
**Marilyn Barber, Carleton University**

DURING THE 2009 Annual General Meeting of the Canadian Historical Association held in Ottawa at Carleton University, I had the pleasure of facilitating a roundtable discussion of Franca Iacovetta’s *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada.* Interest in the 2008 Macdonald prize-winning book and the prospect of a lively discussion attracted an overflow audience that completely filled the room and extended into the corridor.

The richness of Iacovetta’s examination of gatekeepers in the Cold War era enabled the three commentators to address common themes of citizenship and nation-building, but also to explore important facets of the book related to their own research expertise and interests. Royden Loewen, professor of history and Chair in Mennonite Studies at the University of Winnipeg, focused on the contributions of *Gatekeepers* to immigration history and transnationalism. Elise Chenier, assistant professor in the history department at Simon Fraser University, drew upon her research regarding gender and sexuality in postwar Ontario to emphasize the importance of Iacovetta’s inclusion of mental health concerns and to interrogate how the gatekeepers’ motivations are assessed. Magda Fahrni, associate professor in the history department at Université du Québec à Montréal, addressed the adjustments required of postwar families and the analysis of the postwar state. Franca Iacovetta, as always, did not disappoint in engaging with the issues raised by the commentators.

*Gatekeepers* demonstrates the critical contributions that immigration studies can make to an understanding of Canadian history. All participants hoped that the interchange of ideas would stimulate further studies that might address regions apart from the Toronto-centred focus of *Gatekeepers* but continue the important debates raised by the many intertwining analytical threads within the book. We thank *Histoire sociale – Social History* for assisting by publishing the roundtable discussion.

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Royden Loewen, University of Winnipeg

Franca Iacovetta’s book possesses many strengths. It makes a contribution to numerous sub-themes in Canadian history. It is rigorous, almost relentless, in pursuing its thesis. Its passion to build a more inclusive Canadian society is impressive. To my mind, though, the greatest strength of the book lies in the idea that “gatekeepers” included such a very wide variety of agents, from left-wing, second-generation ethnic professionals to right-wing, virulently anti-socialist enforcers of state policy. And they sought to “shape” the lives of the immigrants in so many spheres of everyday life — not only in language, vocation, dress, and politics, but in sexuality, gender, food, and mental health — thus helping to shift the historian’s gaze from concerns with a legal or a “social citizenship,” in the tradition of T. H. Marshall, to a kind of “cultural citizenship,” a paradigm that considers “exclusion” in very specific ways. In so doing, Iacovetta contributes innovatively to the broader Canadian historiography.

As the book’s title suggests, this study is really more than a history of the pressures placed by host society agents on the 25 per cent of postwar European immigrants who came to Toronto. While the case studies, agencies, and media examined tend to be based in Toronto, the approach that Iacovetta develops has wider relevance. The book implicitly invites questions of comparison with other regions and with other historical moments. Certainly the Toronto-based media, the Ottawa-centred citizenship branches, the federal police force, academics of national repute, and other gatekeepers affected every corner of Canada, but the postwar immigrant equation in Western Canada, for example, was simply different than the Toronto experience. It was Vancouver that received most of the 47,000 postwar Chinese immigrants. It was Winnipeg — 35 per cent non-French, non-British — that possessed the most polyethnic society by midcentury, a society in which Ukrainians were the new “white” and Aboriginal “newcomers” were the new “non-white.” These regional demographic distinctions, of course, do not put to question Iacovetta’s methodology, but they do raise the question of just how regionally specific variables might shape the gatekeepers’ project and effectiveness, or even their ethnic composition.

The book also invites circumspection of the current fashion of transnational studies. It seems that nowadays we are all working in transnationality. There is no theme — gender, race, class — that does not find common linkage with scholars in other countries; the “big” variables in the world are the global economy, the communications revolution, urbanization, all the elements of that “age of extremes” enumerated by Eric Hobsbawm. Then, too, migration historians increasingly focus on transnational dimensions of their subject; as Nina Glick Shiller, Dirk Hoerder, Nancy Foner, and others note, it is also a simple fact that migrants increasingly live in more than one site, shaped not by one culture, but by two or more, in what Arjun Appadurai refers to as “global ethnospaces.”

1 See Royden Loewen and Gerald Friesen, Immigrants in Prairie Cities: Ethnic Diversity in Twentieth Century Canada (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

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this age of transnationalism, what is Iacovetta doing with this patently nation-centric book? As she reminds us, the nation still matters. Perhaps it mattered especially in the 1950s when European “immigrants” to Canada had little ability to return or keep active their connections to war-torn or East Block homelands. Iacovetta certainly makes the case for emphasizing how nation-based institutions — the RCMP, Macleans Magazine, the Citizenship Branch — each indelibly attempted to shape migrant peoples.

Of course, it can be argued that in fact Iacovetta’s book is “transnational,” for transnationalism is as much a methodology as a subject matter. In a way, Iacovetta helps us understand nation-centredness transnationally; by invoking the plethora of international experts — Foucault, bell hooks, Sam Cohen — she makes sure that we as practitioners of Canadian history do not parochialize our studies, realizing that newcomers “Canadianized” only in a very narrow sense of the term as liberal society rolled willy-nilly over so much of the globe at this time.

A third contribution of the book is its illustration of citizenship. One might be put off by the fact that the book seems to complain about what appears from other perspectives to be quite a remarkable liberality. I am reminded of the reader Contesting Canadian Citizenship edited by Robert Adamski, Dorothy E. Chunn, and Robert Menzies, which criticizes Canada for excluding women, Aboriginal peoples, Asians, and other groups from citizenship. What is the point of a book that chides the nation for doing what other progressive books chide it for not doing? The point, of course, is that citizenship is a construction, whether it includes or excludes, and whether by including it actually does violence to human dignity. I found especially instructive another award-winning book on immigration, Mae Ngai’s Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and the Making of Modern America. By examining the cultural construction of the “alien” in the United States, Ngai’s book garners the same insight as does Iacovetta’s guide through the process of the construction of the “citizen” in Canada. The very culture, the liberal hegemony, that accords privilege to certain elites to cajole newcomers into conformity grants them the same, oftentimes “racialized,” power to exclude newcomers altogether, and then makes it appear that restriction of the free movement of human beings is a universal, eternal, natural right.

Iacovetta’s book is about the elite that defines Canada and grants itself the right to affect the lives of immigrants. I found myself quarrelling with Reg Whitaker’s back-cover endorsement that the book presents “newcomers … [as] actors

3 Similar observations were voiced at “Transnationalizing History, Transnationalizing Canada: A Workshop,” Millennium Public Library, Winnipeg, April 23, 2009.
who...changed the gatekeepers.” The immigrants in this book do not really come alive, and there is little evidence that the architects of culture were in fact doing what they thought they were doing. The weight of the evidence in Gatekeepers consists of the cases, the stories, penned by the gatekeepers themselves. The idea that the newcomers found in their “arts, crafts, dance” their own cultural sustenance bearing “symbolic value in the future” (p. 101) is there, but arguably comes as a footnote to the main text. To my mind, however, this doesn’t matter. The old adage still stands: don’t criticize a book for what it did not intend to do. The book’s main accomplishment is the recreation of the mindset of the gatekeepers.

In this regard I found most interesting the idea of fear and how fear generates power. One of the gatekeepers’ main fears is of mental illness, an idea in Iacovetta’s book that corresponds with the central idea in “Madness Studies” that “mental illness is a social construct that has varied over time.” Iacovetta’s book turns a stiff and dour, emotionless Canadian history into one with believable people at a moment of fear, optimism, suspicion, dread. The history of emotion is well established with studies on the late capitalist commodification of cheerfulness, the waning of the social respectability of jealousy. Iacovetta’s accomplishment begins in the preface where she writes about “feeling” — depression and joyfulness, disenchantments and engagements. Her book reminds me of one envisaged by Stella Tillyard, who in 2006 noted that “in the best hands, what I’d like to call ‘emotional history’ can combine an original authorial voice, literary awareness and an unashamed quality of love to produce modern popular classics that will last as long as readers find in them something which moves as well as instructs.” Tillyard asks “for popular history and history written with and about feeling to be admitted to parity with history’s other branches, so that it is again one profession about all our pasts.” This is the genesis and genius of Iacovetta’s book.

Elise Chenier, Simon Fraser University

A couple of weekends ago I met for the first time two new members of my extended family. Both are in their fifties; one is Lebanese-Jamaican and the other a relatively recent Irish immigrant. I was invited to their country house in Quebec’s Eastern Townships, one of Canada’s older farming communities that was largely settled by Anglo immigrants from the British Isles and from the United States. We drank Australian wine and ate moussaka, made, I might add, by the Irishman. With our bellies full and our wine glasses refreshed, we settled down in front of the fire. After asking me a few polite questions about my own

historical research, the Irishman proceeded to tell me that Canadian history has absolutely no relevance for at least one-third of all Canadians. Certainly it was irrelevant to all his friends.

It is an unfortunate truth that most people assume that the only thing a book of Canadian history has to offer is information about Canada. He was right, though, that many Canadians — at this current moment, 22 per cent — are “New Canadians” for whom 1759, 1812, and 1919 likely have little meaning. Indeed, like the discipline of history, Canada is in a constant state of reinventing itself.

While I cannot say whether my new, twice-removed brother-in-law will connect with Franca Iacovetta’s Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada, for scholars of history, it has much to offer. More than a history of postwar immigration in Canada, it contributes to the “reinvention” of Cold War history and the history of postwar Canada. Its main contention is that “cold war anxieties and ideology had a profound impact on Canadian reception and citizenship efforts, and that gatekeeper-newcomer relations had an impact on the making of the cold war nation” (pp. 14–15). In other words, both the fact of the arrival and the impact of the settling of thousands of Europeans in Toronto during the postwar era were central to the making and shaping of a Cold War nation.

Reception work, education for citizenship programmes, and ethnic recipes featured in magazines like Chatelaine were not just by-products of the Cold War. They tell us something about the way Cold War immigration, racial, and gender anxieties were expressed, contained, and diffused.

By negotiating its way through the social control model that has dominated much of the history of immigration and the history of mental health, Gatekeepers reaffirms the revisionist claim that the postwar era was neither as oppressive nor as homogeneous as historians once thought. We learn that multiculturalism, for example, was not born out of the organized Ukrainian community’s reaction against the arrogance of the Bilingualism and Biculturalism Commission’s “two nations” model. Rather, its roots are to be found in the way journalists attempted to manufacture a sympathetic, compassionate attitude toward refugees and displaced persons, in the way the International Order Daughters of the Empire and settlement house workers interacted with them, and in the way ethnic communities themselves de-mystified their difference by inviting Anglo-Ontarians to watch, consume, and participate in their traditional cultural festivities. As J. S. Woodsworth had done in the 1910s, in the postwar era mainstream Anglo-Ontario rejected assimilationist views and sought to develop relationships based on humanitarian principles that emphasised mutual understanding.9 As Iacovetta forcefully argues, however, there were real limits to just how much Anglo-Canadians were willing to adapt. Cross-cultural

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9 Radical preacher and socialist J. S. Woodworth propounded typical racial anxieties about the coming of non-Anglo-Saxon immigrants in his book Strangers at Our Gates, but he recanted this position very soon afterward and instead embraced what today we would call “multicultural diversity.”
encounters were filtered through an assumption of the fundamental superiority of liberalism, capitalism, the welfare state, and the “egalitarian” nuclear family.

One of the refreshing assumptions this book makes is that Canada functions as its own entity. Historians of the Cold War era are prone to characterize Canada as a nation in lock-step with American foreign and domestic policy, but this argument is overstated. In fact, Canadian politicians and the public were often openly critical of American Cold War politics, particularly the House Unamerican Activities Committee. Perhaps this tendency exists because the generation of scholars who produced the first wave of Cold War history were influenced by left-wing anti-US foreign policy and Canadian nationalist movements of the late 1960s and 1970s. *Gatekeepers* represents a move away from that tradition. For example, Iacovetta shows that men and women who escaped communism in Eastern Europe contributed to anti-communist speech. Thus, writing in a post-1989 context, Iacovetta acknowledges that there were real reasons to be opposed to communism, that anti-communist activism was more than fear-mongering on the part of Western capitalist governments.

*Gatekeepers* also establishes gender, sexuality, and mental health as an area of significant historical concern in this period. Mental health as a postwar phenomenon has been sorely neglected and very poorly understood: neglected because the Cold War has dominated postwar historiography, and poorly understood because those who write about it rely on theories of social control. Viewed through this lens, “experts” are seen as a homogeneous and monolithic force of power and oppression. In the last 20 years or so, historians of sexuality have done much to complicate that picture by demonstrating, for example, how most of the medical experts we thought were seeking to contain and “cure” homosexuality were in fact liberal progressives whose aim was to bring an end to the criminalization of sexual diversity. The literature on this point is extensive. Social control theorists and the anti-psychiatry movement, and indeed some of the actual treatments undertaken to “cure” homosexuality, have made it hard to see processes of medicalization as a progressive force, but indeed they often were.

Historians Mary Louise Adams and Mona Gleason have brilliantly unpacked how postwar psychology's and, to a lesser degree, psychiatry's normalizing discourses shored up sex and gender normativity and domestic retrenchment, and Iacovetta extends their work, again with excellent results, to show how these ideas were put into play in reception and citizenship activities for New Canadians. Using what she calls “a tactics of close liaison,” settlement house and social workers worked hard to educate New Canadian mothers and fathers


in the ways of modern Canada. The postwar mental health “craze” was about so much more than sex and gender normativity, however. It was an early version of the “think global, act local” movement, which held that stable family life was the secret to security, that personal security was the secret to national security, and that national security would translate into global security. Thus, while feminist scholars have focused on how the mental health paradigm contributed to “domestic retrenchment,” what has always been overlooked is that anti-assimilationism, a precursor to today’s anti-racist, pro-humanitarianism politic, was a part of the vision of security in the postwar period, particularly among mental health experts and their best advocates, parents and educators. Knowing this helps us to understand why so many everyday Canadians, and women in particular, embraced this supposedly patriarchal way of understanding human relations.

Gatekeepers brings these threads together, drawing out how the impulse to perform useful public service intersected with Cold War and postwar anxieties about sex and gender norms and how this new, modern way of thinking about the family included outreach to isolated mothers and the promotion of greater female autonomy to a population who were assumed to cling to old-fashioned, patriarchal ideals.

The mental health project was profoundly optimistic and points to one of the most interesting phenomena of the Cold War era. Everyday Canadians, including children who were subject to years of “duck and cover” films, lived under the shadow of the bomb, and they responded to the prospect of more mass human killings of the kind that devastated Japan with a remarkably optimistic faith in the everyday person’s ability to reinvent the world for a conflict-free future. This faith inspired many of the gatekeepers into community associations who worked with New Canadians, and here is another way Gatekeepers reinvents the field. Among the gatekeepers we find the usual suspects: citizenship officials, UNRAA officials, the RCMP, mental health experts, United Church Women’s Missionary Society volunteers. But the book also identifies as “gatekeepers” the unexpected: welcome visitors, nutritionists, public health nurses, and fashion experts. By including these “unusual suspects,” Iacovetta extends the feminist argument of the importance of the private to the public. It also furthers our understanding of how those things deemed unimportant (food) and even frivolous (fashion) are political discourses unto themselves.

What many of these “gatekeepers” had in common was that they practised a “tactics of close liaison,” which is to say, rather than forcefully assimilate immigrants, Toronto’s gatekeepers aimed to bring them into the Canadian fold by getting to know them and encouraging them to get to know each other. These relationships, and the way in which postwar ideas about mental health informed the project, reveal how the postwar period is far more complex than we have previously appreciated. The hopefulness of the global internationalist project, the commitment to local community, and the altruism that fuelled so many of the gatekeepers’ efforts and ideals are necessary keys for understanding the postwar period. But how are we to go beyond the middle-class missionary/social control/colonial model? Is there a way to unpack critically this postwar project...
while recognizing the value of what can rightfully be regarded as an early version of an anti-racist paradigm?

My own thinking about the postwar era, and indeed about some of the same evidence, has led me to different conclusions than those found in *Gatekeepers*. Where *Gatekeepers* emphasizes regulation and draws on the moral panic model to understand tensions between Anglo-Ontarians and the racialized other, I emphasize the progressive vision that led activists, volunteers, and professionals to reject assimilationism and to promote the egalitarian family.12 Perhaps it is our different subject matter that has led us to take up different tools and thus find somewhat different answers. There is, however, a more general point I am striving toward, and it is this: the scholarship on the postwar era is itself a funny contradiction. Though still a nascent field of scholarly research, the scholarship we do have is stuck in some very deep grooves.

*Gatekeepers* is a remarkable work for many reasons, in particular its depth and breadth and its successful execution of a gender, race, and class analysis that also pays attention to sexuality without ever being a book about just one of those things. Perhaps its singular most important contribution, however, is that it renews postwar history by carefully steering us in a new, post-Cold-War direction that is instructive to more than just Canadian historians for the way it forces us to understand how immigrants themselves played a determinative role in the creation of a postwar/Cold War culture. Such attention to immigrants’ own participation in creating a hybridized and politicized national-ethnic subjectivity widens the field of postwar Canadian history in exciting, provocative, and refreshing ways.

One final note bears consideration. *Gatekeepers* is published by Between the Lines (BTL), a non-scholarly press that produces a wide range of well-designed books of interest to left-leaning thinkers. BTL began publishing scholarly Canadian history for popular and academic audiences in 1998. Its first two books in the series — Michael Dawson’s *The Mountie: From Dime Novel to Disney* and Karen Dubinsky’s *The Second Greatest Disappointment: Honeymooning and Tourism at Niagara Falls*, are works of cultural history that were sure to enjoy a popular audience and that lent themselves well to a generous allowance of images, something that has not been financially viable for traditional academic presses. Many historians are impressed by the beautiful design quality of BTL books and are intrigued by the opportunity to see their books distributed to a wider market. It creates much needed competition and a real alternative to the

12 A quick comparison of our approaches and analysis can be found in “Seeing Red: Immigrant Women and Sexual Danger in Cold War Canada,” *Atlantis: A Women’s Studies Journal*, vol. 24, no. 2 (Spring 2000), pp. 51–60. I argue that the Toronto media’s characterization of the murder of two female immigrants as a “New Canadian” problem was swiftly rejected by its largely Anglo-Protestant readership, and that public concern over their brutal deaths evolved into a national conversation about the problem of perpetrators of physical and sexual violence against women and children. In contrast, Iacovetta draws on this research to argue that the murders were regarded as a “DP” problem alone (*Gatekeepers*, pp. 209–213).
traditional scholarly format. The award of the 2008 Macdonald Prize to *Gatekeepers* secures BTL’s place in the scholarly history publishing marketplace.

BTL is not primarily a scholarly publisher, however, and this has important implications for academic historians. Franca Iacovetta insisted that BTL create a peer review process for *Gatekeepers*, but this is not its normal practice. Without peer review, a book typically has very little value in Canadian university hiring and promotion procedures. As a BTL editor acknowledged during the roundtable discussion, the press is not appropriate for a new scholar’s first manuscript.¹³

As a cross-over publication, BTL’s history series also asks authors to reduce the number of footnotes. This is achieved partly by bundling references into a single note at the end of the paragraph, but my own experience reading *Gatekeepers* was frustrated by this practice. From time to time my curiosity about and interest in new primary and secondary sources was thwarted by the occasional inability to identify the right reference and, in rare cases, any reference, for some of the sources mentioned. What are the implications for academic historians if the sources we use become more difficult to identify?¹⁴

This is not to suggest that BTL should not be publishing scholarly history books. I am entirely in favour of reaching a broader readership with books that are accessible and readable for a general audience. Moreover, in the past three years the world of academic publishing has been undergoing a major restructuring. University presses are stripping their lists in an effort to remain competitive in the increasingly online marketplace. BTL provides an important alternative for mid-career and senior scholars in Canada, but one that at present is limited by its lack of peer review. It remains to be seen how the future of academic publishing will look, but perhaps it is up to us to push for a reconsideration of what “counts” in the world of scholarly publications.

Magda Fahrni, Université du Québec à Montréal
Montreal-born writer Mavis Gallant spent most of the 1940s working as a feature reporter for the *Montreal Standard*, a job that provided her with the opportunity to interview, among other people, British war brides and the “Dionne girls,” the young Polish women recruited to work in Liberal MP Ludger Dionne’s spinning mill in the Beauce region of Quebec. During these years, Gallant also began her career as a writer of fiction — and much of her early fiction was set in wartime Montreal. In her short story “Varieties of Exile,” Gallant attributes to her narrator, a young woman named Linnet Muir, the following reflections:

In the third summer of the war I began to meet refugees. There were large numbers of them in Montreal — to me a source of infinite wonder. I could

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¹³ It deserves pointing out, however, that Michael Dawson’s book, the first in the series, was his first scholarly monograph. It was based on his master’s thesis.

¹⁴ During this discussion, it was noted that non-scholarly French-language publishers in Quebec have long published scholarly history.

not get enough of them. They came straight out of the twilit Socialist-literary landscape of my reading and my desires. I saw them as prophets of a promised social order that was to consist of justice, equality, art, personal relations, courage, generosity. Each of them — Belgian, French, Catholic German, Socialist German, Jewish German, Czech — was a book I tried to read from start to finish. My dictionaries were films, poems, novels, Lenin, Freud. That the refugees tended to hate one another seemed no more than a deplorable accident. ... At the office where I worked I now spent my lunch hour writing stories about people in exile. I tried to see Montreal as an Austrian might see it and to feel whatever he felt. I was entirely at home with foreigners, which is not surprising — the home was all in my head. 15

As a young “girl reporter” assigned to interview wartime and postwar refugees and immigrants, Mavis Gallant could be considered one of the large group of “gatekeepers” who are the subjects of Franca Iacovetta’s book, albeit certainly one of the more sympathetic and self-critical of them. As a writer of fiction, Gallant later captured, in the extract quoted above, the way in which these gatekeepers brought their own expectations and preoccupations to bear on the newcomers.

I would like first to discuss two of the many strengths of Franca Iacovetta’s Gatekeepers, then to highlight what I see as two of its major historiographical contributions. I conclude by raising a question, or rather two related questions.

This book is significant, to begin with, because it tells an extremely important story in compelling and convincing ways. The massive waves of postwar immigration constitute one of the fundamental events in the history of twentieth-century Canada; this immigration brought about a sea-change in the composition and nature of this country. In the book’s first chapter, entitled “Mass Immigration and the Remaking of the Postwar Nation,” Franca reminds us of the sheer scale of this postwar movement of people: over 2.1 million newcomers between 1946 and 1962, arriving in a country of — at the moment of the 1941 Census — only 11.5 million people. The impact of this mass immigration on the host society was felt almost immediately, particularly in the larger Canadian cities, and it transformed these cities.

The first chapter of Gatekeepers, moreover, situates the role played by Canada and Canadians in what was of course a worldwide movement of peoples in the wake of the war: Jewish survivors of the Holocaust; the inhabitants of Europe’s Displaced Persons camps; refugees, the homeless and the stateless; later, “voluntary” migrants — those who chose to leave Europe for political, economic, or familial reasons (or all three) and chose Canada as their destination. The

beauty of the first few pages of this book lies in this wonderful worldwide panorama.

The second great strength of the book is the fact that it is accessibly and powerfully written. In reading it, I was reminded of reading Such Hardworking People: Italian Immigrants in Postwar Toronto (1992) for the first time, as a graduate student, and also of having taught Such Hardworking People, and of the impact that the book has on students, who find that it speaks to them clearly and directly. The accessibility of Gatekeepers was no doubt aided by Franca’s decision to publish with Between the Lines and by what were, in part, I imagine, editorial decisions: an abundance of illustrations; a text free of jargon; and methodological, theoretical, and even, to some degree, historiographical discussions largely tucked away in the endnotes.

An important story, then, powerfully written, this book contributes to a number of historical fields and subfields. Its first historiographical contribution is that which Gatekeepers makes to our knowledge of the state and postwar citizenship. The focus on immigration, but also the decision to situate the immigration story squarely in the context and political priorities of the Cold War, provides a way of looking at the state, and at the construction of citizenship, that is rather different from the “rise of the postwar welfare state” story that we now know well. In many ways, the state appears as more coercive in this story than in most postwar histories of Canada. Although historians of the welfare state and of social citizenship have been critical of the ways in which state welfare measures were often parsimonious and always gendered, reaffirming and enshrining notions and practices of male breadwinners and female dependents, they have nonetheless tended to see the federal state in these years as largely benevolent and expansive, a “provider.” Examining immigration and postwar reception and citizenship work leads Franca — and us, as readers — to rather different conclusions, and this is very useful. Sceptics could of course ask to what extent the Cold War was truly integral to this story; Franca herself acknowledges on page 18 that “Certainly, even without a Cold War, mass immigration and a shift from war to peacetime would have spawned reception and Canadianization programs, and debates over the rights and duties of democracy and citizenship; and the RCMP would have continued its hunt for communists.” Yet the “convergence of European migration with the rise of the Cold War” (p. 43) and the “closely intertwined reception and political agendas” of these twin forces allowed for anti-communist rapprochements and even alliances between newcomers and gatekeepers. Newly arrived anti-communist East Europeans assisted the state in its old battle against the ethnic left and

thus helped to shape Canada’s Cold War culture. Once postwar immigration is taken into account, the story of Canada’s Cold War becomes far richer and more complex.

The second historiographical contribution that I want to mention is that made by Gatekeepers to the writing of the history of postwar families. Assumptions that postwar families were universally contented, conformist, and suburban have largely been laid to rest by recent works in Canadian history, including Franca’s own work on Italian immigrants in postwar Toronto. Gatekeepers contributes to burying these assumptions, but it also insists upon the powerful normative roles played by such stereotypes and expectations. Although, generally speaking, this book does not linger in the daily lives of postwar families in quite the same way that Such Hardworking People did, it does help us to understand better the history of the family in Canada. As Franca points out, the refugees and voluntary immigrants of the postwar era tended to be young and were often newly or recently married couples — the massive immigration of these years is thus largely a familial migration.

Moreover, the chapter on mental health and mental illness drawn from agency sources allows us a more intimate look at the adjustments required of postwar immigrant families, the toll taken on immigrants’ bodies, minds, and psyches by the difficulties and often the horrors of war, the migration process, the adaptation process, low-paying and unsatisfying jobs, linguistic challenges, torn-apart and grafted-together-again families, and unequal power relations between the sexes and between parents and children. These agency records of the difficulties experienced by postwar immigrants are no less mediated, no less filtered, than the articles culled from the daily press or from popular magazines such as Chatelaine, jotted down by social workers, psychiatrists, doctors, and nurses, they are the gatekeepers’ renditions of encounters between (often well-intentioned) gatekeeper professionals and newcomer patients. Nonetheless, these sources allow glimpses of private lives and family lives that are at times painful in their intimacy — in this, they resemble such sources as judicial archives, whose use, French historian Arlette Farge has famously said, allows for “un effet de réel,” the sensation of having glimpsed — accidentally, evidently — the “real life” of people in the past.

The principal question that I would ask of Franca is really a dual question, and it has to do with place and with scale. Although the subtitle of this book is Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada, much of this book is set in

18 In this, it applies to concrete cases some of the insights of work such as that of Mona Gleason in Normalizing the Ideal.
Toronto, and Franca’s interpretation is built upon sources such as Toronto daily newspapers and the records of Toronto social agencies, immigrant aid societies, cultural centres, and institutions such as the Queen Street Mental Health centre. Setting this book in Toronto seems to me to be a logical decision, inasmuch as Toronto was a major receiving city (perhaps the major receiving city) for postwar refugees and voluntary migrants. I wonder, however, how Toronto’s story differs from that of “Canada” or, more precisely, from that of other Canadian centres such as Mavis Gallant’s Montreal (where newcomers confronted two major host populations), Winnipeg, Vancouver, Glace Bay, or Sudbury. Prewar Toronto, like many other Canadian cities, was predominantly, although by no means exclusively, white, Anglo-Celtic, and Protestant. The arrival of these postwar immigrants from southern, central, and Eastern Europe thus obviously did not go unnoticed. These recent arrivals could, nonetheless, as Franca’s book demonstrates, count on the presence of other arrivals, from their own country or a neighbouring one. They could also count on the presence of small businesses — shops, bakeries, butchers, travel agencies — providing goods to which they were accustomed and service in their mother tongue. This may have made the transition and adaptation to life in Canada easier than it might have been elsewhere in the country. Moreover, what happens in Toronto cannot always stand in for what happens elsewhere. The discussion of tendencies in “Canadian social work” in chapter 3, for instance, captures very little of social work in Quebec in this period or of the specificities of social work as practised among Catholic families, by both lay and religious social workers.20

At the same time, if Toronto was not Canada, Canada was not Toronto. What I mean is that the decision to view this, or to present this, as a story about Canada, and not just about Toronto, means that in some ways we do not glean the same sense of place, of local specificities, that we do in Such Hardworking People. We find in Gatekeepers less material on the mutual assistance, gossip, and surveillance inherent to neighbourhood life, less on the paths traced each day between households and sites of work, both paid and unpaid. It seems to me that there is matter for reflection here on the tensions between the local and the country-wide, between Toronto and Canada, and on methodological choices regarding place and scale.

Should there still be anyone out there who thinks that social history necessarily deals with the small, the trivial, or the marginal, Franca Iacovetta’s Gatekeepers is convincing proof otherwise. The story that she tells is central to Canada’s political and economic history, and she tells it in ways that allow us to link the grand and the panoramic to the individual, the intimate, and the domestic.


Franca Iacovetta, University of Toronto

My frankness in academic circles has earned me the nickname “fearless Franca” (pun intended, I think), but sitting through this roundtable was both nerve-wracking and enlightening. I thank my commentators for their intellectual generosity, for their critical insights and probing questions about my use of theory and method in characterizing the post-1945 era, and for their observations on the politics of scholarly publishing. I have bundled various points into a few general themes, and hope my responses will help continue the debates.

I don’t know that I entirely succeeded in writing that elusive cross-over book, but the effort made me a better writer, and for that I am grateful particularly to Paul Eprile and Robert Clarke for their intolerance of academic jargon. I am thrilled that my commentators appreciated my efforts to narrate a complex and dramatic history in a clear, compelling, accessible, and even, as Royden Loewen writes, emotional prose. For an academic so explicit about her left, feminist, and anti-racist politics, not to place theory and analysis at the top might seem odd. (Though this was largely a feminist, Gramscian, intellectual project, clearly other theories and theorists also mattered. More than one critic has called me “relentless” in my efforts to support my major arguments.) Yet central to the craft of history is strong writing, by which I mean not merely telling stories, however interesting, or taking positions, however well-founded, but developing a mode of telling that is simultaneously clear, probing, analytical, demonstrative, and even emotional.

True, as professional historians, we face a dilemma. To put it bluntly, we write for each other (and for peer review) — hence the emphasis on historiography, apparatus, and sometimes exaggerated claims to originality — but we also expect our students to read and understand our scholarship, and then penalize them if they do not fully grasp all the historiographical or theoretical shorthand, our occasional “straw men and women,” or the (sometimes self-indulgent) rhetorical flourishes or polemics that tend to obscure more than clarify. But clear prose and theorizing are not mutually exclusive. What good is writing about fear, anxiety, hope, or desire, if the reader is never made to “feel” anything? Or writing about contradiction, ambiguity, and contestation, if we cannot convey something of the frustration, fear, or anger such predictions can provoke? This is not to be less analytical, but rather to write a more powerful, even insightful, history peopled by subjects acting and reacting with greater or lesser power to conditions that are never fully of their own making. Historians can critically engage theories and models from other disciplines without giving up our trade as wordsmiths. We can be both fine demographers and compelling writers, whether of everyday life or extraordinary events. After all, is not the compelling writing, as much as the

21 I also thank Paul Eprile for his comments on this reply.
22 I borrow this insight from historian Bettina Bradbury, whom I first heard describe the matter in these blunt and useful terms in a conversation about the relationship between teaching and scholarly publishing.
analysis, what makes E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* a masterpiece? (Yes, for me, this is a rhetorical question.)

My commentators address my portrait of the gatekeepers and my characterization of early post-1945 Canada. All three kindly highlight various historiographical contributions (to citizenship, multiculturalism, Cold War, sexuality, and mental health studies, for example) and note the seemingly less prominent or active presence of the newcomers “living” their everyday lives or “acting” in their encounters with gatekeepers. My elastic definition of gatekeeper was meant to be both provocative and illustrative, but, in choosing to make this large and heterogeneous mix of what Elise Chenier aptly called “the usual and unusual suspects” my main subject of analysis, I tried also to convey a sense of how certain newcomers themselves negotiated the predicaments and people they encountered. I also wanted to comment on the nature of gatekeeper-newcomer encounters. Still, in turning an unwieldy manuscript into a more focused book, I did choose, in consultation with my editor, to tip the analytic balance in favour of the gatekeepers’ paradigms, theories, and activities. I made this choice precisely because it allowed me more effectively to document the interconnectedness between the political, social, economic, sexual, and mental health issues and actors involved. It also served to illustrate how a topic that many would have viewed as yet another specialized immigrant study was, as Magda Fahrni nicely put it, “in fact central to Canada’s political and economic history” and “allow[ed] us to link the grand and the panoramic to the individual, the intimate, and the domestic.” I was also building on a 30-year-old historiography that has established immigrants as historical actors; not every book we write has to “prove” this point, and I would urge us all to move beyond histories that merely conclude that immigrants, or workers, or women have “agency.”

Did I portray the gatekeepers (or what an *H-Canada* reviewer called “our gatekeeper ancestors,” a revealing statement) in overly negative or judgmental terms? Or, as Chenier suggests, did I ignore or unduly downplay the role of liberal progressives like the psychiatrists she has so ably studied, or the pluralist precursors to today’s anti-racist activists, or, to add Fahrni’s suggestion, progressives like journalist and novelist Mavis Gallant? I fully welcome the debate on this issue and, yes, underscore the call for many more gatekeeper studies at local, regional, urban-rural, and national levels, which could weigh in on these important questions. I would say the same about the need especially to address Montreal and Quebec, as well as Catholic, as opposed to Protestant and English Canadian, social work paradigms and practices.

I would also ask, however, whether the presence of some progressive social workers or other experts (and others) did fundamentally change the central paradigms of Anglo-Canadian social work or psychiatry in this period. While a minority of social workers lamented and even critiqued the decline of a social change agenda in the 1950s, for example, they could not, as practising social

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23 James D. Cameron, review of *Gatekeepers*, *H-Canada* listserv, December 2008.

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workers involved in, say, resettlement projects, fundamentally alter the professional paradigms and standards by which clients were assessed and treated. The radicals among them faced state surveillance and harassment. Yes, of course, they should be part of a subversive or alternative history of those who courageously fought the mainstream, the conventional, the conformist, and even created a space for an alternative world view and praxis. But what if our goal is to get at dominant ideology and practices? As my commentators kindly acknowledge, I did try to show how individual caseworkers might affect a client’s life, but did individual acts of kindness towards marginal or defiant newcomers challenge a profession that, as many scholars before me have documented, tended to associate conformity to mainstream norms with well-adjustment? My research into case files led me to highlight difficulties, even tragedy, but why assume, for example, that newspaper images of classrooms filled with smiling New Canadians better capture postwar Canada? Does this speak to our investment in the myth of a kindlier, gentler nation?

As for the liberal pluralists, my intention was not to damn individual professionals or volunteers, but to highlight fundamental flaws and contradictions in their tremendously lofty liberal goals. How exactly does one create a “local United Nations”? Or bring about “a family of man” amid a local and global Cold War and pervasive class exploitation? Well-intentioned acts do not necessarily produce positive or even benign results, and good intentions may have little to do with final outcomes. Is it really so conspiratorial to suggest that the early post-1945 immigrant and citizenship campaigns exhibited a contradictory mix of liberal discourses of tolerance, respect, and cultural pluralism as well as intrusive tactics reflecting the rise of a national security state fighting a domestic Cold War against the various perceived threats to mainstream society and its dominant bourgeois models? My larger point was to suggest that the ways in which these profoundly different sets of imperatives bumped against each other helped create a dialectical brew of tension, contradiction, and paradox in this era. Does this observation not apply to the current juxtaposition of multiculturalism and the “war on terror”?

When I gave book-related talks in British and European cities, I was often chastised by some colleague who, wielding a scolding finger, told me I should be more proud to be a Canadian because, after all, each had guessed from my name that I am the child of immigrants. Some pushed until I said what they wanted to hear: yes, my parents were poor and uneducated peasants, and my mother illiterate in her own language, and here I am a university professor, though I was always quick to add that blacklisting, tragedy, and struggle were also part of that history. One English colleague told me I didn’t know my Canadian history, and a hostile German colleague said if I knew anything about how Germany treated

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24 I explore the matter further in the book I am completing on the International Institute of Toronto, which examines the Toronto agency within the wider American pluralist movement of which it was a part.

its refugees (which in fact I do) I would be kinder to Canada’s gatekeepers. They had a point, but, apart from the offensive claim that I was an ungrateful Canadian, it largely reflected an easy, received generalization of Canada as a liberal nation.

These points link to the question of whether I exaggerated the impact of the Cold War on immigrant reception and citizenship work, and that particularly of East Europeans on shaping Cold War Canadian democratic discourse. For years, historians have been writing about two critical developments of the early post-1945 era — the Cold War and mass immigration — as largely separate events. Yet, in doing my research, I could not avoid the Cold War or its connections to more than strictly security issues, though I fully agree that my reading of the records benefited enormously from a revitalized Cold War historiography influenced by feminist, sexuality, and cultural historians. So too did my work, as Loewen recognizes, draw on a transnational sensitivity with respect to both global migration and the Cold War to shed light on a particular nation-state. The state does still matter, even during periods of intensified globalization, past and present, but, given that scholars in different disciplines use the term in different ways, we must clarify our meaning and use of the term.25

Finally, shortly after this session, Ian McKay’s *Reasoning Otherwise* won the Macdonald Prize, further cementing Between the Lines’s emergence as a major player in Canadian history. This standing does not resolve the peer-review dilemma for junior scholars who need to earn their academic stripes, but it is a noteworthy accomplishment. While BTL does not routinely carry out peer review, surely it cannot hurt to ask.

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25 For example, in my collaborative work on Italian workers and radicals around the world, we explicitly use the transnational to refer to people, ideas, and practices that crossed national boundaries while simultaneously documenting how the policies and practices of different nation-states and labour movements helped influence the different rates and patterns of political incorporation and militancy. Donna Gabaccia and Franca Iacovetta, *Women, Gender, and Transnational Lives: Italian Workers of the World* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Donna Gabaccia, Franca Iacovetta, and Fraser Ottanelli, “Laboring across National Borders: Class, Gender and Militancy in the Proletarian Mass Migrations,” theme issue on “Transnational Labor History,” *International Labor and Working-Class History*, vol. 66 (Fall 2004).