



Representation issues in Citizenship and Immigration Canada's "Welcome to Canada" Guide

A short analysis

In 2013, Citizenship and Immigration Canada published a new guide for newcomers, "Welcome to Canada: What You Should Know".¹ Given the guide's role in introducing Canada to arriving immigrants and refugees, it is important that it represent the country fairly. A brief analysis of the text and images in the guide raises some concerns about the representation of Indigenous Peoples, gender, LGBT communities, among other issues.

1. Indigenous Peoples

- The guide says extremely little about Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, with respect to either their history or contemporary realities. The First Nations, Inuit and Métis are acknowledged as founding peoples and said "to have interesting cultures and make important contributions to Canadian society".²
- There are no references to the Treaties signed between the Crown and Indigenous Peoples, nor to the historical injustices perpetrated against Aboriginal Peoples, including the residential schools. In his 2008 apology for the residential schools, made on behalf of the Government of Canada, Prime Minister Stephen Harper spoke of the need to "educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools system" and to forge a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians "based on the knowledge of our shared history".³ It is unfortunate that the opportunity is not taken through the "Welcome to Canada" guide to point newcomers towards this crucial part of Canadian history.
- In all of the images provided throughout the guide, **none** are explicitly of Aboriginal individuals or communities.

2. Gender representation

A. Male overrepresentation

	Male	Female	Total
Adults	31	22	53
Children	7	8	15
Total:	38	30	68

¹ <http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/welcome/>

² Page 21.

³ House of Commons, 11 June 2008.

- In the images presented throughout the document, men appear more frequently than women.
- Among the short personal histories highlighting immigrants' experiences, 8 are male stories, while only 5 are female stories.

B. Gender stereotypes

- More than the half of the images presented in the documents fall into gender stereotypes, meaning that the individuals presented have roles or attributes traditionally assigned to their gender.⁴

<i>Table 2: Stereotypes of gender in pictures of men and women</i>				
	Male	Female	Mixed	Total
Stereotypical gendered image	15	5	5	25
Non stereotypical gendered image or neutral image	5	4	12	21
Total	20	8	17	46

- Of the 10 images representing people in uniform (soldiers, policemen, border official etc.), 9 are of men. There are in fact a total of 12 men in uniform, since some photographs show more than one man. The single woman in uniform is an Immigration Canada official, not an enforcement officer.
- In images where adults act as caregivers to children, most are women (of the few men, most are older men, apparently grandfathers).

<i>Table 3: Gender of adults in pictures with children</i>				
	Male	Female	Mixed	Total
Gender of the adult(s)	1	6	3	10

- Both sexes are presented in professional settings, but men are more than twice as likely as women to be presented in a professional setting.

<i>Table 4: Number of person in professional setting</i>			
	Male	Female	Total
Professional setting	28	13	41

⁴ For example, women caring for children, men in uniform, men in dominant position vis-à-vis women.

- The short personal histories included in the guide also tend to conform to gender stereotypes:
 - For men, the dominant model is of the self-made man who achieves individual success. Values such as sports, strong will and combativeness are exalted.
 - For women, the model presented is as caregiver and helper; they work in the community or public sector. No women are presented as having success in business, sports or academic life.

C. Gender equality

The guide includes a brief paragraph about “Equality of women and men”.⁵ This does not however address the historical and continuing struggles in Canada for economic and political equality for women. It speaks of spousal abuse, honour killings, female genital mutilation, forced marriage and other gender-based violence, which are said to be tolerated by “barbaric cultural practices”. This construction implies that violence against women is peculiar to “foreign cultures” and obscures the widespread reality of violence against women in Canada, and the social context which underlies that reality. A reference to the numerous missing and murdered Aboriginal women would be appropriate here. It would also be relevant to mention the role played by courageous women, in our history and in the present, in fighting for women’s rights, and the existence of women’s organizations where newcomer women could find support in their efforts to exercise their rights.

3. LGBT representation

The section on “Your Rights and Freedoms” contains references to protection from discrimination for all, “including gays and lesbians”, and to the right to marriage for same-sex couples.⁶

However, LGBT realities are not reflected in the images. Of three couples represented in images, none is same-sex. Nor are there any images presented that point to LGBT communities in Canada. None of the individuals profiled in the short personal histories is identified as LGBT. Nor does the text mention transsexual, transgender or bisexual persons.

4. Other concerns

- The armed forces are given disproportionate attention, especially if contrasted with the lack of attention devoted to Aboriginal peoples. Three-quarters of a page is devoted to the armed forces⁷, placed somewhat surprisingly within the chapter on “Your rights and freedoms in Canada.” Working in the military is described as a ‘noble profession’ and ‘excellent career choice’. Moreover, military history is presented as a ‘key component’ of the Canadian identity. The cover of the guide also gives particular prominence to the military, including a picture of a soldier and a group of uniformed men around a cannon.

⁵ Page 36.

⁶ Page 35.

⁷ Page 37.

- The guide gives prominent place to uniformed officers of various enforcement agencies (armed forces, police officers (RCMP and city police), border official, firemen, humane society agent).

<i>Table 5: Pictures of instances of enforcement agencies</i>	
Enforcement officers	8
Other professionals	19-22 (depending on interpretation)

- The chapter on “Your rights and freedoms in Canada” is introduced by four images, one of which is a “hunter in Canadian wetlands”. This image is completely out of place.
- The representation of labour unions is unbalanced. The section on “Employees’ rights” acknowledges the right to join a labour union, but immediately follows up by saying “it is often an involuntary requirement whether you choose it or not. Union fees will be deducted from your salary”. The guide goes on to suggest what to do if your “employer or union has treated you unfairly”. There is no reference to the role of unions in advancing employees’ rights or representing employees if their employer treats them unfairly.⁸
- There is no mention of environmental concerns. In speaking of the economy, the guide emphasizes the importance of natural resource industries, without taking the opportunity to refer to the need to address the ecological and human consequences of these industries, especially for the Indigenous Peoples.⁹ There is no mention of any efforts to green the economy.
- The guide stresses the generosity of the Canadian taxpayers, especially with regard to services to newcomers, including language lessons.¹⁰ Most newcomers must pay a Right of Permanent Residence Fee (\$490) which is designed to offset the costs of such services: it is therefore misleading to represent these services as being paid for by Canadians. Newcomers bring with them educational qualifications and professional skills that Canada has not paid for, and pay taxes in the same way as Canadians do, making the references to Canadian generosity questionable.

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⁸ Page 66.

⁹ Page 22.

¹⁰ Pages 14-15-55-56-57