silent ethnicity "eludes current multicultural policies; yet constitutes the actual challenge. This silent challenge is critical because it deals with matters that do not easily come out in the open, and because it deals with beliefs and unconscious attitudes." Then he poses the question: "Can we honestly speak of a multi-cultural society if these silent dimensions are missing from the equation?"

Van den Hoonaard, himself a Dutch immigrant to Canada, traces Dutch presence in the Maritimes as far back as 1674. He examines their current demographic patterns, their language, marriage, home life, and their religious, ecclesiastical and organizational patterns. In a final chapter he examines in some detail areas where the Dutch make substantial contributions: agriculture, horticulture,

music, crafts, the hospitality industry and grocery business, architecture and engineering.

Van den Hoonaard asserts that such contributions are not typically Dutch. However, when "studied in the proper cultural context which is intangible, these contributions are moored to the Dutch sense of moral geography, freedom of expression, civic responsibility, and value placed on home and family life." (75) He concludes that the Dutch of New Brunswick do not express an overt ethnic affiliation. Their ethnicity, he discovers, is centred on the non-public aspects of culture. With some surprise, he notes that it is religion, not ethnicity, that plays a central role in their lives.

Van den Hoonaard presents a very interesting thesis: We are challenged to reflect on the impact of "silent ethnicity", and to broaden our understanding of multiculturalism. Unfortunately, *Silent Ethnicity* suffers from a lack of conceptual and scholarly rigor. The innumerable typographical errors, missed words, double words, compressed type are most annoying. Further, while improper syntax may be a result of the author's own admitted "Nederlish" (a qualification (?) which should appear in the preface, not Chapter Four), it nonetheless has no place in a scholarly work. Also, short summaries at the end of certain chapters did not make up for a much needed concluding chapter.

Sections of the book left this reader rather puzzled. Fifty-two percent of the Dutch in New Brunswick are said to be Catholic. But is this percentage sufficient to conclude that the Dutch are then "predominantly Catholic or "overwhelmingly Catholic" (54)? In one place Van den Hoonaard "assumes that the 'Dutch' church must play a relatively minor role in the lives of many Dutch" (54). Two paragraphs later we read, "Whether Catholic or Christian Reformed, the Dutch in New Brunswick participate actively in the work of their respective churches." Deep divisions are said to exist among the Dutch in the province (56). But these divisions are not explored sufficiently, nor is

solid evidence given to support such a claim.

What the Weberian analysis has to do with Calvinists occupying the highly developed areas in the Netherlands and the Catholics the inland and southwestern regions is not made clear (52). Neither is the use of the Weberian thesis helpful in shedding light on the 1948-58 Calvinist immigrant experience. Furthermore, the claim -- and here he quotes B.P. Hofstede -- that their "pursuit of social success in the economic field was a religious avocation" (53) is left unexplained.

*Silent Ethnicity* is successful in challenging our understanding of multiculturalism. Its lack of scholarly rigor, thoroughness and clarity unfortunately takes away from what otherwise is an intriguing socio-cultural study.