Happy Homes for a Healthy Democracy?

Creating "the Normal" in Cold War Canada

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The postwar period was both a new genesis and a false dawn because, while the creation of an expansive welfare state significantly altered the terms of Canadians' relationship with the state, it also closed off the possibility of deeper structural change affecting the processes of state formation. Against the backdrop of the anxiety, insecurity, and moral panic unleashed by the Cold War, Canadians were encouraged by popular culture and the state to retreat into the family. The family, therefore, became the primary site of social existence and the principal focus of public policy, wherein the home was framed as a formative site for raising healthy and well-adjusted citizens. The state and popular culture asserted that nuclear family living was the key to both household stability and ultimate victory in the Cold War.[1] In this light, the nuclear family can be understood as a microcosm of the nation, in which a healthy democracy was indeed dependent upon happy homes. As developments unfolding in Cold War Canada are traditionally understood through the rubric of the nation and national security, thinking beyond the nation complicates how Canada's Cold War national consensus was forged. The liberal order framework called historians to think of Canada as a historically specific project of rule which sought to "extend across time and space a belief in the […] primacy of the […] individual."[2] By considering how liberal rights and psychological discourses framed the state's and popular culture's response to the Cold War, the narrow boundaries of the nation-state can be transcended so as to arrive at a more critical and dynamic understanding of Cold War Canada.[3] This analysis of the formation of Canada's 1945-

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[1] Mona Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal: Psychology, Schooling, and the Family in Postwar Canada,* Toronto, Ont: University of Toronto Press, 1999, 57-58.

[2] Ian McKay," The Liberal Order Framework: A Prospectus for a Reconnaissance of Canadian History," In Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant, *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution,* University of Toronto Press, 2009, 620-1, 623.

[3] Adele Perry, "Women, Racialized People, and the Making of the Liberal Order," In Michel Ducharme and Jean-François Constant, *Liberalism and Hegemony: Debating the Canadian Liberal Revolution,* University of Toronto Press, 2009, 276-277.

1970 national consensus builds upon the scholarship of Franca Iacovetta (2006), Julie Guard (2019), Mona Gleason (1999), Steve Hewitt (2002), Ian McKay (2000), and Adele Perry (2009). This paper draws on articles from *Macleans* and *Chatelaine* to demonstrate how liberal rights and psychological frameworks framed popular culture discussions of the family, the nation, sexuality, immigration, and anti-Communism. Although traditionally defined by the ascendancy of psychology, national consensus, and unprecedented prosperity, this paper argues that the insecurity and anxiety of the 1945-1970 period were heavily obscured because the problems of family life were framed in individualistic terms. This paper first considers how the nuclear family ideal was inherently exclusionary because, even as many Canadians aspired to it, few could realize it due to material and psychological constraints. This paper second considers how psychological and liberal rights discourses were deployed to pathologize deviance and preserve the national consensus. This paper third examines how female political activism was subordinated to the wider project of Cold War anti-Communism by considering what was and what was not an acceptable assertion of one's political rights in the face of an existential Communist threat.

The first three decades of the postwar period are traditionally characterized as times of unprecedented economic prosperity, social stability, a baby boom, suburbanization, and consumer culture. This period witnessed a significant revision of the terms of the relationship between the Canadian state and the citizenry, as the creation of various social assistance programmes extended economic citizenship to an unprecedented number of Canadian families.[4] This is not to say, however, that the fruits of affluence and prosperity were universally shared by all Canadians. Lamenting the limits of postwar affluence, a concerned mother wrote in a February 1970 issue of *Chatelaine* that "two widely held myths about family life […] are that we live in a child-oriented

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[4] Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada,* University of Toronto Press, 2000, 5.

society and that the conventional family is the best possible way to raise children. But the family today is often only a father, mother and children, and more and more often it is a single parent and children. […] I wish we Canadians would think less in terms of more elaborate buildings and equipment and more about people.[5] This passage demonstrates how a household's finite material and psychological resources impeded its ability to act as a self-contained bubble. Another consideration one must bear in mind when examining the limitations of postwar affluence is that the nuclear family ideal was premised on individual households being headed by and provided for by a husband, the breadwinner, whose salary would then support his wife and children, as well as a roughly middle class standard of living.[6] By holding "full-time mothers, well-adjusted, bright, industrious children, and attentive fathers" as the model of nuclear family living, postwar welfare policy can be understood as having reinforced the gendered division of labour by further enshrining the male breadwinner ideology into the fabric of postwar Canada.[7] In the absence of full-time mothers and attentive fathers, the attainment of the nuclear family ideal was illusory. The passage from the February 1970 issue of *Chatelaine* thus stands in stark contrast to and demonstrates the hollowness of the nuclear family ideal, as families without sufficient economic means could not hope to attain the vision of nuclear family living held out by the state and popular culture.

Coming off the heels of the Great Depression and the Second World War, Canadians yearned for peace, security, and prosperity in the postwar period. In this age of psychological and technocratic ascendancy, professionals of many sorts, but particularly psychologists and psychiatrists, were positioned as authority figures who could help Canadians navigate the postwar

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[5] Doris Anderson, "If the Family's so Great, Help it," *Chatelaine*, February 1970, 1.
[6] Christie, *Engendering the State,* 312.
[7] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal,* 5.

order.[8] The expert class, therefore, played an integral role in shaping the political, social, and cultural agenda of the postwar period. A staple of postwar Canada's popular culture was suburban advice columns, which targeted Canadian women navigating the pressures of suburban life. Not all was well in suburban paradise, charged experts, whose identification of the supposed malcontents of suburban life formed a persistent feature of their analyses of suburbia. "Suburbia," warned Dr. Alastair MacLeod of Montreal's Mental Hygiene Institute in an October 1958 *Chatelaine* column, "is a growing threat to our mental health. […] It breeds boredom, suspicion and loneliness and disrupts family life by confusing the roles of the sexes."[9] Dr. MacLeod drew his audience's attention to the atomizing nature of suburban life, which he argued threatened to erode the bonds of community and upend the gender order. The purpose of experts' sensational rhetoric and diagnostics can be understood on the one hand as a genuine effort to raise awareness of the discontents, tensions, and ills of suburban life, but on the other hand, as an effort to reaffirm their own status as authority figures on family life.

Despite the inherently Sisyphean nature of the nuclear family ideal, support for and consent to it was manufactured through psychological discourse.[10] Dr. MacLeod's comments therefore ought to be situated in the context of the Cold War, in which the break down of families was considered tantamount to social disintegration because healthy family life was imperative to Canada's Cold War struggle. Psychology's function in cementing the national consensus can therefore be understood in terms of its ability to disseminate bourgeois values to a mass audience and maintain the *status quo*.[11] In the same October 1958 *Chatelaine* issue, Dr. MacLeod stated:

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[8] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 4.
[9] Alastair MacLeod, "The Sickness of our Suburbs," *Chatelaine*, October 1958, 23.
[10] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 4-5.
[11] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal*, 6.

"it's the over-idealization of individual worth […] that has led people to the faulty conclusion that they can live alone. It is impossible without a breaking down of health."[12] A persistent theme in his column is his caution against chastising families too callously, which reminded his readership that if they were to attain the ideal of nuclear family living, they could not become complacent and had to constantly seek out self-improvement. Furthermore, the simultaneous approbation and pathologization of suburban life can be understood in terms of the gradual deployment of rights in that family life had to be closely managed and scrutinized so as to keep the nation from being undermined.

Postwar Canadian society was, on its face, a more pluralistic, tolerant, and welcoming society. While this characterization contains grains of truth, it excludes how life in postwar Canada was premised on a very narrow set of prescribed norms that assessed what was and what was not acceptable. A central pillar of Canada's Cold War national security strategy was domestic containment, which "defined threats to acceptable norms and [was] a proactive strategy through which the body politic [was] made to emulate the values of obedience, conformity, and belief in capitalism."[13] A closer examination of life in postwar Canada reveals that while the framing of the nation as a white-settler state declined as a result of the political and cultural landscape becoming more tolerant of foreign mores, the Canadianization of newcomers remained the end goal of immigration policy.[14] Iacovetta stated: "the Citizenship Branch articulated an ideology of cultural pluralism within a bilingual, two-founding-nations context."[15] Iacovetta situates postwar immigration policy within the context of a cultural sensitivity that was extremely conscious of

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[12] MacLeod, "The Sickness of our Suburbs," 94.
[13] Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada,* Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006, 182.
[14] Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers,* 182.
[15] Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers,* 91.

challenges to the dominance of the Anglo-Celtic Protestant and Franco-Catholic founding nations, in which prospective immigrants were either admitted or denied entry on the basis of their supposed capacity to adopt the Canadian way. Although postwar Canada was decidedly more multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and pluralistic than ever before in the nation's history, it is instructive to view postwar Canada as a vertical mosaic, in which "those outside the ideal, such as working-class, immigrant, or Native families, were not only excluded but pathologized, labelled as 'abnormal' and 'poorly adjusted.'[16] A November 1961 *Macleans* column, which examines the experience of West Indian immigrants in Canada, stated: "if a [West Indian] man asks for admission [into the country,] […] he may still be refused on grounds that he doesn't belong to any of the classes of persons admissible. This formula excludes no one specifically; it just can't accommodate those not included."[17] This passage demonstrates how, through the subtleties and vagaries of Canadian immigration policy, West Indian immigration was restricted. While Canada did not embrace them, it never explicitly pushed them away, thereby placing them in an immigration limbo. Consistent with the gradual deployment of rights, while some newcomers were integrated into Canadian society, West Indian immigrants were, for the most part, unable to share in the prosperity of the postwar years.

The desirability of prospective immigrant groups was in part judged on their perceived ability to be integrated without significantly disturbing the economy or the social fabric, which undoubtedly favoured heterosexual immigrants of European origin. This is because, as the home was held to be a bulwark against Communist subversion and the "liberal subject was coded male as well as European," the spectacle of social disintegration and maladjusted families was an object

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[16] Gleason, *Normalizing the Ideal,* 5.

[17] George Lamming, "The West Indians: Our Loneliest Immigrants," *Macleans*, November 4, 1961, 52.

of considerable anxiety.[18] This sentiment is underscored in a column of the March 1964 issue of *Macleans*, which stated: "the origin of homosexuality, according to most psychiatrists, lies in an unhealthy parent-child relationship during the early years. The mother is said to bind her son to her in a seductive and dominating embrace. This influence is compounded if the father happens to be weak, passive, absent, detached, brutal or cruel."[19] As healthy and happy homes were one of Canada's premier ideological weapons in its Cold War arsenal, weak parental influences were held to yield catastrophic results for the development of the nation's children. Deviation from Anglo-Celtic heterosexual norms therefore represented a challenge to Cold War Canada's gender and sexual order, and was thus framed as anathema to the Canadian way. This ought to be read in light of a subtext in which popular culture's rhetoric equated the "conversion to communism with sexual weakness or degeneracy."[20] Furthermore, the pathologization of groups like West Indian immigrants and homosexuals is demonstrative of how the rubric of liberal individualism was used to diagnose Canadian society's ills, as sexual deviance and failing to assimilate were considered the individual's, not society's, moral failings.[21] By attributing perceived deficiencies to individuals and groups of people, the political order was absolved of the responsibility of shaping the structural conditions under which Canadians lived.

The Cold War inaugurated an age of "national insecurity," in which the federal state took up an ardent and unwavering anti-Communist posture in search of the unknowable, inscrutable, and malevolent forces subverting the fabric of Canadian society. During a period which witnessed the extension of economic and political citizenship to ordinary Canadians on an extraordinary

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[18] Perry, "Women, Racialized People, and the Making of the Liberal Order," 277.
[19] Sidney Katz, "The Harsh Facts of Life in the 'Gay 'World," *Macleans*, 7 March 1964, 18.
[20] Steve Hewitt, *Spying 101: The RCMP's Secret Activities at Canadian Universities, 1917-1997,* University of Toronto Press, 2002,, 54.
[21] Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers,* 91.

scale, one simultaneously observes the state's crackdown on dissension and radicalism. The postwar period not only laid the basis for the considerable expansion of state capacity and state services, but also of state surveillance of ordinary citizens overseen by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP).[22] At a time when Canadians were led to believe that they were confronting social disintegration, popular culture evoked the language of evolution to reassure an anxious public. This sentiment is reflected in a June 1949 *Chatelaine* column, which stated: "we [a group of housewives] are opposed to Fascism, Communism, or any form of revolution in Canada. We uphold evolution which can take place under our present form of Government in Canada."[23] This passage is demonstrative of the phenomenon of passive revolution, in which "substantial institutional concessions [from the state] were made to the multi-voiced left, but only at the cost of editing out their unacceptably aliberal elements."[24] The extension of economic citizenship to an unprecedented number of Canadian families, which granted them a greater stake in Canadian society, can thus be understood as a deterrent against revolution because there were now material incentives for Canadians to defer to the state's authority as their welfare and wellbeing were intertwined with the state's. In this light, the advent of Keynesian social democracy is indicative of state policymakers' recognition that the path forward to economic and social prosperity lay in investing in society's economic and social stability and security, thereby signalling evolution's decisive triumph over revolution in Canadian statecraft.

The Cold War's intensification further altered the postwar social contract by positioning Communism as the foremost threat to Canadian democracy. As a result of social, political, and

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[22] Hewitt, *Spying 101,* 3-5.

[23] Rae Luckock, Joy Denton Kennedy, and Mary Caldwell Agnew, "Communist Controversy," *Chatelaine,* June 1949, 5.

[24] McKay, "The Liberal Order Framework," 643.

economic issues being filtered through the lens of militant anti-Communism, any comment or action professing discontent with the state of affairs in Canada was viewed with extreme suspicion and considered potentially subversive by the state and popular culture.[25] Julie Guard stated: "individual Housewives were named and described derogatively as 'reds' in the press, and the organization was accused publicly, […] [by those in positions of authority] of being a 'Communist front' rather than a genuine consumers 'organization."[26] As "liberal theory was anchored in the privatization of women," fierce red baiting in the press stifled female political activism by restricting what was considered acceptable and legitimate political speech.[27] This required female advocacy groups, if they wished not to be branded as Communist fronts, to take up a staunchly anti-Communist and pro-Western stance, which all but forced them to frame their demands in terms of liberal rights discourse. This sentiment is underscored in a column in the April 1949 issue of *Chatelaine,* which demonstrated the extent to which marxist frameworks were tainted: "the disciples of Marx, Lenin and Stalin have launched a carefully laid International plan to seduce women's groups politically and make them slaves of Soviet foreign policy. […] This is why you find Communists in the forefront of consumers' groups, the peace movement, a civil liberties campaign or a program to combat racial intolerance."[28] Produced in the political and cultural context of fierce red baiting, this passage draws a sharp distinction between the interests of the supposedly subversive female activists and those of the state, when in fact, both groups were interested in stability and prosperity. The editorial frames women not as autonomous agents with their own distinct interests, but as static objects who were easily deceived and especially vulnerable

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[25] Julie Guard, *Radical Housewives: Price Wars and Food Politics in Mid-Twentieth-Century Canada,* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019, 10, 199.
[26] Guard, *Radical Housewives*, 199.
[27] Perry, "Women, Racialized People, and the Making of the Liberal Order," 291.
[28] Ronald Williams, "Are You a Stooge for a COMMUNIST?" *Chatelaine*, April 1949, 22.

to falling victim to their own impulses, thereby delegitimizing their claims to political citizenship. On an ideological level, this reinforced the western gender order by affirming that femininity was fragile and therefore in need of safeguarding against Soviet attempts to masculinize Canadian women. As the editorial's author essentially equated all domestic reform initiatives with Communist subversion, it is illustrative of how female claims to political citizenship were subordinated to the wider project of Cold War anti-Communism.

Coming off the heels of periods of tremendous insecurity, anxiety, and uncertainty, postwar Canada's normal, as outlined by the state and popular culture, was defined in terms of material affluence and the purportedly self-contained nature of nuclear family living, a standard which many Canadian families aspired to, but few could achieve. The state's and popular culture's vision of normalcy was modelled after an Anglo-Celtic heterosexual middle-class lifestyle, against which all other ways of life were judged and deviation from was pathologized. During a period when the spectre of Communist subversion haunted Canada's political and cultural imagination, a national consensus that was ardently hostile to revolutionary change subordinated female activism to the broader project of Cold War anti-Communism. Although the terms of the relationship between the state and Canadians was drastically altered in the postwar period, the state never lost its preoccupation with surveillance. As such, social, cultural, political, economic, and gendered developments unfolding in Cold War Canada were filtered through the lens of and subordinated to the state's and popular culture's militant anti-Communist crusade. In the name of this project, the state and popular culture were invested in downplaying the extent of domestic unrest. Despite state efforts to include groups of people previously excluded from the nation by extending economic citizenship to an unprecedented share of Canadian families, the preservation of the Canadian national project remained a central feature of the postwar national consensus.

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