Towards an intellectual political economy:  
The strategy and reception of academic research on Canadian immigration policy

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Introduction:  
This paper represents an attempt to look outside my day-to-day research at the broader context within which it is situated. It could be thought of as a study in 'intellectual political economy', in an effort to highlight the complex and evolving set of relationships between academia and policy making, but while acknowledging the crucial importance of the political economy context. As such, it fits somewhat within several academic literatures, but only loosely: science studies; the recent attempts to write a critical history of state statistics; and the equally recent work on governmentality.

Basic agenda:  
1. Setting the scene: Immigration and the Canadian experiment  
2. Academia and policy making: governance and governmentality  
3. Metropolis as a model of research and governance  
4. The practice of policy research: performing relevance

1. Setting the scene: immigration and the Canadian experiment  
As in most countries, Canada has shifted its immigration policies a number of times during the past 50 years or so. Following the Second World War, the Canadian government tried to return to an earlier model of immigration that centred on labour recruitment within a framework of white privilege. That is, the government was eager to settle a larger workforce provided it was able to fit into the European contours of the settler state. Along with other countries, most notably the United States, Canada redefined the nature of its immigration system in the 1960s. Due to a complex set of causes that include international embarrassment associated with a racially-specific entry policy, and a 'brain drain' that many believed was nearing crisis proportions, Canada abandoned the system of priorities accorded to European and selected Commonwealth countries in favour of a new assessment system designed to be 'colour blind'. This profound change had little impact at first, since for the most part the number of immigrants admitted was relatively low. However, after 1967 we can see a trend towards globalized immigrant entry to Canada. The policy framework was fundamentally changed again in the mid 1980s, when concern
over falling fertility levels prompted the government to consider immigration as a means to postpone problems associated with demographic aging. This led to new, much higher, immigration targets that have hovered around 250,000 annually since the late 1980s. At present the ministry is considering higher immigration targets, and contemplating an increase to 300,000 permanent migrants per year, as well as 100,000 additional temporary migrants. That means that in the current decade, Canada could see something like 3-4 million added to a population of 30 million, making it the country of highest percapita immigrant intake in the industrialized world.

During the 1990s, in round numbers, about 80 percent of permanent immigrants landing in Canada were officially classified as 'visible minorities', meaning that they are neither indigenous peoples of North America, nor of European (read white) descent. In the 1996 census, 12 percent of Canada's population was in this statistical category and that proportion is certain to have risen between then and the latest census, which was taken in mid-May this year.

The settlement of recent immigrants, and therefore their demographic effects, has been highly uneven in Canada, as elsewhere. Nearly half settle in Toronto which now boasts that it is the world's most multicultural city. Of course, so does Sydney, Australia, New York, and no doubt other places, but the fact remains that 'visible minorities' now make up half of the 3 million inhabitants of the City of Toronto, and there are some 180 languages spoken in the school system.

There are also large minority populations in Vancouver, Montréal and a few other cities, but immigrants have also avoided a number of places. For example, in Québec City, a provincial capital of around 600,000 people, only 1.5 percent indicated a minority origin in the 1996 census.

When considering the magnitude of these changes, a few points are worth bearing in mind: The uneven nature of immigrant settlement means that multicultural issues are absolutely at the forefront of political debate in some parts of Canada and virtually absent from consideration in other parts. Given the various facets of globalization and also the Canadian government's attempts to entice well-off individuals to 'join' the country, there is no such thing as a 'typical' immigrant. The immigrant—and therefore minority—population is exceedingly diverse on many dimensions, including ethnicity, religion, culture, class, and so on. Thus there can be no 'one size fits all' settlement policy.

The issues that accompany immigration are cross-cut by several other notable political movements, especially the struggles of Aboriginal Peoples and Quebeckers to gain more autonomy as distinctive 'nations' within Canada.

Under these conditions of change and political agitation, the crucial question becomes, how does government 'work'? How does it maintain legitimacy as a social institution, or perhaps as The social institution? There are all kinds of indications that the government of Canada
is concerned about this issue, which is at the heart of several recent initiatives/invitations made to academics.

Before moving on, a footnote is in order. In making these points about immigration, demographic change, and the concerns of government, I am decidedly not trying to imply that immigrants, and related growing cultural diversity, 'destroys' or even 'destabilizes' society. I see cultural diversity in positive terms, as a trend that is both inevitable in an age of rapid migration, and enriching. However, the fact remains that it also challenges the legitimacy of traditional institutions—which may be another positive element of immigration...

2. Academia and policy making: new modes/models of governance
Perhaps the most important contribution I hope to make in this paper is to dispel the myth of academia as detached. We are all fully familiar, of course with the notion of academics and the ivory tower. Most of us also routinely, sometimes even enthusiastically, make the point that academia has become a marginalized socio-political force. (I say enthusiastically because it absolves us of responsibility, or complicity). However, I believe this sense of detachment is completely wrong and that academics have had, and continue to have, a very powerful influence on state policy. There are myriad examples, from many countries, but here are a few of the most obvious: the eugenic movement of the early 20th century and all manner of racist policies; Keynes and the welfare state; neoclassical economists and the revival of the laissez faire state; etc.
I also have a more small-scale example. What I've found in conversation with policy makers is that many of them have 'favourite' academic personalities who they take seriously.

In any case, the question, for me, is not, Do academics influence policy, but rather, Which academics influence government policy?
This leads to a corollary point: policy can be changed, and academics who are critical of the state can't absolve themselves of responsibility for the negative impacts of policy. In my opinion, they/we should try to change policy.
...Which leads to another basic point. On the whole, I think, academics pay little attention to the operations of the state. In my intellectual development, I came upon the scene during an outburst of structural theories in the early and mid 1980s. Generally speaking, these saw the state as a tool of capital. As we all know, the critical edge of academic theory has shifted to post-structural theories that see the state as part of several decentred networks of power.
Added to this, of course, is the prevalent view that states are receding in significance in the face of globalization, swept aside in the new gold rush of global capital. Finally, we are witnessing, in most western countries, a shift to a more neoliberal state that simply 'does less' in setting social and economic agendas.
But, it seems to me, none of these ways of theorizing pays close enough attention to the actual operation of the state. There is in fact a strong tendency to assume a static state that carries out certain roles, sometimes well, sometimes badly. But little effort is given to getting inside the state and understanding how the intricate mechanisms of power work. I must be careful, though, because I am impressed by the way the emerging field of governmentality is doing this, so I should not overemphasize this point.

In Canada at least, there is a fascinating relationship between the neoliberal state and academia. I'll start with a familiar story. Canada, in common with many industrialized countries, has seen a great deal of decline in the capacity of the federal government to act. A simple statistic speaks volumes on this issue. In the fiscal year 1984/85, the total value of government spending on all programs was equal to 19.5 percent of the national GDP. By 1999/2000, this figure had fallen to 12.2 percent, indicating an enormous reduction in the scope of the welfare state, in fact back to the spending levels of the pre-welfare state.

Of course, this decline in expenditure has been uneven; certain programs have been untouchable, or at least less touchable, such as pensions and Aboriginal affairs. In contrast, one area of government activity was easily curtailed: its own research capacity. In the postwar period, there was substantial growth of the Canadian bureaucracy, state enterprises, and the quasi-state sector. Much of this was coordinated by growing and powerful policy and research teams in government. The individuals on these teams were, of course, trained in academic settings, many with phds. Aside: there was an important coincidence here between the positivist revolution in academia (that brought us the quantitative revolution in Geography) and the rise of state research. Both relied to a large extent on the digitalization of state-collected data, such as the census, and both held similar views about appropriate forms of research.

Increasingly, data-based research was used to pinpoint problems and justify remedial action. Think of such a basic thing as the unemployment rate, which is now routinely reported on a frequent basis, or statistics showing that incomes lag in certain parts of the country. Another major development in the 'science' of decision-making helped propel this system of understanding and action: cost-benefit analysis.

In 1971 the old Dominion Bureau of Statistics was redefined as Statistics Canada and given a larger mandate to collect information on a wider range of activities, all fodder for the policy/research system taking shape in other parts of the bureaucracy.

Interestingly, a kind of 'research apartheid' developed between academia and the bureaucracy. Certain individuals made connections, of course, but in the main government and university researchers kept separate. There are many reasons for this:

- Government researchers had access to a much wider range of state statistics. They had the census but also administrative records. These, for reasons of
confidentiality (and also lack of computational capacity) were closed to university researchers. This meant that academic research was often less timely and of less appeal for policy makers.

- Secondly, many academics by the early 1970s had begun to question positivist methods and the project of policy-based research. With each step away from the logic of numerical, hypothesis-based research, academics took a step away from potential linkages with state research.
- Finally, the simple fact is that the rift between the two forms of research yielded two networks of researchers who rarely talked to one-another. Again, I must be careful, since there were always a few who crossed the gulf between the two groups, but they were rare.

So, in Canada and I suspect elsewhere too, two separate research traditions and networks existed, both reasonably well funded, and both reasonably well respected. But the existence of these separate networks became more precarious in the 1980s. As western governments began to adopt neoliberal perspectives more and more enthusiastically, they began to trim the budgets of research granting agencies and the university system more generally, and also they began to hollow out their own policy/research systems, which were easy to cut because that was associated with no public outcry.

In the 1990s, there have been attempts to reconnect the two cultures/networks/systems, in many ways out of necessity. This new rhetoric of research partnership is becoming pervasive in many areas. In Canada, national granting agencies are increasingly expecting researchers to make links with policy makers in projects. Hence the enlarged significance of 'policy relevant' research. Universities are eager to tap the new resources of this type of research—it goes without saying.

3. Enter Metropolis as a model of research/governance

In the early 1990s, several well-positioned policy analysts in government began to see a problem in what they called 'stovepipe' thinking: the tendency for each part of the bureaucracy to concentrate on its responsibilities without considering the wider context. Accordingly, they tried to set in motion more 'lateral thinking' (i.e., between ministries dealing with similar issues) by building new, broader networks within the policy/research branches of the state.

In the Canadian case, one senior bureaucrat began to exercise this type of lateral thinking around the issue of immigration, which cuts across many parts of the Canadian public sector, from admissions to health care, the labour market, trade, justice, and so on. He and his colleagues collected together a group of individuals from these departments and approached the national social sciences granting agency to develop a proposal. They were eventually successful in generating a multi-million dollar fund to support immigration research. Given the hollowed out nature of state research on this subject, they decided to use these funds to support academic research, and sent out an invitation for academics to propose Centres of Excellence for immigration studies. In the call for proposals, policy makers set out approximately 30 questions they wanted to see answered. For example, is
there an emerging immigrant underclass in Canada? How is citizenship evolving? What are the labour market barriers preventing immigrants from realizing their potential? etc.

Proposals were submitted and four centres were funded. It's hard to judge the exact funding base for the program, because other funding agencies have stepped in to increase the funding package, and universities have also added money. The federal government spend a lot within the bureaucracy to facilitate (or control, depending on your frame of reference) the research and also transfer about $1.3 million to the centres each year. Total funding is much larger than this.

The four centres are relatively autonomous institutions that are each structured quite differently. Their fate is judged formally in terms of the quantity and quality of policy relevant research they produce, but there is also a sense that they are also valued simply as 'resources' governments can call upon for ideas and advice. The nature of the bureaucracy, however, means that they are continually reviewed... but then so are university departments!

One of the innovative aspects of research in the centres is the requirement that researchers interact with a broad spectrum of stakeholders when they study issues, including federal policy makers, but also municipal and provincial bureaucracies, non-governmental organizations, and to some extent the private sector. All of these types of institutions are represented on the management board of each centre (though in varying degrees). The most challenging component of this mix is the NGO sector, which includes a wide variety of organizations that range from those who provide services to ones that have emerged to challenge government policy. The Metropolis centres, then, often sit 'between' those who make policy and those who organize campaigns against it—but are ultimately funded by one side of that equation.

A number of means have been defined to keep all these participants talking interacting. As already mentioned, they are all represented in the structure of the research centres themselves. Beyond that, there are two conferences each year that bring the participants together (typically, these are half policy makers, one-third academics, and NGOs—the least-funded partner—the remainder).

Finally, comprehensive web sites have been created to link the various groups. The one for the Vancouver centre, for example, has over 100 research papers posted (5 years worth of effort). The Ottawa office of Metropolis has hired programmers to enhance these websites and in particular there is a special search engine that compiles information from all the papers on a given topic. This is of course essential for 'mining' the information, since bureaucrats and NGO researchers are not going to read all the papers.

The federal government is generally pleased with the Metropolis structure, and it has won two awards within the Canadian bureaucracy for innovation in government.
4. The practice of policy research: 'relevance in action'
...or, perhaps: 'research from a privileged position'
There are many advantages to working within a structure like Metropolis.

- Access to administrative data, and enhanced access to public databases. Further, support from the people who operate these databases. And, beyond that, input into the creation and operation of the databases (invitations to steering committees, etc.).

- Access to the inner workings of government, through regular conferences where policy directions are discussed, to personal contacts.

- Input into the policy process, especially during a period when immigration law is being redefined in Canada.

- Research funding and networks for graduate students.

So is this the fulfillment dream of the dream of academic relevance? In a way, there are elements of this, but there are also some important qualifications to be made. Some are challenges that can be worked out, but others are intrinsic to the project and are unlikely to go away.

- The bureaucratization of research
  There are a number of elements to this, not least of which is yet another layer of scrutiny on the research process. But also there is a tendency for academics to get caught in the hierarchy of governments (who do you talk to?). There is, too, a relatively steep learning curve involved in understanding how government operates.

- The nature of partnerships and negotiated outcomes
  At the most basic level, what is policy relevance? For example, is this talk policy relevant? Researchers value the freedom to choose topics and methodologies. Policy makers value research that helps them perform their jobs, meaning research targeted at specific issues they face. Both sides are resistant to change on this issue, and as Metropolis moves forward there are continuing efforts to redefine the meaning of policy relevance, especially from the side of the bureaucracy.

- The power of partners
  What about the NGO sector? There are many issues here. NGOs have the least disposable money to attend conferences and the least formal credibility when making interventions in them. There is also a tendency for bureaucrats and academics to scuttle partnerships by saying the wrong things (e.g., 'now we have the best minds in the country working on this').

- Is anyone really listening?
  This is a revised version of the 'two cultures' issue. Academic success is most readily gained by showing complexity. Often this involves creating new vocabularies and ways of thinking that reveal how seemingly simple things, and taken-for-granted things, have deep causes and contradictions. Yet this type of thinking is very difficult to translate to policy debates. There, questions are often stark, such as "Canada admits 250,000 immigrants; why shouldn't it be 500,000, or 125,000?"
Reading a veritable mountain of academic work will not answer this most basic of policy issues. Academics have opinions on this issue, just like everybody else, but no solid answers. As a result, bureaucrats sometimes think academics have little to offer. And almost all of them refuse to read heavily jargonized academic writing, seeing it as irrelevant to their concerns.

- Can we control the effects of our work?
  To make a positive impact on policy, you have to learn in great detail how policy works—and this takes time and effort. Otherwise, policy recommendations can easily lead to unexpected policy decisions.

**Conclusion: the complexities of policy relevance**

First, what kind of academics are the most influential in terms of policy?

As you may already suspect, it is not simply those who are most successful in the academic sphere, that is, those who have published most and who are most likely to be debated in the literature. The point here is that you can’t apply academic logics to non-academic, or quasi-academic, situations. Instead, the answer is: those who connect to the most important networks within the bureaucracy, and those who learn how to perform relevance.

So far, my presentation has been based on a simplistic assumption, that academics think one way and bureaucrats think another. This may be true on a very aggregate level, but not in the nitty-gritty everyday. Each of these groups contains much diversity. Bureaucrats, for example, range from those who are conservative, support the status quo, and demand positivist-style research, to those who are progressive, want to change things, and demand positivist-style research, to those who don’t respect numbers at all.

There are several interesting ironies here:
Working with bureaucracies reveals the narrowness and conservative nature of universities, in certain vital respects.
Skeptical bureaucrats present real challenges to academic hierarchies.

For their part, academics also cover a large spectrum of attitudes and ideologies, including political views and ways of doing research.

So who matters in all of this?
The best way to look at this is through the lens of network theory, and I like the ideas of Latour here, thought I don’t want or need to take on all the elements of actor network theory (e.g., Latour’s concept of purification).
What strikes me quite forcefully, is the fact that the participants on all sides of Metropolis arrive in the project in already-made networks. To belong to these, individuals have to think and perform properly. (aside: this isn’t a criticism. we ALL belong to networks that require particular modes of performance). These are critical in shaping who does and doesn’t matter.