Immigration Policy, Public Libraries and the Social Practice of Exclusion in Canada

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ABSTRACT
Canada’s immigration policies have historically constituted a social practice of exclusion that privileges the hegemonic project of one social identity over that of another, namely the capitalist state over other social relations in society. Using critical discourse analysis, this doctoral dissertation project examines the ways in which the state’s constitution of immigrant communities and their relationships with state institutions, such as the public library, represents one site where such hegemonic struggles unfold. This research addresses the question: As an institute of the state and product of public policy, what role has the public library played in constituting immigrants to Canada and in what ways have these practices contributed to the inclusion or exclusion of immigrants in Canadian society?

Keywords
Public libraries, immigration policies, Canada, Ontario, immigrants, social exclusion, critical discourse analysis

INTRODUCTION
In 1946, in its Final Report, the Senate Standing Committee on Immigration and Labour described Canada’s Immigration Act as “a non-Immigration Act. Its main purpose seems to be exclusion. The object in view in most of its sections is to keep people out; not let them in”. The Committee was referring to the 1910 Immigration Act, which explicitly “prohibited…the landing in Canada, … of immigrants belonging to any race deemed unsuited to the climate or requirements of Canada”. The exclusionary powers in the Act were heightened further by regulations introduced through orders in council - a form of legislative authority that bypassed the usual scrutiny of parliamentary processes. In practice, this meant that until the middle of the 20th century the combination of the Immigration Act and numerous regulations constituted a social practice of exclusion that produced a hierarchy of preferred and non-preferred source countries of immigrants to Canada. While farmers from Britain, the United States and North Western Europe were preferred, the controlled entry of other classes of workers, who were also needed in the Canadian economy, were carefully selected from ‘non-preferred’ countries in Asia and Eastern Europe.

LITERATURE REVIEW
In recent years, with sustained global migration, national governments in the United Kingdom, the United States, Germany, Australia and Canada are increasingly turning to cities and municipalities to administer immigrant settlement policies and programs (Siemiatycki & Triadafilopoulos, 2010). In this regard, there has been interest in the particular role that public libraries, as municipal institutions, play in immigrant settlement and integration (Ashton & Milam, 2008; Frisken & Wallace, 2000). Scholarly research on immigrants from the field of library and information science (LIS) falls into two camps. On the one hand, researchers have focused on the role of the ‘information practices’ of immigrants in their integration and ‘social inclusion’ in society (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Caidi et al., 2009). Elsewhere, LIS research has aimed to demonstrate the ways that public libraries have responded to immigrant needs through the provision of information, services and resources, and the potential opportunities that public library spaces afford them in developing social networks and participating in the broader society (Audunson et al., 2011; Fisher et al., 2004).

Despite this, however, public libraries struggle to be socially inclusive as evidenced by the lack of diverse library staff to address the range of linguistic and ethnocultural differences (Overall, 2009). Further, in an increasingly multicultural world, Muddiman (1990)
observes that the greatest weakness of the library’s service philosophy “is its inflexibility and its insistence on the primary of a uniform service in an increasingly segmented and diversified world” (p 90).

More critical perspectives in LIS scholarship are needed to understand the ways that public libraries both constitute and are constituted through society’s broader ideological context. In this regard, LIS research in political economy has critically examined the role of the public library as a mode of social regulation both by “demonstrating links between the practices of librarianship and the emerging industrial economy’s requirement for workers, consumers and citizens” (Stevenson, 2010, p 11) and, more significantly, “in the transformation to information-based economies” (Stevenson, 2005). However, there has been no work to date that links the historical development of public libraries as a state institution to national immigration policies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK
In this project, I draw upon the work of a number of immigration policy scholars whose work focuses on the exclusionary nature of Canada’s immigration policy. In 1983, historians Abella and Troper published their groundbreaking work None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933-1948, which served to lay bare Canada’s complicity in keeping Jews out of Canada through restrictive immigration laws, regulations, and discretionary bureaucratic practices. More comprehensive in scope and analytic method, however, is sociologist Peter Li’s work on the plight of the Chinese in Canada. From 1858, when the Chinese first arrived in British Columbia as labourers, Li asserts that an anti-Chinese movement resulted from forms of institutionalized racism built on the social construction of the Chinese as an ‘inferior race’ that would be unable to assimilate into Canadian society. He states:

“The withdrawal of citizenship rights, the exclusion of immigration, and the restrictions on occupational competition were legally sanctioned by the state and thus formally institutionalized. The resulting discrimination was systematic and legal, and its practice was rationalized by an ideology stressing the superiority of white over non-white” (Li, 1998, p 37).

Another contributor to the critical scholarship on Canada’s immigration policy is Yasmeen Abu-Laban who identifies three policy eras. The first era, ‘Anglo-conformism’, is the period leading up to 1967 representing the majority of Canada’s immigration policy history, which was “explicitly racist and favoured the entry of white, particularly British-origin Protestants except in periods when there was insufficient labour in Canada or countries viewed as ethnoculturally similar” (Abu-Laban, 1998, p 191). The second policy era begins in 1967 with the introduction of the point system and “a formally non-discriminatory immigration policy characterized by an emphasis on skills for independent applicants and a policy of official multiculturalism” (Abu-Laban, 1998, p 192). A third policy era began in the early 1990s where policy has been shaped by two contradictory forces: a pervasive discourse on the integration of immigrants into Canadian society and “the growing exclusions of immigration selection and the tightening criteria for formal citizenship” (Abu-Laban, 1998, p 193).

In the context of this research, immigration policies are read as instances of social practice vis-à-vis institutional power that constitute social identities, structure relationships between social identities, and work to produce and reproduce broader systems of belief (Fairclough, 2001). As Stevenson (2009) observes Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis “provides a systematic means of uncovering the ideological dimensions of what often appear as highly polished and transparent accounts of the world. As such, policy texts are analyzed in terms of their power to reproduce or transform existing power relations” (p5). Fairclough asserts that any instance of discourse can be read “simultaneously as a piece of text, an instance of discursive practice, and an instance of social practice” (Fairclough, 1992, p 4). While the textual level focuses on the linguistic properties of a text, the discursive practice considers how texts are produced and interpreted. Finally, the social practice dimension refers to how the institutional or organizational context shapes the nature of the discursive practice and its constitutive effects.

METHOD
This dissertation project consists of: (1) the description, analysis and interpretation of Canadian immigration policy in the Post-World War II era to the present day as a social practice of exclusion that privileges the hegemonic project of one social identity over that of another, namely the capitalist state over other social relations in society, and (2) an examination of the ways in which the state’s constitution of immigrant communities and their relationships with state institutions, such as the public library, represents one site where hegemonic struggles unfold. Sources of public library discourse will be sampled in accordance with key immigration policy eras from (1) national and provincial (Ontario) library association briefs and position statements, (2) the discourse of library practitioners and scholars in Canadian and Ontario library journals and library association conference proceedings, and (3) select public library service plans in Ontario.

PRELIMINARY FINDINGS
While data collection and analysis is currently underway, some descriptive data from the Canadian and Ontario library literature can be reported as follows.

Preliminary database searches of keywords in titles and subject headings yielded a total data set of 38 articles. Corresponding with the three immigration policy eras identified by Abu-Laban (1998), 1) ten (10) articles published prior to 1967 characterized immigrants by terms such as “foreigner” or “New Canadian”, 2) sixteen (16) articles published between 1967-1993 were characterized by terms such as “non-English”, “multiculturalism” or “multilingualism”, and 3) twelve (12) articles published after 1993 were characterized by such terms as “multilingualism” and “multiculturalism” but also “new immigrant communities” or “diverse populations”.

Future data collection activities include systematic manual searches of journals in the sample to capture non-indexed references to immigrants and to analyze the ways that immigrants are constituted in the various library discourses.

IMPLICATIONS
This research aims to demonstrate that public libraries represent one site where the historical struggle for power in Canadian society plays out. It is important to recognize that despite stated professional values of neutrality, public libraries have participated in broader social practices of exclusion such as those constituted through national immigration policies.

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REFERENCES


