

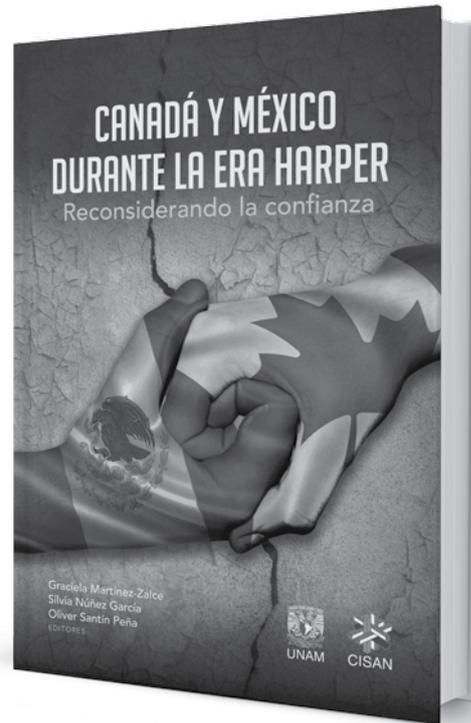
**Canadá y México durante la era Harper:
reconsiderando la confianza**

(Canada and Mexico in the Harper Era:
Reconsidering Confidence)

Graciela Martínez-Zalce, Silvia Núñez García,
and Oliver Santín Peña, eds.

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The history and current situation of Canada are dealt with only modestly in North American studies, which for several decades now have centered on the United States, its history, its domestic and foreign policy, or its relations with its neighbors, just to cite a few examples. Justin Trudeau's taking office as prime minister in November 2015 positioned Canada as one of the central actors in international politics, above all thanks to his government's leadership in receiving refugees, mainly Syrians. However, in Mexico a great deal is still unknown about the country of the maple leaf, whether its politics, culture, society, or economy. In addition, the importance of a broader, closer relationship between our two countries is not widely recognized.

In this context, the research done by the Center for Research on North America (CISAN) has been key for generating knowledge about our northern NAFTA partner. Since its creation in 1988, this center has been committed, as former Director Silvia Núñez García has said, to broadening and strengthening research on Canada, which has been structurally weak for more than two decades. The book *Canadá y México durante la era Harper: reconsiderando la confianza* (Canada and Mexico in the Harper Era: Reconsidering Confidence),

published in 2017, contributes admirably to the mission of offering literature about Canada. Its six articles deal with issues like Canada's power structure, management of energy resources, and diplomatic relations with Mexico in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, among others.

This volume offers an approach to today's Canada, for example, for understanding how a Conservative government managed to stay in office almost 10 years in a country that abroad is seen as liberal, or for breaking down stereotypes about Canada's commitment to the environment and sustainable development.

Silvia Núñez García's prologue presents some of the commonalities of both our nations, which make it possible to see how closer bilateral relations are not only possible, but desirable after decades of a cold, distant connection. In her opinion, both Mexico and Canada are characterized by their "vocation for peace, harmony, and cooperation; . . . both countries are identified by their opposition to protectionist policies and their favorable attitude to the free market, with particular attention to actions that strengthen democratic governance."¹

Núñez García also shares how, beyond the official bilateral relationship, other actors are the ones who have

fostered ties the most, such as civil society, academia, and sub-national governments. This is particularly interesting since it is a case of how paradiplomacy is sometimes more effective than diplomatic relations on the level of foreign ministries or heads of state. One example can be found in Quebec, one of Canada's ten provinces, which has forged close links to its counterparts in other countries, and Mexico is no exception.

In the article "Antecedentes y consolidación del liderazgo conservador de Stephen Harper en Canadá" (Background and Consolidation of Stephen Harper's Conservative Leadership in Canada), Oliver Santín Peña presents a detailed review of the Conservatives' rise to power. It began in 2000 with the emergence of the Canadian Reform Conservative Alliance after the Liberal Party entered a crisis due to the corruption scandals that began to explode during the government of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in 2002.

It would seem that from 2003 to 2011, Canadian politics was a web of early elections, party leadership reshufflings, and "punishment" votes by the electorate. However, Oliver Santín's article presents the period simply, thanks to his efforts to address non-experts in Canadian politics. His article emphasizes the figure of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper; in Santín's words, studying him "will be indispensable for understanding what has happened in Canada in such a short time, and the role the country is going to play in coming years."²

In his article "Canadá y México en el contexto del TLCAN: veinte años de relaciones problemáticas" (Canada and Mexico in the Context of NAFTA: 20 Years of Problematic Relations), author Athanasios Hristoulas deals with three stages in the two countries' bilateral relations: the years before the signing of the agreement, the period after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States, and the nine years of the Stephen Harper government. This allows the reader to examine both the similarities and differences between the two countries around sensitive issues such as trade and national and regional security.

He makes it clear, for example, that during the second half of the twentieth century, Canadian foreign policy was interventionist, particularly during the Cold War. This orientation was manifested in its participation in the North Atlantic Treaty Organiza-

tion (NATO). In that same period, however, Mexico defended non-intervention in line with the Carranza and Estrada Doctrines. On the other hand, Hristoulas makes an interesting, precise analysis of the complexities of the NAFTA negotiations, which Canada was not initially a part of due to both the Canadians' and the Mexicans' wariness about their privileged relationship with the United States.

Along these same lines, "Visa canadiense para mexicanos: una reflexión sobre la construcción mediática de Canadá sobre México" (Canadian Visa for Mexicans: Thoughts on Canada's Media Construction of Mexico), by Juan Carlos Barrón Pastor, looks at how the imposition of the Canadian visa on Mexicans tensed bilateral relations, above all in the framework of Stephen Harper's 2014 state visit to Mexico to commemorate NAFTA's twentieth anniversary. The effects of that imposition, as well as positions later taken by both Harper and Mexican President Peña Nieto, are analyzed from a pertinent geopolitical perspective. What Barrón makes very clear is that all these events, which he terms a "diplomatic disconnect," cooled bilateral relations as never before. At the end of his article, he presents a prospective scenario of those relations and Canadian positions on migration.

In "Cómo comprender a Canadá en tiempos de restricción" (Understanding Canada in Times of Restriction), Graciela Martínez-Zalce delves into Mexican-Canadian relations from another perspective, that of cultural exchange. Based on this, she shows how certain artistic performances, like those of Quebec's Cirque du Soleil, and events like film festivals and concerts, contribute to generating knowledge about Canada, but above all to social and cultural understanding. In her words, "Entertainment is a very big window, to the point that it is the first item on the Canadian Embassy's agenda in Mexico in terms of the Mexican public's introduction to Canadian culture."³

Also very pertinent are the articles "Los recursos naturales en Canadá durante el gobierno de Stephen Harper" (Natural Resources in Canada during the Stephen Harper Government), by María Teresa Gutiérrez Haces, and "Networks in Canadian Cultural Analysis," by Will Straw. The first explains the Conservative government's strategy for energy resource management, particularly of Alberta's tar sands, and explains in detail

the role and relation of the onetime Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) with Harper's energy projects. Particularly interesting is the polemic around cases of impunity of Canadian energy companies.

Will Straw's article is very useful for academics from the region because it analyzes different ways in which Canadian studies are carried out around the world and some of the tools for deepening research in certain areas like the arts. He also argues how and why what has been called "Canadianization" marked research and knowledge generation about Canada.

Why has Canada abandoned the Kyoto Protocol? Why have Mexico and Canada not managed to consolidate a strong, close bilateral relationship? What is the make-up of Canadian identity? The answers to these and many other questions can be found in *Ca-*

nadá y Mexico durante la era Harper: reconsiderando la confianza, a contribution to contemporary Canadian studies. ■■

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¹ Silvia Núñez García, "Prólogo," *Canadá y México durante la era Harper: reconsiderando la confianza* (Mexico City: CISAN, 2017), pp. 9-10.

² Oliver Santín Peña, "Antecedentes y consolidación del liderazgo conservador de Stephen Harper en Canadá," in *op. cit.*

³ Graciela Martínez-Zalce, "Cómo comprender a Canadá en tiempos de restricción," in *op. cit.*, p. 127.
