avec elle. L’auteure clôt son analyse en présentant la vie de quelques veuves, certaines fortunées, d’autres plus pauvres. Comme le précise Bradbury dans l’introduction, ces biographies ont été choisies non pas parce qu’elles étaient représentatives, mais parce qu’elles démontrent la diversité des expériences vécues par les veuves montréalaises.


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Tarah Brookfield’s very good book sheds a great deal of new light on Canadian women and the Cold War. Although its title is somewhat curious – there are few Cold War comforts to be found in this book, and more than a little Cold War discomfort – its subtitle accurately reflects the book’s preoccupations. Brookfield contends that many Canadian women perceived children to be the primary potential victims of global insecurity in the decades following the Second World War. The book thus details activist women’s efforts, both at home and abroad, to “save the children” from the consequences of international military and diplomatic conflict. While Brookfield’s subjects were concerned with real children, they were also driven by visions of what historian Karen Dubinsky has called the “symbolic child”.

Brookfield’s Cold War is both long – from the immediate post-Second World War years through the 1970s – and broad. Readers of the book will be reminded of how immediate and acute concerns about the arms race and nuclear holocaust were for many Canadians, right up until the early 1980s; the Cold War discussed here, however, includes not only the stockpiling of nuclear weapons, but also North American efforts to topple Communist regimes overseas, and notably in Asia. While this is a study of Canada as a whole, readers will gain, not so much a sense of the ways in which different Canadian regions experienced the Cold War, as a sense of the experiences of key activist women, mostly English-Canadian, and their associations, such as the Voice of Women (VOW) or the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Many of these activist women were motivated, Brookfield argues, by maternalism. A key component of Canadian women’s political stances and strategies in the last decades of the nineteenth century, maternalist ideologies were still present (and useful) some seventy-five years later. While for some women, and some associations, maternalism may have simply been adopted as rhetoric, difficult to attack even in an era that insisted upon political conformity, other militant women appear to have felt deeply that they, as real, potential, or surrogate mothers, were particularly well-placed to protect and defend the human race in the face of mid-twentieth-century threats. Maternalist thinking existed alongside, and
sometimes took a back seat to, other ideologies: nationalism, for instance, predicated on a particular vision of the role that Canada might play in the Cold War, or progressive internationalism, such as that espoused by WILPF.

The first section of the book, entitled “At Home”, examines women’s efforts to stave off the consequences of the Cold War in Canada. Three chapters explore, in turn, community-based civil defence efforts; the building of fallout shelters (a campaign that never really ‘took’ with ordinary Canadian women); and campaigns in favour of disarmament. Brookfield chooses to draw upon the historiography of postwar North America that insists upon the links to be made between Cold War diplomacy, on the one hand, and domesticity incarnated by the nuclear family, on the other – notably the well-known work of Elaine Tyler May, Veronica Strong-Boag, and Doug Owram.

The book’s second section, “Abroad”, is fascinating, and is the truly novel part of this study. Here we see Canadian women’s involvement in various campaigns involving children in other parts of the world: donations to, and fundraising for, United Nations-led efforts to improve the health and safety of children, such as UNICEF; fostering children in (non-Communist) countries such as South Korea, Hong Kong, and Greece; aid, in money and in kind, to children who had suffered the fall-out of the war in Vietnam; and the thorny and controversial question of international adoption, notably as it played out in Vietnam and Cambodia. The author’s analysis is perceptive and nuanced: she examines these complex issues from different angles, pointing out the problematic nature of the politics involved in some of these causes while at the same time drawing a sympathetic portrait of the Canadian women who believed so strongly in them. Brookfield is able to draw on existing works on some of these topics, notably the excellent and thought-provoking studies of adoption by Dubinsky and by Strong-Boag, but in most of the second part of her book she is breaking new historiographical ground. Where possible, the author attempts to ascertain the thoughts and sentiments of those on the receiving end of Canadian aid: for example, she shares with her readers some heartbreaking and perplexing extracts from letters written by South Korean children to their Canadian foster-parents and underlines the complex nature and unclear meanings of this fostering. In general, Brookfield makes excellent use of the records of voluntary associations and non-governmental organizations, as well as of governmental records such as those created by the Departments of External Affairs, Defence, and Health and Welfare, unearthing correspondence and other documents that testify to the persistent lobbying undertaken by some Canadian women. She also makes good use of oral histories, including some fifteen interviews that she herself conducted. These manuscript sources and oral histories allow Brookfield to glimpse the unwavering commitment of some remarkable and dedicated women – Ursula Franklin, Muriel Duckworth, Elizabeth Brown, Lotta Hitschmanova, Marion Kerans, Lil Greene, among many others – as well as the personal costs of this activism for some of these women (notably Goldie Josephy, who, by her own account, sacrificed both her health and her marriage to the cause of world peace).

The author is generally well served by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, although the book is marred by a number of typos. Some black-and-white images (photos, film stills, and excerpts from leaflets and brochures) are to be found in the book, but most of them are quite small and have been inserted discreetly into the text rather than showcased as they deserve. But these are quibbles related to the production of the book, and not to its
content. The analysis found in Cold War Comforts is important and original, and this study will undoubtedly interest scholars of social movements, of women’s activism, and of twentieth-century Canada more broadly.

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In The Deepest Sense: A Cultural History of Touch, Constance Classen gives readers a “feel” for medieval and early modern Europe while demonstrating the centrality of touch to the social, cultural, and religious formations of premodernity. More broadly, she advocates for sensory history, and for the role that scholars in the social sciences and humanities have to play in our understanding of the senses. Early in the book Classen reminds readers that “to rely on science for a true understanding of perception is both to disregard the ways in which science is itself a social construct and to detract from the significance of culturally specific models of sensation” (p. xv). The sensory practices and symbolism of any period and its cultural values and norms are closely related and indeed mutually constituted. Foregrounding the senses therefore provides an innovative analytical lens for understanding past cultures; Classen argues that such analyses have the potential to make the “dry bones of historical fact…more interesting and more memorable” (p. xii).

Classen defines touch broadly to include not just bodily contact, but also the sensations associated with temperature, corporeal movement, pleasure, pain and other aspects of embodied experience. She also carefully acknowledges the multisensory nature of human experience rather than trying to disentangle touch from the other senses. Drawing such wide boundaries around her subject allows Classen to investigate an eclectic range of ideas and experiences related to touch by exploring “the tactile values that shaped the sensibility and sociality” of medieval and early modern Europe (p. xiii).

The Deepest Sense challenges the common assertion that the transition to modernity can be charted through a straightforward narrative of the rise of the cultural importance of vision – which Enlightenment thinkers came to associate with rationalism – and a corresponding decline in the primacy of touch – which the same thinkers associated with primitivism and base emotion. This is, of course, an embodied version of the equation that allowed the Middle Ages to be characterized and dismissed as “dark.” Classen problematizes these assumptions, arguing that “the sensory patterns of history are too complex” for such a simplified account (p. 159). She writes that “touch does not simply recede from cultural life in modernity, it is re-educated, and while it retreats from some domains, it expands into others” (p. xiv). For example, although Classen would not suggest that one replaced the other, the practice of touching artifacts was newly banished from museums and art galleries in the nineteenth century at the same time that the rise of the department store (regularly cited as representative of the new regime of vision) provided a new public venue for handling both precious and profane objects. This shift,