

“Knock, Knock, Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door” Immigrants and the Guardians of Privilege in Canada

Tanya Basok et Marshall Bastable

Volume 63, printemps 2009

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/11t63re01>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Committee on Labour History

ISSN

0700-3862 (imprimé)

1911-4842 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce document

Basok, T. & Bastable, M. (2009). “Knock, Knock, Knockin’ on Heaven’s Door”: Immigrants and the Guardians of Privilege in Canada. *Labour / Le Travail*, 63, 207–219.

REVIEW ESSAY / NOTE CRITIQUE

"Knock, Knock, Knockin' on Heaven's Door": Immigrants and the Guardians of Privilege in Canada

Tanya Basok and Marshall Bastable

David Goutor, *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872–1934* (Vancouver: UBC Press 2007)

Franca Iacovetta, *Gatekeepers: Reshaping Immigrant Lives in Cold War Canada* (Toronto: Between the Lines 2006)

Habiba Zaman, *Breaking the Iron Wall: Decommodification and Immigrant Women's Labor in Canada* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books 2006)

THE TITLES OF THE BOOKS under review reflect the images and metaphors of gates and walls that various immigration scholars have evoked.¹ The three books deal with different forms of exclusion that certain immigrants coming (or aspiring to come) to Canada have experienced in the past 130 years. Whether forbidden to disembark on Canada's shores, precluded from expressing their cultural and ideological beliefs and principles, or prevented from getting better paid and more secure jobs, immigrants from particular countries have been subject to control, surveillance, regulation, discrimination, and racism. Throughout this time, fears of economic competition or threats to national identity have mixed with concerns over national security and the protection of economic privilege of the host society. The great migrations of

1. See, for instance, Nathan Glazer, ed., *Clamour at the Gates: The New American Immigration* (San Francisco 1985); Alan Dowty, *Closed Borders: The Contemporary Assault on Freedom of Movement* (New Haven 1987); Mark Gibney, ed., *Open Borders? Closed Societies? The Ethical and Political Issues* (New York 1988); Anthony Richmond, *Global Apartheid: Refugees, Racism, and the New World Order* (Toronto 1994).

modern times and the conflicting attitudes and policies of Western countries towards immigrants tell us much about the dilemmas of liberal democracy with its conflicting needs for economic growth, formal equality, and *de facto* exclusions of some groups from the privileges of membership.

In May 1914 the Japanese ship *Komagata Maru* steamed into Vancouver harbour carrying 376 South Asian immigrants sponsored by a leading Sikh businessman and the South Asian community of British Columbia. Canadian immigration officials who met the ship refused to allow the immigrants to disembark. During the two-month legal battle that ensued, the federal and provincial governments required that the immigrants remain on board the ship, and delayed provisions to them. The government won its court case and, escorted by a Canadian warship, forced the *Komagata Maru* to return to India. Police met the ship at the docks of Calcutta, and as the passengers disembarked, twenty were killed and others taken to jail. This unsavoury incident symbolizes, as the books under review here reveal, the Canadian immigration policy and practice which is torn between the need for immigrant workers to construct a nation and the tendency to exclude immigrants on the basis of race, culture, and class.

Both *Guarding the Gates* and *Gatekeepers* demonstrate how ambivalent Canadians have been about immigrants and the Canadian nation since that nation began. Each reveals how the idea of directed nation-building remains a cornerstone of the Canadian identity. These books show how fears and anxieties about immigrants have kept immigration a central political issue and have resulted in policies and practices aimed at directing and protecting the cultural identity and economic development of Canada.

In *Guarding the Gates: The Canadian Labour Movement and Immigration, 1872–1934*, David Goutor traces in detail the exclusionist views of the Canadian labour movement leaders from the 1880s until the 1930s. He argues that the ferocious anti-immigrant views of mainstream union leaders were based on the fear that immigrants would drive down wages by their mere presence and by their willingness to work for wages lower than those of Canadian workers, and especially of high-skilled craftsmen, for whom the mainstream Canadian labour movement was a voice of defence. However, while Goutor takes the union leaders at their word, he also analyzes the heavily racist anti-immigrant discourses and arguments that union leaders deployed. Goutor brilliantly shows how union leaders engaged two parallel but distinct lines of argument, one economic (immigrants as threats to Canadian wage rates) and one cultural (immigrants as threats to Canadian values). Goutor thus approaches the problem of the relative autonomy of economic and cultural factors at work in Canadian immigration history, but with little argument he accepts the economic interpretation over the cultural. Goutor examines in some detail how various peoples of the world were by class, race, and/or culture deemed unsuitable for Canadian citizenship. A hierarchy was constructed: immigrants from British and North-West Europe could be more easily assimilated than

those from Southern and Eastern Europe, but Asians were beyond the pale and indeed posed a threat to the social and cultural values of Canada. Goutor devotes much of his book to these distinctions which developed in the minds of union leaders, but he is much too facile in dismissing the xenophobia of the union movement as derivative of the wage-rate argument. The weight of his own evidence might have prompted more discussion of this theoretical issue.

Goutor's methodology may account for his unwillingness to grapple more directly with the theoretical dimensions to the cultural aspects of the labour movement's views on immigration. He tells his story almost exclusively from the perspective of labour leaders and the labour press. He has many quotations to amply demonstrate the wild claims about how immigrants would destroy the country, and suggests that such views were held generally. He suggests that labour's racist views were simply a reflection of the times. As the racist ranting poured forth from labour union leaders, Goutor continually reminds us that labour's views were no different from other social and political groups. He states early in the book that his aim is not "to shame or discredit unionists for past policies and public statements, or to place the burden of guilt on the labour movement for Canada's often abrasive history of racial and ethnic relations." (10) Indeed he congratulates union leaders for their "intense and sustained engagement with immigration and closely related issues such as race, ethnicity, and gender, economic and trade policy, defining and defending standards of living, and nation-building and constructing the national community." (10) His actual argument then is not so much what he claims – that labour was motivated by fears that immigration drives down wage rates – but that labour leaders of the past should not be held responsible for their racism because their racist views "were not formed in a vacuum but in response to particular economic, political and social conditions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries." (10) He is determined to write a Rankean past "as it actually was." The problem with this is that it can excuse racial and cultural prejudices which are embedded in the minds of union leaders today.

Goutor does however lay out a blunt account of labour's ferocious and relentless attack on the Canadian government policy which allowed a miniscule number of Chinese immigrants to enter Canada to work on the railway in order to make the National Policy succeed – that is, to build an economic base to secure the newly independent nation of Canada. Of particular interest is Goutor's analysis of how labour leaders incorporated Chinese immigration into their understanding of labour's struggle against capitalism. Here Goutor does provide an interesting analysis of labour's efforts to construct a theory of how immigration affects class struggle, concluding of course that Chinese immigrants ended up as allies of capital.

From the 1870s, when Canadian industrialization began and new Canadian labour organizations developed, the discourse of class predominated and unions strove to create a Canadian national and working-class identity based on the "Anglo-Saxon race." Labour unions used racist as well as the

cheap-labour arguments against the announcement of the Mackenzie Liberal government that Chinese immigrant labourers would be brought in to complete the Canadian Pacific Railway. Even the Knights of Labor, led by mostly skilled workers, opposed admitting Chinese labourers into labour organizations, thus breaking their own stated fundamental principle of non-exclusion. This fact is too often only parenthetically acknowledged by labour historians today, some of whom feel the need, as Goutor does, to excuse such racist policies on the grounds that it was the prevailing ideology of the time.

Goutor's research makes clear that from its beginnings in the 1870s Canadian organized skilled labour excluded workers on the basis of race, and campaigned continuously for government to carry out racist immigration policies. Labour constructed an elaborate hierarchy of races, with the "Anglo-Saxon" on top, followed by western Europeans, then eastern and southern Europeans, then a long drop to Asians, with the highly industrialized and world power Japanese only slightly above the non-industrial and militarily weak Chinese. Lastly came the peoples of any part of Africa. A variety of non-economic claims were used to exclude immigrants. Africans were excluded on grounds of climate. On the other hand, Canadian black workers were not seen as a threat to wages, nor were Canadian Aborigines.

Chinese immigrants were a complex case. While they comprised a tiny part of the Canadian workforce, they were seen as a serious threat to wages and Canadian culture. Labour first demanded a higher head tax on Chinese immigrants, but then complained that the railway capitalists were lending Chinese immigrants the money to pay the tax and thereby indebting Chinese workers to their capitalist bosses. This, they said, put Chinese workers on the side of capitalists in the great class struggle. Other non-economic arguments were deployed: the Chinese were too depraved to integrate into Canadian society, they were content to live on starvation wages because they were not consumers (an important part of the National Policy), but their frugality allowed them to accumulate large amounts of money which they then returned to China, thus taking money out of the Canadian economy. The Chinese male migrants, said labour, were uncivilized and morally depraved sexual predators.

Goutor's underlying argument is that "clusters of factors" went into labour's racial depiction of immigrants, but the most important was fear of cheap-labour competition. This can give a rational basis to racism, yet, as Goutor also acknowledges, there was no rational basis to their claim that the few Chinese immigrants who were allowed into Canada could possibly alter, or "swamp" Canadian society and culture. Labour's cultural attack on the Chinese was *wildly* exaggerated, a point to which Goutor might have given more attention.

These criticisms reveal the strength and value of this book in that it prompts much thought. David Goutor has written an excellent account based on extensive and first-rate research, of the Canadian labour movement's unsavoury treatment of immigrants in a country of immigrants. This detailed and well documented account enriches the literature on organized labour's exclusion-

ism of the past.² It was nothing less than a betrayal of their supposedly socialist ideals of worker solidarity. The legacy of the decades which Goutor examines is the racial hierarchy which became the basis for Canadian immigration policy. While the specific form of the hierarchy altered somewhat after World War II and another surge in Canadian industrial development, the system remained hierarchical nevertheless.

Racism thus emerged from the necessity of bringing foreign workers into Canada to implement the grand economic strategy of the National Policy. The aim was to control immigration such that it would fulfill its economic objectives, but not threaten the dominant British social and cultural structure of Canada. This racist fear became embedded in Canadian immigration policies. This racial immigration policy of protecting a particular British vision of Canadian values and identity reached a climax in 1947 when Prime Minister Mackenzie King pronounced in the House of Commons:

The policy of the government is to foster the growth of the population of Canada by the encouragement of immigration. The government will seek by legislation, regulation and vigorous administration, to ensure the careful selection and permanent settlement of such numbers of immigrants as can be advantageously absorbed in our national economy.... The people of Canada do not wish as a result of mass immigration to make a fundamental alteration in the character of our population. Large scale immigration from the Orient would change the fundamental composition of the Canadian population.³

The question is: to what extent has this principle governed Canadian immigration since World War II? While Goutor writes of guarding the gates to Canada to exclude all immigrants, Franca Iacovetta looks at gatekeepers who, given the growing demand for labour during the post-war economic boom, could not keep immigrants out entirely, yet saw themselves, like their labour union predecessors, as guardians of a bourgeois idea of Canada, protecting Canada from eastern and southern European immigrants whose bourgeois credentials were uncertain at best.

The policy of 1947 was still active in 1967, modified by the popular term "unity in diversity," which, as Iacovetta demonstrates, meant instilling immigrants with Canadian values and behaviours. The material culture of newcomers was to be celebrated and would enrich, but not change Canadian culture (pizzas and folk dancing but nothing that was contrary to bourgeois culture such as Communist ideology, crime, violence, and non-participation in consumer culture). Cultural pluralism was welcome especially if it had commercial or political value (pizza restaurants and the "ethnic vote" began their ascent at this time). Iacovetta refers to this as "cultural appropriation and

2. See, for instance, E.M. Bonacich, "A Theory of Ethnic Antagonism: The Split Labor Market," *American Sociological Review* 37, 5 (1972), 547–59; and individual contributions to Johan Wets, ed., *Cultural Diversity in Trade Unions, A Challenge to Class Identity* (Aldershot, UK 2000).

3. Freda Hawkins, *Canada and Immigration: Public Policy and Public Concern* (Montreal and Kingston 1988), 91, 93.

ethnic containment” in Cold War Canada. (76) In short, together Goutor and Iacovetta show that the view of immigrants as threats to bourgeois culture is a consistent theme in Canadian immigration history. The fear of Chinese immigrants was transformed into the fear that certain European immigrants were susceptible to the Marxist cells that operated in many countries, including Canada. As Western European economies began to recover in the 1950s, and Canada was forced to seek more workers from outside preferred countries, Canadian gatekeepers gave themselves the mission of educating immigrants and indeed Canadians in general about the dangers of Communism.

The key official in charge of this campaign was Vladimir Kaye, the chief liaison officer of the Citizenship Branch of the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the main governmental gatekeeper. Kaye was a Ukrainian-Canadian nationalist, a post-war career civil servant who had taught at the University of Ottawa and wrote on the history of Ukrainian-Canadians. This Cold War gatekeeper’s task was to bring about “unity in diversity” and he poured all his energies into combating left-wing Ukrainian-Canadians, and viewed immigrants from Soviet-controlled Ukraine and other eastern countries as vulnerable to communist organizers and their propaganda press in Canada. Kaye’s job was to organize anti-communist immigrants to discredit the ethnic Canadian left. (104) Anti-communist immigrants thus had a political as well as economic value to the government. Iacovetta unwinds some of the complexities of the ethnic immigrant community, in which the anti-communists were more interested in supporting the liberation movements back home than in fighting communism in Canada. Just as Goutor writes that immigrants before World War II were socially constructed in a hierarchy of racial qualities, Iacovetta writes of Cold War gatekeepers who constructed a hierarchy of countries according to their tendency to embrace communism. It so worked out that in both cases Anglo-Saxon countries were at the top of both hierarchies. Immigrants of French background also scored high in the anti-communist scale, despite the significant Communist presence in France. (107)

But the effort to re-educate the mass of eastern and southern European immigrants who came to Canada during the early Cold War was much broader than simply combating communist ideology. Iacovetta argues citizenship is something constructed in an ongoing dialectic between two groups. On the one side were those with power and their gatekeepers, or ‘reception workers’, such as academic experts, social workers, state officials, school principals, newspapers and magazines (Iacovetta emphasizes the role of *Chatelaine*), the National Film Board – in short the entire section of the established Anglo-Canadian middle class which dealt with surveillance, communication, education, and behaviour modification, and sought to persuade immigrants and native Canadians alike to take up bourgeois political and moral ideals, table manners, cultural values, and consumer lifestyles. Social workers looked at this from a particular perspective, arguing that this assimilation model would reduce prejudice

and intolerance, allowing the newcomers to participate in creating a new and modern Canadian culture. It all amounted to an ambitious "grand national experiment in citizenship." This all seems like a great improvement over the racial extremism of the first 70 years of Canadian treatment of immigrants, but Iacovetta shows how much of 'multiculturalism' was a sham. *Gatekeepers* contains many interesting examples and individual episodes that seem to illustrate her overall argument. Iacovetta identifies her theoretical perspective as Marxist, anti-racist, and feminist, and she alludes to cultural theorists such as Gramsci and Foucault. But these theoretical and general explanatory frameworks are not fully developed. Nevertheless *Guarding the Gates* is an excellent book which takes us into the everyday lives and struggles of immigrants who entered the country during the Cold War and changed the face of Canada.

In May 2008 the British Columbia government apologized for the *Komagata Maru* incident of 1914, and on August 4, 2008 Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper stood on stage at an Indo-Canadian cultural festival in Surrey, British Columbia, and apologized for Canada's role in the affair. The apology prompted much emotional debate over immigrants and the idea of apologizing for historical events, and revealed how much immigration provokes anxieties over social identities (what is a Canadian?) and the economic consequences of immigration (does it develop the country or depress wages?). These political apologies, and those for other racist acts demonstrate that past immigration policies and practices, even the distant past, are not merely matters of historical interest. In immigration matters, the past, as the saying goes, is not history; it's not even past. Habiba Zaman illustrates how racism (and sexism) continue to shape the lives of Canadian immigrants and particularly visible minority women.

Breaking the Iron Wall explores various processes through which post-World War II Canadian immigrants, particularly women, have become confined mainly to low-wage, monotonous, dangerous, and insecure jobs. Zaman employs the concept of commodification to characterize these kinds of jobs. From her perspective, commodified jobs and sectors are the ones that are not regulated by the state and that, instead, rely exclusively (or almost exclusively) on market processes. For Zaman, decommodified sectors, by contrast, are those that are regulated by the state. She attributes the commodification of jobs held by immigrant women to policies and practices linked to globalism or the ideology that encompasses neo-liberal principles and policies. Borrowing the concept of decommodification from Polanyi, Offe, and Esping-Andersen, the author associates decommodification with a wide range of social citizenship rights which, in the context of work refer to employment insurance, sickness benefits, pensions, vacation, and extended health care benefits.

Zaman examines statistical information to demonstrate that when immigrant women enter the labour force, their incomes are lower than those of immigrant men and Canadian-born women. She points out two explanations

for this trend. Some analysts have blamed the poor performance of immigrant women in the labour market on some structural limitations, immigrants' limited skills, and lack of social networks. Others have pointed out that racism, sexism, and classism are responsible for this pattern. Zaman finds both approaches limited because they ignore immigrant women's voices. By contrast, the author places emphasis on immigrant women's own narratives as they try to explain why and through what mechanisms they are relegated to poorly paid, temporary, and unprotected jobs and the prospects they have to obtain jobs that enjoy social benefits and protections. The book is based on 64 in-depth interviews with immigrant women from Asia and Southeast Asia, particularly those from Bangladesh, India, and the Philippines currently residing in Vancouver. Some of this research was conducted in collaboration with the Vancouver Philippine Women Centre.

Zaman illustrates how different mechanisms of exclusion from the jobs in what she calls the "decommodified" sector are employed for different categories of migrants. For Asian women who immigrate to Canada predominantly as "dependents" of principal applicants, inadequate job and language training, absence of accreditation, and reductions in government support to settlement services create almost insurmountable obstacles, forcing them to accept poorly paid and insecure jobs and preventing them from acquiring skills and knowledge required for more secure and better paid jobs. This exclusion is rooted in the very process of immigrant selection. As Zaman points out, using their discretionary power, the immigration officers devalue women's credentials from their countries and grant them the status of "dependents" of male applicants. As "dependents," women, particularly racialized women, are ineligible for free language training courses, vocational training, social services, and other benefits. Aggravating the situation, in the neo-liberal climate, government support for language and vocational training programs for immigrants has been reduced and restructured, placing further restrictions on settlement assistance that immigrants can receive. Even though immigrants pay a \$975 landing fee per person, they receive inadequate services upon their arrival. For instance, in British Columbia, the second highest immigrant-receiving Canadian province, immigrants wait for nine weeks to have their language skills assessed and three to six months after the initial assessment to enrol in English language classes. Furthermore, once students acquire rudimentary English skills, they become ineligible for further language training support.

These practices towards Asian women – the updated "head tax" for example – suggest that Canadian treatment of immigrants has changed little from the fundamental attitudes and principles described by Goutor and Iacovetta. Zaman illustrates specific mechanisms that assign Filipino women to vulnerable jobs that lack social protections. For instance, she convincingly explains how a two-year live-in requirement traps many immigrant women in low-paying jobs by preventing them from maintaining and upgrading their

qualifications as nurses or in other professions that they had acquired in the Philippines. Consequently, even upon the completion of their two-year live-in requirement, they continue working for less-than-minimum wages as caregivers. She uses Filipino women narratives to illustrate abusive working conditions they encounter in many Canadian families. They include: working excessive hours without adequate compensation, being assigned additional duties not covered by the contract, receiving poor living quarters, and being under-nourished by the employers. These abuses go undetected because the BC provincial government (similar to other provincial governments) does not monitor labour conditions, such as hours of work, nature of activities, wages, accommodation, food, and holidays, in private households.

Relying on the narratives presented by Asian women, Zaman illustrates how barriers to more secure and better paid employment are related to neo-liberal policies adopted by the federal and provincial governments. Analyzing particular regulations and deregulations, she convincingly argues that these policies result in: limited settlement services, lack of government-funded support for immigrant women's jobs search, substandard labour regulations by the provincial government in British Columbia, and limited subsidized daycare. Most immigrant women interviewed in this study held part-time jobs that required flexible hours, making them ineligible to receive social benefits and entitlements such as Employment Insurance, extended medical coverage, pension benefits, sick leave, and vacation. They were employed in secondary manufacturing, office work, or service jobs, jobs characterized by low wages and poor working conditions. At the same time, high housing costs and a shortage of subsidized housing prevented these immigrant women from spending money on courses which would allow them to upgrade their skills. Furthermore, lack of affordable childcare and government subsidy made it impossible for these women to enrol in courses. Due to their lack of knowledge about educational systems, requirements for recertification, and work experience in the immigrants' countries of origin, professional associations (doctors, dentists, architects, engineers, veterinarians, lawyers, pharmacists, and others) served as gatekeepers erecting barriers for immigrants in their pursuit of professional licenses.

Yet, Zaman also shows how despite various challenges, most women from South and South-East Asia explore avenues to receive accreditation and undergo a re-skilling process in order to obtain professional jobs for which they had been trained in their home countries. Some do succeed. Yet, to enable more immigrant women to attain better paying and secure jobs, the author makes the following recommendations: (1) set up regulatory bodies that would be able to develop more adequate tools to evaluate foreign credentials and, in cooperation with federal and provincial governments, develop a standardized and uniform system to be adopted by all provinces; (2) provide language and vocational training to all immigrants, men and women; (3) make daycare accessible to all families, freeing women to pursue opportunities to upgrade

their skills; and (4) reform the live-in-caregiver program making it possible for women to obtain permanent residence upon arrival.

Two migrant women organizations, the India *Mahila* (Women's) Association and the Philippine Women Centre, discussed by Zaman, advocate for these and other changes. Collectively, women in these organizations challenge local, national, and global forces that subordinate women migrants. They empower individual women migrants to counter and improve abusive working conditions. By presenting women's stories, Zaman illustrates how, by building networks, immigrant women negotiate and develop strategies to change their lives.

Overall insightful and ethnographically rich, the book has some limitations. First of all, the concepts of commodification and decommodification, so central to Zaman's analysis, are unclear and require further elaboration. Even though the author first mentions the concepts of commodification and decommodification in the Introduction and uses these terms frequently (perhaps too frequently throughout every chapter of her book), she does not develop the concept of commodification until page 74 and of decommodification until page 92. This makes it rather difficult for the reader to fully understand the meaning of these concepts in the first half of the book. Furthermore, these concepts are employed in an inconsistent manner. For instance, Zaman tells us that the concept of commodification has been used to refer to "an increasing reliance on the market to do things cheaper and faster through the private sector." (8) Yet this definition does not adequately cover the range of issues the author raises in her book. The author asserts that immigrants are commodified, often without having a chance to be de-commodified. (116) But if commodification is a process of turning something that was not of market value into a commodity with market value, it would imply that immigrant women had not been commodified before. Yet, as we learn from further reading in the book, most immigrant women discussed in this book had held jobs in the labour market prior to their migration to Canada.

The last chapter is rather disappointing. One often hopes to find some new ideas and reflections in the concluding chapter. Zaman, on the other hand, offers a summary of each chapter, not much different from a summary presented in the Introduction. Four paragraphs of less than a page outlining policy recommendations constitute the only new section in this chapter. Commodities, commodification, use values, and market values are elements of a complex – and controversial – labour theory of value which Zaman needed to explain and illustrate more fully.

Despite these limitations, the book is certainly commendable. By focusing on immigrant women's views and perceptions on how specific policies, regulations, and practices lock them into jobs with no social citizenship rights attached to them, and how these policies and practices are shaped by neo-liberal ideologies, Zaman presents an analysis that is highly useful for scholars, activists, and politicians.

The three books discussed above talk about enormous obstacles faced by potential and actual immigrants (particularly, visible minority immigrants). Some have been prevented from settling in Canada, others have been forbidden to express their cultural and ideological beliefs, and others have encountered barriers to their socio-economic mobility. Despite the similarity in the three titles reviewed in this essay, there are some differences between them. While Gouter and Iacovetta focus on those who exclude, Zaman's focus is on the excluded. And therefore it is not surprising that only Zaman deals with efforts to break the gates and walls and overcome obstacles to exclusion.

Today, new walls are erected by the Canadian authorities. On March 14, 2008 the federal government tabled changes to the *Immigration and Refugee Protection Act* (IRPA) as part of the federal budget (Bill C-50). These changes would give the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration the power to narrow processing of immigration applications. They would put certain limits on the humanitarian and compassionate category which currently is the only avenue available to those who encounter difficulties in the process of pursuing family reunification. At the same time, the government reaffirmed the current policy shift away from permanent settlement of immigrants towards the migration based on temporary visa arrangements. And just like in the past, labour organizations express dismay at the government's policy. But in contrast to the past, the position of organized labour is supportive of the rights of people to immigrate to Canada in dignity. On March 31, 2008, in his letter addressed to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration Canada Diane Finley and Prime Minister Stephen Harper, circulated widely among pro-migrant advocates, the National President of the United Food and Commercial Workers Union Wayne Hanley writes:

As you are aware, the law as worded could allow instructions that block the processing of applications based on country of origin, race or religion. Transparency and fairness in the processing of applications are apparently being exchanged for an opportunity for discriminatory and arbitrary Ministerial practices. From our perspective, this is merely another example of a conscious policy shift of Citizenship and Immigration Canada towards treating immigrants as merely disposable and exploitable temporary labour. We believe that fundamental components to a successful immigration strategy in Canada, such as family reunification and permanent resident status, will be undermined under these new amendments.

Underscoring some of the basic flaws in legislation and regulations under IRPA governing the Temporary Foreign Worker Program, which have resulted in multiple abuses of these workers, in its March 31, 2008, submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, the British Columbia and Yukon Territory Building and Construction Trades Council call upon the government "to make a binding commitment to end the exploitation and abuse of migrant workers." Numerous community organizations raise similar concerns. The Toronto-based Ontario Council of Agencies Serving Immigrants (OCASI) issues a statement immediately following the proposed changes, stating, "OCASI expects that responding to Canada's economic

needs should not compromise Canada's vision to build this country through the settlement and integration of immigrants as fully equal participants in society." These are just some examples of migrant rights' advocacy by Canadian labour organizations and other community supporters.

Recently, immigration scholars have turned their attention to attempts by migrants and their supporters (including organized labour) to break down the mechanisms of exclusion.⁴ Both the social construction of the boundaries of privilege (discussed in the three books reviewed in this essay), as well as the deconstruction of these boundaries, are important issues and require more attention among migration scholars.

Immigration thus raises issues about the theory and practice of liberal democracy with its emphasis on formal equality and de facto practices of exclusion. Until World War II questions of equity did not even enter the vocabulary of policy makers in the immigration field. But in the second half of the 20th century relationships between immigration and notions of rights (whether human rights or citizenship rights) have become increasingly important and will be even more important in the future not only among pro-migrant rights advocates but in policy-making circles. Today it is generally agreed that people have the right to leave their country – a right listed in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, but they do not have the right to enter any country of their choosing. The rationalities behind the free movement of goods, capital, and services are not extended to the movement of people. Whatever the practical reasons for this exclusion, the theoretical and social justice issues associated with immigration policy need to be incorporated into studies of gatekeeping and social change.

Since the first humans walked out of Africa 100,000 years ago, migrations have driven social, economic, and cultural change, from the Bantu migrations of 1200 B.C. to the 'barbarian' migrations at the end of the Roman Empire, to the mass migrations which filled North America in the 19th and 20th centuries.⁵ But the present and future may be the greatest of the ages of migration, as millions of people in the world are on the move, many pushed by dire

4. See, for instance: Juanita Elias, "Struggles over the Rights of Foreign Domestic Workers in Malaysia: the Possibilities and Limitations of 'Rights Talk,'" *Economy and Society* 37, 2 (2008), 282–303; Jennifer J. Chun, "The Limits of Labour Exclusion: Redefining the Politics of Split Labor Markets under Globalization," *Critical Sociology* 34, 3 (2008), 433–52; Jennifer Chun, "Public Dramas and the Politics of Justice: Comparison of Janitors' Union Struggles in South Korea and the United States," *Work and Occupations* 32, 4 (2005), 486–503; Anne McNevin, "Political Belonging in a Neoliberal Era: The Struggle for the Sans-Papiers," *Citizenship Studies* 10, 2 (2006): 135–51; Anne McNevin, "Irregular Migrants, Neoliberal Geographies and Spatial Frontiers of 'The Political,'" *Review of International Studies* 33 (2006), 655–674; William Robinson, "'Aquí estamos y no nos vamos!' Global Capital and Immigrant Rights," *Race and Class* 48, 2 (2006), 77–91; and Monica Varsanyi, "Interrogating 'Urban Citizenship' vis-à-vis Undocumented Migration," *Citizenship Studies* 10, 2 (2006), 229–49.

5. John Haywood, *The Great Migrations: From the Earliest Humans to the Age of Globalization* (London 2008).

circumstances of war and oppression, many more others pulled by opportunities in rich Western countries like Canada which will increasingly rely upon immigrants to reduce labour shortages and provide the demographic basis for long-term survival. Canada has always been a nation of immigrants – even the Aboriginal peoples migrated here 15,000 years ago – and it will continue to absorb peoples from all countries and cultures. It is only in the last few decades that a human rights approach to migration has started gaining prominence. This issue will undoubtedly continue to make strides into the Canadian political agenda.