

# Constructing Canadian National Identity on the Aftermath of WWII: Selection and Citizenship Policies and Practices for Post WWII “Displaced Persons”

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# Context of Research Project

- Part of a larger interdisciplinary study by an international research team consisting of Social Scientists and Computer Scientists from SMU, Dalhousie University and Universidad Nacional del Sur (Argentina)
- **Objectives:**
  - to develop a trainable, novel Natural Language Processing and Visual Analytics tool,
  - to facilitate, expand, and produce semantically nuanced text-intensive research in Social Sciences and contribute to the 'state of art' in Computer Science.
  - To identify trends and processes in the social construction of various groups of immigrants and refugees through newspaper discourse
- Work in progress, to include other immigrant groups, other time periods and possibly Toronto Star.

# Interdisciplinary Research Methodology

- With regard to the research methodology:
  - Translate the manual steps of labelling in qualitative research to be incorporated into the software tool
  - Find and save 'ideal' articles to be used in the training of the software
  - Help develop and test the tool's first stage:
    - Several rounds of labelling using different versions of the software, numerous articles –numerous rounds, learn CS language 😊
    - Evaluate other articles on the subject (of DPs) which don't use "DP" per se –may be used in either exploring our research question deeper or expanding our focus (i.e. : more rounds of labelling)
    - Test whether the tool is working properly
  - facilitate labelling of irrelevant/relevant articles: speed up the elimination of irrelevant articles and increase access to probabilistically more relevant articles

# Interdisciplinary Research Methodology

- The labelling tool that the Computer Science team developed/used for 'DP' research project has been refined to be applied to our new subject of interest: to map the historical changes in the usage and meaning of 'multiculturalism'
- Now easier, faster and more organized, and have the option of running parallel sessions.(for example multiculturalism and economy, multiculturalism and language, multiculturalism and art)
- While these were in progress, we continued 'traditional' coding with the 521 articles which were originally manually labelled as relevant out of 2038



***“For more than 2,000 of Europe’s long-suffering displaced persons, the dream of a worthwhile life is about to come true: A decent job, a place to live and eventual citizenship in a free country.”  
(The Globe and Mail, February 5, 1948)***

- the construction of DPs as the “other” is part of an official institutionalization and normalization of difference, and relatedly, of a Canadian national-identity building project.
- *The Globe and Mail* was instrumental in the identification and (re)production of a “discourse of gratitude”
  - By justifying unequal treatment based on an assumed Canadian superiority and benevolence toward the unfortunate but grateful displaced persons
  - By obscuring and devalorizing the contributions of the DP’s into Canada’s capitalist economic development.

# Theoretical Considerations

- *Anderson (2006)*: “nation state” is an “imagined political community” with “a deep, horizontal comradeship (...) regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail”.
- Each ‘nation state’ consists of ‘unique’ characteristics (culture, language, history) –different from ‘us’ and each other (*Hobsbawm, 1992*)
- From Marxist perspective: newspapers and print material are conceptualized as “superstructure” and subservient to the capitalist economic relations of production.
- Ideology and the state are in the service of the dominant class (*Miliband, 1977*)
- Ideological State Apparatuses –even if independent and/or contradictory to the dominant state ideology, still serve the state’s politics: the politics of the dominant class to ensure its reproduction (*Althusser, 1969*)
- The media is a means by which (capitalist) ideology claims a dominant position and secures consent of the subordinate classes. (*Hall, 1977*)



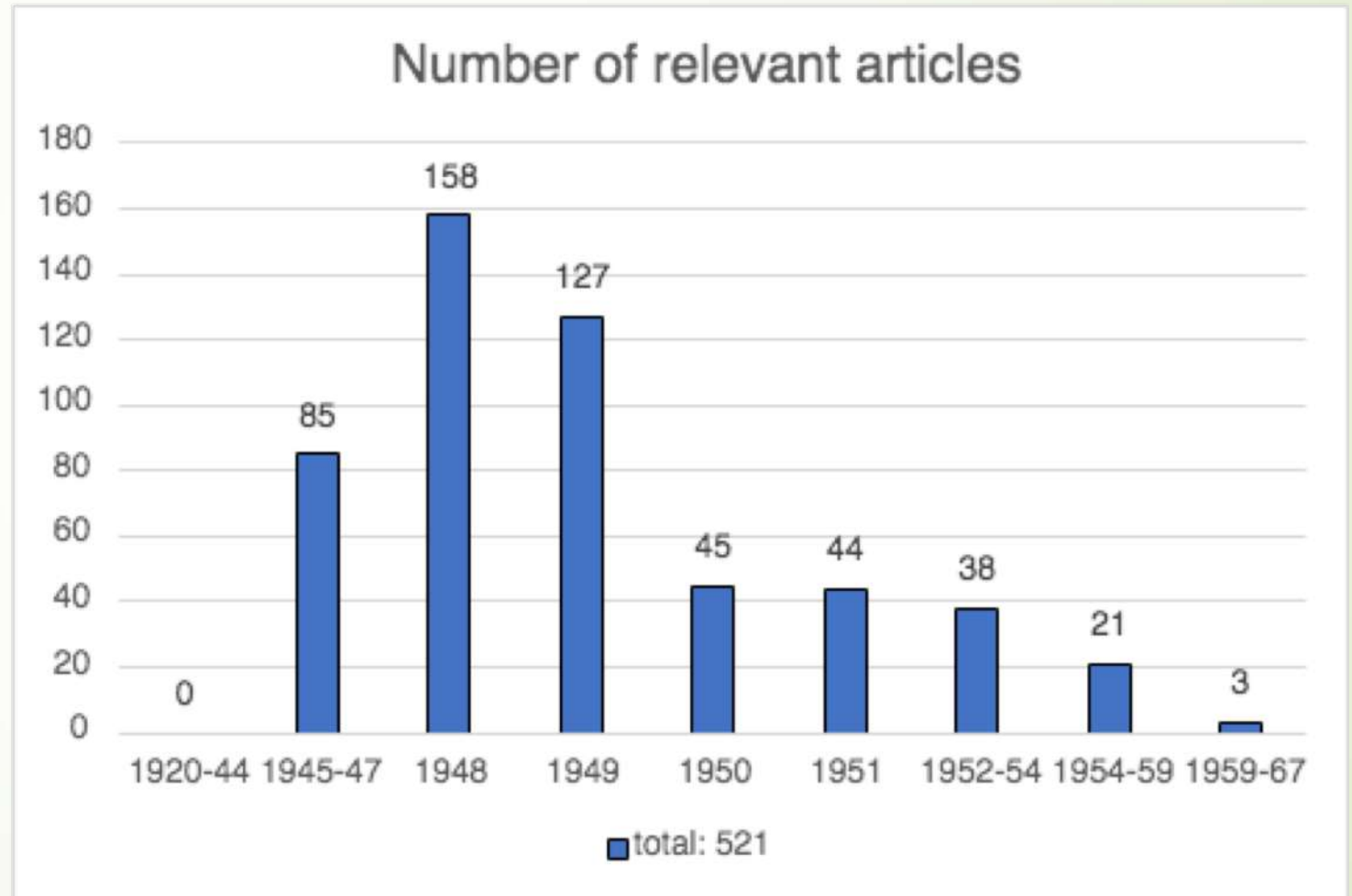
# Theoretical Considerations

Dual (split) Labour Market Theory (*Bonacich, 1979*) and (*Bolaria & Li, 1988*)

- those delegated to the lower echelons of a labour market are the same groups discriminated by race, ethnicity, gender and other dimensions
- The political economy of 'other'ness: "otherness" has been a deliberate strategy to justify the exploitative treatment of a subordinate group
- Prone to super exploitation and beneficial to capitalist dominant class because cheaper (greener) and of the antagonisms between expensive and cheap labour
- Early institutionalization of difference : Canadian immigration policies designed to keep out "undesirables" Chinese Immigration Acts 1885 to 1923, or the "Continuous Journey" Regulations in 1908 for immigrants of Sub-Continent origin.
- Ranking of European immigrants: Southern and Eastern considered inferior because of their culture, language, religion, mores –than Northern Europeans
- Even stricter between WWI and WWII (great depression) –until 'bulk labour' schemes were introduced to accept DPs

# Social Science Methodology

- Keyword search: "Canada" AND "DP" in Globe and Mail through ProQuest
- 1945 to 1967
- Open coding on Zotero
- Summarize and Thematize





# Critical Discourse Analysis

- Critical Discourse Analysis: a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities (Mullet 2018)
- identified the discrepancies, inconsistencies, and contradictions in newspaper articles between the representations of displaced persons
  - and the employers', government officials' and Canadian citizens' expectations of them
  - or the actual material inequalities of their life and work circumstances in Canada
  - Points that articulated openly, OR by way of assumptions, OR by being consistently dismissed in newspaper articles

# “Displaced Persons” –DPs: A Historical Profile

- 850,000 lived in Displaced Person's camps in Europe –closed mostly by 1952
- From the Nazi German concentration camps, prisoners of war, political refugees, former slave or voluntary workers, former forces under German command, stateless persons, refugees from former German occupied countries and Eastern Europe (Soviet satellite or annexed)
- Under the care of International Refugee Organization
- 155 to 165 thousand displaced persons were admitted to Canada between the years 1946-1962
- We analyzed the selection and citizenship processes under which Displaced persons came to and stayed in Canada

# The DP Story in the News Media

- Came in **two different streams**, either way, IRO pays for their travel by sea
  - Relatives –private sponsor groups (changing definitions)
  - ‘bulk labour’ schemes –most discussed in the Globe and Mail
- Both need to undergo health and security check-up – but the workers go through a selection process and are subject to a certain ‘citizenship’ vetting
- Industries: mining, agriculture, bush workers/loggers to work in pulp in industry, lumber industry, construction (hydro/railway), textile-garment industry, health care assistants (for public institutions) and domestics for public/private
- There is demand from these industries (and employers): as they are desperate to be saved from labour shortages, they apply to the government
- Contradictory Social Constructions –some positive, some negative, but all manifestations of how the DPs were constructed as the ‘other’

# Constructing the “Other”

- **Health:** DPs are presented as
  - hungry, miserable, living on runny soup and black bread, in bad unheated houses with no food on plank beds, at the verge of collapse
  - –yet they are healthy because the industries needed physical strength: (“hardy stock of people”) and we want the healthiest, those who pass the tests, those who are “ready to tackle the bush.”
- **Family reunification:**
  - Heart breaking stories of losses of family/friends to Soviets, bombings, camps, lonely, homeless
  - –yet contracts don’t allow family members to be brought in. Mostly single individuals are preferred. They have go through regular immigration channels to bring their family members. In Canada; dramatic stories of family reunification upon DPs’ hard work

# Constructing the “Other”:

- **Work ethic and Work Credentials:** destitute, jobless, miserable, weak, slave labourers (thus exhausted)
  - Yet, they want to come for hard work; receive high praise for their hard work; better than the Canadian worker,And they have valuable “European skills”; are educated, and industrious
  - work menial jobs with gratitude; for accreditation they need capital and time (pass exams, go to school)
- **Political involvement and Union Participation:** described as *victim*, oppressed, terrorized by war and police states, passive, docile: They had to learn “the meaning of freedom” in a non-police state
  - Yet *heroes* with agency, opposed to dictatorships, freedom lovers, who actively sought freedom and dignity by running away
  - They showed the determination to find “liberty” and thus showed “the robust qualities that belong to nation-builders”

# Accomplishing Citizenship

- 4 steps

- 1. The Selection Process:

- IRO does medical tests;
  - those who pass are interviewed by industry representatives (for women, YWCA or Catholic Women's League);
  - physicians;
  - immigration officials ensure their DP status;
  - RCMP for political background –mainly non-communist :
- **Selection Criteria:** The “deserving immigrants” had to be “*physically and morally fit*” and possessed “fitness (...) to become good Canadian citizens”

# Accomplishing Citizenship

## ➤ 2. Labour Market Participation:

### ➤ contract completion:

- overseen by the federal government,
  - 10 months to 2 years, 5 years as non-status,
  - accommodation/food deducted from salaries and forced banking + contradictory reports on working conditions and salary parity,
  - no family reunification,
  - celebrated by 'release certificates'.
- *"these men and women, of their own free will, entered into an agreement which is expected that they shall carry out. If there had been any doubt about it, they would still be in Germany"* MacNamara (deputy Labour minister of the time)(TGM, November 15, 1947).
- *"There is not a girl in a DP camp who would not gladly agree to work for nothing as long as she may come to Canada. I will wash dishes. If need be, I will scrub floors"* (Nicol 1947).



# Accomplishing Citizenship

## ➤ 3. Acculturation with time:

Classes upon completion would make them become “loyal and true citizens”

- **Language:** high volumes of reporting/praising on their effort to learn (yet, some know many languages); their English is accented, DPs find it very hard to learn the language
- *Their construction as being linguistically inadequate, takes away from their labour contributions*
- **Civics:** extreme effort to learn Canadian geography, history, law & customs and to conform on clothing; calls to Canadian people to invite them to picnics, homes etc. so that they can learn the Canadian ways
- *Not having these skills is devaluing their ability to be recognized as equal participants in the making of the Canadian nation*

# Accomplishing Citizenship

## 4. Political Selectivity: Absence of certain political tendencies (communism)

- Canada: 'free democratic ways' 'a non-Police state', 'free speech'
- Canadian Reds: anti-democratic, aggressive verbally and physically towards DPs, who in turn despised them, +anti-immigration and anti-democratic
- Labour union representatives deemed 'red tainted Canadians' were barred from the selection teams.
- Celebratory articles depicting the resistance of DPs to communist party overtures, and DPs' eagerness to help 'fight the fifth column'
- A particular Canadian national identity, which excludes all communist or leftist elements, including that of the "Canadian" communists

# The Discourse of Gratitude

- *The Globe and Mail* helps build a national identity –at a particular time and space conjuncture **through the strategic construction and inclusion of the DP ‘other’**
- Construction of the ‘self’ ‘us’ via constructions of the ‘other’ –inferior yet acceptable in Canada due to the **generosity and humanitarianism** of Canadians
- Constructions of the ‘self’ via the grateful ‘other’ (DP): **DPs presented as grateful** for being accepted - a discourse that obscures the exploitative material conditions and normalizes citizenship processes as well as a vision of capitalist development
  - Coming to Canada as DPs under these conditions is an opportunity for a new life, a resort from being ‘slave labourer’ and contracts are the price of passage. **It is a fair exchange to dreamland, and an opportunity to get acculturated**
  - Yet, DPs save industries from labour and skill shortages, and secure extra profit (by working for less, and being obedient and controlled)
  - They work under the threat of deportation, forced contracts, without families or union participation (other severe personal deprivations), and will be in limbo for another few years even after the completion of their contracts.
  - citizenship policies implemented by the Canadian state, outlined **strict labour contracts** and **conditional citizenship**: an alliance with the dominant capitalist class.

# Conclusion

TGM: a **key ideological state apparatus** which constructed the DPs as “them/other”, resting on often contradictory claims, yet always coming from a socio-economic context of poverty, misery, and oppression, and, as a result, always inferior. In opposition, a national “us” / “Self” / “Canadians” was constructed as coming from a privileged and superior world.

- The articulation and (re) production of a discourse of “gratitude” which DPs feel (or must feel) toward **Canadians who were tolerant, fair, and benevolent:**
  - Obscured the operation of a dual labour market
  - normalized class and ethnic hierarchies,
  - justified the institutionalization of difference,
  - and reinforced a national identity for all Canadian citizens in which class and ethnic hierarchies were seen as natural / normal
- Thus, it contributed to the construction of a Canadian national identity and Canadian capitalist nation building.