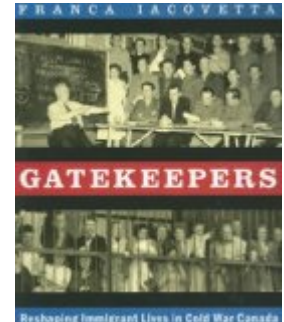


Franca Iacovetta. *Gatekeepers.* Toronto: Between the Lines, 2006. xiii + 370 pp
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In this monograph, University of Toronto professor of history Franca Iacovetta investigates the interaction between post-WW II European newcomers and Canada's gatekeepers. These middle-class men and women included relief and social workers, child and mental health experts, welfare administrators, dietitians, reporters, and columnists who worked to integrate immigrants and shape them into good Canadian citizens. Iacovetta's areas of specialization include women, gender, immigration, labor, and social history. All these interests are reflected in this important thematic study which breaks new ground in post-WW II Canadian immigration history. Her explicit aim is "to shed new light on connections between the political, social, gender, sexual, and immigrant history of early Cold War Canada and the politics of citizenship in a postwar capitalist democracy" (p. ix). She works toward this goal by reviewing a vast range of archival and published sources, both oral and documentary, including caseworker files.

Iacovetta argues that Canada's early Cold War gatekeepers tried to mold the newcomers accord-

ing to "Anglo-Canadian middle-class ideals" in food customs, child-rearing methods, marriage, democracy, anti-communism, and physical, mental and moral health (p. 11). Her construction of these gatekeepers is largely negative, and her narration and judgments of their work is highly critical. She presents herself as "a left feminist anti-racist" and contends that Canada is "a vertical mosaic in which privilege and opportunity still arise according to class-based, racist, and sexist, including heterosexist, criteria" (p. x). While early Cold War Canada did become more ethnically diverse, she observes, it developed a "modest and hypocritical form of cultural pluralism" (p. ix) and became a "national security state" with corrupt democratic ideals (p. xiii). She asserts, "Canada fought a largely secret but often dirty Cold War, one that trampled on civil rights in the name of protecting liberal rights and democratic freedoms" (p. 18).

Iacovetta begins by charting the nation's postwar relief efforts and creating a profile of early Cold War Canada. She describes the large inflows

of displaced persons and newcomers, and describes their youthfulness, favored destinations (largely Ontario), class differences and political sentiments. Canada gradually opened its doors in response to “economic self-interest, labor shortages, international pressures, and pro-refugee lobbies” (p. 9). Those permitted to enter were screened according to “the country’s long-standing ‘White Canada’ policy” (p. 10) and attitudes toward communism. While the context of the Cold War and expanding welfare state was a time of “social optimism” and “rising expectations,” it was also fraught with anxieties about communism, nuclear fallout, weak families, juvenile delinquency, mental illness and sexual deviance (p. 11).

Successive chapters examine the interactions between diverse types of gatekeepers and newcomers. In the mainstream media, journalists highlighted the contrasts between a ruined Europe threatened by spreading totalitarian communism and a Canada of abundance, opportunity, freedom, and democracy. Iacovetta profiles important immigrant groups, such as the war brides, the Dutch, the Italians, the Germans, and refugees from behind the Iron Curtain, especially “the Hungarian 56ers.” Newcomers were targeted by professional mental health and social work leaders who aimed to integrate and mold the newcomers into “Canadian ways”—essentially conventional practices in gender roles, the family, sexuality, and citizenship. Because postwar elites had created the welfare state to encourage “continuing obedience to the needs and demands of the economic order and its ruling elites,” the gatekeepers encouraged “a modest form of cultural pluralism” that was “least threatening to the state and its dominant classes” (p. 51). Drawing on Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault, Iacovetta highlights the way elites, such as gatekeepers, supposedly elicit popular consent through encouraging self-discipline and self-censorship impelled by a desire to belong and “to reap the rewards” of conformity. Conformity to “dominant bourgeois ideals,” especially to the gendered middle-class

nuclear family, was a central concern of the gatekeepers (p. 58).

Iacovetta provides an important examination of the reception and integration work of the International Institute of Metropolitan Toronto (est. 1956) and the federal government’s Citizenship Branch. In her view, much of their work, while perhaps well intentioned, aimed at containing and cleansing newcomers of dangerous and threatening ideas and behaviors. Indeed, this is a major theme of her study. Gatekeepers tried to eliminate old-world political divisions and to encourage support for democracy, capitalism, and middle-class ideas of the nuclear family and heterosexuality. Iacovetta states: “the newcomers were expected to perform their role as pleasing, decorative symbols of Canadian tolerance and pluralism, and to perform an ethnicity that was a carefully contained presentation of music, costumes, dances, handicrafts, and food” (p. 96). The Citizenship Branch carefully monitored the ethnic press. Through links with editors and ethnic group leaders, as well as fact sheets, its staff tried to undermine the older pro-communist media while supporting the status and work of anti-communist newcomers (p. 104).

The gatekeeper practice of containment extended to other areas of immigrant life. Iacovetta claims that gatekeepers used food to their own ends: “Canada’s postwar food and nutritional gatekeepers—a group including professional dietitians, public health nurses, social workers, food writers, and fashion-makers as well as Citizen Branch officials—were at the ready to assess and shape the newcomers’ nutritional profiles and food practices—and thereby to promote a pro-capitalist and pro-democracy ideal of family and kitchen consumerism” (p. 137). Advice columnists, social workers, and settlement houses tried to democratize authoritarian and patriarchal European family structures. By doing so, they “promoted conservative and contradictory family values that privileged a white (which in English Canada

meant Anglo-Celtic), middle-class and heterosexual nuclear household” (p. 171). Hence, they “ignored or downplayed” existing gender inequities in Canada. Gatekeepers also saw emotionally and psychologically disturbed European men as a special threat to Canadian women and their way of life. By depicting their problems as individual or cultural, gatekeepers “sidestepped the damage done to women everywhere in the name of male privilege, moral order, and the family” (p. 231).

Both “damaged” and sexually nonconformist women were problems for the gatekeepers, according to Iacovetta. She has a very insightful section about the psychological and sexual experiences of European women who suffered through the horrors of war, Nazi labor camps, and refugee centers. These experiences were little understood by Canadians. Gatekeepers worked to contain sexual delinquencies; their ideal was “responsible wives and mothers capable of making a good partnership with a responsible man and raising a future generation of healthy and well-adjusted Canadian children” (p. 234). The “security state” was also anxious about dangerous women who might seduce political leaders and government officials into divulging state secrets. Iacovetta has harsh words for the state and the RCMP who used surveillance, blacklisting, and deportation to patrol the nation’s security. The national security state was really “an insecurity state that lashed out at perceived and real enemies” (p. 262). Canadians and newcomer Cold Warriors shaped “a Canadian brand of McCarthyism, with its guilt by association tactics.” The state engaged in “flagrant civil liberty violations” (p. 262). She probes the complexities of the “sexual and political subversives” by reviewing several female spy scandals and trials, including the sensational affair of Gerda Munsinger in 1966.

Iacovetta’s final chapter recaps her argument and highlights the impact of the immigrants and gatekeepers. Overall, the gatekeepers portrayed the newcomers this way: “as fragile or damaged

women, men, and children in need of sympathy, patience, support, guidance, and psychological or moral rehabilitation as well as training in participatory democracy and citizenship.” Women played important roles both as gatekeepers and immigrants. Gatekeepers “willingly intruded into people’s lives and regulated or punished those who transgressed dominant norms” (p. 290). While some were “well-intentioned,” concerned and compassionate, others were “intrusive and insensitive.” Immigrants and gatekeepers together remade Canada “into a more culturally pluralist society and into a Cold War ‘corrupted democracy’ or national ‘insecurity’ state” (p. 291). The Cold Warriors among the newcomers “worked to reinforce and strengthen the Cold War consensus, thereby contributing to the mutual distrust and paranoia of the era,” and sustaining “a repressive culture” and “reactionary forces.” The gatekeepers influenced the newcomers: “For many immigrants, even the successful ones, integration and citizenship came at a price, namely, a willingness to defer to the gatekeepers’ agendas or suffer the consequences of indifference, defiance, or disobedience” (p. 291). Iacovetta concludes by tracing the parallels between early Cold War Canada and the post-9/11 era when, once again, an external enemy—now Muslim terrorists instead of communists—justifies the vilification of the “other” and the use of repressive measures.

This study is a fascinating and penetrating one that greatly expands on her work published over a decade ago on the role of social workers in making “new Canadians.”[1] It also uses analytical approaches to citizenship and making “good citizens” that were explored in Robert Adamoski et al, eds., *Contesting Canadian Citizenship: Historical Readings* (2002). Her analysis here investigates the role of a broad range of Canadian gatekeepers in their interaction with early Cold War newcomers. She identifies who they were, presents their aims, analyzes their thinking, and describes the multiple strategies they used to reshape the new Canadians. As well, she recognizes

the agency of the immigrants and their occasional resistance to gatekeeper rehabilitation. Her analysis is effectively contextualized and sensitive to the latest scholarship on women, gender, sex, immigration, and social history. As well, she makes explicit her critical perspective rooted in left feminism and anti-racism.

On the downside, her judgments are harsh and relentless. History itself surely cautions humility in judgment, since each generation acts according to its best lights which are quite evidently not those of the present. Iacovetta constructs the gatekeepers overall in a most unflattering way as hypocritical, insensitive, anti-Semitic, racist, prejudiced, homophobic, middle-class, alarmist, victim-blamers, sexist, controlling, intrusive, meddling, moralizing and pro-capitalist. Praise is rationed; blame runs freely. Evidently, our gatekeeper ancestors seriously violated her contemporary vision of the good society. The study concentrates largely on Ontario, even Toronto. Were there any regional differences in how gatekeepers functioned? Moreover, it seems impossible to say what proportion of immigrants interacted with the gatekeepers and how successfully they rehabilitated those who did. Then again, a short section of the study could have indicated the continuities and discontinuities with the interwar and later Cold War eras, and whether or not the gatekeepers had any concerns about the many British and American immigrants who entered Canada after the war.

Iacovetta's work points to the need for further investigation into other dimensions of the processes of newcomer integration and reshaping in the Cold War era. Such research will need to consider possible regional differences. As well, it should explore the influences of business and government workplaces, radio and television, the ethnic group and neighborhood, the churches, the schools, the language instructors, and newcomer friends. The gatekeepers, albeit important, were

only one set of players who worked to create new Canadians.

Note

[1]. Franca Iacovetta, "Making 'New Canadians': Social Workers, Women, and the Reshaping of Immigrant Families," in Franca Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde, eds., *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

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