



Book Review

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Patricia Cormack and James F Cosgrave, *Desiring Canada: CBC Contests, Hockey Violence, and other Stately Pleasures*. Toronto, ON, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2013. 257 pp. \$27.95. ISBN: 9781442613911 (paper); \$70.00. ISBN: 9781442645653 (cloth)

Cormack and Cosgrave's book on the construction of Canadian identity starts out with the famous (within Canada) assertion by former Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau that "There's no place for the state in the bedrooms of the nation." This quote is used to anchor the authors' discussion around how the passions and desires of Canadians – the focus of the book – are closely regulated and constructed by the state. Cormack and Cosgrave use a number of symbols and signifiers of Canadian identity to make this argument: hockey (particularly violence), Tim Horton's coffee, the state broadcasting channel Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), television comedy shows, and gambling. These themes are each divided into different chapters, but in reading the book, we find that they are all actually linked closely together. For example, hockey is without a doubt the most popular sport in Canada, but it may not have become that way without the CBC's weekly broadcasts of the sport on Hockey Night in Canada. In such a way, it seems that the CBC actually lies at the heart of three of the book's chapters, and is really the focusing point of many of the book's main arguments.

In their chapters on the CBC (Chapters 1 and 5), Cormack and Cosgrave make the argument that the CBC's role as a public institution is more than just making profits through its broadcasts, but also to foster national identity through entertainment. This is demonstrated poignantly in Chapter 5 ("The funny state apparatus"), where it is argued that Rick Mercer's weekly comedy show (*The Rick Mercer Report*) is structured in such a way as to highlight key aspects of Canadian identity, such as rurality, remoteness, nature, and even the heroic power of the state. The authors point out that some of the CBC's critics (and even CBC executives themselves) have argued that the network's mandate is to socialize Canadians to share the interests of the state, and to foster a sense of shared identity. This is done not only through television shows and news programs but also through commercials and contests that are aired on the network, and used to promote key ideals and symbols of "Canadianness." Since, as is argued in the book, Canadians are a "state-loving" people, their interests and forms of identity are more easily co-opted by the state.

The book's second chapter on Tim Horton attributes the success of the coffee chain to the trend toward consumption (as opposed to economic or political) based forms of identity that began to emerge in Canada during the early 1990s. The chapter also argues that the brand has become such a strong marker of Canadian identity due to its integration with and explicit support of other Canadian "institutions" like hockey, the military, and the state. For instance, the authors use the example of the "Timbits" program which sponsors youth hockey in the country, and the Tim Horton's restaurants in Canadian military bases abroad to demonstrate these linkages. Interestingly, they attribute the popularity of Tim Hortons' annual "Roll up the Rim" contest to the increasing prominence of gambling in Canadian society, which was a nice connection to the chapter on gambling.

In a similar fashion, the third chapter focuses on professional hockey as a symbol of Canadian identity and demonstrates how it has become a key marker of Canadian identity through its associations with and support from the state. The most interesting aspect of the chapter for me was the argument that professional hockey, and its mediation by the state, socializes Canadian men through the tropes of masculinity inherent in broadcasts of the sport. The authors point especially to the charismatic co-host of Hockey Night in Canada, Don Cherry, whose way of talking and world views are extremely masculine and right-wing in nature. Indeed, his comments often offend some viewers, and is in some ways an unlikely spokesperson for the state's broadcasting channel. Nonetheless he is a Canadian icon and is famous for his unapologetic support of fighting in hockey, and chastising of foreign hockey players – particularly Europeans – who are "pansies" and thus inferior to "tough Canadian boys" (see pp. 122–125). As such, Cormack and Cosgrave develop a persuasive argument around the popularity of fighting in hockey, as well as the changing role of the Canadian military, which could signal that Canada is actually a more violent nation than commonly believed.

On first read, I found the chapter on gambling an odd selection for the book, as I did not initially consider it to be a popular Canadian pass-time. Although on closer consideration, and during a recent trip back home to Canada, I recognized that different forms of gambling were almost as prominent as Tim Hortons. In fact (although not mentioned in the chapter) when the National Hockey League was locked out during the 2004–2005 season, televised poker quickly replaced it as the prime time entertainment option on Canadian sport channels, and still enjoys regular broadcasts. The authors use this discussion of gambling to speak to the ways in which states sponsor or promote different forms of activities in order to shape their citizens' desires, and that the chosen activities change over time. In particular, they note how gambling in Canada has gone from an illegal or shadow activity, to one that is now fully legal and socially acceptable, and that the state now capitalizes on this to its own economic benefit (but harm for many of its subjects).

One general critique that I had of the book is that the theorists drawn on to add conceptual depth at times seemingly comes out of nowhere, and lacks sufficient

depth, and relevancy. Indeed, it is important for such a book to contain strong links to theory, as otherwise there would be little separating the book from a pop-culture book on Canadian symbols of identity. Nonetheless, I felt that the conceptual points made were often forced, and did little to aid the authors' argument. In fact, there are numerous instances of this throughout the book (with some exceptions), which make the book seem almost like an introductory textbook on Canadian sociology or Canadian identity, meant to introduce undergraduate students to key sociologists and basic sociological concepts. This would of course be fine, but it seems that this was not the targeted aim for the book. Despite the fact that *Desiring Canada* is sufficiently explanatory to be read by non-Canadians or Canadianists, on the whole, this book will most likely appeal and speak to those with some familiarity of and background on Canadian cultural institutions. Moreover, it is accessible enough to be read by educated readers outside of academia, and should be of interest to the general public within Canada, or those with a general interest in the country.

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