

monsoonal fluctuations, the lands around the Bay of Bengal will, he argues, be among the hardest hit by the “rising waters” produced by a warming earth (266). Perhaps, Amrith wistfully hopes, looking forward, these threats will “open a small window” for “reimagining” the Bay of Bengal as an integral whole (284).

Already a prize-winning book, *Crossing the Bay of Bengal* at once opens up the history of this often neglected region, and demonstrates how scholarly writing can be made accessible to all. A masterful work, this book deserves a wide readership.

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BOUCHARD, Gérard (ed.) – *National Myths: Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*.  
 London: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 306.

Our political identities and identifications are formed via processes at once communal and deeply psychological, the result of multifaceted historical, sociological, and cultural forces. As Seymour Martin Lipset (1959) wrote many years ago, the stability of nations, particularly nations existing through democratic consent, depends on *effectiveness* and *legitimacy*. Effectiveness refers to the performance of the state, primarily its ability to establish conditions for economic development and distribution. Legitimacy is more symbolic in nature, reflecting the support of the population for key institutions of society and how the political process prioritizes and addresses major issues of concern. Lipset underscored that, while effectiveness relies on instrumental assessment, legitimacy is more affective and tied to the maintenance of a common “secular political culture.” As Gérard Bouchard and his fellow contributors explore in this engaging collection of essays, a fruitful framework for understanding this symbolic and emotional connection between individuals and their political system is in terms of national myths, or the beliefs, values, meanings, memories, and ideals that are associated with the project of the state.

This volume consists of sixteen chapters, all but one of them examining the mythic dimensions of national identity in a specific country. The last chapter by Bouchard synthesizes themes from the constituent chapters and highlights topics for researchers going forward. The continents of North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and South America are all represented in the book, although with certain selection biases. Canada gets two chapters; Japan has its own chapter and is also the focus of a chapter on Chinese attitudes; Australia, an interesting case for this kind of analysis, is omitted. In his brief Introduction, Bouchard explains that authors received free rein in regard to their definition of the concept of national myths as well as their focus on particular questions of mythic origins, functioning, impact, and evolution. While the result serves the editor’s aim of conveying “the richness” of this field of inquiry, it also presents intellectual and methodological inconsistencies bound to limit the collection’s appeal for some audiences.

Bouchard's own chapter on Quebec, which he portrays as "the small nation with the big dream," is valuable not only for its detailed discussion of the collective imagination of this Francophone Canadian province, whose national strivings resulted in two referenda on sovereignty in 1980 and 1995, but also for his summary of the sociological approach to analyzing the concept of myth. Bouchard explains that myths are distinctive in four respects: they are complex hybrids of contending elements—fact and fiction, reason and emotion, conscious and unconscious beliefs; they have meaning in terms of both a particular social and historical setting and grander universal symbols and narratives; they possess an almost sacred, self-perpetuating power; and they can function either to promote or to inhibit social change. Bouchard locates all these themes in Quebec's mythic heritage, although two "master myths" have wielded transcendent power during the last two hundred years—Quebec as "the dominated humiliated nation," and Quebec as "the fragile threatened cultural minority." Currently, disparate new myths are emerging in which the forces (and attractions) of globalization appear to be undermining Quebec's historical preoccupation with nationality, yet without replacing this preoccupation with a coherent, vitalizing alternative for popular consumption.

Allan Smith's chapter on the nation of Canada offers a telling companion piece to this focus on Quebec. Quebecois resistance to full absorption into the larger Canadian state project has not detracted from the myth making of English Canada so much as it has, in Smith's words, contributed to the construction of a national "role as custodian and overseer of a power-allocating apparatus" devoted to maintaining the "correct balance" between centralized authority and subnational self-determination. This defining tension, in turn, has placed Canada, practically and psychologically, in the company of other countries—among them Spain, the United Kingdom, and Belgium—that all face predicaments of governance regarding "nations within nations."

Ian Tyrrell from the University of New South Wales, Australia, writes the chapter on the United States. From the days of Tocqueville, American society has excited the curiosity of foreign observers, and there is something to be said for the perspective that political and cultural distance affords in this tangled business of national mythology. Tyrrell centers his discussion on the myth of American exceptionalism, or "the idea of the United States as a unique civilization outside the normal historically determined path of human history." Three pillars of imagination uphold this general conviction: first, a strong religious sensibility capable of accommodating the value of freedom of worship as well as the notion of a divinely sanctioned democratic imperialism; second, the dual political principles of liberty and egalitarianism; and third, the belief in American economic abundance. What is perhaps most interesting about this myth of exceptionalism on the contemporary scene is not its broad-based unifying appeal, however, but its divisive appropriation in the discourse of the political right precisely as economic problems at home and military setbacks abroad have gnawed away at American self-confidence. And while Tyrrell notes how the mantra of exceptionalism effectively constrained the process of American health reform by marginalizing

foreign practices in this sector, much more could be said along these same lines in policy areas ranging from capital punishment, to education, to global warming.

In his chapter on Russia, Yitzhak Brudny traces the mythic aftermath of the collapse of Soviet communism. Although many new post-communist countries have established identities that aim in the direction of liberal democracy, such is not the case with Russia. Rather, the national mythology of the new Russia contains decidedly anti-liberal and authoritarian elements that harken back to an old notion of Russia as “an empire with a unique non-Western path.” Consistent with this shift, there has even been a campaign under Putin for the rewriting of school textbooks to accent anti-Western perspectives and Russian nationalist themes. Brudny emphasizes the far-reaching policy consequences of this mindset, which induces political elites to take steps calculated to expand and glorify the state. More than just intellectually persuasive, these analytical observations provide a compelling means for understanding Russia’s aggressive actions in the region of Ukraine and Crimea since the winter of 2014.

This is but an illustrative sampling of the numerous “master” and “derivative” myths of nationhood encompassed in this compendium, which promises to have broad utility for comparativists working in political science, sociology, history, and related disciplines. Bouchard suggests that, contrary to the view of some commentators, national myths are hardly becoming less important in this era of global interconnection. In varying ways, these case studies support his claim, as well as the importance of his call for more investigation of the intricate pathways by which mythological structures rise, fall, and exert their hypnotic influence within the psychic underpinnings of the polity.

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CARSTAIRS, Catherine and Nancy Janovicek – *Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work and Nation*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2013. Pp. 290.

*Feminist History in Canada: New Essays on Women, Gender, Work and Nation* is a thoughtful, well-written and ultimately convincing compilation of essays composed by leading scholars who have forever shaped the fields of women’s and gender history in Canada. Edited by historians Catherine Carstairs and Nancy Janovicek, this collection evocatively features works that demonstrate the important contributions women have made to the economic, social and cultural realm of Canada. With a strong focus on biography, the authors present a unique flare to Canadian feminist history, offering rich descriptions of various conditions, interactions and experiences faced by individual and collective groups of women over time. This anthology focuses on a wide range of issues and explores a variety of important themes, covering the latest debates in the field and providing thought-