

Internally Displaced Persons in Canadian News Discourse. The Case of the 2016 Alberta Fires

Abstract: Although the concept of environmental refugees has been circulating for more than thirty years, not much has been written about how the displacement of people caused by environmental disasters has entered into public discourses. More specifically, within the empirical investigations into the discourses on environmental displacement, the phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) moving inside the borders of their own countries as an effect of disasters has received little critical attention with respect to how it is framed.

The present article explores the discursive constructions of IDPs in Canadian news discourse which refer to the destructive 2016 Alberta fire in Fort McMurray, the heart of the tar sands region. Thus, a corpus of news reports is analysed in a discourse-analytical perspective with the intent of identifying specific discursive strategies, frames and patterns in the representation of the social actors within newspaper narratives. The analysis shows that the representations of IDPs in the corpus under investigation are characterized by different patterns of language choice compared to those emerging from the discourses on climate refugees, asylum seekers and migrants in general, evident in previous studies. In the end, what becomes also apparent is that nomination strategies are connected to specific ideologies in discourse, on the basis of which the correlation between the tar sands and the fire is either omitted or mildly unveiled.

Keywords: *internally displaced persons, tar sands, Canada, fire, news discourse*

1. Introduction

In 2016, the entire population of Fort McMurray, a boomtown in northeast Alberta, Canada, was evacuated as a massive fire engulfed residents' homes, huge portions of the Albertan forest and parts of Highway 63, the main road leading out of the city. Fort McMurray, located in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and within the northern belt of Canada's boreal forest, is best known for being the main permanent residential, logistics and service hub for the tar sands,¹ around which a very profitable market has grown, making Canada the biggest source of U.S. crude oil imports and the third largest proven oil reserve after Venezuela and Saudi Arabia.² Tar sands are deposits of bitumen, a very dense and viscous form of petroleum mixed with sand and clay that occupy 21% of the province of Alberta. The extraction of oil through mining and drilling is carbon-intensive and results in massive greenhouse gas emissions. Moreover, huge amounts of fresh water, pumped from the Athabasca River, is needed for the process. Since the water becomes toxic after the extractions, it cannot be given back to the river; therefore, it is retained into extremely polluted ponds which nonetheless let pollutants leak through the soil into the groundwater system. As a consequence, the whole area surrounding the tar sands working sites is highly contaminated and exposed to a number of 'accidents'. Regardless of the risks, the population of the area has increased since early 2000s due to the exploitation of the tar sands, with people migrating stably from other parts of Canada or from abroad to join the sector and others being only temporary residents in mobile workcamps during the boom period.³ According to the 2015

¹ See Oriana Palusci, "River of Hell: Athabasca Tar Sands Narratives", in Palusci, ed., *Green Canada* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2016), 67-85.

² Michael Levi, *The Canadian Oil Sands: Energy Security vs. Climate Change* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations), 2009.

³ The region grew from 56 workcamps in 2006 to 123 by 2015, hosting the so called "shadow population". For more detailed statistics, see <https://www.thediscourse.ca/data/canadas-shadow-population>.

Census, the shadow population in the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo accounted for 4,342, whereas the permanent ranged at 78,382.⁴

On May 3, 2016, eighty-eight thousand people, according to official sources, were directed from Fort McMurray to evacuation centers scattered throughout the country as the fire quickly advanced in apocalypse-like scenarios, defined by PM Justin Trudeau as the largest fire evacuation in the history of Alberta. On May 4, the Alberta government declared a provincial state of emergency that remained in place until June 10. A total of 49 fires burned, covering about 582,000 hectares of land, including part of Saskatchewan.⁵ News reports about the event were picked up worldwide, alerted by the dramatic tones of the Canadian news media. Even though the extraction of billions of barrels of bitumen in Fort McMurray is notoriously included into the list of the primary causes of global warming leading to extreme environmental disasters such as the Alberta fire, dry weather conditions and winds of up to 70km/h were reported to be the main causes of the catastrophe. The relationship between the Alberta tar sands and the 2016 fire was not made explicit in public discourse. One reason for the omission is possibly due to the fact that the tar sands in Canada have become vital to many of those who were affected by the fire and to the country's economy as an energy superpower. In fact, a work by Debra Davidson and Mike Gismondi shows how oil sands discourse in Canada functions to normalize capitalist exploitation of this resource and legitimate the Alberta/federal governments,⁶ while recent research argues that the fire activity in boreal forests has increased dramatically in the last few years and a strong connection linking drier climatic regimes, severe fire weather and climate change has been drawn.⁷

Although the concept of climate-induced migrants has been circulating for more than thirty years, not much has been written about how the internal displacement of people caused by environmental disasters has entered into public discourses. More specifically, the phenomenon of Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs, from here on) moving inside the borders of their own countries as an effect of environmental disasters has received little critical attention with respect to how it is framed in discourse. The present article explores the discursive constructions of IDPs in Canadian news reports which refer to the 2016 Alberta fire. A corpus of news reports is analysed in a discourse-analytical perspective with the intent of identifying specific discursive strategies, frames and patterns in the representation of social actors within newspaper narratives. Attention is given to the convergence of discourses into sets of narratives that ultimately impact on politics, practices and social relations.⁸ The analysis argues that the representations of IDPs are characterized by different patterns of language choice, including nomination, activation, mitigation, as well as different discourse *topoi*, compared to those emerging from the discourses on climate-induced migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, evident in previous studies.

⁴ Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, "Census 2015: Executive Summary" (2015), <http://www.rmwb.ca/Assets/Corporate/Census+Reports/Executive+Summary++Municipal+Census+2015.pdf>.

⁵ Government of Alberta, "Final Update 39: 2016 Wildfires" (2016), <https://www.alberta.ca/release.cfm?xID=41701e7ECBE35-AD48-5793-1642c499FF0DE4CF>.

⁶ See Debra J. Davidson and Mike Gismondi, *Challenging Legitimacy at the Precipice of Energy Calamity* (New York: Springer, 2011).

⁷ Mike Fennigan et al., "Future Area Burned in Canada", *Climatic Change*, 72 (2005), 1-16; M.D. Flannigan and C.E. Wagner, "Climate Change and Wildfire in Canada", *Can. J. For. Res.*, 21 (1991), 66-72.

⁸ Ernesto Laclau, *Emancipation(s)* (London: Verso, 1996).

2. Methodology and Research Questions

The present study employs both quantitative and qualitative methods. The analysis is corpus-based and therefore makes use of the tools of Corpus Linguistics (CL) in combination with the methods offered by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). The choice was made in order to uncover “the social, political, historical and cultural context of the data”.⁹ Hence, the research has employed the models provided by Paul Baker, Baker and Gabrielatos and McEnery and Hardie.¹⁰ More specifically, it is based on the premise that corpus work is “an empirical approach”,¹¹ in that it aims at analyzing language in use, but it also maintains with Baker *et al.* that “[a] corpus analysis will allow us to see which choices are privileged, giving evidence for mainstream, popular or entrenched ways of thinking”.¹² At the same time, a discourse-analytical perspective has been adopted in the attempt to “study the organization of language above the sentence or above the clause”.¹³ The approach chosen is therefore discursive and the study is informed by CDA methods, since it relies on the assumption that “any part of any language text, spoken or written, is simultaneously constituting representations, relations, and identities”, as pointed out by Fairclough and Wodak.¹⁴ Consequently, it shares the view according to which discourse does manifest particular worldviews, relations, identities and ideologies, and that, as a set of “context-dependent semiotic practices”¹⁵ that are socially constituted/constitutive, it cannot but be analyzed in its situatedness, considering its multiple layers of contexts. Accordingly, the ultimate intent of this article is to unveil the latent power and impact of discourse practices as the expression of ideologies in power, as well as the circumstances and the consequences of their production and usages. In doing so, the analysis examined frequencies and statistically significant lexical patterns in the corpus under investigation as well as their expanded concordances, taking into account collocations. Collocability was determined through mutual information (MI), a method that favors content words that, compared to function words, more clearly indicate discourse prosodies.¹⁶ Starting from the quantified linguistic indicators, discursal phenomena in the form of argumentative devices and strategies were then recognized and examined. A combination of the inventories provided by van Leeuwen and by Wodak and Meyer, including nomination, predication, argumentation, intensification, and then functionalization, activation and passivation was used to conduct the analysis on the representation of social actors.¹⁷ Starting from how participants of social practices are nominated and therefore positioned in discourse, defining characteristics ascribed to them were identified by looking at predication strategies. These were found to be the expression of news reporters’ involvement in

⁹ Paul Baker *et al.*, “A Useful Methodological Synergy? Combining Critical Discourse Analysis and Corpus Linguistics to Examine Discourses of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press”, *Discourse and Society*, 19 (2008), 273-306.

¹⁰ Baker, *American and British English: Divided by a Common Language?* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2017); “Representations of Islam in British Broadsheet and Tabloid Newspapers 1999-2005”, *Journal of Language and Politics*, 9.2 (2010), 310-338; *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis* (London: Continuum, 2006); Baker and Costas Gabrielatos, “Fleeing, Sneaking, Flooding: A Corpus Analysis of Discursive Constructions of Refugees and Asylum Seekers in the UK Press, 1996-2005”, *Journal of English Linguistics*, 36.1 (2008), 5-38; Tony McEnery and Andrew Hardie, *Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge U.P., 2012).

¹¹ Elena Tognini-Bonelli, *Corpus Linguistics at Work* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2011), 2.

¹² Baker *et al.*, *A Glossary of Corpus Linguistics* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh U.P., 2006), 25.

¹³ Michael Stubbs, *Discourse Analysis* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983).

¹⁴ Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, “Critical Discourse Analysis”, in Teun A. van Dijk, ed., *Discourse as Social Interaction: A Multidisciplinary Introduction* (London: Sage Publications, 1997) 258-84.

¹⁵ Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak, “The Discourse-historical Approach”, in Wodak and Michael Meyer, eds., *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage Publications, 2009), 89.

¹⁶ Baker and Gabrielatos, “Fleeing, Sneaking, Flooding”, 7.

¹⁷ Theo van Leeuwen, “The Representation of Social Actors”, in Carmen Rosa Caldas-Coulthard and Malcom Coulthard, eds., *Texts and Practices: Readings in Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Routledge, 1996) 32-70; Wodak and Meyer, eds., *Methods for Critical Discourse Analysis*.

discourse, who also make use of mitigation and intensification to tone down or sharpen the representation of IDPs to explicitly or implicitly support the argumentation for or against the tar sands industry. The strategies led to the identification of a limited number of discourse *topoi*, intended as “conclusion rules that connect the argument with the conclusion”,¹⁸ as well as to the metaphors and cognitive frames employed in Canadian news reports, which is the genre under investigation.

Given the crucial role that news media play in the circulation of knowledge about climate change, both as a narrative and a material phenomenon,¹⁹ news reports in English from Canadian newspapers were chosen for this investigation. As a type of discourse, “news stories” have a quintessentially narrative dimension that relies on the socio-cognitive force of language and is the expression of ideological positions.²⁰ The alleged reliability of print news ultimately powers up the impact they have on the public opinion and for this reason the rhetorical strategies used to deliver news content is of interest to this analysis.

Boycoff points out that climate change has been covered by North American news media since the 1930s, with a particular focus on its devastating effects.²¹ Although many scholars and researchers have dedicated their attention to US media coverage of climate change, based on a research conducted by Young and Dugas, to date there have been very few studies on Canadian news media coverage of the issue.²² Antilla, for instance, proposes an analysis of public perception of global climate change through media constructions of scientific knowledge worldwide, including Canada, although only in comparison with the US and Europe.²³ Conversely, Young and Dugas investigate media treatment of climate change in Canada through the observation of two national newspapers, *The Globe and Mail* and *The National Post*, in the years 1988-2008.²⁴ They uncover a trend in Canadian news media towards the severance of climate change from its causes. In this sense, as their study reveals, climate change in Canada has become a metaphor and a window of opportunity for journalists to tell stories about politics and the economy that nonetheless fail to provide insights into the problem. Following a similar line, Stoddart, Halyza-Delay and Tindall analyze climate change news coverage in Canadian national newspapers from 1997 to 2010 and conclude that the Canadian news discourse about climate change is dominated by themes related to governmental responsibility, policymaking and ways to mitigate climate change itself.²⁵ Overall, all these studies take into account the issue and coverage of climate change but do not consider its impact on human migration and how this is framed in news discourse.

Similarly, within the empirical investigations into the discourses on climate change and climate-induced migration, IDPs moving inside the borders of their own countries as an effect of environmental disasters have received little critical attention with respect to how they are framed in news discourse. This is especially true if we compare the amount of research on IDPs with the works and analyses dedicated to more ‘recognized’ forms of environmental migration, such as that of refugees fleeing from areas devastated by disasters to reach destinations outside the borders of their own countries.

¹⁸ Reisigl and Wodak, *Discourse and Discrimination* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁹ Carol Farbotko and Heather Lazrus, “The First Climate Refugees? Contesting Global Narratives of Climate Change in Tuvalu”, *Global Environmental Change*, 22.2 (2011), 382-390; Katherine E. Russo, *The Evaluation of Risk in Institutional and Newspaper Discourse: The Case of Climate Change and Migration* (Naples: Editoriale Scientifica, 2018).

²⁰ Van Dijk, *News Analysis: Case Studies of International and National News in the Press* (Hillsdale: Erlbaum, 1988).

²¹ Maxwell T. Boycoff, “‘We Speak for the Trees’: Media Reporting on the Environment”, *Annual Review of Environment and Resources*, 34 (2009), 431-458.

²² Nathan Young and Eric Dugas, “Representations of Climate Change in Canadian National Print Media: The Banalization of Global Warming”, *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 48.1 (2011), 1-22.

²³ Liisa Antilla, “Climate of Scepticism: US Newspaper Coverage of the Science of Climate Change”, *Global Environmental Change*, 15 (2005), 338-352.

²⁴ Young and Dugas, “Representations of Climate Change”.

²⁵ Mark C. J. Stoddart et al., “Canadian News Media Coverage of Climate Change: Historical Trajectories, Dominant Frames, and International Comparisons”, *Society and Natural Resources* (2015), 1-15.

Therefore, by focusing on the investigation of IDPs in Canadian news discourse, the article aims at filling a gap left by previous studies. The main research questions addressed herein are:

1. How are IDPs linguistically defined, nominated and constructed in the news coverage pertaining to the 2016 Alberta fire?
2. What are the discursive strategies employed?
3. What are the most frequent discourse *topoi*?
4. What ideologies lie behind certain representations of IDPs?

3. Corpus Design

A corpus of news reports was specifically designed for the purpose of this study and named Wildfire Newspaper Corpus (WNP_Corpus). The timeframe set was April 30, 2016 – September 1, 2016, which corresponds to the beginning and the end of the fire coverage and post-recovery issues. The corpus includes news reports from Canada's major national and local newspapers, comprising 89 stories (67,819 tokens). The articles were retrieved from *ProQuest* using the query terms "Fort McMurray" [and] "fire" [or] "wildfire". It was then uploaded to the online platform *Sketch Engine* for investigation and analysis of raw frequencies and collocations. The SiBol corpus of English Broadsheet Newspapers was chosen as a reference corpus as it contains 650 million tokens and collects more general news articles on a wide range of topics, covering the years from 1993 to 2013.

4. Internally Displaced Persons in Canadian News Discourse

In line with CDA methods, the initial step in the analysis was to examine the wider context of use of the term *Internally Displaced Persons/IDPs* across institutional sources and glossaries. Its most common definition is generic and comes from the United Nation's *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*, according to which IDPs are:

[p]ersons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised State border.²⁶

Although the document mentions natural and human-made disasters as one of the causes of human displacement, the definition regards the displacement caused by religious, political and discriminatory violence. Moreover, unlike refugees, IDPs do not have a special status in international law but rely only on national protection in response to their humanitarian crisis.²⁷

Whereas the UNHCR has moved towards a definition of environmentally displaced persons as "people who are displaced from or who feel obliged to leave their usual place of residence, because their lives, livelihoods and welfare have been placed at serious risk as a result of adverse

²⁶ UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement", (1998), www.refworld.org/docid/3c3da07f7.html.

²⁷ Robert McLeman and Francois Gemenne, "Climate-induced Community Relocations", in Robin Bronen, ed., *Routledge Handbook of Environmental Displacement and Migration* (London: Routledge, 2018), 395.

environmental, ecological or climatic processes and events,”²⁸ other definitions, recollected in Table 1, remain broader. While, as Russo remarks, the scientific and political debate on climate-induced migration in the last fifteen years, “has led to the emergence of highly creative and contested terms”,²⁹ including *environmental refugee*, *environmental migrant*, *climate refugee*, *environmentally displaced person* etc., terminology (and international laws) exclusively related to climate-induced IDPs is still lacking some specificity. Indeed, the term itself, unless preceded by pre-modifying clusters (climate-induced, for instance), remains quite vague in that internal displacement can occur in several forms and be triggered by different causes, including wars and persecutions.

<i>Oxford Dictionary</i>	(IDP), a person who has been forced to move within their own country as a result of conflict or environmental disaster.
<i>TransLegal Dictionary</i>	someone who has been forced to leave their home, often because of war, but who still lives within their country's borders
<i>Dictionary of Genocide</i>	(IDPs) (also referred to as internal refugees or displaced persons) refers to those who are fleeing armed conflict or internal strife and/or persecution (or the fear of persecution) but have not crossed an internationally recognized state border and are thus still residing within the territory of their own country
<i>Historical Dictionary of the United Nations</i>	(IDPs). The term designates persons forced to flee or leave their homes for a variety of reasons, most commonly armed conflict, violence, violations of human rights and man-made or natural disasters within their own countries [...] Wide variations in weather conditions, which may attribute to climate change are another contributing factor. Insofar as IDPs do not cross state borders, they cannot benefit from the rights and status provided by international refugee law and the protection and assistance of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees [...]
<i>Encyclopedia of Human Rights</i>	Internally displaced persons are individuals forced from their homes as a result of armed conflict, generalized violence, human rights violations, or natural or human-made disasters and who have not crossed an internationally recognized state border

Table 1. Definitions of *Internally Displaced Persons*

As it may be ascertained in Table 1, the definitions of IDPs, regardless of the reasons of their displacement, frame the category of subjects as individuals who are forced to leave their home, while remaining within the borders of their home states. If news discourse works according to the aforementioned definitions, then, in our corpus we could expect *IDPs* to share both the collocates and

²⁸ Brian Gorlick, “Environmentally-displaced Persons: a UNHCR Perspective”, (2007), www.ony.unu.edu/seminars/2007/16May2007/presentation_gorlick.ppt.

²⁹ Russo, *The Evaluation of Risk*, 57.

discourse prosody with *refugee*, since a strong reference to forced displacement is activated in both terms.

Further research into the Canadian institutional discourse shows that the term is not employed by the provincial government of Alberta and the federal government of Canada in their official reports on the 2016 fire. Two documents were examined in this regard, the “Home again. Recovery after the Wood Buffalo Wildfire” and “May 2016 Wood Buffalo Wildfire Post-Incident Assessment Report”, both released by the government of Alberta through its official website, the former prepared for the Ministry of Municipal Affairs, the latter for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency. In none of the final reports the term *Internally Displaced Persons/IDPs* occurs. On the contrary, the people of Fort McMurray and Wood Buffalo affected by the fire are referred to by using a range of variable terminology that includes *displaced residents*, *affected people*, *displaced people*, *evacuated people* and *evacuees*. However, these definitions remain imprecise and are formulated as a rejection of *Internally Displaced Persons*. Also, the absence of the term *Internally Displaced Persons* in the final reports highlights a fundamental disagreement between the official documents of the province of Alberta on the one hand, and the examined glossary and definitions on the other, since IDPS are *de facto* re-nominated in Canadian institutional discourse. Although the focus of this article is not the examination of institutional discourse, the data offered some ground for undertaking the first steps in the quantitative analysis, since the clusters have been used as query terms to interrogate the corpus and shed some light into how IDPs have entered Canadian news discourse.

5. Internally Displaced Persons in the WNP_Corpus

The quantitative analysis starts with the investigation of the query terms searched in the Wildfire Newspaper Corpus (hereafter WNP_Corpus), in order to identify which terms were preferred to talk about IDPs, based on raw frequencies. In addition to the terms identified by taking into consideration official sources and glossaries (Table 1), a list of the most frequent nouns in the corpus was also retrieved to widen the pool of query terms and spot other nomination strategies. *Residents*, *refugees* and *people* were found to be possible candidates in this analysis and were therefore further investigated. Lists of occurring collocates were generated, so as to find potentially interesting clusters of meaning used in the representation of social actors. The span was set at five words on the left and right of the node, and collocability was determined through MI scores. Only collocate candidates with an MI score higher than 5 were included in the analysis.

Query term	Occurrences
<i>People</i>	242
<i>Residents</i>	71
<i>Evacuees</i>	59
<i>Refugee</i>	52
<i>Internally Displaced Persons</i>	0
<i>affected people</i>	0
<i>evacuated people</i>	0

Table 2. List of query terms and their raw frequencies

As Table 2 illustrates, in this corpus IDPs are never named as such. The absence of the term is consistent with the lack of its usage within the provincial reports issued by the government of Alberta. Therefore, the data seems to suggest a connection between institutional and news discourses, since the latter picks up from the former, although re-contextualization and mediatization strategies occur as well.

In this case, the presence of both *evacuees* and *refugees* is relevant in this corpus, as they seem to occupy the gap left by the absence of *Internally Displaced Persons* more directly than other terms. Here, the discursive strategy of re-nomination occurring as functionalization is employed to discursively construct the social actors, in such a way that, in their lexicalization, the focus shifts away from their condition of being displaced to either their action of evacuating/being evacuated to a safer place (when they are referred to as *evacuees*) or to their vulnerability (when they are called *refugees*). We can hypothesize that both lexical choices are ideologically imbued since *evacuees* and *refugees* activate strings of meanings that contribute to the representation of the human disaster alternatively as the result of a natural event that was successfully managed by the government of Alberta because people were safely and quickly moved to a temporary shelter, or as a humanitarian crisis.

In order to confirm or deny the hypotheses, two lists of frequent collocates of *evacuees* and *refugees* were retrieved and organized in Table 3 and 4. This phase allows the identification of predication strategies that unveil the traits, characteristics and qualities attributed to the social actors, which are strong indicators of the stance adopted in their representation.

Collocate	Co-occurrences	MI
host	6	10.08
staggering	3	9.57
overwhelm	3	9.08
airlift	3	9.08
camps	4	9.31
vast	3	8.72
Clear	4	8.61
majority	3	8.57
sent	3	8.31
private	3	8.08
either	3	7.80
car	3	7.80
money	3	7.37
trying	3	7.37
north	3	6.85
most	4	6.40
work	3	5.85
would	3	5.76
oilsands	3	5.61
Edmonton	6	5.61
were	6	5.27
McMurray	11	5.19
Some	3	5.07

Table 3. Collocate candidates of *evacuees* sorted by MI scores

Collocate	Co-occurrences	MI
Syrian	9	10.49
Immigrants	3	9.04
Against	4	8.59
Number	3	8.04
Violence	3	7.49
Canada	4	5.45
Muslims	6	5.35
About	3	5.34
By	5	5.26
It	3	5.15
Crisis	4	5.01

Table 4. Collocate candidates of *refugees* sorted by MI scores

By looking at the lists, it becomes apparent that *evacuees* and *refugees* are part of different discourse prosodies. Collocates of *evacuees* show that the term is employed in the corpus to refer to the people of Fort McMurray. On the other hand, *refugees* presents a more complex scenario in that the term appears to collocate with words such as *Muslims* and *Syrian* and with negative categories of reference (*violence* and *crisis*). If we expand the analysis of collocates to the observation of concordance strings, we will notice that discourses on refugees intertwine in this corpus with those on evacuees, although the two terms designate different social actors within a comparative framework that poses, for instance, the number of Syrian refugees and that of Fort McMurray evacuees on two opposite benches.

1	①	doc#3	about Canadian culture and understand the local people, said Altaani, a Syrian refugee who came to Calgary with his wife and three sons in March. </s></s> "We are ve
2	①	doc#17	Some 80,000 Fort McMurray residents - nearly four times the number of Syrian refugees accepted by Canada - have been forced to flee their own dreams. </s></s> This
3	①	doc#56	Some 80,000 Fort McMurray residents - nearly four times the number of Syrian refugees accepted by Canada - have been forced to flee their own dreams. </s></s> This
4	①	doc#67	and his family, who had moved to northern Alberta only months ago as Syrian refugees , were evacuated once again. </s></s> Amany Darwish, president of the Canadi
5	①	doc#69	our search. 16 - Jo Cox, 41, a British MP who championed the cause of Syrian refugees and campaigned for Britain to stay in the EU, was killed by a gun- and knife-wie
6	①	doc#75	ederal government will spend more than \$1 billion to bring in and help Syrian refugees , but the best it can do for the 88,000 displaced and homeless residents of Fort I
7	①	doc#76	try during the first three months of 2016, a large number of whom were Syrian refugees . </s></s> It noted Canada had not received that many new immigrants in a sing
8	①	doc#76	current system of demographic counts in July 1971. </s></s> Falk said Syrian refugees were also a significant contributor to Manitoba's population gain in the last year.
9	①	doc#76	I with the Kurdish Association of Manitoba recently told him about 1,300 Syrian refugees have arrived in the province since Nov. 1. murray.mcneill@freepress.mb.ca Cre

Fig. 1. Concordance strings of *Syrian refugees*

1	①	doc#0	ste has poured into relief centres in Alberta set up to accommodate the 80,000 evacuees . </s></s> A variety of offerings of places to stay and use of vehicles have been
2	①	doc#2	government has announced plans to speed up access to EI for Fort McMurray evacuees .; Cole Burston, Alp-Getty Images / Two women walk between portable houses
3	①	doc#2	dering River, 200 kilometres south of Fort McMurray, that's housing some 400 evacuees . </s></s> Data di pubblicazione: May 7, 2016 </s></s> A march of tradition, his
4	①	doc#4	, 2016 </s></s> As worst appears over, generosity overwhelms; Supplies cram evacuee centres, but long-term needs remain Autore: Hopper, Tristin. </s></s> Informaz
5	①	doc#4	torists in the first minutes of the fire. </s></s> By Saturday, the vast majority of evacuees were either in Edmonton, or scattered to family and friends across Canada. </s>
6	①	doc#4	Atlantic coast, Marine Atlantic was offering free passage to any Fort McMurray evacuee trying to get their car to Newfoundland. </s></s> The Shell-owned Albian Aerod
7	①	doc#4	me, in particular, had sprung into action to mount a staggering private airlift of evacuees trapped in the north. </s></s> The airport is normally used exclusively for privat
8	①	doc#4	than 7,000 people. </s></s> Buses would be sent into oilfields camps hosting evacuees , they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into th
9	①	doc#4	ered vacant by the economic downturn. </s></s> On social media, at least one evacuee still shaken by the fire said she was nervous to go to a supply centre because s

Fig. 2. Concordance strings of *evacuees*

Two *topoi* emerge from the analysis of concordance strings when *refugees* occurs in the corpus: the *topos* of finance (Canadian evacuees are more in need of funds compared to refugees from elsewhere)

and the *topos* of difference (Canadian evacuees are not refugees, because they are more ‘real’). The *topoi* overlap and support the same argumentation, i.e. Alberta evacuees need to be assigned more funds than refugees because they are the people who are really in need. The reporters, however, are very careful in not confusing the two terms (*evacuees* and *refugees*) when it comes to nominating Canadian and allegedly non-Canadian displaced persons, since only Fort McMurray residents are functionalized as evacuees, whereas non-Canadian citizens are referred to as refugees to Canada, even if they were affected by the fire as the rest of Fort McMurray people. The extract below, taken from the *Toronto Star*, provides an example:

Fahed Labek and his family, who had moved to northern Alberta only months ago as *Syrian refugees*, were evacuated once again. Amany Darwish, president of the Canadian True Power organization in Fort Mac, said she believes about six families of *Syrian refugees* fled to safety, but was concerned painful memories would be stirred. (*Toronto Star*, 6/05/2016)

In this report, the representation of Syrian refugees frames the social actors as more vulnerable than the residents who had to leave their houses, because fleeing to safety would stir painful memories. Refugees are therefore categorized as emotional and helpless. It is worth recalling, in this regard, the case of the people of New Orleans uprooted by hurricane Katrina in 2005, addressed by *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times* and the Associated Press, in their initial reporting, as *refugees*, which caused strong reactions both by the storm’s survivors and by the federal government. The response was due to the fact that, according to part of the public opinion, including George W. Bush, these people were Americans, not refugees, which was deemed, instead, a racist term, “[b]ecause the concept of the ‘refugee’ summoned a sense of vulnerability that contradicted everything the United States – and its citizens – supposedly stood for.”³⁰ *Internally Displaced Persons* was also disregarded both by US news media and within the institutional debate. Canadian news reporters seem to have avoided similar issues by adopting different nomination strategies.

In another extract, references to Syrian refugees are made in order to amplify the dramatic impact of the number of people who had to flee from their houses in Fort McMurray compared to that of the refugees that Canada had to accept:

Some 80,000 Fort McMurray residents - nearly four times the number of *Syrian refugees* accepted by Canada - have been forced to flee their own dreams. This is a human tragedy of near unimaginable proportions for a country that has never known the cruelty of war displacement. (*Leader Post*, 6/05/2016)

Even though helplessness does not characterize the representation of evacuees, the strategy of argumentation is employed to frame the condition of Fort McMurray residents as more dramatic than that of the Syrian refugees who came to Canada in search of shelter. However, this occurs only in discourses where the *topos* of finance occurs. As indicated by lexical choices and intensification (*nearly four times*, *near unimaginable*, *has never known*), the epistemic status of the proposition is modified and the illocutionary force of the utterance widened, while argumentation is used to justify the preferential treatment of Albertan evacuees compared to refugees. In fact, according to the reporter’s perspective, evacuees are experiencing a human tragedy that is not comparable to that of Syrian refugees who entered the country, but that is close enough to what a war displacement might have produced, should Canada have experienced war. The discourse of Alberta evacuees being more in need than refugees does not seem to be simply boosting newsworthiness; instead, it evolves into the

³⁰ Adeline Masquelier, “Why Katrina’s victims aren’t refugees: musings on a ‘dirty’ word”, *American Anthropologist*, 108.4 (2006), 736.

debate over whether the federal government should assign more funds to face the emergency (*topos* of finance). Similarly, in only one case the evacuees of Fort McMurray are referred to as *refugees*, although the reporter uses direct speech to distance him/herself from the statements of the speaker. In fact, in this extract from *The Hamilton Spectator*, the journalist reports the words used by North Greenville mayor David Gordon when pleading his citizens to help those affected by the fires in Fort McMurray. The mayor uses the phrase *true refugees* in an effort to criticize the Canadian government that has spent more than \$1 billion to help Syrian refugees and allegedly did not do enough for the evacuees of Fort McMurray:

These people need help. These are *the true refugees of Canada*; 80,000 to 90,000 people have been forced out of their homes, forced out of their jobs - they have nothing. (*The Hamilton Spectator*, 16/05/2016)

The discourse emerging from the extract revolves around the opposition real vs. bogus refugee that has animated the debate over the ‘refugee crisis’. By means of predication (*true*) and repetition (*forced out/forced out*), *refugees* shifts to occupy the category of *evacuees*, since evacuees are represented as being more real and more in danger, therefore more in need of funds from the government of Canada. The *topos* of difference is supported by the strategy of othering refugees to Canada and unveils an anti-immigration stance and anti-refugee rhetoric that is built on the appropriation of the term *refugee* to claim that the fire evacuees are the only ‘refugees’ that Canada should financially support.

Turning backwards to the analysis of collocates, we can now concentrate on the representation of evacuees. By looking at Table 3, collocate candidates can be intuitively grouped into words pertaining to the domains of hospitality (*host, camp, oilsands*), mobility (*staggering, airlift, car, north, McMurray, trying, Edmonton, sent*), quantity (*vast, majority, most, some*), finance and property (*money, private*). Interestingly, the string of concordances retrieved for *oilsands* collocating with *evacuees* (Fig. 3) reveals that uses of the noun revolve around the *topos* of hospitality in that tar sands camps were used as hosting venues during the emergency.

1	doc#4	than 7,000 people. <S><S> Buses would be sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into th
2	doc#41	than 7,000 people. <S><S> Buses would be sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into th
3	doc#62	more than 7,000 people. <S><S> Buses were sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , transporting those evacuees to the airport where they were loaded either into

Fig. 3. Concordance strings of *oilsands* collocating with *evacuees*

The occurrences of *oilsands* as a collocate of *evacuees* place the term within a humanitarian framework that is even more visible if we extend the analysis to the wider context of the report. In an extract taken from the *Calgary Herald*, the association between tar sands companies and evacuation processes is strengthened since the Albion Aerodrome, southwest of Albion village and very close to Fort McMurray, operated by popular oil company Shell Canada, is said to having been used for evacuating people from the emergency area, whereas it normally brings workers into the tar sands region.

The Shell-owned Albion Aerodrome, in particular, had sprung into action to mount a staggering private airlift of *evacuees* trapped in the north. The airport is normally used exclusively for private 737 flights ferrying workers into the *oilsands*, but for several days it coordinated military and charter flights evacuating more than 7,000 people. Buses would be sent into *oilsands* camps hosting *evacuees*, they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into the cargo hold of a C-130 Hercules. (*Calgary Herald*, 9/05/2016)

In this extract, the strategy of argumentation is used to justify an overall positive representation of the tar sands companies operating in the area of Fort McMurray. By means of activation, Shell Canada is proposed as a dynamic force (agent) in the attempt of solving a humanitarian crisis, while evacuees are passivated as undergoing the activity of being saved (patients) within the same framework. Both roles are activated through predicational strategies that frame Shell Canada (the reference to the tar sands is metonymical) as springing into action repeatedly (“for several days”) while evacuees are trapped or hosted at tar sands camps. The ideology hidden behind such discursive strategies is, therefore, one that sympathizes with the tar sands industry in Alberta and its proponents. However, the ideological load in the discourse of legitimation emerging from the extract should not come as a surprise since the *Herald* has proved to be the Canadian daily newspaper most closely associated with the tar sands.³¹

In order to check the extent to which evacuees are passivated or activated in this corpus, the word sketch tool offered by *Sketch Engine* was used to retrieve the occurrences of *evacuees* as the subject and the object of clauses.

Verbs with <i>evacuees</i> as object	
trap	3
host	3
house	2
shake	2
fly	2
invite	2
transport	1
accommodate	1
support	1
displace	1
help	1
give	1

Table 5. Verbs with *evacuees* as object sorted by number of occurrences

Verbs with <i>evacuees</i> as subject	
be	6
try	3
trickle	2
Wait	2
do	2
put	1
check	1
head	1
use	1
take	1
face	1

Table 6. Verbs with *evacuees* as subject sorted by number of occurrences

³¹ Shane Gunster and Paul Saurette, “Storylines in the Sands: News, Narrative, and Ideology in the *Calgary Herald*”, *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 39, 333-359.

As visible from Table 5 and 6, *evacuees* in this corpus occurs as the subject and as the object of clauses in equal proportion, a trend that seems to be in line with the occurrences of *evacuees* as a subject and an object of clauses in the SiBol corpus. In the reference corpus, the occurrences of *evacuees* as a subject only precede verbs of movement such as *arrive*, *leave* and *flee*, whereas within our corpus, when it occurs as a subject *evacuees* precedes verbs of movement but also of action, such as *head*, *take*, *try* and *trickle* (Fig. 4). This means that in Canadian news reports the representation of evacuees does not narrow down the social actors to their condition of being displaced, but includes their ability to overcome their displacement by taking actions.

1	doc#4	storists in the first minutes of the fire. </> By Saturday, the vast majority of evacuees were either in Edmonton, or scattered to family and friends across Canada. </>
2	doc#4	Atlantic coast, Marine Atlantic was offering free passage to any Fort McMurray evacuee trying to get their car to Newfoundland. </> The Shell-owned Albian Aero
3	doc#4	Fort McMurrayites who spent the night along Highway 63. </> But for the evacuees still trickling down, most have been well-fuelled and well-supplied by oilsands </>
4	doc#4	omic troubles have just been solved, according to some of the more pragmatic evacuees who were waiting their turn on Saturday for an escort south. </> Oil prices
5	doc#4	omic troubles have just been solved, according to some of the more pragmatic evacuees who were waiting their turn on Saturday for an escort south. </> Oil prices
6	doc#6	ry foreign workers who have fled Fort McMurray face an uncertainty that other evacuees do n't . </> Their work permits are tied to a specific workplace for a specific
7	doc#6	king for employment insurance to be extended to foreign workers and all other evacuees who do n't qualify. </> For migrant rights advocates, the plight of Fort McK
8	doc#11	Ve Love Fort Mac' is seen on a farm near Colinton on Friday as Fort McMurray evacuees head south to flee a massive wildfire affecting the northern Alberta city.; Larry V
9	doc#11	s at the Edmonton airport on Friday.; Ryan Remiorz, The Canadian Press / An evacuee checks his smartphone as he rests at a shelter on Friday in Lac La Biche.; Col
10	doc#36	e headed to the Fort McMurray 468 First Nation, southeast of the city. </> Evacuees were able to stop for food, water and gas there when they fled the fire. </>
11	doc#41	storists in the first minutes of the fire. </> By Saturday, the vast majority of evacuees were either in Edmonton, or scattered to family and friends across Canada. </>
12	doc#41	Atlantic Coast, Marine Atlantic was offering free passage to any Fort McMurray evacuee trying to get their car to Newfoundland. </> The Shell-owned Albian Aero
13	doc#41	Fort McMurrayites who spent the night along Highway 63. </> But for the evacuees still trickling down, most have been well-fuelled and well-supplied by oilsands </>
14	doc#41	omic troubles have just been solved, according to some of the more pragmatic evacuees waiting their turn on Saturday for an escort south. </> Oil prices are up. </>
15	doc#54	>>> CP PHOTO Data di pubblicazione: Jun 27, 2016 </> Fort McMurray evacuees take up temporary residence in Brighton Autore: Campbellford, John. </>
16	doc#62	storists in the first minutes of the fire. </> By Saturday, the vast majority of evacuees were either in Edmonton or scattered to family and friends across Canada as f
17	doc#62	a ferry service Marine Atlantic was offering free passage to any Fort McMurray evacuee trying to get their car to Newfoundland. </> The Shell-owned Albian Aero

Fig. 4. Concordance strings of *evacuees* occurring as a subject

A recurrent pattern emerging from the analysis of concordance strings is {*evacuees* + [be] + -ing form}, which suggests that evacuees are framed as a dynamic group in the process of *using* and *waiting*, as the following extracts testify:

Having an opinion is one thing, flaunting it on the same Twitter hashtag that *evacuees were using* to share vital information is something else entirely. If there was any thought that would most assuredly not help evacuees in that moment, it was the airing of grievances against Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, climate change and Alberta Premier Rachel Notley. (*Winnipeg Press*, 7/05/2016)

In the worst way possible, a lot of Fort McMurray's economic troubles have just been solved, according to some of the more pragmatic *evacuees who were waiting* their turn on Saturday for an escort south. Oil prices are up. Reconstruction work will bring jobs back to the city. (*Calgary Herald*, 9/05/2016)

The examples show instances of activation in which *evacuees* are coded as actors in material processes (waiting to go south and using an hashtag). Both representations occur within a framework that includes climate change and oil. In the first extract the reporter condemns the way people on social networks have criticized the federal and provincial government and blamed climate change. Both Justin Trudeau and Rachel Notley are nominated by means of functionalization which legitimizes their roles as institutional representatives and suggests that the writer's stance sympathizes with their positions. Similarly, in the second extract the reporter deems the economic troubles of Fort McMurray solved, as a positive result of the crisis. In this framework, evacuees are not caught in the midst of a humanitarian

crisis, but are strategically represented as in the process of waiting their turn to go south, while the oil industry will bring jobs and spin the economy into the city once again.

One interesting aspect of discursive representations is the use of metaphors. A metaphor employed in the representation of *evacuees* revolves around the use of the lexical verb *trickle*, comparing the movement of evacuees to the gentle flowing of a stream or the falling of drops. The metaphor recurs in two identical reports by the *Calgary Herald* and *National Post*. It is worth pointing out that both newspapers are owned by the Postmedia newspaper chain, which suggests that they both share the same ideological standpoint.

In the early stages of the disaster, these impromptu rescuers had been a godsend to thousands of out-of-gas Fort McMurrayites who spent the night along Highway 63. But for the *evacuees* still *trickling down*, most have been well-fuelled and well-supplied by oilsands camps and military airlifts, and they're *making a beeline* to accommodations around Edmonton. (*Calgary Herald*, 9/05/2016)

Although water metaphors have been widely used in news reports about refugees and asylum seekers,³² where images of floods, tides and waves abound, here the reference to water is toned down and mitigates the representation of evacuees as slowly and safely streaming south. The picture seems to be quite distant from the threatening and uncontrollable waves of migrants allegedly throwing the hosting countries into dangerous crises, as mostly claimed in populist discourses on immigration. On the contrary, evacuees are caught in the last phase of a now solved emergency, in a framework that, once again, provides a positive evaluation of the tar sands industry and of the fire evacuees. Another metaphor emerging from the extract that is worth noticing is that comparing evacuees to bees heading straight to their accommodations. The image backs up the previous metaphor in an overall representation of evacuees as being disciplined and moving out of Fort McMurray in a non-chaotic way, which would confirm, in this perspective, that according to the reporter no real emergency happened or that the emergency was handled perfectly by the tar sands industry that played an active role.

A pattern that emerged from the concordance analysis of *evacuees* (Fig. 5) occurring as an object is the use of the strategy of intensification, which is not employed, though, when the term occurs as a subject.

1	doc#0	le has poured into relief centres in Alberta set up to accommodate the 80,000 evacuees .	</s></s> A variety of offerings of places to stay and use of vehicles have been
2	doc#2	Jering River, 200 kilometres south of Fort McMurray, that's housing some 400 evacuees .	</s></s> Data di pubblicazione: May 7, 2016 </s></s> A march of tradition, his
3	doc#4	me, in particular, had sprung into action to mount a staggering private airlift of evacuees trapped in the north.	</s></s> The airport is normally used exclusively for priva
4	doc#4	than 7,000 people. </s></s> Buses would be sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into tr	
5	doc#4	ered vacant by the economic downturn. </s></s> On social media, at least one evacuee still shaken by the fire said she was nervous to go to a supply centre because :	
6	doc#6	on. </s></s> The group is calling on the government to give the foreign worker evacuees open work permits, so they can search for a new job in Canada. </s></s> It's al	
7	doc#13	</s></s> He praised Albertans who have responded generously to help displaced evacuees and First Nations communities that welcomed fleeing Fort McMurray residents.	
8	doc#16	passed \$60 million. </s></s> Much of that money is going towards supporting evacuees on the ground, as reported by CTV News Calgary. </s></s> To donate, call the l	
9	doc#39	ential employees were evacuated. </s></s> Suncor said it was housing 2,000 evacuees at its work camps. </s></s> Syncrude also reduced production to minimize the i	
10	doc#41	me, in particular, had sprung into action to mount a staggering private airlift of evacuees trapped in the north. </s></s> The airport is normally used exclusively for priva	
11	doc#41	than 7,000 people. </s></s> Buses would be sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , they'd be sent into the airport and loaded either into a packed airliner or into tr	
12	doc#41	ered vacant by the economic downturn. </s></s> On social media, at least one evacuee still shaken by the fire said she was nervous to go to a supply centres because	
13	doc#42	nies were scrambling to contain the crisis and spending their own money to fly evacuees out of the region. </s></s> Without their quick and all-hands-on-deck response,	
14	doc#62	ed Albian Aerodrome sprung into action to mount a staggering private airlift of evacuees trapped in the north. </s></s> The airport is normally used exclusively for priva	
15	doc#62	ore than 7,000 people. </s></s> Buses were sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees , transporting those evacuees to the airport where they were loaded either into	
16	doc#62	>Buses were sent into oilsands camps hosting evacuees, transporting those evacuees to the airport where they were loaded either into a packed airliner or into the ca	

Fig. 5. Concordance strings of *evacuees* occurring as an object

³² Baker and Gabrielatos, "Fleeing, Sneaking, Flooding".

Numbers are often used “to give the impression of objective research and scientific credibility”,³³ although none of the figures’ sources is cited. While elsewhere, in studies regarding minority groups, refugees and immigrants, numbers are associated to the *topos* of danger in order to convey the idea of a mass invasion,³⁴ here they are used to praise the efficiency of the evacuation procedures as well as the hosting capabilities showed by the tar sands industry and by fellow Canadians in general. Interestingly, in one report, the metaphor of water shifts away from being employed in the representation of evacuees to that of the materials donated to help evacuees and “poured” into Albertan relief centers, while 80,000 people are promptly and safely accommodated.

Moving forward in the analysis of collocates, collocate lists were also retrieved for *people* and *residents*.

Collocate	Co-occurrences	MI
evacuating	4	7.92
90,000	7	7.75
2,000	4	7.68
goodness	3	7.50
age	4	7.24
Living	5	7.10
Lives	4	7.05
10,000	3	7.05
stories	4	6.92
80,000	7	6.91
Leave	5	6.56
thousands	4	6.27
fled	4	6.36
access	3	5.95
come	6	5.90
evacuated	4	5.73
nearly	4	5.71
forced	5	5.65
buildings	5	5.65
evacuation	8	5.59
trying	3	5.50
start	3	5.43
many	9	5.22
homes	7	5.21

Table 7. Collocate candidates of *people* sorted by MI score

³³ Russo, “Floating Signifiers, Transnational Affect Flows: Climate-induced Migrants in Australian News Discourse”, in Andrew Baldwin and Giovanni Bettini, eds, *Life Adrift: Climate Change, Migration, Critique* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2017), 199.

³⁴ Christopher Hart, *Critical Discourse Analysis and Cognitive Science: New Perspectives on Immigration Discourse* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

Collocate	Co-occurrences	MI
Let	4	9.66
Displaced	6	9.13
80,000	9	9.04
90,000	3	8.30
Flee	3	8.30
Fleeing	3	8.25
Return	6	8.11
Some	5	8.06
Evacuated	4	7.59
Leave	3	7.57
Homes	6	6.73
Evacuation	4	6.34
McMurray	23	5.99
Many	3	5.26

Table 8. Collocate candidates of *residents* sorted by MI score

The collocates in Table 7 can be divided into groups, according to the domain they pertain to: mobility (*evacuating, fled, evacuated, evacuation, leave, come, forced, access*), quantity (*90,000, 2,000, 10,000, 80,000, many, nearly*) and property (*homes, buildings*). Although this list is longer than the one retrieved for *evacuees* (Table 3), the collocates seem to be less varied since they could only be divided into three semantic groups, whereas the collocates of *evacuees* cover a more articulated spectrum, ranging from words pertaining to the domain of mobility to that of finance and hospitality. It can be argued that while *evacuees* presents more diversified semantic preferences and enters a range of discourses within a variety of topoi, *people* in this corpus is mainly used in narratives focusing on the evacuation process and in combination with numbers. The collocates of *residents* appear to be even more restricted since they can be grouped into words of mobility (*displaced, flee, fleeing, return, evacuated, leave, evacuation, McMurray*) and quantifiers (*80,000, 90,000, some, many*).

Although *people* is a generic collective noun, its strongest collocates, pertaining to the semantic group of mobility, show that in this corpus the noun tends to collocate with words related to the evacuation process, which suggests that several combinations of *people* and *evacuating, evacuation, evacuated, living* etc. are used in spite of or as another possibility for *evacuees*. The results confirm the initial hypothesis, i.e. different strategies of re-nomination of IDPs occur in this corpus. The same applies to *residents*, although in this case the strongest collocate combination is *displaced residents* which represents another productive alternative to *evacuees*, covering the semantic gap left by the absence of *Internally Displaced Persons*.

Both *people* and *residents* are described in this corpus by means of quantifiers, using tokens that range from *80,000, 90,000*, and *thousands* to *10,000, 2,000* and the cluster *more than* followed by a number.

① doc#24	: to grab what they could, lock their doors and leave. </s></s> More than 80,000	people	were trying to get out on a few available exit points. </s></s> Think about the en
① doc#29	The fire spread into the oilsands capital on May 3 and forced more than 80,000	people	to leave. </s></s> It destroyed roughly 2,400 homes and other buildings _ about
① doc#30	ut 10 per cent of Fort McMurray's 25,000 buildings. </s></s> More than 80,000	people	were evacuated from the northern Alberta community. </s></s> "Thank goodnes
① doc#65	is father, Neil, told the Mississauga News. </s></s> "I mean, there were 80,000	people	living there and now it's a ghost town. </s></s> " On Thursday, Alberta Health St
① doc#65	cuation that Notley said could hardly have gone better when evacuating 80,000	people	from a town that had only two roads out. </s></s> About 300 firefighters were or
① doc#17	ould be \$9 billion in insurable losses. </s></s> Fort McMurray is a city of 82,724	people	like most any other in the country. </s></s> But at 56.78 degrees north latitude a
① doc#55	ould be \$9 billion in insurable losses. </s></s> Fort McMurray is a city of 82,724	people	like most any other in the country. </s></s> But at 56.78 degrees north latitude a
① doc#74	9 and attributed it mainly to an influx of new immigrants. </s></s> It said 86,216	people	arrived in the country during the first three months of 2016, a large number of wi
① doc#27	id 15 helicopters are involved in fighting the wildfire that has driven over 88,000	people	from their homes in the oil patch community. </s></s> Goodale was also not pre
① doc#71	to jam one in there this week. </s></s> At the same time as many of the 88,000	people	who fled Fort McMurray were sitting gridlocked between the flames, some dista
① doc#16	e need help. </s></s> These are the true refugees of Canada; 80,000 to 90,000	people	have been forced out of their homes, forced out of their jobs - they have nothing
① doc#21	inly be said of Moose Jaw, which welcomed some of the approximately 90,000	people	who fled the fire. </s></s> LIP referendum Citizens Advocating Sensible Taxatio
① doc#23	he fact all business operations came to halt in a Fort McMurray, a city of 90,000	people	, could also affect Canada's GDP reading for May. </s></s> "I think (the Fort Mcl

Fig. 6. Concordance strings of *people* occurring with quantifiers

① doc#58	ant and 13.9 per cent respectively. </s></s> Alberta as a whole added 421,918	residents	since the previous census was taken, an increase of 11.6 per cent. </s></s> Th
① doc#9	to tour a damaged neighbourhood on the ground. </s></s> More than 80,000	residents	had to evacuate their homes May 3 as the flames carved a destructive path thr
① doc#11	forest has forced the evacuation of Fort McMurray. </s></s> More than 80,000	residents	of the northern Alberta city have been evacuated. </s></s> A provincial state of
① doc#22	ns. </s></s> The Insurance Bureau of Canada is urging the more than 80,000	residents	who have been forced to evacuate the city to contact their insurance providers
① doc#31	to tour a damaged neighbourhood on the ground. </s></s> More than 80,000	residents	had to evacuate their homes May 3 as the flames carved a destructive path thr
① doc#54	ll raging out of control, spread into the city, forcing the evacuation of its 80,000	residents	. </s></s> Mark was working at a college downtown, where he's a learning and
① doc#62	dfires, which are still burning, have forced the evacuation of more than 80,000	residents	. </s></s> Data di pubblicazione: May 9, 2016 </s></s> Rebuilding Fort McMurr
① doc#67	the middle of the northern oilsands capital of Fort McMurray, forcing all 80,000	residents	to flee. </s></s> More than 2,400 buildings were lost but firefighters managed t
① doc#25	s and floods. </s></s> The fires in May forced the evacuation of almost 90,000	residents	from the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and destroyed about 2,400 hor
① doc#51	s and floods. </s></s> The fires in May forced the evacuation of almost 90,000	residents	from the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo and destroyed about 2,400 hor
① doc#57	as constructed in Edmonton in 1938. </s></s> The city had fewer than 90,000	residents	and there were only about 700 Muslims in Canada at the time. </s></s> The co

Fig. 7. Concordance strings of *residents* occurring with quantifiers

It is worth noticing that the pattern $\{more\ than + [number] + people/residents\}$ indexes the topic of emergency and disaster, as in the following examples:

The fire spread into the oilsands capital on May 3 and forced ***more than 80,000 people to leave***. It destroyed roughly 2,400 homes and other buildings - about one-tenth of the city. (*Moose Jaw Times Herald*, 12/07/2016)

The winds shifted and what was a small localized evacuation turned into the largest in Alberta's history. Many people were given 30 minutes to grab what they could, lock their doors and leave. ***More than 80,000 people*** were trying to get out on a few available exit points. Think about the entire city of Moose Jaw or Prince Albert being asked to be evacuated. Where do you go? What do you take? (*Moose Jaw Times Herald*, 7/05/2016)

In both extracts, the representation of people as numbers occurs as part of narratives of the evacuation that rely on personalization and dramatization. According to Boykoff and Boykoff, these are “first order journalistic norms, because these factors are significant and baseline influences on both the selection of what is news and the content of news stories”.³⁵ As Bennet remarks, personalization is “the tendency to downplay the big social, economic, or political picture in favor of the human trials

³⁵ Maxwell Boykoff and Jules Boykoff, “Climate Change and Journalistic Norms: a Case-study of U.S. Mass-media Coverage”, *Geoforum*, 38.6 (2007), 1192.

tragedies, and triumphs that sit at the surface of the events”.³⁶ In this case, the *Moose Jaw Times Herald* restrains its coverage of the fire to the micro level of individuals. Stories are dramatized by highlighting dramatic details in a *crescendo* of tension aiming at amplifying the ‘spectacular’ consequences of the fire and triggering feelings of affect and sympathy. What is construed is a “regime of pity” where suffering is presented as an aesthetic spectacle.³⁷ Through such reports, that seem to be very similar to the TV footage that Chouliaraki defines as “ecstatic news”, the readers are involved in a relationship of proximity with the victims of the fire; they become part of the news narrative as they are put in the position of voyeurs of and participants to the pain of the other.³⁸ By means of sentimental empathy and reflexive identification between the sufferers and the readers, pity and care are built as “socially constructed disposition to feeling”.³⁹ More evidently so in the second extract, where intensification is also used to frame the fire as “the largest in Alberta’s history”. In the first extract, the topic of emergency, revolving around the number of people evacuated and the amount of buildings destroyed, occurs in a framework where Fort McMurray is nominated by means of metonymy as the tar sands capital. The strategy seems to be aimed at constructing a relationship between the emergency created by the fire and the tar sands, which may be interpreted as a negative evaluation of the oil industry, blamed as having a causative responsibility in the emergency.

When *people* or *residents* are used in the narratives of evacuation, dramatization appears to be the most used strategy. Following the same line of previous extracts, in another report taken from *The StarPhoenix*, the representation of the people fleeing the fire makes use of the metaphor of the exodus, which creates an association between the forced evacuation of Fort McMurray people to the struggle and journey of the Jews towards freedom in Israel:

Consider the orderly exodus of people who, quite literally, had to drive through fire to escape. (*The StarPhoenix*, 6/05/2016)

In this extract, people are represented as the heroes of their own salvation, since they heroically face challenges in order to escape. In aiming to achieve emotive effects, the movement of people is predicated as an exodus, but, surprisingly enough, the term is modified by *orderly*, which mitigates the connotation of *exodus* as a mass departure that is nonetheless delivered in a non-chaotic way. Therefore, the term, instead of bringing in a negative discourse prosody, contributes to the overall activation and positive evaluation of the social actors. Conversely, in our reference corpus, *exodus* is found to strongly collocate with *refugees* (9.33 MI score) and to bring about a negative discourse prosody, since words occurring in its surrounding are *prevent*, *civil* and *war*. The metaphor is therefore re-contextualized in this report, and the *topos* of displacement, usually employed in narratives of out-groups outnumbering in-groups, is overcome within a framework that provides a positive evaluation of IDPs and of their ‘journey’.

So far, it seems that IDPs named as *people* or *residents* tend to be activated in the representations collected in the corpus under investigation. However, in order to check the extent to which they are activated or passivated, the occurrences of both *people* and *residents* behaving as subjects and objects of clauses were retrieved.

³⁶ Lance W. Bennett, *News: the Politics of Illusion* (New York: Longman, 2002), 45.

³⁷ See Lilie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: Sage, 2006).

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 157.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

Verbs with <i>people</i> as subject	
Be	32
Have	12
Flee	6
leave	5
Get	4
Start	3
Call	3
Go	3
Near	3
Think	2
Know	2
experience	2
Ask	2
Seem	2
Wait	2
Try	2
become	2
Flock	1
Light	1
Fleeing	1
nurse	1
choose	1
repeat	1
prepare	1
Stay	1
Seek	1
return	1
struggle	1
arrive	1
include	1
contribute	1
Feel	1
Look	1
Want	1
loose	1
leave	1
Take	1
Do	1

Table 9. Verbs occurring with *people* as subject sorted by number of occurrences

Verbs with <i>people</i> as object	
Be	7
evacuate	4
Kill	3
prepare	3
Help	3
employ	2
Beg	2
Gain	2
Get	2
remind	1
prefer	1
credit	1
Pull	1
Die	1
injure	1
house	1
Urge	1
drive	1
Light	1
Stop	1
displace	1
force	1
Give	1
make	1
Take	1
Have	1
Say	1

Table 10. Verbs occurring with *people* as object sorted by number of occurrences

As visible from Table 9 and Table 10, based on raw frequencies, *people* occurs as the subject of clauses more often than it occurs as the object, and it usually precedes verbs of movement such as *flee*, *leave* and *go*, as was noticed for *evacuees* in its occurrences as a subject. Similar results were obtained from the observation of *residents*, as Table 11 and Table 12 show.

Verbs with <i>residents</i> as subject	
Be	11
Have	7
Flee	4
Care	2
Lose	2
move	2
bring	2
purchase	2
refuse	2
Rally	1
suffer	1
Join	1
collect	1
leave	1
Need	1

Table 11. Verbs occurring with *residents* as subject sorted by number of occurrences

Verbs with <i>residents</i> as object	
displace	4
schedule	3
let	2
evacuate	2
add	1
ask	1
flee	1
force	1
have	1
say	1
be	1
take	1
have	1
say	1

Table 12. Verbs occurring with *residents* as object sorted by number of occurrences

Overall, it seems that both *residents* and *people* share similar discourse prosodies and representations. While refugees are often deprived of their agentivity, in this corpus, IDPs, alternatively named as *evacuees*, *people* or *residents* are denied the alleged helplessness with which refugees are generally represented, since the state of emergency they experience is only transitory. More specifically, although salient pre-modifiers of *people* and *residents* include *displaced* and *evacuated*, which could have suggested an overall passivation of the social actors, the data show that IDPs are framed as doers rather than do-tos, whereas, for instance, numerous studies have found that refugees are often seen as helpless, passive victims.⁴⁰ Therefore, the Canadian news reports provide an alternative portrayal to

⁴⁰ Farbotko and Lazrus, “The First Climate Refugees?”.

those accounts that represent refugees in terms of a potential national security problem and as a flow of ‘others’ threatening national borders.⁴¹

6. Concluding remarks

The 2016 Alberta fire lasted for two months. Coverage of the fire concentrated between May 1 and May 12, when evacuation orders were issued by the government of Alberta and forced people to evacuate. The analysis has found that, in the corpus under consideration, IDPs are never named as such by Canadian news reporters. On the contrary a range of alternative terms are chosen, also in compliance with the terminology adopted in Canadian institutional discourse, more specifically in two official reports, the “Home again. Recovery after the Wood Buffalo Wildfire” and “May 2016 Wood Buffalo Wildfire Post-Incident Assessment Report”, where IDPs are re-nominated as *evacuees* and *residents*. The analysis confirms that Canadian news discourse is informed by Canada’s institutional discourse in that terminology is re-contextualized, while other discursive strategies are also employed and can be seen as the expression of dominant ideologies and discourse *topoi*.

The analysis has focused on four query terms, but it found that only three were used as re-nominations of *Internally Displaced Persons*. Uses of *refugees* in this corpus occur in the wider frame of representation of IDPs, although the term is never employed to name them. On the contrary, it activates the *topoi* of finance and difference since, by means of argumentation strategies, Canada’s IDPs are said to be more in need of funds than non-Canadian refugees. At the same time, when IDPs are named as *evacuees*, the analyzed news reports seem to highlight the resilience showed by Fort McMurray IDPs, on the one hand, and the ability of the tar sands industry to intervene and avoid a humanitarian crisis, on the other. The latter case especially applies to the news reports from newspapers that have notoriously showed a pro-oil-industry position, such as the *National Post* and the *Calgary Herald*. It also seems interesting to notice that, across these reports, the fire is realized as *wildfire*, and by means of predications (*out of control*, *roaring*, *raging*) that aim at framing it as a natural event and, therefore, evacuation as a consequence of an environmental disaster. Moreover, the results seem to challenge the initial hypothesis according to which IDPs would have been expected to share collocates and discourse prosody with refugees, since references to forced displacement are embedded in the definitions of the two terms. While in the representation of climate-induced migration analyzed by Russo,⁴² fear appeals that trigger anxiety, vulnerability and alarm characterize the framing of transnational mobility in newspaper discourse, here the characterization of IDPs, when these are linguistically realized as *evacuees*, relies on lexico-grammatical choices that are meant to dignify Canadian strength and resilience, on the one hand, and also to legitimate the tar sands industry on the other. Based on collocations and prosody, it could be argued that the coverage appears to prevent readers from demonizing the evacuees as a mass of refugees who will live on federal welfare.

Conversely, when IDPs are named as *people* or *residents*, different prosodies and discourse *topoi* are activated. While strategies of argumentation occur in news reports where *evacuees* are differentiated from *refugees*, in the news reports where IDPs are lexicalized as *people* or *residents*, the social actors fall into a narrative that privileges the *topos* of disaster and the strategies of intensification and dramatization to trigger affect and sympathy. Despite the *topos*, however, *people* and *residents* tend to be activated rather than passivated, which is in line with the general representation of IDPs in this corpus, regardless of the employed nomination strategies. However, it has been noticed that when *people* and *residents* occur, the evaluation of the tar sands industry varies. Indeed, in narratives where

⁴¹ Nick Gill, “Environmental Refugees”: Key Debates and the Contributions of Geographers”, *Geography Compass*, 4 (2010), 861-871.

⁴² See Russo, *The Evaluation of Risk*, 106-110.

the strategy of intensification occurs in the form of quantifiers collocating with the query terms, a link is mildly unveiled between the emergency caused by the fire and the tar sands, which seems to suggest a negative evaluation and de-legitimation of the oil industry. This is realized by means of references to Fort McMurray as the hub of the tar sands, whereas, in more legitimating reports, the oil sands industry is represented as a pro-active participant in the evacuation procedures.

One last consideration regards the general usage of discourse *topoi*. It has been stated that the *topoi* of finance, difference and emergency occur throughout the corpus, although with different discursive associations. While the *topoi* of finance and difference are activated by occurrences of *refugees* when compared to *evacuees*, the *topos* of emergency emerges when IDPs are lexicalized as *people* or *residents*. However, even in this last case, the emergency itself is mitigated and IDPs are never constructed by means of threat-connoting cues. Two metaphors spotted in the qualitative analysis, that of the non-chaotic exodus and the representation of evacuees as a gentle, trickling flow, provide further confirmation. It seems that the recurring *topoi* and typical associations identified by Wodak in immigration discourse, such as the *topoi* of burden, character, crime, danger, disadvantage, displacement etc., that justify exclusionary social and political practices, are here overturned in such a way that there is no othering of an in-group vs. an out-group.⁴³ On the contrary, the *topoi* of hospitality and assistance, for instance, constructs IDPs as an inner part of the Canadian society.

To conclude, based on the qualitative and quantitative analysis conducted on the Wildfire Newspaper Corpus, it can be argued that different re-nomination strategies of IDPs occur in Canadian news discourse on the 2016 Alberta fire, each activating certain characterizations of the social actors that unveil more or less positive evaluations of the tar sands discourse. At the same time, ideological positions emerge in news reports that deny the use of the term *Internally Displaced Persons*. News reporters opt, instead, for the framing and understanding of people displacement in Alberta as an environmental rather than a climate-induced event, which is in line with Canada's recent ambiguous response to climate-related issues.

⁴³ Wodak, *Methods of Critical Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage, 2001).