International Students, Equity, and Marginalization: Unpacking the Human Impact of Internationalization

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April 2024

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Educational Studies.

Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Figures

[1] The Ideological Seascapes figure was conceptualized by Mittelmeier et al. (2023).

Glossary

Critical internationalization: Understanding how power in internationalization functions to disadvantage some while privileging others (George Mwangi et al., 2018).

Critical perspectives: Help us understand practices that "serve the interests of the dominant class while simultaneously dehumanizing others" (Brown, 2004, p. 78). It is the research that recognizes the role of power and how it feeds into unjust practices which become givens and understanding of how dominant discourses and structures contribute to inequities (Cannella & Lincoln, 2015).

Equity: Shapes how we understand fairness, power, access to resources, and social protections (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Ziguras, 2016). An equity lens "makes explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence, and marginalized individuals who are differently located in the educational process" (Ng, 2003, p. 214).

International student: "Non-Canadian students who do not have 'permanent resident' status and have to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education" (Statistics Canada, 2010)[2].

Intersectionality: The body is a "meeting point" of identities and "how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others" (Ahmed, 2007, p.14). Meeting points operate along lines of race, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality, SES, and more (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality impacts how we see the world but how the world sees and interacts with us.

Other/Othering: Explored by Said in *Orientalism* (1979), Othering is the active process of treating a group differentially and as inferior from what is identified as a dominant group. Said's Other is a distinction between "us" and "them" where this Othering corresponds to marginalization, or the exclusion and pushing of groups perceived as Other to the margins. This marginalization has consequences for international students as the out group, including discrimination and access to resources. The distinction between us in them is often entrenched in colonialist attitudes linked to large structures of "power, knowledge, hegemony, culture, and imperialism (Burney, 2012, p. 23).

White normativity: Refers to the framing of Whiteness as the status quo and any student who does not meet that criteria is Othered as different or an outsider. This can also be framed within

[2] Bennet et al. (2023) also note that we can understand status beyond visa-based descriptions. It should also be noted that some students may not meet this criteria but encounter similar experiences with status (e.g., students who have lost status, students who are refugees, and more). However, the thesis most closely focuses on those requiring study permits/visas to study.

the space of deficit narratives where those seen as other or identified as non-white are objectified as less (Madriaga & McCaig, 2019). This is also linked to the obfuscation of race and the role it can play in inequitable experiences.

Abstract

The consequences of rapid internationalization within the context of higher education are unavoidable in 2024, warranting the urgent need to understand the human cost of this neoliberal-driven growth, particularly as it pertains to international students and equity. Bringing in roughly 22 billion dollars annually, international education is hugely lucrative for Canada. However, there is a shadow over this profitability which prioritizes income over the experiences of international students. Critical scholars have problematized the dehumanizing rhetoric of international students as "economic objects" (Lomer, 2014). There are persistent issues around international student rights, discrimination, and systemic issues including diminished access to funding, access to social protections, and growing instances of exploitation. However, much of the research on international students is still entrenched in acculturation rhetoric, which can privilege deficit discourses and remove attention from these pervasive issues. In contrast, this thesis emphasizes the importance of a critical lens, which encourages understanding international student experiences from a perspective of equity, Othering, and marginalization. More specifically, this thesis addresses the overarching questions: What are the ways in which international students in Canada have been Othered, marginalized, and impacted by their non-citizen status and other intersecting identities and how is this marginalization mediated by policy, inequity, and practices in international higher education?

This thesis addresses the research objective through three distinct, yet inextricably intertwined manuscripts. Manuscript 1 critically analyzes the impact of policy on international students and how the pandemic functioned to exacerbate and create inequities for international students. Manuscript 2 privileges the narratives of international students, employing critical thematic analysis to unpack how they conceptualize fairness and inequity as framed by their

international student status. This was achieved through interviews with 13 international graduate students across disciplines at a large research-based Canadian university in Quebec. Manuscript 3 provides a conceptual analysis on the ways in which the subfield of research with international students requires critical nuance in how race is discussed or omitted in research. Together, the manuscripts create a novel and nuanced composite to enhance understanding of the ways international students have been marginalized, Othered, and impacted by inequity by highlighting overlooked discourses on race, the conditionality of international student status, bureaucratic labour, and the mediating impact of policy.

Keywords: International students, equity, critical analysis, critical internationalization

Résumé

Les conséquences de l'internationalisation rapide dans le contexte de l'enseignement supérieur sont inévitables en 2024, ce qui justifie le besoin urgent de comprendre le coût humain de cette croissance néolibérale, en particulier en ce qui concerne les étudiants internationaux et l'équité. L'éducation internationale, qui rapporte environ 22 milliards de dollars par an, est extrêmement lucrative pour le Canada. Cependant, une ombre plane sur cette rentabilité qui donne la priorité aux revenus plutôt qu'à l'expérience des étudiants étrangers. Des chercheurs critiques ont problématisé la rhétorique déshumanisante des étudiants internationaux, considérés comme des « objets économiques » (Lomer, 2014). Il existe des problèmes persistants concernant les droits des étudiants internationaux, la discrimination et les problèmes systémiques, notamment l'accès réduit au financement et aux protections sociales et les cas croissants d'exploitation. Cependant, une grande partie de la recherche sur les étudiants étrangers est encore ancrée dans la rhétorique de l'acculturation, qui privilégie les discours déficitaires et détourner l'attention de ces questions omniprésentes. En revanche, cette thèse souligne l'importance d'une perspective critique, qui encourage la compréhension des expériences des étudiants étrangers du point de vue de l'équité, de l'altérité et de la marginalisation. Plus précisément, cette thèse aborde les questions primordiales suivantes: de quelles façons les étudiants étrangers au Canada ont-ils été altérisé, marginalisés et affectés par leur statut de non-citoyen et leurs autres identités croisées, et comment cette marginalisation est-elle médiatisée par la politique, l'iniquité et les pratiques en enseignement supérieur international ?

Cette thèse aborde l'objectif de la recherche par le biais de trois manuscrits distincts, mais inextricablement liés. Le manuscrit 1 analyse de manière critique l'impact de la politique sur les étudiants étrangers et la manière dont la pandémie a exacerbé et créé des inégalités pour les

étudiants étrangers. Le manuscrit 2 privilégie les récits des étudiants étrangers, en recourant à une analyse thématique critique pour analyser la manière dont ils conçoivent l'équité et l'iniquité en fonction de leur statut d'étudiant étranger. Pour ce faire, des entretiens ont été menés auprès de 13 étudiants étrangers de troisième cycle dans différentes disciplines au sein d'une grande université canadienne de recherche au Québec. Le manuscrit 3 fournit une analyse conceptuelle des façons dont le sous-domaine de la recherche sur les étudiants étrangers exige une nuance critique dans la façon dont la race est discutée ou omise dans la recherche. Ensemble, les manuscrits créent un composite nouveau et nuancé pour améliorer la compréhension des façons dont les étudiants internationaux ont été marginalisés, altérisés et touchés par l'iniquité en mettant en évidence les discours négligés sur la race, la conditionnalité du statut d'étudiant international, le travail bureaucratique et l'impact médiateur de la politique.

Mots-clés : Étudiants étrangers, équité, analyse critique, internationalisation critique

Acknowledgments

Where does one begin when they are surrounded by so many incredible people, personal and professional? When I started writing my thesis, I envisioned the finish line (which at times seemed far) and who I'd like to thank when I got there. I joked that "I wanna thank me", in the spirit of Snoop Dogg. While I am immensely proud of this achievement, realistically, I could have never done this without the amazing help and support from my "people".

I would like to express my gratitude for the funding that allowed this research to take place. Thank you to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) funded iMPACTS project as well as the Fonds de Recherche du Québec (FRQSC) for funding this important research. Thank you to the Gretta Chambers Fellowship and Mitacs for your funding contributions.

To my supervisors Marta Kobiela and Shaheen Shariff: your warmth and supervision have not gone unnoticed! Thank you so much for supervising with attention, care, and valuable knowledge. I look forward to taking these skills with me. Thank you for those countless letters of recommendation, and words of encouragement. To Sylvie, thank you for taking a PhD student from across the pond under your wing. Your guidance and support have been incredible.

Mom, and Dad, thank you for giving me an amazing childhood that left me space for curiosity, for taking me to the Young Author's Conference at our local university, and for supporting me as a "baby" writer. Thank you to my brother Will, who sometimes calls me smart not ironically, which is one of the greater achievements a little sister could ask for.

In addition to my family rock, my chosen family/friends inside and outside of academia have helped me in so many ways: from the motivating coffee shop dates to co-work, and fun times to decompress from writing and research. Thank you friends for your second pair of eyes

on last-minute deadlines, and sympathetic ears. Sarah, Chris, Shikha, Jill, Julie, Maleika, Nelsy, Camila, the “fam”, and so many others!!! Thank you James for your love, care, and pep talks!

I’d also like to thank all of my university communities including The Research with International Students group who gave my research a home —I’ve learnt so much from you all! To my writing groups: seeing familiar faces at Shut Up and Write, the calming, guiding voices of Marième, Donetta, Claire, and the rest of the crew at Graphos kept me going. Thank you to all of my McGill, DISE, and Education collaborators, including the iMPACTS team, EGSS, ACIS, and GPC. Thank you Michael for shepherding all of us through DISE!

Thank you to all of my research collaborators including International Student Services and all of my participants. Your time, narratives, and feedback have been so indescribably incredible. Without you, none of this research could have happened.

Finally, thank you to all of the baristas and scenic coffee shops of Montreal—you are my quiet motivators and cheerleaders.

Author Contribution and Contribution to Original Knowledge

The thesis follows McGill University's format for a manuscript-based thesis, consisting of three manuscripts. I confirm that I am the sole author for all of the manuscripts and verify that I conducted, analyzed, and wrote the research myself. My committee members Dr. Marta Kobiela, Dr. Syvlie Lomer, and Dr. Shaheen Shariff provided feedback and coaching throughout multiple iterations of the manuscripts and the thesis. Manuscript 1 (Chapter 4), published in 2024 appears as a chapter in *Pandemic Injustice: Navigating Legal and Policy Lines During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Dietzel & Towfigh, 2024). This belongs to a larger series edited by Dr. Shariff through publisher Peter Lang: *Confronting Systemic Omissions and Impacts in Educational Policy*. Editing and conceptualization of the chapter happened with the additional editorial feedback of the editorial team including Dr. Shaheen Shariff, Dr. Christopher Dietzel, and Kimia Towfigh. This contribution was subject to the publisher Peter Lang's rigorous single blind refereeing process, where submissions are reviewed by selected scholars. Manuscript 2 (Chapter 5), is pre-publication and will be submitted as a book chapter or journal publication. Manuscript 3 (Chapter 6), published in 2023 appears as a published chapter in: *Research With International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations* (Mittelmeier et al., 2023). Dr. Sylvie Lomer, Dr. Jenna Mittelmeier, and book collaborators in the Research with International Students group provided formative feedback on the chapter. The chapter contribution and book were subjected to the publisher Taylor Francis's rigorous peer review and integrity process. As per Taylor Francis's criteria, independent experts reviewed the work along criteria of "validity, significance, and originality" and deemed the chapter appropriate for publication.

I confirm that the thesis and its manuscripts (collectively and individually) make novel contributions to research. Canada is having to reckon with the consequences of rapid internationalization and effectively needs up-to-date research to understand the impact of this internationalization. Understanding internationalization from an equity standpoint is critical for addressing rapid internationalization in international higher education. Together, the manuscripts form a composite to understand this inequity. Five important overarching contributions include dismantling the monolith of international students, understanding the role of race in international student experiences, novel conceptualizations of bureaucratic labour and conditionality of student status, the act of Othering, and unpacking the contradictions in doubling discourses. These contributions receive further elaboration in Chapter 7's discussion.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

You've decided. You're going to start your journey as an international student and pursue higher education in another country. Why? It's hard to choose just one reason, but you've always been curious about other countries, and you think it will enhance your career prospects. Admittedly, it's been difficult choosing the "where", but you've decided you want to go to an English-speaking country because you already know the language and there will be opportunities to improve your English, making you more competitive in this globalized world. You're nervous about studying predominantly in your second language, but you've been studying English since you were 12, and your TOEFL scores are sufficient for many universities and colleges.

You manage to narrow down your choice between two countries, vacillating between Canada and the United States. American culture has often caught your interest, but the anti-immigration rhetoric gives you pause, particularly after the pandemic and following Donald Trump's public statements towards non-White foreigners[3]. A recruitment agent came to your high school and made a great case for Canada. From what you've heard, the immigration policies appear far more accessible, and Canadians seem kind and welcoming. The recruitment agent said they would help facilitate the application process, so you're confident their guidance will make the process smoother.

You've got the country, but now you have to pick where to apply. You've leafed through a number of colourful brochures and university websites, brandishing flags from around the world, highlighting diversity, international campuses, and programs designed to give you an advantage in your career. The choice is tough! You've researched institutions, but the agent really promoted a school with a business program that aligns with your professional goals. You

[3] See Potok (2017) and Rose-Redwood & Rose-Redwood (2017) for context on how the "Trump Effect" impacted international student immigration.

thought you'd end up in a big city like Montreal or Toronto, but maybe a smaller city will mean more opportunities to connect with locals? You're from a small city yourself, but a couple of other students who went to your high school already go to this school, so it feels like a safety net.

You applied to two schools in Canada, and some schools closer to your home, just in case. After months of waiting, you've received a response and you've been accepted to your first choice. You're excited, but there are a lot of administrative steps to complete. First step: get your study permit sorted. You've submitted your transcripts, your passport, other documentation, and fees. Once again, you're waiting. For a fee, the recruitment agent helped you with your study permit application materials, but you haven't received many updates. The tuition bill arrives and it's overwhelming, as the school costs significantly more than what Canadians pay. You could study for a fraction of the cost in your home country, but you know this will be a worthwhile investment. While waiting for your study permit, you reach out to the school with some questions—they assure you that everything will be answered at the pre-departure orientation two weeks before classes start. In the meantime, you start securing loans and grants to ensure that you make the first tuition payment. Loans will only go so far, so your parents use their home as leverage[4] to cover the remainder of the costs—like you, they see your education as an investment.

Your school has a page for grants and fellowships, and you start applying. However, you realize that you are ineligible for many because the majority are reserved for Canadian residents[5]. That's okay, because Canada now has more permissive laws around working and studying. You're confident that you can find something.

[4] See Hune Brown (2022) where parents mortgage their farm to pay their child's tuition.
[5] See OneVoice (2021) for more information on tuition and financial need of international students.

You're still waiting on your study permit and classes start in just two weeks. It's surprising because you've read online that students from other countries received their permits much more quickly[6]. You were hesitant to book your flight without having your study permit in hand, but airfare is only increasing, and you don't want to miss class. The agent reassures you, noting that there have been significant delays in study permit processing following the pandemic, but that you will get your permit in time. Your last-minute flight purchase put a large dent in the reserves you had for your move, but you're still counting on employment to cover your expenses[7].

In focusing on the bureaucracy of your study permit, you haven't had much time to consolidate housing. The dormitories were expensive, so you decided to find an off-campus apartment with roommates. But, you're finding it hard to find an apartment—rates are exorbitant. You eventually find a place off-campus sight unseen because your flight is approaching. The landlord is asking for an inflated security deposit because you're a foreign renter[8]. Not having any other viable options, you pay the deposit.

To your relief, your permit finally arrives, and you're off. You are processed at immigration and you're officially in Canada. Exhausted, but excited to finally be in a new country, you arrive at your apartment. It looked much better in the photos, but it fits your needs. You found out later that the inflated security deposit requested from your landlord isn't legal, but you've just arrived and don't want any legal troubles. You meet your other roommates, also international students, but from other countries. You had hoped to meet some Canadian students as well, but it's also nice living with people who understand what it's like to study far from home.

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[6] See Irete (2022) highlighting the differential wait times for students contingent on country and race.
[7] See Chapter 5 for personal narratives on waiting for immigration and securing employment.
[8] See Balintec (2023) which provides context for the current housing crisis and subsequent discrimination.

There have been some stumbles but you're finally about to see what you came here for—a Canadian education. You have your course schedule and are eager to explore campus—the main campus is beautiful. But, to your surprise, you find that instead of taking courses on the main campus, you'll have to go to an off-campus location in the Cineplex. You never imagined your first Canadian academic experience would take place in a movie theatre, and you're disappointed that you're not getting the full campus experience[9]. There were unprecedented numbers of international students for the business program, and no lecture halls could accommodate all of you. There is a bus that leaves from campus to take students to the cinema complex. Between shuttling between your apartment, classes in the Cineplex, and your one class on campus, you're tired and have limited time to study.

Because of the erratic schedule and time spent traveling during the day, you have to work in the evenings. You had hoped to find something on campus, but you found that many of the on-campus employers were privileging native English speakers. Juggling between work, school, and social life in Canada is challenging, but you welcome the change. So far, the first semester isn't quite what you expected, but you're hopeful that you'll still have the chance to connect with Canadian students, and that despite the financial challenges, the move was worth it!

Every year, millions of students worldwide, like the student in the vignette above, choose to pursue education outside of their home countries. These students arrive at many destinations, with Canada being one of the top countries international students are choosing (OECD, 2022). This vignette is a composite of many of the issues framing international higher education today, from the systemic issues international students must confront to study in another country, the immigration protocols and bureaucracy associated with being an international student, to issues

[9] See Armstrong (2022) which chronicles how international students at Cape Breton University were bussed to the Cineplex for their courses.

of inequity, discrimination, and exploitation (Patel, 2020; Tannock, 2018). This thesis intends to unpack the systemic inequities documented in the vignette through three manuscripts that each capture important key elements on the ways current internationalization strategies and policies contribute to the marginalization and Othering of international students. The current chapter sets the background for the thesis.

Media Spotlight: Challenges Faced by International Students in Canada

With increasing international student numbers and more publicity around some of the issues these students face in public consciousness, discourse around international student experiences is gaining more attention. There are sensationalized reports of international students living under bridges against the backdrop of housing crises (National Post Staff, 2023), news of international student caps in an effort to curb immigration (Rana, 2024), and mounting tuition rates (Wong, 2024). Earlier headlines focused on students facing deportation (Rana, 2023), international students being turned away from study in Quebec from immigration officials (Canadian Press, 2023), and the reliance Canada's economy has on international students and temporary labour (Globe Editorial Board, 2024). While headlines from prominent papers capture topical issues impacting students, it is notable that news outlets are choosing to report more consistently on the impact of rapid internationalization, neoliberal international higher education, and the results of these trends and challenges created for international students. More consistently, the outlets signal high tuition fees and limited infrastructure for increasing numbers. There is additional growing critique on for-profit universities who aggressively recruit international students, exploitation, mental health challenges faced by students studying in Canada, and other markers of international student experiences. However, the media's greater attention on rapid internationalization is not without problems. Lee et al.'s (2020) critical review

of the media's discourse on international education found three troubling themes: the commodification of international education, international students as "charity cases", and deficit discourses implying international students act immorally. Scholarly research has also fallen into some of these less-favourable portraits on international students, which has received attention from critically engaged scholars (e.g., Mittelmeier et al., 2023). Some of the most pervasive depictions in research are unidimensional themes of international students that centre on acculturation, adjustment, and deficit narratives (Bista & Gaulee, 2016; Lomer et al., 2023; Heng & Lu, 2023; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). However, before unpacking some of these themes further in the thesis, it is helpful to first understand, who are international students?

Who Are International Students?

With the internationalization of higher education, there are a number of ways in which the term "international student" is defined, ranging from more conceptual to legal definitions set forth by the Canadian government. The government defines international students as:

> Non-Canadian students who do not have "permanent resident" status and have had to obtain the authorization of the Canadian government to enter Canada with the intention of pursuing an education. In other words, international students are those who have come to Canada expressly to pursue their education (Statistics Canada, 2010).

This definition makes some key distinctions: first that international students are not permanent residents. The second element is that students are required to obtain paperwork to enter and study in the country. This paperwork is important in that a student's status is entirely conditional and contingent on obtaining these requisite papers. Finally, the government also defines intentionality as a criterion—international students must be coming to Canada explicitly to study. Although foreign student and international student are often used interchangeably, the government makes a

distinction, noting that foreign students include those who have permanent residency (International Education, 2011).

While the majority of this thesis speaks to international students in terms of their legal status as defined by the Canadian government, understanding some of the conceptual ways in which international students have been described is also advantageous. To promote inclusivity in research, Bennet et al. (2023) encourage going beyond the categorical visa-based descriptions of international students where one is simply international based on their visa immigration status. They clarify that this categorization creates a "false dichotomy" between international students and "home", or Canadian students and creates risk of not understanding the importance of individual differences, instead relying on underlying assumptions and stereotypes. Bennet et al. further explain that often international student status is conceptualized in absolutes: e.g., international student status is defined by visa and nationality, and that there are fixed and expected outcomes based on these categorizations. They further explain that there are individuals in both home student and international student groups who may have similar needs. For example, students who have refugee status but may neither be an international student, permanent resident, or Canadian may potentially share experiences with students traditionally categorized as international students. While this research focuses more globally on the government-defined definitions of international student statuses, it is helpful to be more inclusive of our understandings on who is considered "international". In my research, the visa implications of international student status are crucial, and the institutional definitions based on this visa status function to create inequities for students. Therefore, the government definition will be privileged. However, I caution that in using this definition, the importance of individual differences and nuance as explored by Bennett et al. (2023) within these definitions must be understood.

Although I use "international student" to talk categorically about study permit holders pursuing studies at Canadian institutions, I must qualify that there is no one, unifying international student experience. Rather, these manuscripts seek to identify factors that can and do mediate experiences for some international students. Student experiences are varied, particularly in terms of marginalization. As such, understanding and identifying how the outlined policies in this paper may impact individuals differently is paramount. Nurse (2019) using Crenshaw (1991) as a point of departure encourages the use of structural and representational intersectionality to better frame how international students experience their host countries/host institutions, and to also understand how host countries and host institutions interact with them.

International students arrive at their new higher education institutions with their own expectations and hopes. However, these expectations are not always met (e.g., Guo & Guo, 2017). While not everyone's international student experience will resemble the vignette above, many students will encounter *some* of these themes. Using Nova Scotian University, Cape Breton as a case study for the impact of Canada's aggressive internationalization strategy, the vignette explores some of the consequences of this rapid growth on international students—from classes segregated from their Canadian peers in the local Cineplex, limited employment prospects, and unaffordable housing.

The Development of the Current Neoliberal Model of International Education

In addition to every student's unique international student journey, the monetization of higher education also underpins international higher education as we see it today, reflected by the differential fees international students pay compared to their non-international peers, and the effort placed into the recruitment and branding of international higher education (Johnstone & Lee, 2014). As international student numbers in Canada have increased nearly 200% in the past

decade, higher education institutions and local milieus struggle to accommodate all of the students, sometimes leading to a mismatch in the rose-tinted branding of international student experiences, versus the reality that some students may encounter (Basen, 2016; CBIE, 2023; Guo & Guo, 2017).

One of the largest driving factors of international education and subsequent boom in international student numbers in Canada is the nation's internationalization strategy proposed by the Minister of Trade entitled *Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity,* which is a document offering a point-by-point plan of this strategy (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). The profitability of international education is evident in Canada's strategy, first proposed in 2014. Coming in just behind the export value of gold and automobiles, and ahead of liquefied petroleum, as of 2017, the business of international education is one of Canada's largest sources of export revenue (Roslyn Kunin and Associates, 2017). In the 2014 internationalization strategy document, the financial contributions of international students Canada have prioritized getting more international students to pursue their studies here. The Minister of Trade's strategy suggested that by internationalizing Canada in the domain of education, Canada could ultimately set itself up for "long term prosperity" (Global Affairs, 2014). Comparing the newest iteration of the internationalization strategy, which sets targets for 2019-2024 to the original internationalization strategy, the spirit of prosperity remains strong. Like the 2014 report, the newest iteration titled *Building on Success: International Education Strategy, 2019-2024* also emphasizes driving prosperity and the importance of Canada remaining competitive against other competitor nations including Australia, France, Germany, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. International students are also referred to as a source of revenue and "human capital" within the strategy. As seen in the preceding section, this strategic language fits

into the critique of scholars including Lomer (2014) who identify the ways in which rhetoric around internationalization presents students as economic objects.

The "brand" of Canada is discussed explicitly, namely under the EduCanada brand which is described in the newest strategy as representing "the high quality of Canada's education sector and contributes to increased numbers of international students across the country. Under the new International Education Strategy, the use and effectiveness of the brand will increase" (Government of Canada, Building on Success, para. 1). The literature provided by the Canadian government consistently emphasizes the EduCanada brand—a brand which holds so much importance that it is a protected trademark. Kizilbash opens their 2011 report *Branding Canadian Higher Education* with the observation that nation branding as seen in the internationalization strategy is an increasing trend. Under this report, analysts and researchers argued that Canada needed clearer and stronger branding. More than a decade later, the rhetoric and strategy of branding is stronger than ever in *Building Success* (Government of Canada, 2020).

The 2014 internationalization strategy placed significant emphasis on Canada's imagery as a leading study destination. Johnstone and Lee (2014) show how this shiny branding is replicated in recruitment brochures. The branding and internationalization documents explicitly delineate how the government aims to describe Canada, namely safe, reliable, multicultural, and immigration-friendly. Canada's branding also implies competition—Canada not only wishes to demonstrate that it is safe and welcoming, but also safe(r) and (more) welcoming when compared to competitor countries such as the United States, the U.K., and Australia. The element of competition has been well-established by scholars as a major tenet of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002; Johnstone and Lee, 2017). Competition is thus replicated in Canada's efforts to race ahead

of its competitors as universities become businesses, and students themselves become not only exports, but consumers of services. Stein (2017) sheds light on this imagery, explaining that:

> These 'seamless', idealized images tend to foreclose unflattering representations of the host nation, and make significant promises about the various kinds of capital that students can derive from their pursuit of international education (Lomer et al., 2016). (p. 462).

Unflattering representations are a direct detriment to Canada's branding, and it is therefore advantageous to shift the focus to attracting vs. deterring students from studying. Additionally, the branding works to promote Canadian exceptionalism, foregoing its role in colonialism, racism, and the Othering of international students (Stein, 2017). There is a strong rhetoric of success, competition, and prosperity in respect to the financial drivers of attracting more international students in the Canadian government's most recent internationalization strategy (Government of Canada, 2020). More students equals more prosperity and greater financial contributions. Also appealing to Canada, is the hope that students who study will stay, continuing to contribute to Canada's economy and fulfill ongoing and expected labour shortages resulting from an aging population and low birth rates.

The landscape of international education has changed significantly over the years (Choudaha, 2017; de Wit & Merkx, 2012; NAFSA, 1966). Globally, the profile of who studies abroad, motivations for pursuing studies abroad, as well as motivators for host institutions to welcome foreign students has not been constant. Social, political, financial, and health factors have rapidly changed how international education is not only perceived, but how it functions, and how international students navigate that system (Choudaha, 2017; Marginson, 2020). From the tightened visa security following September 11th, geopolitical tensions impacting student

mobility as witnessed in the 2019 Saudi Arabia-Canada tensions, and the COVID-19 pandemic, international education is volatile (Choudaha, 2017; Firang, 2020; Webster, 2019).

NAFSA's (1966) historical account of international education pinpoints India as being the starting point for international education, where as early as 600 BCE Islamic scholars were encouraged to find scholarly enlightenment, including intellectual exchange in China (Welch, 2005). Other early conceptions of international education involved wandering scholars, traveling to academic institutions seeking enlightenment as individual agents (de Wit & Merkx, 2012; NAFSA, 1966). However, the time of the wandering scholar resembles little of what international education has evolved to in recent years. De Wit and Merk's (2012) summary of the 20th century describes rapid changes in international education following The World Wars. After World War II's devastation, nations felt mutual understanding was paramount for avoiding more catastrophic wars—international cooperation through university exchanges was just one method of achieving this. Still popular today, the Erasmus program continues to promote student exchanges within Europe. Specifically, the rationale for international education was for peace and understanding, but also international security and foreign policy. The 1980s entered a period that is more indicative of international education today— Some European and American institutions started to introduce differential fees for international students and active recruitment of foreign students became a more common practice. When these institutions started employing differential tuition fees for international students, the neoliberal driven international education that defines the current higher education context took hold. Neoliberalism is a hallmark ideology shaping international higher education in that monetary gain not only drives, but supersedes, most factors in the academic milieu (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). This is seen prominently in Canada's most recent international education strategy.

The major tenet of Canada's most recently revised international education strategy is "driving prosperity" (International Education, 2020). This prosperity refers to the major financial contributions international education makes to Canada through inflated tuition rates paid by international students, research innovation from international student researchers, and the job shortages international students fulfill. While this strategy highlights international education as an essential facet of Canadian economic success, it is wholly contingent on the financial contributions of international students and omits the importance of the intrinsic value, importance, and needs of international students. Prior to the pandemic, international education in Canada brought in an all-time high of roughly 22 billion dollars annually (International Education, 2020). The economic impact of international education in Canada has been well established, but in focusing on the prosperity of international education, framed within neoliberal rhetoric, perspective is lost on the most essential element of international education, which are the international students themselves who come to study in Canada.

The Canadian Bureau of International Education (CBIE) reports that as of 2023, over 1 million international students chose to study in Canada (CBIE, 2023). Illustrated in the vignette, a number of push-pull factors influence why and where students choose to study abroad including: economic and educational opportunities, pathways to immigration, gaining access to education in a specialized field, and new experiences (Fakunle, 2020; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). As international student numbers increase and international education becomes more lucrative, the body of research on international students is also growing and garnering more attention. While this prior context is imperative for understanding the landscape of international education, international students are central to my work as a researcher. The current landscape of international higher education is not without casualties—international students have been

Othered, marginalized, and exploited by a system that often prioritizes their financial value over their human value (Bennett et al., 2023; Ellis, 2023; Karram, 2013; Tavares, 2021). Othering, explored by Said in Orientalism (1979) is the active process of treating a group differentially and as inferior from what is identified as a dominant group. Said's Other is a distinction between "us" and "them" where this Othering corresponds to marginalization, or the exclusion and pushing of groups perceived as Other to the margins. This marginalization has consequences for international students as the out group, which is explored throughout this thesis.

During my PhD, and through the course of this thesis, it has been my priority to investigate some of the lived experiences of international students, with an ultimate goal of creating a more humane portrait that signals some of the systemic external factors impacting their lives. My research works to confront the overwhelming narrative that the value of international students is in their profitability, reflected in the vocabulary often employed to describe these students including "cash cows" and "exports", essentially distilling their being into what Lomer calls, "economic objects" (International Education, 2020; Lomer, 2014). A priority in this thesis is to explore, interrogate, and problematize these perspectives within the context of these aggressive internationalization strategies. This has been achieved through my critical analysis of policies most impacting international students including immigration policy, review of case law, COVID-19 policies, challenges around legal barriers, and public discourse around international students through media, press releases, and social media (Hutcheson 2020; Hutcheson, 2023; Hutcheson, 2024). Additionally, I have listened to their personal narratives from their testimonies and experiences about life as an international student in Canada, highlighting some of the inequities they encountered. Through these research endeavours, my work provides a much-needed understanding of how the landscape of international education

functions to create inequities for international students. By providing a novel framework of inequity, I can concisely map not only how international students experience and conceptualize inequity, but how these inequities relate to and reinforce one another. Furthermore, I address critical gaps in the literature, particularly around how the subfield of research with international students engages (or does not engage) with important dimensions of race.

Research Objectives and Questions

In addition to policy rhetoric on the economic impact of international education, much of the research focusing on international students and their experiences centres on how they navigate their new host countries, through the lens of acculturation or acculturative stress (e.g. Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Acculturative stress is defined as "the psychological impact of adaptation to a new culture" (Smart & Smart, 1995, p. 25). While Berry's (2006) acculturative stress as a construct provides insight into how international students may adjust to their host country of study, and the stressors that they may encounter (e.g. discrimination, language fluency, social support, financial burden, etc.), the lens of acculturation places emphasis on students' internal experiences with adjusting to a "dominant" culture, and the resulting stress that occurs from this adjustment. Problematically, this perspective omits the importance of external factors and structural barriers that may adversely impact their experience. Furthermore, the construct of acculturation presents as unidirectional in the sense that the construct frames how international students go through the process of "adjusting" to a culture but fails to address how the environment itself creates the stressors. Difficulties encountered by the student are presented as "tensions" encountered between their culture and the receiving culture. Oftentimes, acculturation is framed within closeness to Western ideals, heavily influenced by Eurocentric and colonialist ideologies

(Vasipolous, 2016, Yao et al., 2019). Additionally, acculturative stress frameworks do not adequately highlight the bi-directionality of not only how the international students engage with their host countries of study, but how the host country engages with the student. For example, what does Canada, Canadian institutions, and classrooms do to receive international students, how do the entities within Canada adjust to and interact with students?

By looking more broadly at structural issues, policy issues, and agencies that create an environment where difficulties traditionally believed to be aligned with acculturation and acculturation stress persist, we gain a deeper understanding of the bigger picture of factors that really shape the lives of international students. Despite the limitation of acculturation and acculturative stress as constructs, they are still employed as the prominent framework by which international student experience is viewed (e.g., Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Heng, 2020). However, as issues of inequity emerge for international students, I argue that it is important to focus on those systemic factors that shape experience including bureaucratic labour, access to support, barriers to equity and services. Perhaps most importantly, it is advantageous to highlight policy as a most prominent influence (e.g., Tamtik et al., 2020). The impact of policy on international students is explored in depth within this thesis, as they can impact those without home student status differentially.

Canada is a premiere destination for international students, representing one of the countries with the greatest proportion of international students, competing with Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom (CBIE, 2018). However, it would be a misguided assumption to equate greater student numbers and the popularity of Canada with better experiences and outcomes for international students. Indeed, current research demonstrates that international students in Canada may encounter a number of challenges including crippling

tuition fees and limited financial support, bureaucratic labour, systemic discrimination, vulnerability in the justice system, and racism, among other inequities (Hutcheson, 2020; Kong et al., 2020; Smith & Khawaja, 2011). Many of these pre-existing issues have only been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that disrupted the world as well as international higher education (Koo & Mathies, 2021; Zabin, 2022).

There are many goals I hoped to achieve in undertaking this PhD research. Firstly, it is my intent to give momentum to emergent critical literature in international higher education, joining scholars confronting the monetization of international higher education and the human consequences of those actions, ultimately contributing to the humanization of international students beyond "cash cows" (e.g., Patel, 2020). Furthermore, I undermine the emphasis that has been placed on deficit-centred perspectives of international students and acculturation rhetoric, which functions to undermine the systemic issues embedded in international higher education which creates barriers for students.

Admittedly, my enthusiasm for this research has led to a wide scope of inquiries on international student experience. There are endless aspects of international students' lives and the systems that impact those lives that can be explored, but I was particularly motivated by critically informed research on international students (e.g., Beck, 2013; George Mwangi et al., 2018; Nurse, 2019; Tannock, 2018). In this manuscript-based thesis I centre on critical aspects of international higher education, asking: **What are the ways in which international students in Canada have been Othered, marginalized, and impacted by their non-citizen status and other intersecting identities? How is this marginalization mediated by policy, inequity, and practices in international higher education?**

By engaging with a critical lens (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2018; Lawless & Chen, 2014; Nixon, 2017; Young & Diem, 2018) that highlights some of these inequities and experiences, I contribute novel work to provide evidence of these inequities, marginalization, and Othering through analysis of policy and practice and international student testimonies. More specifically, my work bolsters research that critiques current perspectives and practices within the field of research with international students, policy impacting international higher education, and consequences of the monetization of international education. My work also contributes to international student advocacy and humanizing international students against neoliberal rhetoric. Finally, in employing multiple methods ranging from critical policy analysis, critical thematic analysis, and conceptual commentary on the way in which international students and race are talked about, I aim to provide new methodological contributions as these manuscripts are strengthened by their intersections.

Thesis Overview and the Manuscripts

This thesis consists of 7 chapters. The current chapter, Chapter 1 provides background and overview of the manuscript-based thesis. Chapter 2 provides a literature review starting with the history of international education, identifying prominent theories shaping international education in Canada today, mapping research within the subfield of research with international students, and future directions. Chapter 3 describes the guiding theoretical framework for this thesis as well as an overview of the methodologies and methods utilized in each manuscript. In order to best answer my questions which contribute to the understanding of how international students experience education in Canada as non-citizens, I address international student experience from three linked manuscripts outlined in Chapters 4, 5, and 6. Chapters 4 and 6 are published as book chapters. Copyright permissions are documented in Appendix A.

Chapter 4 appears in the book *Pandemic Injustice: Navigating Legal and Policy Lines During the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Dietzel & Towfigh, 2024). In this manuscript, I map the policy of international education as an omnipresent mediating factor impacting how international students navigate and experience higher education. This analysis is conducted against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which not only functioned to illuminate inequities for international students, but ultimately exacerbated them. I employed critical analysis of international education policy within global, national, and local contexts, which are not distinct levels of analysis, but interconnected areas where policy flows (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Through this analysis, themes emerge around the impact of "cash cow mentality", and challenges international students encounter around, discrimination, immigration, and access to resources as mediated by policy.

Using the groundwork of Chapter 4's critical policy and critical discourse analysis, Chapter 5 investigates how international students perceive inequity and fairness as mediated by their international student status and other identities. Through interviews with 13 international graduate students, participants' perceptions of inequity are encompassed via 9 themes. This chapter provides deeper insight into barriers students have accessing social protections such as healthcare and funding, and importance of bureaucracy in their student experience. The chapter highlights existing issues around immigration, health care, and rights as non-citizens, ultimately pinpointing systemic areas of inequity. However, how these factors impact students are best understood through an intersectional lens.

Chapter 6, published in *Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations* (Mittelmeier et al., 2023), is a conceptual look at the way in which the field of research on international students engages with (or does not) engage with race.

This chapter reviews some of the shortcomings of research and literature that essentializes, and stereotypes international students. Furthermore, I identify the ways in which current literature excludes race or other significant intersectional elements. The chapter concludes with offering better practices for including racialized student voices and identifies how race is not a non-issue in international higher education.

Finally, in Chapter 7's discussion, key themes and novel contributions are reviewed. The example of racialized international students and sexual violence is presented to understand some of the concrete and critical ways in which prevalent themes from the thesis converge, showing the utility of using these key themes as a framework for understanding issues of international student inequity that manifest in international higher education. This commentary is informed by two of my publications in the *Education and Law Journal* focusing on gender-based violence and allows me to critically analyze the intersections of international student status, race, and sexual violence against the backdrop of policy, case law, and media discourse to provide more space to understand international student experience through equity and marginalization.

Collectively, these three manuscripts and discussion are oriented to exploring how international students' experiences can be mediated by external policies, practices, and ideologies. To avoid replicating the deficit narrative inherent in acculturation frameworks, I look at many of the external structural factors that shape international student experiences. By approaching these connections via three manuscripts, it is intended to allow readers to see the unique aspects of each perspective, but also allows me to show the common thread and links between these three areas of influence and perception. Students remain at the centre of my work, but in presenting this body of work, it is my hope to give understanding and insight to policy

makers, institutions, and other stakeholders to create a more equitable, and welcoming experience for international students in Canada and elsewhere.

Connecting Thread

The manuscripts are tied together through common intersections and themes including, omissions, (in)equities, intersections of identity, and the underlying role of policy and the pervasiveness of neoliberalism. Through my analysis of policies, students' testimonials, and discourse, I have found ways to highlight student experience from concurrent perspectives. Perhaps the most pervasive thread is the omnipresence and ubiquity of neoliberalism as it permeates international higher education, shifting focus on the economic value over the human value of international students (e.g., Changamire et al., 2021; Karram, 2013). Policy is also a strong undercurrent in this thesis as I convey its comprehensive impact on the lives of international students—from its effect on immigration to the barriers of reporting sexual violence as a non-citizen. Voice and rhetoric are also important components between the manuscripts. Chapter 4 privileges the rhetoric of the policies, Chapter 5 privileges the voice of the students and the first-person narrative impact of those policies, while Chapter 6 speaks to portrayals in research and the broader field of research with international students. Together, the manuscripts not only identify the importance of what is said, but also what is *unsaid*. Omissions are areas where international students are omitted or excluded from services and narratives. As seen in the earlier vignette, international students do not always have the same access to resources as 'home' students. I identify these omissions as key inequities encountered by international students.

As the manuscripts demonstrate, many factors can contribute to how international students in Canada navigate their student lives. However, a nuanced, intersectional understanding is imperative as we see how racialized status can further impact marginalization,

discrimination, and omissions. Therefore, I explore the marginalization and Othering of international students, further impacted by race. These themes of intersectionality and marginalization link to some personal experience that also informs my work. Ahmed (2007) calls the body a "meeting point" [of identities] and qualifies that "how we experience one category depends on how we inhabit others" (p. 14). To clarify, I use myself as an example focusing on just some of my intersecting identities: I am an international student, I am Black, I identify as a woman, English is my first language, and I am American. Categorically as an international student in Canada, within the language of policy, we are supposedly treated the same (apart from very specific cases like differential tuition fees where international students from France and Belgium pay less in fees). However, how we experience the world is quite different.

A Word on Positionality and Intent

As I first began my inquiry into the experiences of international students early in my doctoral student career, I encountered an excerpt that resonated strongly with the work I hoped to accomplish. Karram (2013) signaled existing tensions in the field of international higher education, astutely pinpointing that there are two camps engaging in the affairs of international students, those who see "international students as an economic market to be engaged with, while the other seeks to understand and support their day-to-day lived experiences" (Karram, 2013, p. 5). I find myself in the latter camp, a researcher who seeks to understand the complex lives and experiences of international students in Canada, which is a foil to the prominent rhetoric of international students as objectified exports. Furthermore, I strive to create a more nuanced understanding of international students to contrast the neoliberal rhetoric of international students as economic objects, or individuals to be recruited for monetary gain.

Exploring research when you are an insider-outsider is a unique perspective as you approach your topic as a researcher, but also a member of the community you seek to know more about (Dwyer & Buckle, 2009). As aforementioned, I, the author, am an international student. As a visible minority, I encounter racism, and my experience as an international student has not been without challenges. A frequent microaggression I have encountered in Quebec, Canada are locals asking me where I'm really from, as some individuals do not see how a Black person can also be really American, but not identify as African or Caribbean. English is my first language and I have a strong command in French which allows me to navigate social situations and documents with relative ease. However, when I speak in French, my accent and skin colour is a signal to Quebecois that I am an "other". My non-citizen status means my access to healthcare is limited and expensive, and as a non-citizen I've had to figure out what my rights in this country are. To my advantage, as an American citizen, my immigration process in Canada is more streamlined. Considering the increasing number of international students currently studying in Canada, we all have different and intersecting identities that impact how we navigate Canadian society and its institutions. I cite this personal experience to clearly identify how international students are not a monolith. I consider this added insight an advantage, allowing me to provide depth to my research. This personal experience is further explored in my research methods and Chapter 5.

Through my nuanced analysis of the international higher education landscape through student testimonies, policy, and systemic structures this thesis identifies key inequities that most impact international students like myself in Canada. Also importantly, I hope to capture these experiences in a way that counters deficit rhetoric and outdated constructs of acculturation. Ultimately, this work will function to identify some of the ways in which governments, universities, and university administrators can better serve and support international students.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

There are endless opportunities and perspectives from which scholars and stakeholders seek to understand international higher education and how international students occupy, experience, and are impacted by this space (Mittelmeier et al., 2023). From critical perspectives, focusing on the marginalization, Othering, and inequity of these students, to research embedded in neoliberal rhetoric and governmental initiatives focused on recruitment and prosperity, international student adjustment, and everything in between. The critical perspectives are a newer approach, and understand that international students are not passive objects for recruitment, nor are international students individuals who need to acculturate to the host culture of where they study (Heng & Lu, 2023; Hutcheson, 2023; Mittelmier et al., 2023; Ploner, 2023). Some of these perspectives seek to understand how international students have been marginalized by their student status (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2018; Harati et al., 2022). The vignette in the first chapter demonstrated some particularities of what international students can encounter in Canada including immigration challenges, financial challenges, and other bureaucratic barriers. While this vignette will not be representative of everyone's experiences, it was curated to highlight some of the more pervasive, and systemic issues that impact their lives in their host countries and host institutions as informed by current events, the state of international education in Canada, and student interviews featured in Chapter 5.

Chapter 2 sets out to further contextualize important factors that influence international students and their subsequent experiences around inequity and marginalization by surveying the literature across four dimensions: the history of international education as well as a tracing of policy documents that have shaped internationalization of higher education in Canada,

acculturation and adjustment-centric research, approaches for conceptualizing international students and equity, and the systemic challenges constructed in international higher education. The literature review begins by tracing the explosion of international student numbers in the country. Next, the prominent ideologies and policies impacting international higher education, including the impact of Canada's aggressive internationalization strategy and overarching influence of neoliberal practices in international higher education are highlighted, as they create the foundation for subsequent treatment of international students in Canada. Shifting focus to identify the prevalent ways in which international student experiences have been most consistently constructed in recent literature, the chapter moves on to perspectives on adjustment and acculturation, and problematizes some of these prominent perspectives. Following this overview, I summarize newer, emergent, critical perspectives including intersectional insights on international students, with emphasis on equity and marginalization.

A Brief History of International Education: From Wanderers to Neoliberal Realities

There are currently 1 million[10] international students at all study levels in Canada (CBIE, 2023). Far surpassing recruitment goals of international student immigration and enrolment despite the devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in other sectors, international students are booming in number. This represents nearly a 30 percent growth in pre/post pandemic enrollment numbers. Within the last decade, there has been over a 200 percent increase of international student numbers in Canada (CBIE, 2023). As international student numbers increase, the composition of the student numbers has not been constant. At this point in time, students from China and India represent the largest numbers, composing just over half of all international students in the country. Students from the Philippines and France represent the next

[10] This number is subject to change throughout the thesis as international student numbers have shifted dramatically in Canada throughout chapter revisions and publications

largest proportion of international students. The Philippines has seen the most rapid increase, with more than a 112 percent increase between 2019 and 2023. Other top sending countries with significant increases in numbers are Nigeria, Colombia, and Hong Kong (ICEF Monitor, 2023). As of January 24, 2024, internationalization is entering a new period, with the nation enforcing caps on student visas to further regulate immigration (IRCC, 2024).

In addition to the dramatic difference of international student numbers, international education across the world has gone through many iterations. De Wit and Merkx (2012) provide an overview of international education, summarized in this section, which traces its beginnings from the 12th century to the dramatically changed landscape of the 21st century. In de Wit's and Merkx's summary, the 12th century is characterized by teachers, students, and scholars who would undertake pilgrimages or *peregrinatio* on their quest for scholarly enlightenment from other universities. The 16th century's "golden age of wandering scholars" ended abruptly under Europe's reformation where studying abroad was no longer viewed as an asset, but rather a vehicle that spread contamination of religious and political ideology. Replacing the *peregrinatio*, the Renaissance of the 17th and 18th centuries promoted *la grand tour*, where student mobility increased again for families who could afford to send their children abroad. Research fellowships and formalized agreements between institutions for exchanges brought on a more structured version of international education during the late 19th century and early 20th century. Following the devastation of WWI, nations felt mutual understanding was paramount for avoiding more catastrophic wars—international cooperation through university exchanges was just one method of achieving this. Specifically, the rationale for international education was for peace and understanding, but more importantly international security and foreign policy. Official agencies like the IIE and the DAAD were created to facilitate exchanges between countries. After much of

Europe was destroyed by WWII, students abroad prioritized the United States as a premier destination as Europe rebuilt. Canada also became a more desired destination following the war. The 1950s and 1970s saw more students studying abroad, but movement was largely unorganized. Despite the lack of organization, the message was clear: The policy for foreign study was "humanitarianism and internationalism". While the 1950s-1970s was about humanitarianism and internationalism, the Cold War also spurred a different need—education as an instrument. Tsvetkova (2008) paints international education as a source of influence during the Cold War. Within the East/West confrontation that came at this time, education was a means for spreading ideologies, politics, and agendas. More pointedly, it was a power play for allegiance. While the USSR promoted Marxism, the U.S. pushed capitalism as their ideology (Tsvetkova, 2008). The economic impact of study abroad is not just for peace and understanding but economic competition. De Wit and Merkx believe the culmination of the Cold War shifted the role of international education from political to economic.

Of note, much of the literature surrounding the history of international education prior to the 21st century focuses on its evolution in Europe. De Wit and Merkx's (2012) discussion of history prior to the 1960s focuses almost exclusively on exchanges between the Global North (e.g. between North America and Europe, Intra-Europe, and exchanges between these countries and Russia). Until they introduce the Global South in their discussion of the 1960s, much of the Global South's role in international education was omitted, when in fact, modern Global South countries played a large part before the 1960s. NAFSA's (1966) historical account of international education pinpoints India as being the starting point for international education as early as 600 B.C. Additionally, Islamic scholars were encouraged to find scholarly enlightenment, which meant education in other countries including China (Welch, 2005). As yet

another example, Paracka (2003) uses Sierra Leone's Fourah Bay College as a case study, taking readers through Sierra Leone's history and relationship with international education from 1861-2001. The three distinct periods are marked by missionary education, colonial education, and development.

Moving to the 21st century, a contemporary perspective on the evolution of international education is Choudaha's (2017) analysis, presenting international education as three waves.

Wave 1 (1999-2006): Foreign institutions including those situated in the United States and Canada sought international student talent as a means to fill skills gaps, particularly in M.A. and PhD programs. This was an effort to find the best and the brightest, and students were heavily reliant on funding. Following 9/11, the US government placed tighter restrictions on student visas, making travel more challenging for international students.

Wave 2 (2006-2013): The second wave was marked by the financial crisis. As funding for universities (and in turn, financial support for international students) declined, universities impacted by the recession including the United States and United Kingdom, became more creative in raising revenue. The recruitment model shifted from recruiting "academic global talent" to raising revenue through recruiting more international students who pay differential fees. The changing economics of international education laid the framework for practices we see today.

Wave 3 (2013- present): This wave is marked by uncertainty— with the impact of Brexit unclear, and President Trump's aggressive anti-immigration rhetoric, countries like Canada are becoming a more desirable destination for international students. Students from emerging economies like India, Nigeria, and Vietnam, are being sought after by "destination countries" like Canada, Australia, the U.S., and the U.K., to fill many skills gaps. Additionally, the financial

value of international student tuition dollars continues to be a driving force in international education. Choudaha cautions that as schools place more emphasis on recruitment, universities must also find balance with supporting students.

Leaving off from Choudaha's 3rd wave, we have entered a time where there are more international students in the world, international education is very profitable, and migration from countries in the Global South is a "key trend" in international education (Migration Portal, 2018). In Canada alone, the export of international education to foreign countries is a multi-billion-dollar enterprise (Global Affairs Canada, 2017). Scholars have documented how the unprecedented impact of the COVID-19 pandemic led to a number of new issues including distance education, decreased mobility, among other challenges (Bilecen, 2020; Firang, 2020; Firang & Mensah, 2022). Far from the early descriptions of wandering scholars, international education is a thriving business, and universities and students play an important role in the marketplace. Students are not only consumers of services and active participants of the marketplace—they have also become objects of profit in the form of exports (e.g., Lomer, 2014). The objectification of international students has given way to criticism from scholars who problematize the "cash cow" narrative of international students (Lomer, 2014; Qureshi & Khawaja, 2022; Yao & George Mwangi, 2022). Given the current climate of higher education including the monetization of higher education, critical scholars in international higher education argue that neoliberalism is one of the most influential factors impacting international education and consequently international students today (Changamire et al., 2022; Ellis, 2022; Guo & Guo. 2017; Hutcheson, 2024; Karram, 2013; Lee et al., 2020; Lomer, 2014). In addition to neoliberalism, neoliberal policies create circumstances that significantly impact international students. With today's rapidly changing international education landscape, a closer look at these

issues is timely and fundamental for understanding the context of (in)equity and marginalization of international students in Canada. In the following section, I delve further into the impact of neoliberalism on international higher education.

Neoliberalism's Impact on International Students in Canada and International Education

Harvey (2007) indicates that neoliberalism relies on deregulation and privatization. This action is further qualified by diminished areas of social support. The monetization of international education fits into a larger rhetoric of neoliberalism. Giroux (2002) highlights neoliberalism as the commodification of education, the advent of students as consumers, and the university as business. In practice, this translates to neoliberalism as an economic ideology where monetary gain is paramount and takes precedence over social issues. Ball (2012) further clarifies that neoliberalism runs deeper than a practice, and that it impacts relations profoundly, explaining, "neoliberalism gets into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do, and into our social relations with others. It is about how we relate to our students and our colleagues" (p. 18). Ball goes on to explain that neoliberalism effectively puts a price on knowledge.

In the case of international students, it is increasingly common to flag neoliberalism as a ubiquitous philosophy in higher education which impacts these students in unique ways (Changamire et al., 2022; Ellis, 2022; Guo & Guo, 2017; Hutcheson, 2024; Karram, 2013; Johnstone & Lee 2014; Lee et al., 2020; Lomer, 2014). Critical theory, born of (neo) Marxist ideologies supports the claim that political and economic factors, of which neoliberalism is an important one, often have a negative impact on marginalized groups such as international students (Denzin et al., 2008). To be more specific, "realities are constructed in and through people's linguistic, cultural, social, and behavioral interaction which both shape and are shaped

by social, political, economic, and cultural forces" (Fishman & Mclaren, 2005, p. 33). This critical approach acknowledges that political, social, and economic forces have specific consequences on groups, particularly if they are marginalized. Under a neoliberal ideology, education is a "producer of goods and services that foster economic growth... from the discourse of global economy including productivity, competitiveness, efficiency and maximization of profits" (Zajda, 2010, p. xiii). Critical perspectives problematize the practice of treating students as "economic objects." This schema of student objectification has led to a number of inequities (Lomer, 2014). Signaling this clear and explicit commercial objectification of international students, Tannock (2018) believes that students are treated no differently than any other commodity, like cars, or pharmaceuticals. Patel (2020) challenges this dehumanizing rhetoric and asks, "Why is it that today those societies which demonstrate stereotypical, prejudicial, and discriminatory behaviours about international student communities are those who embrace the international student dollar with open arms?" (para. 15). Unlike cars and pharmaceuticals, students require support, care, and recognition as humans.

This dehumanisation occurs when key stakeholders in international higher education, invested in the profitability of the industry see international students as dollar signs, no different than other profitable, neoliberal-driven industries. Karram (2013) identifies a key tension that arrives from the pull neoliberalism has on the monetization of international education, identifying that "one sees international students as an economic market to be engaged with, while the other seeks to understand and support their day-to-day lived experience" (p. 5). In investigating the humanistic side of Karram's question, focusing on students' experiences, needs, and well-being, what are these lived experiences of international students?

Prominent Perspectives on International Student Challenges: Adjustment, Acculturation, and Deficit Discourses

Focusing on Karram's (2013) student-centered understanding of international students, the next section of this literature review will focus on the persistent and pervasive challenges these students can be met with when they pursue their studies in Canada and how scholars have described these issues. One set of prominent perspectives are those that privilege research on acculturation and deficit discourses. Perspectives of international students and equity are presented as a foil for these perspectives.

Adjustment, Acculturation, and Acculturation Stress

As illustrated by Chapter 1's vignette, leaving one's home country for higher education can include many compounding barriers upon arrival. In addition to much of the bureaucratic labour that occurs pre-immigration, getting to the new country, and settling into the new country is not always seamless (e.g., Olanubi, 2023). There are many ways in which these periods of transition and adjustment are conceptualized. However, a significant proportion of the research focusing on international students and their experiences centers on how they navigate their new host countries, through the lens of adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, or acculturative stress (e.g., Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). *Acculturation*, a phenomenon most associated with Berry (2005) is "the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members" (p. 698). In 2016, Bista and Gaulee conducted a thematic analysis of dissertations published on international students. Their results found that dissertations on acculturation were the most prevalent theme for these dissertations. Years later, this rhetoric remains strong– scholars choose to focus on these issues of acculturation, seeking to understand

what happens when students arrive in a new place and the resulting discord of the newness of the destination country (Bista & Gaulee, 2017).

In addition to acculturation is the theme of adjustment. An overwhelming proportion of research that addresses challenges that international students in Canada encounter are centred around adjustment, which is conceptualized in many ways. Schartner and Young (2016) describe three types of adjustment for international students: psychological, sociocultural, and academic. Yi (2003) describes five areas of adjustment international students face in new countries including: academic, physical health, financial, vocational and personal/social adjustment. Adjustment is often used interchangeably and ambiguously along with adaptation (e.g., Schartner & Young, 2020; Vasipolous, 2016). However, some scholars make a distinction: Matsumoto et al. (2006) define adjustment as how students experience change, and adaptation as an indicator of the outcomes that occur from this change. Adaptation and adjustment are often referred to within the context of acculturation in the literature and it is often problematized in that failure of international students to adjust can lead to subsequent difficulty. This difficulty is frequently framed as *acculturation stress*, or "the psychological impact of adaptation to a new culture" (Smart & Smart, 1995, p. 25).

While the constructs of adaptation, adjustment, acculturation, and acculturation stress provide insight on how international students may adjust to their new environments, and the stressors that they may encounter (e.g., discrimination, language fluency, social support, financial burden etc.), the perspectives often place emphasis on students' internal experiences, or rather the discord that occurs from international students being "different" and not assimilating to their host environment.

Much of the literature on acculturation and assimilation imply that international students are "Other" until they fit or assimilate. In Bennett et al.'s (2023) chapter on international students and inclusion, one of the authors who is also an international student explains that, "assimilation is encouraged under the guise of integration, where we must work to understand the local culture while there seems to be no push for understanding us in return" (p. 15). They further explained that there is an overarching contradiction where students are tokenised for their diversity in the marketing and branding of the university, while at the same time, expected to culturally adjust and "blend in." Acculturation research in respect to international students also implies a lessness, that students are adjusting poorly because of internal processes or cultural understanding that are missing due to their being foreign. As I will elaborate further in Chapter 6, which documents better practices for engaging in research with and on international students, it is explained that currently there is too much emphasis on White normativity in terms of how international student experiences are described and understood (e.g., Madriaga & McCaig, 2022; Vasilopolous, 2016; Yao et al., 2019). Essentially, a students' perceived distance from Whiteness is a precursor to distress, and under an acculturation lens, when a student fails to adjust, it is because of this arbitrary perception of non-Whiteness. There is also an implied "lessness" explored further in Chapter 6, which describes how this lessness is entrenched in racism. Within the scope of perspectives on acculturation, it is helpful to question, "how is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018, p. 233). Taking this idea further, we can also ask, how is inequity operating here, or what difficulties arise because of the broader context of where international students study (e.g., policy, attitudes towards international students, racism, and additional factors). As it stands, much of the literature implies that it is on the student to adjust to the new culture, rather than the host countries and institutions meeting student needs and expectations.

This perspective omits the importance of external factors and structural barriers that may adversely impact their experience. By looking more broadly at structural issues, policy issues, and agencies that create an environment where difficulties traditionally believed to be aligned with acculturation and acculturation stress persist, we gain a deeper understanding of the bigger picture of factors that really shape the lives of international students. Tannock (2018) provided an analysis of the structural factors shaping international student experience in respect to equality in the U.K. which has been useful in understanding the Canadian context. Through a series of interviews with students and administrators and an in-depth policy analysis, structural policy issues such as immigration, citizenship, funding structures, and the profitability of international education emerge as prominent factors shaping international students' lives abroad.

Deficit Discourses

A close cousin of these acculturation-centric perspectives are deficit discourses. Deficit discourses are described as "disempowering patterns of thought, language, and practice that represent people in terms of deficiencies and failures" (Lowitja Institute, p. 1). Deficit discourses often emerge in research on international students including within the Canadian context (Heng, 2018; Lomer et al., 2023; Mittelmeier et al., 2023; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2021; Surtees, 2019). Ultimately, the individual is the shortcoming, and the perceived shortcoming is directly contingent on the belief or imagined characteristics the person believes is indicative of people in that group. Furthermore, "deficit-thinking reduces the barriers to linguistic, cultural, and intellectual 'deficits' these students encounter" (Shahrokni et al., 2022, p. 126). Often, deficit discourses are linked to the perception that international students have cultural deficiencies, due to lack of familiarity with the new host culture, and subsequently encounter problems with adjustment. These beliefs are deeply entrenched in colonialist perspectives, where one's

perceived distance from Whiteness is a marker of one's deficiencies (Madriaga & McCaig, 2022). For example, Xu (2022) describes how Chinese international students have routinely been categorized "as a homogenous, deficient, pedagogic group" (p. 159). While there are many examples of deficit discourses, one pervasive example is how the replicated "problem" of Chinese international students and lack of critical thinking has become far too prevalent in the scholarly landscape (Song & McCarthy, 2018). This example offers an understanding of how Whiteness is often centered as the norm within colonialist attitudes in international higher education. Lomer and Mittelmeier's (2023) research mapping found that deficit discourses in the UK increased in tandem with rising international student numbers.

Additionally, McKenzie and Scheurich (2004) warn against deficit discourses as an equity trap. In this chapter, *equity traps* are described as tools that administrators, teachers, and service providers often employ for the benefit of diverse populations, when in fact, they are detrimental. One example is seen in a police pamphlet intending to help international students, but instead categorizes them as naive, and lacking cultural knowledge, claiming this may make students subject to exploitation (Hutcheson, 2020). Although it is helpful to acknowledge that international students are entering their institutions with varying levels of knowledge and experience, it is imperative to avoid focusing solely on their presumed deficits or shortcomings. Doing so is not only reductivist, but problematic in that it assumes any lack of knowledge is the fault of the student rather than that of the institution. This perception perpetuates a neoliberal outlook that makes the individual responsible for structural issues, rather than identifying what institutions can do to ensure that their students have the requisite information.

In their analysis of publications on internationalization, Mittelmeier and Yang (2022) found that a significant portion of publications privileged deficit rhetoric. Consistent with Lomer

and Mittelmeier's (2023) argument, deficit narratives were consistent and lacked criticality. Speaking further on this lack of criticality in research with international students, Mittelmeier et al., (2023) believe it is essential to understand the larger context and structures that can negatively impact international students, rather than place responsibility on students. These structures are further unpacked in the subsequent section on international students and equity.

Alternative Perspectives: International Students and Equity

Countering deficit discourses, Patton Davis & Museus (2019) offer an important reminder; that "people are not problems" (para. 4). Furthermore, they explain that "researchers who situate people as problems engage in deficit thinking by focusing on fixing people rather than fixing oppressive and disabling systems." Rather than focusing on the internal processes of adjustment as a source of challenges international students may face in Canada, in this thesis, I take an alternate approach: one which focuses on the prevalent systemic, ideological issues as vehicles for inequity for international students is a more useful framework. Some of these prominent systems and ideologies include the neoliberal context of international higher education which prioritizes profit over well-being, and the resultant financial burden students face: systemic racism and discrimination against international students and the erasure of this racism, systemic omissions, and the bureaucratic labour of international students, and barrier creating policies further discussed in chapters 5, 6, and 7. In this section, I begin with defining how equity is understood within the scope of this thesis, and survey the literature which highlights some of these inequities encountered by international students.

Defining Equity and Inequity

Conceptualizing how many of these aforementioned factors shape how international students live and study in Canada can be better understood through an equity lens informed by a

critical perspective in this thesis. In this thesis, I conceptualize inequity through how we understand the marginalization and Othering of international students, namely through policies, ideologies, and exclusions by which they are disproportionately impacted. Equity is further mediated by fairness, power, and access to resources (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Ziguras, 2016). George Mwangi et al. (2018) also assert the importance of an equity-driven lens where research should be evaluated through one essential question: "How are concepts of power, privilege, domination, marginalisation, hegemony, or inequality discussed at an organisational/institutional level?" (p. 1095). Circling back to Mwangi et al.'s understanding of equity, power is also a key element for understanding equity. Power is understood as a driver of inequity in this thesis, which is supported by Ng's (2003) belief that an equity lens "makes explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence, and marginalize individuals who are differently located in the educational process" (p. 214). By understanding how power operates to impact international students who are "differently located", I gain scope on inequity.

Equity, also conceptualized as fairness by some scholars, falls by the wayside under neoliberalism where profits are prioritized over equity. Understanding the situational context such as neoliberalism and the monetization of higher education provides insight into the conditions that allow inequity to thrive (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020; Ziguras, 2016).

International Students as an Equity-Seeking Group

Within higher education in Canada, equity is overwhelmingly discussed within the wider landscape of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI). EDI policies vary widely across Canadian institutions in terms of how EDI is defined, their mission, and how the policies are enforced (Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). Despite the omnipresence of EDI discourses and rising international students, these policies often omit international students as equity-seeking groups (Buckner et

al., 2022; Das Gupta & Gomez, 2023; Legusov et al., 2023; Tavares, 2021). Buckner et al. found that the two largest Canadian universities did not include international students in their EDI policies, calling many of the policies superficial. Additionally, Das Gupta & Gomez identify the very real harm resulting from the exclusion of international students in university EDI including "social exclusion, discrimination, and racism" (p. 78). Tavares (2021) further explains that "in spite of the university's long-standing commitment to aspects of EDI, international students felt excluded and othered in the community" (p. 1). Despite these systemic exclusions, I take care to outline how inequity has manifested in the literature for international students in the following section.

Conditionality of Status

First and foremost, it is important to underscore that there is a conditionality to international student status which largely contributes to inequity for this group. This means that in order to meet the conditions to legally remain in Canada under an international student visa, certain conditions must be met and maintained (e.g., Goldring & Landolt, 2013). Some of the conditions necessary for remaining in Canada legally include maintaining active status as a student, having the financial capacity for tuition and living expenses, ensuring validity of paperwork (e.g., study permit and supporting documentation), maintaining grades, and not violating terms of work conditions. Failure to meet these conditions can mean deportation and study delays (Olanubi, 2023). Two of the biggest barriers for maintaining student status are the immigration requirements and visa processing wait times. The pandemic only functioned to further complicate the process.

This conditional status creates vulnerability, and thus additional inequities for international students while they study in Canada (Firang & Mensah, 2022) note the vulnerability

of international students due to their temporary status while studying in Canada. For example, due to international students' visitor status, they were systematically excluded from pandemic-related support including financial relief. As international students are categorically 'temporary' migrants, there are limitations that students can and can't do, calling these students a "captive group of workers" (Das Gupta & Gomez, 2023, p. 78). They further clarify that in this conditionality international students "benefit the neo-liberal economy, providing cheap labour to small business owners such as grocery stores, restaurants, warehouses, cleaning companies, food services and delivery services" (p. 78).

An additional inequity is that a students' movement between borders can be further constrained contingent on a students' passport country which creates extra conditions. Critical tourism explains that not everyone navigates borders in the same way. Passport power and race are predictors for who can go where and under what conditions (Bilecen & Van Mol, 2017; Torabian & Miller, 2016). Another consideration in the conditionality of student status is the volatility that exists for students. Trilokekar et al.'s (2021) analysis of changing geopolitics in news releases and articles shows how students function alongside these geopolitical events. Speaking to diminishing relationships between Saudi Arabia and Canada, students were suddenly left in limbo in 2018, with insecurity over whether they could continue their studies (Marcoux & Barghout, 2018). Understanding how this conditionality is a function of geopolitics, passport power, and race is advantageous in mapping how international students encounter inequity.

Financial Burden

Perhaps one of the biggest sources of inequity for many international students concerns financial stability (e.g., Etem, 2012; Laframboise et al., 2023; Nagesh, 2018; Word Education Services, 2020). As referenced in Chapter 1's vignette, when students come to Canada, there are

many challenges around paying increased tuition fees, securing employment, and financial administration of moving, including airfare, study permits, housing, and other fees. Despite international students paying at times double, triple, or nearly quadruple what Canadian students pay, up until the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, there were government impositions that required these students to work fewer hours. Pre-pandemic international students in Canada could not exceed 20 hours per week in off-campus work (Government of Canada, 2019). Although the Canadian government vets students through their immigration dossiers to ensure they are coming with sufficient funds to survive in Canada, many students struggle with paying crippling tuition fees, finding work, and making ends meet (e.g., Etem, 2012; Nagesh, 2018; Kamil, 2020).

This financial burden gained publicity during the deportation case around Punjabi international student Jonbandeep Sandhu who struggled to survive after paying student fees (Hill, 2019). Sandhu faced deportation for exceeding the number of hours international students are permitted to work while employed as a truck driver. On one hand, Canada wants the economic benefits that international students bring to Canada via their tuition dollars, the money they spend while in Canada, and the fulfillment of skills shortages, but on the other hand, it appears that they do not expect international students to be prosperous themselves while completing their studies. Moreover, students are welcome in Canada, but only under a very specific set of conditions. Lee, Maldonado-Maldonado, and Rhoades (2006) describe how countries attempt to "regulate, control" … and most importantly" benefit" from immigration (p. 546). However, it is clear that there is less emphasis on the aftercare following immigration (Dauwer, 2018).

There appeared to be a turn of fortune during the pandemic when Canada lifted off-campus work limit restrictions for international students in an effort to fulfill job shortages

throughout the country (Crossman et al., 2021). However, during the pandemic, one third of international students reported difficulty paying for basic necessities like rent and utilities and also missed out on important financial supplements from the government which were catered to Canadian citizens (World Education Services, 2020). In addition to difficulties procuring work, international students can also encounter more difficulty in obtaining jobs that are relevant and linked to their studies (Scott et al., 2015). Due to hiring bias, some employers prefer to hire Canadian students, fearing the extra administrative labour that could accompany hiring an international student. Additionally, certain valuable practica and internship opportunities may not be available to all students, contingent on immigration status (Scott et al., 2015). Furthermore, an interdisciplinary survey of international graduate students' financial challenges found that these students were statistically more likely to struggle financially compared to their home student peers. (Laframboise et al., 2023).

Exploitation and Status-Based Considerations

The Financial burden faced by international students, imposed by increasing tuition rates, inflation, and limited employment options allow exploitative practices to thrive**.** Advocacy groups like Migrant Students United have documented this exploitation (Spring Magazine, 2022). In the Shadowy Business of International Education, Hune-Brown (2022) documents employer wage theft, sexual exploitation, and predatory behaviour from immigration agents.

Prior to the new changes around work hours to meet labour shortages, students like Sandhu worked under the table to make ends meet. Employers would exploit this status, knowing that they could both underpay and overwork students (Das Gupta & Su, 2023). If employers reported that students had worked more than 20 hours, those students could be at risk of violating the terms of their study permit (Hune-Brown, 2022). Keung and Perira (2022) call this

relationship Canada has with its international students "predatory", leaving students open to blatant exploitation. They further note that the pandemic only functioned to further exploit students, stating how systems have failed students, leaving them to rely on services described as patchwork.

In addition to housing and work exploitation, there is also the risk of sexual violence and exploitation. Bonistall (2020) called for more careful research on international students and sexual violence describing the additional systemic barriers face by these students. In the shadowy business of international education, student testimonies showed instances of sexual exploitation from employers (Hune-Brown, 2022). Unfortunately, while the scope and impact of sexual violence in international students remains understudied, research has gained more traction in the past five years. Fethi et al.'s (2023) analysis showed international students at elevated likelihood of being victims of sexual violence compared to their non-international student peers. This was true for international students across the included intersectional dimensions. International students in Canada also face additional barriers to reporting sexual violence and accessing services (Hutcheson, 2020). For racialized international students, some of these barriers are amplified (Bonistall, 2020; Hutcheson, 2020; Hutcheson, 2023; Park, 2018).

Discrimination, Race, Racism, and Intersectionality

Race is just one of the factors that can influence dimensions of international students' lives. However, at times race is omitted from the discourse in favour of a monolithic and homogenous view of international students. Beck (2023) calls these oversimplified depictions harmful, where racialized experiences are erased, and "students are blamed for their own negative experiences" (p. 184), as seen within deficit and acculturation frameworks. Race can impact how students are received by their host institutions and host countries (Hutcheson, 2023).

Collapsing all student experiences into the same monolithic portrait (e.g., Buckner et al., 2021; Heng, 2019; Lomer et al., 2021; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023) is overly simplistic and removes the persistent encounters racialized international students may have abroad, but continues to be standard practice in the literature (Beck, 2020; Buckner et al., 2021; Hutcheson 2023). Smith & Khawaja's (2011) study found that racialized international students were more likely to experience instances of discrimination and racism. Additionally, the Canadian Bureau of International Education routinely surveys information on international students in Canada. Their 2021 survey found that some racialized international students are significantly more likely to report instances of harassment and discrimination (p. 5). This was more marked for students who identified as Black or Asian. Houshmand et al. (2014) documented instances of racial microaggressions for international students from Asia who reported they felt excluded, avoided, and mocked. There is also a gendered component to having safety to report discrimination. The 2021 CBIE report found that female international students, particularly those who identify as minorities, don't feel as confident in reporting discrimination. While racism against international students preceded the COVID-19 pandemic, the physical and verbal violence against racialized international students gained attention. In their analysis of tweets, Mittelmeier and Cockayne (2020) found alarming rhetoric of racism against international students during the pandemic, including students who reported avoiding sitting by Asian international students and racist jokes from professors. In the wake of the pandemic, people who identified as Asian reported feeling less safe, but overall, it was found that feelings of unsafety were elevated for all visible minorities (Statscan, 2020).

A large proportion of international students are racialized in Canada, although having a clear number is challenging due to how data on international students is collected. Clarity in

student numbers may be related to the fact that international students are largely omitted from Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion rhetoric (e.g., Buckner et al., 2022; Tamtik & Guenter, 2020). Additionally, because international students have been treated as a homogenous whole, international student data is not always analyzed according to dimensions of race and other intersectional facets. Another large contribution to diminished understanding of international students and race is the act of "data siloing" which Buckner et al. (2022) describe as "decoupling between discourses of equity and inclusion and the lived realities of many international students on Canadian campuses" (p. 52).

Despite these limitations, Chapter 6 explains the work scholars have contributed to our understanding of the implications of systemic racism that works against international students and how "race adds an extra dimension" to inequities already faced by international students (Ghaffar, 2020; Houshmand et al., 2014; Wei & Bunjun, 2020). Changamire et al. (2022) explains that "academia must be accountable for the differential impact of race on the experiences of students" (p. 519), particularly as the field or research with international students can omit this significance. Although some of the rhetoric on race and international students has been minimized, race is undeniably a factor influencing what life can look like for international students in Canada and elsewhere. Racism isn't solely a function of who students come into direct contact with, the bureaucracy students encounter is also entrenched with racism in the Canadian context.

Structural racism around immigration is embedded at the level of government institutions (Cantwell & Lee, 2010; Koo et al., 2021). Structural racism, defined by Koo et al., is understood as "embedded in the social, economic, and political system and influences the ideologies, practices, and institutions that produce and reproduce power as well as the opportunities shaped

by racial and ethnic backgrounds" (p. 285). Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has publicly admitted to racial bias in immigration procedure for students and released a statement saying, "the government agrees that more can be done with respect to racial bias and discrimination within the organization and its policies, programs, and operational processing functions." This statement followed pushback from the notably high rejection of study permits from students arriving from African countries.

Race is just one aspect of the larger composite of intersectionality. Intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991), understood as the ways different aspects of identity interlock and intersect to impact encounters with privilege and oppression helps us avoid the homogenous view of international students that has been consistently reported in the field of research on international students (Glass, 2022). Describing these experiences with this lens is important in efforts to avoid essentializing and stereotyping students (Heng, 2019). Shown in an analysis of how race and international students interact, I explained that:

> Although the term ‘‘international student" is a catch-all phrase for foreign students studying abroad, this group is not a monolith; the false construction of the ‘‘international student" is reductivist and takes away the nuance of students' distinct experiences that are shaped by their intersecting identities (e.g., race, sexuality, socio-economic status, dis/ability). These multiple meeting points of identities echo Crenshaw's foundational work on intersectionality, which was informed and shaped by gendered violence against women. Crenshaw posits that individuals are made up of simultaneously interlocking and intersecting identities that impact how they experience the world. Similarly, Ahmed states that the body is a ‘‘meeting point" of identities that ultimately dictate not only how each individual experiences the world, but also how the world interacts with each individual.

As such, while international students at large are bound by many of the same policy issues, race is an important factor of international students' identity that impacts their experiences (Hutcheson, 2020).

Chapter Conclusion

As evidenced by this chapter, the literature on international students is vast and there are many perspectives that contribute to our understanding of factors that mediate international student experiences in Canada. Shifting from perspectives on acculturation and deficit to that of equity is beneficial for situating how international students have been othered and marginalized in Canada. This shift is complementary to the critical lens that is used in the subsequent manuscripts for this thesis. In the next chapter, I describe this critical lens in further detail and outline the methodological framework and research paradigm which guided the three manuscripts.

CHAPTER 3: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

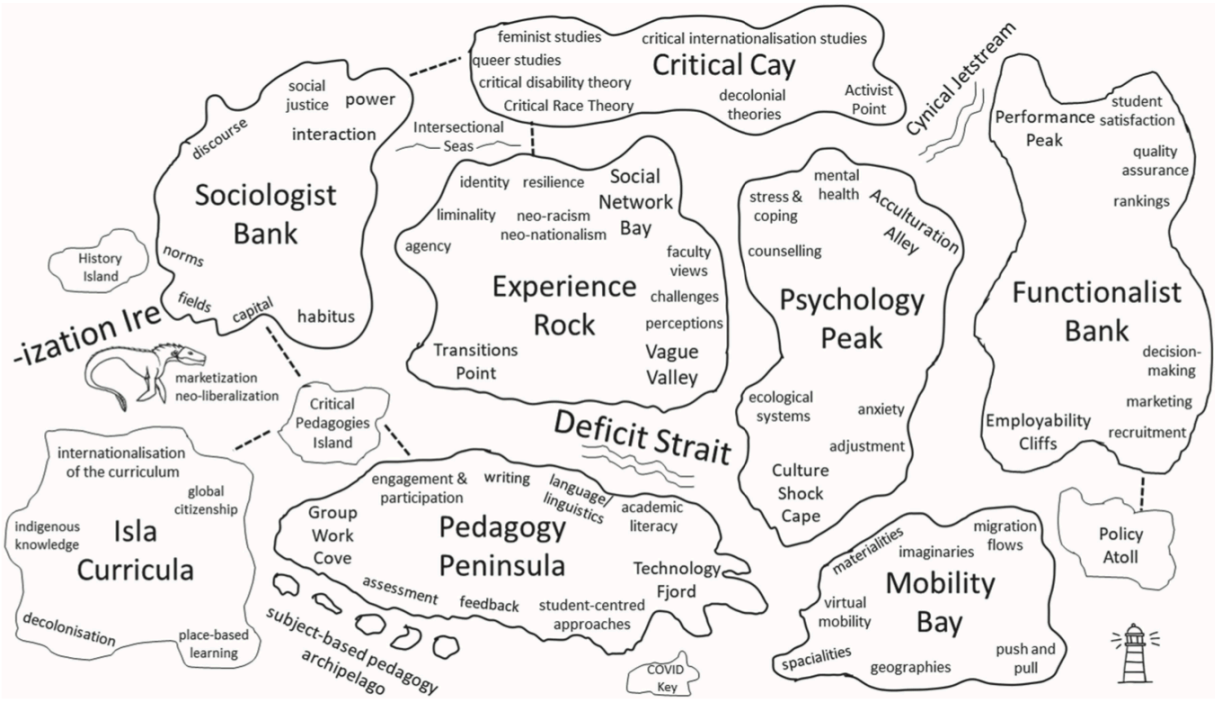
In this chapter, further context is provided for my research on international students and equity that appear in the next three chapters. Before presenting the interconnected manuscripts that follow, it is helpful to establish the guiding theoretical frameworks that have contributed to the writing of this thesis. Beginning with a journey through the "ideological seascape" of research with international students, I map where my research falls within the wider scope of this subfield, and how I arrived at these perspectives, motivated by life experience, and where existing research took me. Next, I present my critical paradigm, providing evidence for why these perspectives are complementary to my research. The manuscripts are presented along with detailed descriptions of the utilized methodologies and methods. The following chapters will offer a deeper explanation of its methods and methodologies within the manuscript itself.

Theoretical Approaches for Understanding Research with International Students

Inspired by Macfarlane (2012, 2022), Mittelmeier et al. (2023) created an "ideological seascape" (Figure 1) effectively making a visual map of the subfield of research with international students (p. 24). As a visual person, I found it helpful to locate myself in space through Mittelmeier et al.'s representation to situate my research, understanding the different islands, seas, and formations, and how they relate to each other.

Figure 1

The "Ideological Seascapes" of Research with International Students (Mittelmeier et al., 2023)



In this section, I will navigate through the map with reflections on my own personal experience and journey with this research. Beginning with the Psychology Peak was a natural starting point as my background was in psychology before engaging with this research. As I first began my inquiry into understanding international students and how they fit into international higher education in Canada, I was confronted with a slew of research focusing specifically on the acculturation and adjustment of international students, which has also been signaled by scholars in the field (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Lomer et al., 2023; Heng & Lu, 2023; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2022). As described in Chapter 1 and 2, international student's distress is described as a symptom of disparate home and host cultures, and "failure" to adjust. These feelings of distress were always depicted as something to be addressed with counseling and resulting from students

who have yet to assimilate or acculturate. While mental health is an important dimension of understanding student experiences within the context of psychology, it is important to recognize the pitfalls of the acculturation trap outlined in the preceding chapter, including its ties to deficit narratives. Just next to the Psychology Peak is the Deficit Strait explored in Chapter 2 as the close cousin of acculturation perspectives. Deficit perspectives paint international students as "less" than their Canadian classmates (e.g., Shahrokni et al., 2022). Looking for alternative perspectives, I found myself at Experience Rock, which is aligned more with the topical issues I was seeing in Canadian higher education. Experience Rock includes international student experiences, as well as how international students are perceived, and challenges that can be encountered. With Donald Trump elected as President of the United States in 2016, rising neo-nationalist attitudes, and the resultant "Trump Effect", I was interested in how these attitudes impacted international students in the United States and in Canada, as the U.S. became a less desirable destination for students (Potok, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose Redwood, 2017). Working with faculty groups, I was curious about how faculty members conceptualized and talked about international students, how students were perceived, and the perceived challenges students encountered as framed by their experiences. In addition to some of these experiential elements, I wanted to know more about these external elements that mediate student experience. Neoliberalism, and the marketization of international higher education are present in the "-ization Ire". One cannot decouple these "-izations" when discussing the subfield of research with international students. Discussed in Chapter 2, understanding the ubiquity of neoliberalism and its impact on key policy drivers such as Canada's internationalization strategy, differential tuition fees, and aggressive international student recruitment are essential for scope. While neoliberalism was the first policy area I had flagged in my interest in research with international

students, understanding the wider landscape of policy was important: from regional and national immigration, to the impact of larger scale geopolitics (Bamberger & Morris, 2023; Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Trilokekar et al., 2020). The more I understood policy and its disproportionate impact on international students, I realized I needed a framework to better understand inequity. This led me to the Critical Cay, home of critical internationalization studies, critical race theory, decolonial theories, and more.

Covid Key

Before diving deeper into the Critical Cay and its importance within the scope of research with international students, it is necessary to take a layover to the Covid Key. No one could have planned to research the pandemic, but its profound impact on the world at large, as well as on international students cannot be denied (Firang & Mensah, 2022; Kirby, 2024; Zhao & Bunyan, 2023). Covid Key, while smaller on the map, is not peripheral. Rather, the pandemic functioned to exacerbate existing inequities for international students. The conditionality of student status became more apparent with immigration factors. Seeing examples in the United States, where under a Trump presidency, international students faced potential deportation created worry for students in neighbouring Canada (Potok, 2017; Rose-Redwood & Rose Redwood, 2017). Additionally, students faced limited access to financial support like the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), which offered assistance during the financial turmoil of the pandemic. Taking care to understand this disproportionate impact on international students is a helpful case study for understanding international student experiences.

Critical Cay

To continue this travel metaphor in the research with international students seascape, the Critical Cay is significant in my work. Inspired by critical and equity-focused scholars, all of these symbolic travels have been done to further understand my key research questions. Scholars such as George Mwangi et al. (2018) and Madriaga and McCaig (2022) have identified international education and research with international students as lacking in criticality. In their mapping of research, Mittelmeier et al (2023) identify this limited criticality in multiple areas, from failure to explain and understand the systems that facilitate inequity, the differential impact of geopolitics on students, intersectional dimensions, and the role of power and power differentials (p. 27). A decade ago, scholars claimed that internationalization has "lost its way" with its aggressive focus on monetization and profits to a detriment to the field (Brandenburg & de Wit, 2011). This consistent focus on monetization has a human cost: international students. Referencing Karram's (2013) perspective, against the backdrop of neoliberalism that prioritizes international students for the profit, it is imperative to understand the daily lives and needs of international students. As a researcher, I believe that criticality is essential for those who engage in research with international students to better understand their lives and experiences.

From critical race theory and critical internationalization studies, a broader conceptualization for how I understand and approach criticality comes from George Mwangi et al. (2018) who asserts that "critical research promotes transforming the status quo, rectifying injustices and inequities, and understanding power relations to illuminate oppression, exploitation, and marginalization (Crotty 1998; Giroux 2011)" (p. 1092). How do these elements identified by George Mwangi et al. (2018) fit into how we engage in research with international students? Before further understanding a critical lens on international education and international

students, we first have to understand international students as a marginalized group. In beginning this research endeavour, I didn't realize that calling international students a marginalized group was controversial. While engaging with rhetoric of discrimination, the conditionality of international student status, and issues of financial exploitation within a wider landscape of neoliberalism, it seemed obvious. However, I realized that my work was competing with stereotypes including the "rich international student trope." This is supported by memes depicting images of "what international students eat for breakfast" featuring a Chinese takeout box. Instead of noodles, the takeout box is filled with expensive jewelry (Nagesh, 2018). While there are international students who are part of the financial elite, this is not the reality of all students (Laframboise et al., 2023; WES, 2022).

Chapter 2 took care to outline some of the inequities faced by international students including the impact of the conditionality of their status, exploitation from the housing market and employers, systemic discrimination, and other structural factors that function to marginalize students and perpetuate areas of inequity. A critical lens is just one tool to understand this inequity. George Mwangi and Yao (2021) explain that “by incorporating critical theory and perspectives to our lens, we pay attention to educational practices and ideas that “serve the interests of the dominant class while simultaneously silencing and dehumanizing ‘others’” (Brown, 2004, p. 78) within international HE research and theory” (p. 555). Below, I introduce other elements which function to marginalize international students within a critical framework including the othering of international students, the role of power in critical perspectives, and the importance of an intersectional understanding within this framework.

Criticality and Othering

The dehumanization of international students has been seen through their depiction as "cash cows" and "economic objects", highlighted in Chapters 1 and 2. Colourful brochures have aimed at promoting the diversity of institutions function to tokenize international students (Bennett et al., 2023; Buckner et al., 2021; Pippert et al., 2013). This tokenizing also fits into a large construction of the Othering of international students. Critical perspectives lend understanding to the Othering of international students. Said (1979) conceptualizes "the Other" as a distinction between "us" and "them", entrenched in colonialist attitudes that is linked to larger structures of "power, knowledge, hegemony, culture, and imperialism" (Burney, 2012, p. 23). Moosavi (2020) further explains this Othering, problematizing the prominent colonialist view in international education that Asian students as Other are not capable of "critical thinking" compared to their Western student peers and that intervention is needed to improve this stereotyped perception of thinking. Heng and Lu (2023) refer to this belief that international students have to improve as a "subtle" form of Othering and that researchers must be aware of these personal biases and subjectivities when they engage in research with international students (p. 47).

Liu and Qian (2023) provide definitions on how international students have been Othered, noting that Othering is a process. This focus on process is particularly important and has been identified by scholars like Asante et al. (2016). In their publication on racialized international students from Africa studying at an American university, they found that participants felt the process of "becoming" Black with the American context and reflected on this changing identity and perception. Similarly, Zewolde (2022) describes the overt Othering of Black African international students studying in the U.K., identifying student encounters with racism. Zewolde's interviews explored forms of Othering resulting from homogenization, or the

failure to see African students as coming from different African nations but rather the non-existent "country" of Africa. Another prominent form Othering includes students being exoticized, a gendered experience of being sexualized. In a publication on international, students, sexual violence and race, I describe how exoticizing is another way in which international students are othered and contributes to gender-based violence (Hutcheson, 2020). Marginson (2012) provides further insight on depictions of international students as "exotic Others" saying,

> Whether welcome or unwelcome international students are legally defined as aliens, as 'Others'. They are culturally Othered as well. Thus, foreigners are often seen as culturally exotic outsiders. There is no obligation to engage with the exotic, or include it in a common humanist regime—and it is a short step from 'fascinating and mysterious' to 'dangerous'. But far from being dangerous, the inferior status of mobile non-citizens renders them relatively de-powered and vulnerable, despite an often-notable capacity in fast learning and tenacious survival (p. 497).

This fits into other "doubling discourses" about international students: dangerous and mysterious, cash-cow or profiteers. Beck (2023) explains this Othering and "doubling discourse" where international students are somehow known, and unknown, depicted in conflicting yet simultaneous "positive and negative representations" (p. 186).

Despite this Othering which is important to capture in critical perspectives, in their discussion of international students and equity, Tavares (2021) explains that "international students are not always considered an equity-seeking group, despite the structural barriers international students face" (p. 1). However, I assert that international students should be considered an equity-seeking group, and understanding these students' lives in Canada is paramount as student numbers grow and there is increased compelling evidence of these

inequities. I am in agreement with Ng's (2003) belief that “an equity lens assumes that education institutions and their processes are not neutral" and “makes explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence, and marginalize individuals who are differently located in the educational process” (p. 214).

Criticality and Power

As described in Chapter 2, a “critical approach acknowledges that political, social, and economic forces have specific consequences on groups, particularly if they are marginalized.” A local example is the deregulation of tuition in Quebec, which means international students are now at the mercy of universities to decide what “fair” differential tuition prices are. Despite these additional tuition dollars, international students do not receive additional services in keeping with the extra income they provide (Latulipe Loiselle & Jouhari, 2018). This was highlighted in Basen’s (2016) documentary where a university couldn’t support students academically despite desperately needing their money to keep the university afloat. Differential tuition fees, and the emphasis on the profitability of higher education are helpful examples to understand the link between critical perspectives and neoliberalism. Explained in the mapping of the ideological seascape, the role of “ization” and neoliberalism must be understood within the scope of international higher education and within critical frameworks.

Speaking further to consequences that have a differential impact on certain groups in a critical lens, the previously explored incident with Saudi Arabian students as political pawns offers a helpful example. Similarly, a current geopolitical event also threatens the status of Indian students following the assassination of a Sikh leader on Canadian soil (National Post Wire Services, 2023). In the different conceptualizations of critical perspectives, power is a prominent theme (Lee et al., 2006). Power assumes that there are those who have it, and those who possess

less. In understanding this, we are aware that this diminished power has consequences. Within the context of this research, we understand the impact of power on marginalized groups like international students. In Cannella and Lincoln's (2015) description, critical perspectives are explained as "any research that recognizes power—that seeks in its analyses to plumb the archeology of taken-for-granted perspectives to understand how unjust and oppressive social conditions came to be reified as historical 'givens'" (p. 244). Cannella and Lincoln further explain that critical perspectives understand the impact of "social constructions, grand narratives, and social ideologies" (p. 244). George Mwangi et al. (2018) critique that in the broader field of internationalization, we need more explicit explanation on the role of power, further clarifying that ultimately internationalization is "disadvantaging some and privileging other" (p. 14). Like George Mwangi et al. (2018), I also agree that we require further understanding of how this power functions.

Critical perspectives provide space for not only naming these inequities, but confronting them. While I conceptualize power and social justice in terms of criticality, next to the Critical Cay is the Sociologist Bank which houses perceptions of power and social justice. It is the intention of this thesis to understand international students from a social justice perspective, with the aim of creating more equitable practices, particularly in the field of research with international students still requires some conceptual changes focusing on equity. In the discussion of each chapter and overall discussion, insights are provided on impactful ways to challenge inequity and marginalization. Groups like Migrant Students United are highlighted for their corresponding work which seeks to illuminate these critical issues in Canadian internationalization.

Criticality and Intersectionality

It is important to note that equity is not felt or perceived in the same way for all students, international students included. For example, during the pandemic, racialized groups reported feeling less safe (Statscan, 2020). Asian students were unfairly categorized as propagators of the virus (Kong et al., 2021; Litam, 2020; Ziems et al., 2020). The importance of the Intersectional Seas in the ideological seascape cannot be understated in the broader field of international education and the subfield of research with international students where these students have been routinely described as homogenous (Buckner et al., 2021; Heng, 2016, Hutcheson, 2023; Lomer et al., 2021; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023; Tran, 2016). The Intersectional Seas which are located between the Critical Cay, Experiential Rock, and Sociologist Bank are intuitively placed on the map as intersectionality informs criticality and the ways in which one's marginalized identity might interact to impact equity. Crenshaw's (1991) foundational naming of intersectionality gives us the language to understand this impact. Explained in my 2020 publication, "Crenshaw posits that individuals are made up of simultaneously interlocking and intersecting identities that impact how they experience the world" (Hutcheson, 2020, p. 198). Relatedly, it is also helpful to understand the body as a "meeting point" (Ahmed, 2007). The way in which these identities interact and are perceived "dictate not only how each individual experience[s] the world, but also how the world interacts with each individual" (Hutcheson, 2020, p. 198). Some of these meeting points operate around the lines of race, gender, (dis)ability, sexuality, social economic status, and much more. This perspective is essential as these manuscripts document how student experiences can be seen through a lens of equity and marginalization.

Race is explored more closely in Chapter 6. To help understand the role of race, Delgado and Stefancic's (2012) understanding of Critical Race Theory also offers helpful insight. Housed

on the banks of the Critical Cay, Critical Race Theory "offers understanding of how race functions to impact international students' experiences" (Hutcheson, 2023, p. 98). In using a critical race theory framework, we can better conceptualize how race and internationalization interplay. Madriaga and McCaig (2022) speak about racialized international students and the Othering impact of their distance from Whiteness. They note how often, Whiteness is almost invisible, meaning that being White is normalized while being racialized is seen as being different. Although the research with international students is still lagging in terms of how we discuss (or don't discuss) race, including frameworks like critical race theory is essential for understanding the impact of these dual and intersecting identities. A local example in Quebec is that international students from Africa are more likely to have their study permits rejected (Government of Canada, 2023). In Chapter 5 I examine how some students believe their race was a factor for procuring employment in their department. Additionally, important considerations emerge where students see their racialized identity as being inseparable from their international student identity. Students in Chapter 5 discuss their personal processes of being racialized and being indoctrinated into racism as they reflect on their perceptions of equity.

Overview of Research Paradigm and Methodological Approach

Constructing my research paradigm was an opportunity to explore my basic beliefs that contribute to my worldview and effectively, how I approach my research (Brown & Dueñas, 2019; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Scotland, 2012). In this section, I explore what drives the research that comprises my thesis, how I think about this research, and the tools I employed to answer my research questions. Admittedly, the subfield of research with international students has received critique for not consistently demonstrating theoretical rigor (e.g., Heng, 2020; Stein, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to conceptualize my paradigm that complements my main research

questions: "**What are the ways in which international students in Canada have been Othered, marginalized, and impacted by their non-citizen status and other intersecting identities" and "How is this marginalization further mediated by policy, inequity, and practices in international high education?".** While many analogies are available for understanding the purpose and construction of a research paradigm, e.g., onion, net, circle, glass box, and ferris wheel (Brown & Dueñas, 2019), I prefer the brick/building block analogy offered by Guba and Lincoln (1994). The construction of my research paradigm discussed below can be attributed to five main building blocks, adapted from Brown and Dueñas: axiology, ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods. Importantly, while the building blocks are discrete and distinct, it is also necessary to highlight the harmonization that must occur among these building blocks, which will be further unpacked at the end of this section. This paradigm, or research process, is critical in nature, as my research questions most fundamentally seek to understand issues of social justice and marginalization as they pertain to international students (Crotty, 1998; Scotland, 2012). An overview of my critical paradigm can be further explored in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Paradigm Overview

Critical Paradigm: International Students and Equity (adapted from Brown & Dueñas, 2019)				
Axiology ***What is valuable?***	**Ontology** ***Theory of reality***	**Epistemology** ***Theory of knowledge***	**Methodology** ***Research toolkit***	**Methods** ***Tools***
• The timeliness of the research • Growing infringements on international student equity • Positionality • Genuine interest	• Critical theory is the "virtual reality shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109).	• Critical theory • Critical internationalization • Critical race theory • Intersectionality ** These are the most prevalent in my thesis*	Critically informed bricoleur approach with multiple methodologies including: • Critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, critical thematic analysis • Glonacal approach • Ideological critique	• Semi-structured Interviews • Desk-based research methods (including, journals, press releases, etc.) • Review of policy • Review of the literature • Triangulation

Axiology

The first building block implored me to ask the foundational question of what I value and why I am engaging in research that addresses international students and inequity. Guiding axiological questions include particular motivations such as academic and political (Brown & Dueñas, 2019). While international students in education are certainly a "hot topic" in Canada now given the impending enrollment caps from the federal government, and new provincial directives, including new language requirements in Quebec, I firmly believe it is important to highlight the infringements on international students' equity and resulting marginalization. Positionality is inseparable from axiology (Brown & Dueñas). As discussed in Chapter 1, I am an international student. Additionally, I am a racialized international student which informs what I value in research. As an insider-outsider, I am personally impacted by the factors I analyze and highlight in this thesis, which of course further informs what I find to be valuable. I have an agenda of calling out change including the practices of international higher education that marginalize international students, as well as practices in research with international students that require challenging (Scotland, 2012). Furthermore, I also work with international students, seeing the systemic and structural challenges that international students and collaborators disclose. Positionality, interest, and the timeliness of my work converge to inform my axiological approach.

Ontology

Ontology is best understood as the nature of reality (Crotty, 1998; Staller & Chen, 2022). An ontological approach driven by critical theory conceptualizes this nature of reality as the existence of multiple realities that are subjective and "shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender values" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 109). Importantly, critical

theorists seek to understand how subjective realities can influence research. Furthermore, it understands the relations of power within a society, which is an effective perspective when understanding the nature of inequity on marginalized groups including international students (Brown & Dueñas, 2019; Crotty, 1998; George Mwangi et al., 2018). Staller and Chen (2022) explain that "our ontological stance is intricately connected with your beliefs about what would be the best way of getting to know reality" (p. 8) and implies that ontology is linked with epistemology, which is discussed in the subsequent section. Crotty also supports this link, explaining that "ontological and epistemological issues tend to merge together" (p. 10), particularly as they are both informed by theory, which was explored in the above discussion of the Critical Cay.

Epistemology

Epistemology refers to the theory of knowledge, and what is known (Crotty, 1998). Crotty explains epistemology as how we arrive at understanding "how we know what we know" (p. 8). Epistemology can also be understood as "the theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, p. 3). The overarching epistemological stance of my thesis is informed by critical theory. Critical theory as an epistemological viewpoint is "grounded in the belief that knowledge is shaped by power dynamics and social structures. Researchers who adopt a critical theory stance seek to uncover and challenge power imbalances and injustices in society" (Alele & Malau-Aduli, 2023, para. 5). Within a critical theoretical perspective, there is an important understanding that researchers of this persuasion are ultimately looking to expose injustice. It also acknowledges the importance that power plays in a given society (e.g., Brown & Dueñas, 2019). Critical theory and critical perspectives were more closely explored in my above walk-through of the ideological seascape.

Critical theory is important to how I approach my epistemological stance—understanding the subjectivity of knowledge is important to how we understand knowledge and knowledge construction. Critical theory, originating in the Frankfurt School, understands the inherent stratifications which exist in society that expose individuals to inequity. To understand how these inequities persist, first we need to understand the wider context that allows this inequity to proliferate (e.g., Fui et al., 2011).

Under my critical epistemological stance, I give attention to three areas: critical internationalization, critical race theory, and intersectionality. These concepts are explored more in-depth within the theoretical research landscape with international students above. However, I would like to give more attention to the field of critical internationalization.

Despite still being on the fringes of scholarship on internationalization, critical internationalization perspectives are gaining momentum (George Mwangi et al., 2018; Stein, 2021). Critical internationalization is understood as "an approach that seeks to identify, challenge and ultimately interrupt how mainstream approaches to the study and practice of internationalization have contributed to the reproduction of systemic harm in higher education and beyond" (Castiello-Gutiérrez, da Silva & Stein, 2023, para. 4). The Critical Internationalization Studies Network (CISN) explains that there are many ways in which internationalization is explained, particularly as tensions arise around differing ideologies (n.d.). However, there are some commonalities, particularly around power relations, distribution of resources, and a greater need to criticize approaches in internationalization that are described as "mainstream" (CISN, para. 2). Neoliberalism emerges frequently as a prominent ideology in critical internationalization research requiring challenging, particularly as the monetization of international education is a perpetrator of systemic inequity (George Mwangi et al., 2018).

Methodology and Methods

Methodology in this thesis refers to the suite of frameworks in my toolkit used to answer my research questions. The tools, or methods housed within the methodological toolbox refer to the actual procedures to acquire data (e.g., semi-structured interviews, document review, desk-based research methods). The chosen methodologies are influenced by the confluence of my axiological, ontological, and epistemological approaches. To better conceptualize how these methodologies are used and linked throughout the thesis, Table 2 demonstrates links between methodologies and methods within the context of the undertaken research.

I prefer to address these critical methodologies as a toolkit rather than an explicit method, as there is no "one way" to do critical methods (e.g., Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Diem et al., 2014; Kincheloe & McLaren, 2005). In fact, I see myself as a "bricoleur". When I first began my inquiry into the issues that impact international students in education, I gravitated towards qualitative methodologies and methods. During this journey, I came across the terms "bricolage" and "bricoleur" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). These French words have multiple meanings, which usually centre on meanings around building, construction, and repairing, namely with tools and objects that someone has "handy". Bricolage is the act of doing these actions, whereas the bricoleur is the doer of these actions. As a French speaker, in the sea of available qualitative approaches, the word stood out. It felt special that as a researcher, I could be a builder, or a *bricoleur*. But, what does this word mean within the scope of my work on international students, equity, and marginalization? How could I approach this work and my central question on how international students have been marginalized?

As an early career researcher, I wanted to prioritize getting my research "right", believing that there was truly *one* best way to tell the story. However, what bricolage has taught me is that

there are multiple ways of telling and interpreting, each valid, contingent on our positionality, intersectional dimensions, our motivations for engaging in research, and more. Furthermore, research is not static but rather an "interactive process" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1999, p. 6). In Chapter 1, as a racialized international student, it was important to share that element of my identity as it informs how I approach research but also how my participants interact with me, as explored in Chapter 5.

The manuscripts featured in Chapter 4, 5, and 6 were an opportunity to tell a story as a bricoleur, utilizing multiple methods to address themes of inequity for international students. Each manuscript provides a unique opportunity using different methods to create a composite of how we can understand international students and inequity, effectively employing bricolage. Due to the nature of the questions, the inextricable influence of neoliberalism of international education and the pervasive ways in which international students have been Othered by ideology, practices, and marginalized, I found a critical paradigm to be most advantageous for my research question and goals. To better understand the deeper description of these, below are brief summaries of the focus, methods, and methodologies of each manuscript to pre-empt the methodological considerations. An overview of these methodologies and methods for all chapters is provided in Table 2.

Table 2

Research Methodology

Critically Informed Bricoleur Approach		
Methodology, Chapter	**Description**	**Use in Context and Methods**
Critical Discourse Analysis (Mullet, 2018; Rogers, 2011) ● Chapter 4 ● Chapter 6	Mullett (2018) defines Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as "a qualitative analytical approach for critically describing, interpreting, and explaining the ways in which discourses construct, maintain, and legitimize social inequalities" (p. 116). It offers an understanding of both power and inequality (Rogers, 2011). A simplified understanding of Mullett's CDA can be understood as identifying the discourse (e.g., COVID-19 related policy impacting international students, published research on international students), exploring the background and context of the discourse, analyzing the text, and interpreting. CDA incorporates the assumption that language is not neutral—language has an agenda and within the scope of this research, it is helpful to understand that ideology and power are imbued into language (Mullett, 2018). Like critical thematic analysis discussed below, it harnesses a number of techniques, and is helpful for understanding timely discourses (e.g., the pandemic, and impending immigration changes).	Chapter 4 uses CDA paired with critical policy analysis (discussed below) to understand COVID-19 policies. In Chapter 6, I review literature in the field of research with international students to uncover some of the inherent issues in the way research is conducted, namely in the omissions of race, and the problematic discourse on race when it is included**.** Surveying the literature in the subfield of research on/with international students, I provided an ideological critique on the omissions of international students and race, as well as prevalent deficit discourses. The prior analysis informed the a priori codes applied in the initial deductive analysis in Chapter 5.
Critical Policy Analysis (Diem et al., 2014; Mak & Thomas, 2022; Young & Diem, 2018) ● Chapter 4	Critical policy analysis (CPA) is closely guided by "the role of inequality and privilege" perpetuated by policy and the resulting impact on marginalized populations (Diem et al., 2014, p. 1072). While there are multiple ways to approach CPA, the research was most guided by 3 guiding principles (Young & Diem, 2018): ● "CPA examines the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge and the creation of 'winners' and 'losers.' ● "CPA explores social stratification and the impact of policy on relationships of privilege and inequality." ● "CPA is interested in the nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of historically underrepresented groups (p. 82)." Additional critical insights include understanding the ways in which policy is written and how it is actually enforced, where the policy is made and how that implementation manifests, and policy origins. Consistent with other bricoleur approaches it is helpful to acknowledge that there is no "one size fits all" with engaging in this kind of research. However, the centrality of these critical methodologies is to ultimately see how these actions and ideologies work to disadvantage some students while privileging others (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2018)	Chapter 4 uses CPA to unpack how international students were impacted by policies during COVID-19. I demonstrated policy-based inequities encountered by international students during the pandemic and the resulting consequences. Using desk-based research methods, I identified salient policies related to the COVID-19 pandemic that had consequences for international students from an equity standpoint. These sources were identified most prevalently through social media, particularly from Canadian government officials, news outlets, and press releases. Using the previously outlined principles of critical frameworks, I analyzed these sources to identify areas of inequity and marginalization. The scoping nature of the review was beneficial as the pandemic was unexpected, emergent, and unfolding in real time (Mak & Thomas, 2022). The central themes identified in Chapter 5 informed the a priori codes used in the first iteration of deductive analysis. The interviews with international graduate students happened after I had completed much of my analysis for Chapter 4. A priori codes were developed from the major sources of policy-driven inequity

		identified in Chapter 4
Critical Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Lawless & Chen, 2019; Onuoha et al., 2023) ● Chapter 5	Critical thematic analysis (CTA) is a way of taking traditional thematic analysis (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021) while applying a "critical agenda" (Lawless & Chen, 2019). Traditional thematic analysis is intentionally flexible, allowing researchers to use thematic analysis to understand different contexts and theoretical persuasions (Lawless & Chen, Braun & Clarke, 2021). However, seeking a more rigorous protocol, Lawless and Chen created a more precise method, critiquing the previously "fussy" and imprecise application of critical thematic analysis. Lawless and Chen explain that in order to engage in CTA, key questions must be asked, including: "How do macro-and micro-level discourses, practices, and systems intersect and reproduce dominations and oppressions?" (p. 97). The ultimate goal is to analyze and make a link between "interview discourses, social practices, power relations, and ideologies" (Lawless & Chen, p. 92).	In Chapter 5, interviews with international graduate students were analyzed to identify key areas of insight on inequity, power imbalances, and other manifestations of marginalization. Braun and Clarke (2021) offered further insight to thematic analysis and opportunities to employ reflexivity. The analysis consisted of six steps, which receive more detail in Chapter 5. These steps include: becoming familiar with the data, generating codes and coding data, reviewing and revising codes, "theming" the codes, revising themes, and writing the report in keeping with a critical theoretical framework.
Ideological Criticism (Berger, 2014) ● Chapter 4 ● Chapter 5 ● Chapter 6	In order to understand ideological criticism, it is first helpful to understand ideology. Merriam-Webster (2024) defines ideology as "a manner or the content of thinking characteristic of an individual, group, or culture" and "the integrated assertions, theories and aims that constitute a sociopolitical program." Ideological criticism seeks to critique these major assumptions of ideologies. Ideological review and critique are complementary to critical methodologies (Brown & Dueñas, 2019. Simply explained, ideological critique challenges and criticizes texts that are "of consuming interest to a particular group (Berger, 2014, p. 128). Ideology is embedded in multiple forms of communication, including research rhetoric and publications. A Marxist perspective problematizes how often those who create ideological content aren't always explicitly aware of the ideology that has been imbued into that content (Berger, 2014). This perspective is helpful for understanding how research is imbued (consciously and subconsciously) by ideology, and the detriment of sharing these perspectives.	Chapter 6 challenges the assumptions and beliefs that are prevalent in how research with international students is conducted, particularly around dialogues of race. Research problematically reproduces the deficit centered approaches while failing to consider how to incorporate important rhetoric on international students and race. The thesis at large also challenges prevalent ideologies including neoliberalism and the monetization of higher education which can have an inequitable impact on international students. Furthermore, as explored in each chapter, dominant perspectives on acculturation and deficit discourses are challenged, encouraging readers to understand international student experiences in ways that identify the structural barriers that perpetuate inequity. These ideologies are identified, conceptualized, and critiqued.
Glonacal (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) ● Chapter 4 ● Chapter 5	A glonacal approach aids in outlining policy in three interlinked areas: global, national, and local. The glonacal agency heuristic is employed because it allows policy to be seen across "intersecting planes of existence" rather than actors that exist within very isolated spheres (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002, p. 281). Care is taken to show the fluidity of policy and influence between the global, national, and local, so as to not fall into the trap of over-prioritizing local contexts (e.g., Carpenter, 2015). Inspired by Clark's (1983) model outlining the relationship between a hierarchy of market, professional organizations, and government/managerial models, Marginson & Rhoades (2002) sought to create a model that helps explain the relationships between these levels of agencies and agents. The heuristic's goal is to "foster exploration and analysis of types and patterns of influence and activity, to reconceptualize social relations and actions globally, nationally, and locally" (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002, p. 290). The motivations behind the creation of this model were to (a) demonstrate the	Under a glonacal approach, I addressed policy occurring at the global, national, and local level for a more comprehensive perspective (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002). Here, it is important to understand that policies occur at multiple levels. Using immigration as an example: In Quebec, international students who study in Canada are required to get approval from both the Canadian government, but also the provincial Quebecois government. At the global level, geopolitical tensions between countries can impact where and when students can cross borders as seen with the earlier Saudi Arabia example. This perspective gives understanding to the suite of policies impacting international students during the pandemic in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, a glocal approach gives an understanding to the scale

	interconnectedness of policy and agencies, (b) show the impact of globalization on policy, (c) de-emphasize the nation-state as the major player in international education policy, and (d) highlight the importance of the historically understudied local level within international and comparative frameworks.	of inequity: ranging from access to local resources to tensions between Canada, and a students' home country.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 (Manuscript 1) was written as a critical policy review, with elements informed from scoping reviews, surveying and analyzing how policy during the COVID-19 pandemic impacted international students. The surveying nature of the review was beneficial as the pandemic was unexpected, emergent, and unfolding in real-time (Mak & Thomas, 2022). Specifically, I identified how certain policies functioned to create inequitable circumstances for international students. Salient policies included, immigration policy, Canada's internationalization strategy, the controlling of social protections as seen in the disbursement of the CERB and CESB, and rights established in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, particularly as they pertain to discrimination. Triangulating between the policies, social media, press releases, and news outlets allowed for a more comprehensive understanding of how this community was marginalized during the pandemic.

Due to the emergent and unanticipated nature of the pandemic, limited research was available to understand its immediate impact on international students. Therefore, a traditional literature review was not a feasible option. Chapter 4 utilizes multiple methodologies including critical discourse analysis, critical policy analysis, and ideological criticism. Critical discourse analysis lends itself to gaining scope on emergent areas and getting "the pulse" on an ongoing situation. Critical policy analysis was complementary to identify the mediating policies that much of the emergent news were referring to. Table 2 describes these methodologies in more detail.

In addition to analyzing the policy documents, I also analyzed news articles to understand how international students were portrayed in current events. Using search tools such as google news, as well as searches on major newspaper publications including Global News, and the

modest body of published research available, I employed searches with Boolean operators when available. Sample searches included, but were not limited to: “International students” AND “pandemic” OR “COVID-19” AND “Canada”. Additionally, I had news alerts enabled for emergent news.

For all the policy documents and the news articles, through inference, and elements borrowed from thematic analysis include forcefulness, repetition, and recurrence (Owen, 1984), I was able to identify prominent ideologies and discourses most prevalent in each document. Furthermore, these discourses were linked to policies. For example, Canada’s internationalization strategy and the monetization of international higher education were linked to a number of news publications including: “Not a Blank Check” (Deuel, 2020) and Mendecino’s (2020) tweet, “International students enrich our culture and communities and contribute $22B to Canada’s economy.” A critical approach also understands the importance of tracing the history of policies (Lawless & Chen, 2019). A glonacal approach (Marginson & Rhoades, 2002) also allowed opportunity to zoom in and out on the interplay of policies of the global, national, and local levels (for example, federal financial support programs, vs. institutional support, vs. geopolitical relationships between countries and the crossing of borders). This chapter provided an opportunity to understand how policies during the pandemic impacting international students had historical roots before, and continued to impact students after.

Chapter 5

Using the policy review from the preceding chapter as a point of departure, Chapter 5 (Manuscript 2) investigates how international students perceive equity and fairness as impacted by their international student/non-Canadian status. Chapter 4 identified important inequities for

international students as mediated by policies around the pandemic. A group of 13 international graduate students were recruited to participate in a study about equity following the pandemic. Through semi-structured interviews, students were asked a series of questions on how they perceive equity and fairness and the ways in which the pandemic interacted with these inequities as mediated by international student status. A more detailed description of the employed methodologies and methods are outlined in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6

Chapter 6 (Manuscript 3) presented an opportunity to do a deeper evaluation of how race and racism impact international students. While this area receives attention in Chapter 5's discussion of race, intersectionality, and how they impact international students' inequity as reflected in the students' testimonies, Chapter 6 provides a deeper discussion on the subfield of research with international students. First, reviewing the literature, I summarized some of the ways in which race mediates experience for international students, employing critical race theory and perspectives on intersectionality. I then engaged in a critical analysis of research with international students, highlighted the omissions of talking about race, and problematized some of the ways race can be weaponized through deficit narratives. The analysis gave way to an ideological critique of the messages on deficit narratives, and the minimizing of race in research with and on international students.

The literature that informed Chapter 6 was identified through desk-based research methods including scoping reviews of the literature. Being part of the Research with Internationals Students Community, I first consulted with colleagues on their perceptions of the inherent issues that are prevalent in our subfield. In collaborating on the book, *Research with International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations,* we held

workshops assessing areas requiring change in our field. But in order to signal areas requiring new conceptual approaches, it was necessary to understand themes and patterns within the wider field. To do so, I employed searches on research with international students, identifying literature reviews, scoping reviews, thematic analysis, and previous empirical research (e.g., Bista & Gaulee's 2017 thematic analysis of dissertations that featured research on international students). My goal was not to do a comprehensive search, but instead to survey research that provided insight into theoretical foundations into conceptualizing international students (both regarding race and not regarding race) and critically examine the discourse entrenched in the literature. Guiding questions revolved around how scholars talk about race and international students when they do, and literature and insights as to why it is still controversial. The chapter served as an opportunity for ideological criticism (Berger, 2014), taking care to challenge prominent ideologies in the subfield of research with international students. To challenge these prominent practices around racial exclusion and constructs of acculturation, I privileged scholars who signaled key intersectional omissions, further explored in the chapter.

Ethics, Positionality, Reflexivity, and Trustworthiness

Research for Manuscript 2 which involved interviews with graduate international students occurred under the institution's ethics review. Students gave informed consent (form in Appendix B) with the opportunity to discontinue with research at any point of time. Reflecting again on my own positionality as a racialized international student researcher, the outcomes, feedback, and well-being of international students is important to me. Moreover, for all three manuscripts, my positionality influenced the values in the axiological approaches embedded in the research paradigm. Of course, this identity provides its challenges as well as benefits. Meaningfully employing reflexivity (e.g., Braun & Clarke, 2021) throughout the process of

planning, executing, and evaluating the research was a key component for upholding trustworthiness in the research. Guided by Nowell et al., (2017), my thesis employed major elements of trustworthiness including: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Triangulation and prolonged exposure were key strategies for ensuring credibility in my thesis. My engagement with international students is not limited to exclusively research—I collaborate with this community on multiple panels and organizations. By sharing my ongoing research with these personal and professional communities, I ensured that I received external, critical feedback from the conceptualization of this research to the final analysis and write-up. Beginning with fielding the first iterations of research questions and interview questions, to sharing ongoing analysis with supervisors, international students, and stakeholders working with international students, these external checks were instrumental and valuable.

Before commencing interviews, like with all research, appropriate preparation was essential. Chapter 4's policy review was helpful in giving insight on policy and inequity which contributed to the formulation of my interview questions. Instead of engaging in "cold" interviews, it was important to test my questions with other international graduate students. I fielded the questions with international graduate students and colleagues who provided feedback. Additionally, the questions were also tested with stakeholders in the international student community, including internationals student supervisory groups. Creating the questions was an iterative process, incorporating feedback from international students and stakeholders in international student equity. In keeping with trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017), member checks were absolutely imperative to provide adequate triangulation between the policies, questions, and how I hoped to address international student marginalization and inequity.

Supported by Cohen and Crabtree (2006), critical methodologies are dialogic centric—conversation between the participants and the researcher is necessary to guide the research project. The process is reflexive wherein the researcher and participants question and challenge the current landscape in higher education. Furthermore, as explained by Lather (2007), critical research should be participatory and collaborative. This research was collaborative, from its conceptualization, to its analysis. Gaining additional clarification through member checks and incorporating international student perspectives beyond my own was really important for the success of the project.

When available, member checks were conducted with participants to verify and clarify the analysis. Participants provided clarity and context to excerpts and shared feedback on analysis. In keeping with trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017), member checks were absolutely imperative to provide adequate triangulation between the policies, questions, and how I hoped to address international student marginalization and inequity. While there were constraints with limitations, students graduating, and availability, I was not able to do member checks with all students, but the additional checks I had with some participants were extremely insightful. Two big concerns I had were related to the anonymity of students. To clarify, one student is from a country where there are few students at the institution. In our post-interview follow-up, I asked how she wanted to be presented, and in our dialogue she discussed that she wanted to be sure her nationality would appear. She is an activist in her home country, and she wants visibility to the unique circumstances that surround international students from Afghanistan, particularly around ability to navigate borders and limited passport power. Sharing my ongoing analyses with other international students as well as support services was extremely informative.

In respect to transferability, ensuring there were accurate, meaningful, and contextual connections to student experiences and the real world were necessary. Therefore, bringing the ongoing research to campus groups, wider networks of international student advocacy provided additional generalizability. Using thick descriptions of student testimonials, connections were made. Triangulating these testimonies, my initial policy analysis along with news, current events, and feedback from international student service panels created more opportunities for transferability, and made this research relevant to the "real world". In listening to student reflections on race in Manuscript 2, as well as how racialized international students were impacted by racism in the existing research, it allowed for deeper reflection on how research incorporates racialized international students.

In respect to dependability, my research process has been deliberate, documenting insights and strategic choices as I continue forward. An important caveat to note is that when engaging in critical research, having an exact replication is not feasible and some variation is to be expected for a number of reasons (e.g., the role of positionality, different axiological approaches). However, by presenting clearer demonstrations of my theoretical constructs, important insights for my research rationale are provided.

As an insider/outsider, confirmability is of key importance. Being deliberate and transparent about the theoretical framework and analytical process contributes to the understanding of the analytical processes and decisions made. Constant reflection also provided another failsafe for avoiding research bias (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Finally, effort was also made to ensure that this research was "non-extractive and unhungry" (Phillips, 2022). Ultimately, ensuring that the research findings provide an important contribution to international students and equity is an essential goal.

Chapter Summary and Preview

This chapter lays out the conceptual, theoretical, and practical approaches that guide this thesis and collection of manuscripts. Beginning with a walk through of the prominent theoretical approaches driving research with international students, we understand how a critical approach lends itself to best addressing the overarching research questions on international students, equity, and marginalization. The next chapter is the first of a series of three manuscripts that all contribute to how I conceptualize international student equity and marginalization. Not only is it the first publication in this thesis, but it chronologically was the first chapter I authored of the three manuscripts. In surveying the policy impacting international students during the pandemic, I gained insight for the subsequent chapters.

CHAPTER 4: MANUSCRIPT 1

"What Will Happen to Us?": Policy Barriers and International Student Marginalization in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic

Hutcheson, S. (2024). "What will happen to us?": Policy barriers and international student marginalization in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic. In Dietzel, C., & Towfigh, K. (Eds.), *Pandemic injustice: Navigating legal and policy lines during the COVID-19 pandemic* (pp. 81-100). Peter Lang.

Abstract

Valued in billions of dollars, international education is a lucrative enterprise in Canada. In recent years, the country has prioritized international student recruitment to compensate for decreasing public funding for universities. At first glance, this seems like an ideal solution— universities benefit from the cultural exchange, international students enjoy a more "worldly" education, and universities can compensate for less funding. Upon closer inspection, however, international students face inequities, particularly around non-citizen/resident rights, access to social protections like healthcare, and financial burdens. Not only did the COVID-19 pandemic expose some of these inequities, but it also exacerbated them. Using policy as a lens for analysis, this chapter investigates the inequities and unique challenges international students face as COVID-19 changes the landscape of international higher education. Specifically, this chapter examines four major themes: (a) the monetization of higher education and the pitfalls of the international student as a "cash cow" mentality, (b) inequities around access to financial resources and social protections, (c) discrimination, and (d) immigration flows, borders, and barriers. Thus, this chapter employs a critical analysis to pinpoint the vulnerabilities of international students in a neoliberal market that often prioritizes profit over well-being.

Keywords: international students, international education, inequity, immigration, critical policy analysis, discrimination, COVID-19 pandemic

Introduction

While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced individuals, institutions, and governments around the globe to adjust to an unprecedented reality, one sector that continues to struggle is international education. In Canada, March 2020 was marked by sudden campus closures and international students in visa limbo. In an effort to secure campuses, university dorms closed without adequate notice, leaving many international students in precarious situations without housing (Geary, 2020; McKenna, 2020). In the United States, international students were left reeling after Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) announced that if an institution was not holding in-person classes, they would have to leave the country (ICE, 2020).

While both examples show the precarity of non-citizenship status for students studying outside of their home countries, before the pandemic, there were already demonstrable policy-related flaws in international education, particularly regarding equity (e.g., Karram, 2013; Tannock, 2018). Healthcare inaccessibility, skyrocketing tuition costs, discrimination, and the commodification of international students have been a focal point for several scholars (Hutcheson, 2020; Karram, 2013, Lomer, 2014; Tannock, 2018). These pre-pandemic issues quickly worsened during the pandemic, thereby exacerbating existing inequities for international students.

It is important to note that international education is a significant industry for many countries. Canada, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom rely heavily on international student fees. In 2019, there were nearly 640,000 international students studying in Canada, contributing roughly $22 billion to its economy each year (Government of Canada, 2019). Canada is the third leading destination for international students, after the United States and Australia (Canadian Bureau for International Education [CBIE], 2019). With decreased

public funding for education and an aggressive internationalization strategy from the government, international student tuition has become a financial "lifeboat" for many Canadian institutions (Basen, 2016). However, since it is uncertain how the pandemic will continue to impact the number of international students—and consequently, the Canadian economy—Canadian stakeholders in international education are closely observing policies regarding who can come to Canada, and under what conditions. Moreover, international students worldwide who are already in their host country of study or those hoping to come to their host countries may wonder "what will happen to us?" as they look for support and answers in public forums (Tabnawr, 2020).

This chapter examines how international students have been marginalized by policies in international education before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. I present a policy-forward review that exposes neoliberalism as a major force affecting international students' lives and, in doing so, unpack how international education relevant policy impacts international students. Much of this chapter will focus on policies in Canada, with an emphasis on Quebec. When appropriate, I also incorporate a comparative perspective, calling attention to relevant policies from outside Canada. This comparative lens between nations is beneficial due to the connectedness of systems in international education—the global, national, and local are inextricably linked (e.g., Marginson & Rhoades, 2002; Webster, 2019). Canada, the United States, Australia, and the UK are direct competitors in international education, and events in one country create ripples in the others. For example, the "Trump effect" is believed to have increased international student enrollment in Canada (Potok, 2017). Given the interconnected, global context of international higher education, employing a critical international lens is advantageous.

This chapter surveys the pandemic context of international higher education through policies and actions of the Canadian and U.S. governments, as well as academic institutions that have impacted international students. Moreover, this chapter identifies some of the most pressing issues in higher international education as they pertain to international students' experiences by analyzing social commentary, media articles, and relevant literature. Recognizing the novelty of the pandemic, as well as the numerous policy issues that have emerged and have been exacerbated by the pandemic, a wide survey of the current landscape is warranted.

This chapter is structured as a literature and policy review, guided by critical analysis (e.g., Lawless & Chen, 2019; Nixon et al., 2017), critical discourse analysis (Mullet, 2018; Rogers, 2011), and critical policy analysis (e.g., Diem et al. 2014; Young & Diem, 2018). I employ critical methods to evaluate "the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge" and "the role of inequality and privilege" (Diem et al., 2014) and examine differences in resource distribution between international students and Canadian students. Applying this critical lens, I also consider how neoliberalism plays a mediating role in international students' experiences. The holistic approach offered by critical methods is useful to the analysis of policies and practices in international education, as it provides a framework that demonstrates how the pandemic and the four themes around international education (i.e., the monetization of higher education, access to resources, discrimination, and immigration) are not only related, but also mutually constitutive.

The Monetization of International Higher Education

International students, who contribute roughly 22 billion dollars to the Canadian economy each year and who are routinely characterized as "cash cows" are relied on to compensate for decreased public funding for education (e.g., Crawley, 2017; Study International, 2017).While

the number of international students in Canada has risen dramatically in recent years, support services are not necessarily proportionate to this growing number (e.g., Basen, 2016; Guo & Guo, 2017; Scott et al., 2015). As higher education continues to shift toward a neoliberal business model, greater emphasis has been placed on generating income rather than ensuring the well-being of students (De Wit, 2016; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland, 2013; Karram, 2013). Karram identified this tension, pinpointing how "one sees international students as an economic market to be engaged with, while the other seeks to understand and support their day-to-day lived experience" (2013, p. 5).

To illustrate how critical the financial contributions of international students are to universities where international education is a key component of the economic strategy, particularly during a pandemic, consider this example from the United States: The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, which feared losses in international student revenue, took out an insurance policy for protection against the anticipated drop in Chinese students (Bothwell, 2018). This drop in students would have had a detrimental, if not catastrophic impact on the University's budget. Sylvie Lomer believed this could signal a trend of similar precautions worldwide (Bothwell, 2018). As universities will inevitably seek new ways to weather the pandemic with less of the international student income that many universities in Canada and the United States have become dependent on, other universities may seek similar insurance strategies. This is one of the ways in which the pandemic has revealed the fragility of international higher education and the repercussions of over-reliance on international students as a revenue stream, particularly as international student enrollment quotas fall short (e.g., Deuel, 2020). Overall, this emphasis on revenue and quotas is indicative of a neoliberal ideology.

Neoliberalism in International Education

Pervasive in the current context, McChesney (1999) called neoliberalism the "defining political economic paradigm of our time" (para. 1). Neoliberalism, as defined by Harvey (2007), is the "deregulation, privatization, and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision" (p. 3). In practice, neoliberalism becomes an economic ideology where monetary gain is paramount and takes precedence over social issues. Giroux (2002) contextualized the implications of neoliberalism by explaining that higher education has been commercialized and viewed as a commodity such that students are framed as consumers and the university as a business. Concerning international students, neoliberalism is a ubiquitous philosophy that impacts their experience in unique ways. In Quebec, tuition fees have been deregulated, which means that universities are allowed to determine "fair" tuition prices for international students, thereby raising tuition at their discretion (Latulipe Loiselle & Jouhari, 2018). This preceded a roughly 7 % increase in tuition for international students in Canada for the 2020–2021 academic year (Statistics Canada, 2021). The decision to raise fees during a pandemic surprised and frustrated many students, especially since classes were online and students could not access on-campus amenities. As educational systems across Canada struggled to adapt to virtual learning and diminished classroom capacity, students asked why they were paying more for less (Amin et al., 2020; Keung, 2020; see Chapter Six).

In Canada, international students pay tuition rates that are on average three times more—and at times, four times more—than their Canadian peers (Canadian Federation of Students, 2020). The higher tuition rate has contributed to several stereotypes about international students, one being that all international students have disposable wealth. This stereotype is pervasive and presents itself in memes. To illustrate, one meme depicts a Chinese takeout

container with a Coco Chanel emblem, golden chopsticks, and gold necklaces for noodles with a caption that reads, “What international students have for lunch” (Nagesh, 2018). While there are affluent international students, this stereotype does not reflect the wealth of the general population of international students. Such stereotypes are harmful and obfuscate the reality that many international students struggle financially (CBIE, 2018; Charles & Overlid, 2020; Etem, 2012; Nagesh, 2018; World Education Services, 2020).

Scholars have critiqued using international students as “a blank check” (Deuel, 2020). Adding to the perception of international students as a form of revenue is the fact that the government categorizes international education as an export (Government of Canada, 2019). Lomer (2014) asserted that this kind of objectifying discourse positions international students as “economic objects.” This narrative has been particularly evident during the pandemic, as universities are concerned about the impact of international student enrollment and subsequent income losses, perhaps more than the students themselves.

The Commodity of Education

Education is commodified in neoliberal societies (Giroux, 2002) and universities are globally marketed as goods/services to the international student consumer. To sell itself to prospective students, Canada has become a brand—one that promotes itself as a leading study destination. Canada’s internationalization strategy entitled *Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* emphasizes this imagery by presenting Canada as safe, reliable, multicultural, and immigration friendly (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). Since branding also implies competition, which is a major tenet of neoliberalism (Giroux, 2002; Johnstone & Lee, 2017), Canada not only sells that it is safe and welcoming, but that it is

also safe(r) and (more) welcoming compared to competitor countries and thereby more appealing to their international student-consumers. In Canada's pandemic economic recovery agenda, the priority is to "leverage and promote the 'Canada' brand domestically and internationally, emphasizing value addition and innovation" (Canada Industry Strategy Council, 2020, p. 23). By reframing the imagery of safety during the pandemic, the government's agenda now includes the "launch of public health messaging campaigns abroad to instill confidence in potential international students" (Canada Industry Strategy Council, 2020, p. 23).

Competition reinforces and perpetuates the notion that education is a commodity and that universities are businesses with all students as consumers and international students as exports. Since international students are positioned as "consumers," it is important to consider what students-consumers want. Marginson (2020) suggested that moving forward, students will prioritize institutions that offer better "health security." Commenting on the Australian context, Lehmann and Sriram (2020) predicted that the treatment of current international students will have consequences on a country's image such that international students "could help shape our country's reputation as a safe and welcoming destination in the post-pandemic world—but only if we look after them" (para. 1).

As consumers in a neoliberal market, students are closely observing the policy choices made by institutions of higher education. Marginson (2020) predicted that as higher education recovers from the impacts of the pandemic, competition for recruiting international students will become even fiercer. It will be valuable for research in this field to investigate the (re)branding of universities and countries post-pandemic and the impacts of such efforts on the experiences of international students. Headlines such as "International Recruitment—Is Canada Facing a Big Squeeze?" (Nicol, 2020) and "Can Canada's Universities Survive COVID?" (Ansari, 2020)

displayed the urgency of the financial crisis in higher education. Challenging these financial concerns, this chapter implores universities to look beyond depictions of international students as "lifeboats," "cash cows," and "blank checks" and, instead, attend to them as human beings by supporting their health, safety, and education and reducing the inequities they experience.

Social Protections: Financial Aid, Financial Security, and Health

Critiquing the commercialization of higher international education, Tannock (2018) focused on international students as exports, identifying that:

> flesh and blood individual human beings are reframed to become just another income generating market commodity, that is no different from an automobile or pharmaceutical product that has been packed into a shipping container and sent overseas for distribution and purchase. (p. 41)

The objectifying language around international students may result in overlooked rights. Exports and economic *objects* do not require healthcare and supports, but flesh and blood *people* do.

At times when the cultural contributions of international students are commended, there is often a caveat to their financial contributions. On September 22, 2020, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, Marco Mendecino (2020), tweeted, "International students enrich our culture & communities, and contribute $22B to Canada's economy." International students make large financial contributions to Canada, but this relationship should not be unilateral. It is therefore essential to inquire what international students *need*?

In this section, I discuss access to resources, particularly around healthcare and financial supports, since international students have struggled with access to healthcare (Redden, 2020) and a lack of financial support from both universities and the government (e.g., Firang, 2020).

This lack of access has become more apparent during the pandemic. Specifically, Bilecen (2020) identified the necessary support that international students have required during the pandemic as "social protection," which refers to a set of resources that bolster and protect against various risks, such as discrimination and poverty. These social protections are both tangible and intangible resources that can be mobilized against risks and may include government initiatives or more local organizations, such as student committees (Bilecen, 2020). My review of pandemic-related policies and practices in Canada highlights how international students' access to social protections is often precarious.

Although international students are stereotyped as affluent, economic prosperity is not a reality for many of them. With large tuition bills, less access to financial aid, and precarious job prospects, many international students struggle not only to pay for tuition, but also necessities such as groceries and rent (CBIE, 2018; Charles & Overlid, 2020; World Education Services, 2020). This financial vulnerability opens international students to exploitation, particularly as they must navigate the 20-hour cap on work hours (Government of Canada, 2022).

In response to the financial difficulties that arose during the pandemic, such as job losses and decreased work opportunities, the Government of Canada created the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) to mitigate financial losses (Government of Canada, 2021b). Students, including international students, could access the CERB by demonstrating that they earned more than $5,000 in the past year. However, this $5,000 cap presented numerous barriers. First, many students had not earned enough money in the past year to reach the $5,000 threshold (Kamil, 2020; World Education Services, 2020).

Second, due to study permit restrictions, some international students have worked "under the table" to supplement their finances (Tomlinson, 2019). This created a problem for them, since

income from undocumented work does not count toward the CERB's $5,000 requisite. Another barrier to the CERB is that a Social Insurance Number is required, which some international students simply do not have for a number of reasons including gaps between visas and processing delays for renewals (Matassa-Fung, 2020). The CERB also did not protect from losses of *potential* income, meaning students were expecting jobs that were no longer available due to the pandemic.

Furthermore, the initial campaigns used to inform the public about the CERB and other financial relief programs did not mention international students, leaving many international students confused as to whether or not they were eligible for the CERB. Interestingly, many Canadian students were also unable to access the benefits associated with the CERB, so Canada launched the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB), which was created to fill the gaps and support the need of students (Government of Canada, 2021d). Unfortunately, however, international students were entirely excluded from the CESB (Kamil, 2020). Overall, even though Canada acknowledged the dire financial situation of many of its citizens and students, the country's provision of financial aid to international students was conspicuous: Canada relies on international students for its economic survival, but international students cannot count on Canada for their economic survival, even in the time of a crisis.

These omissions have also been prevalent as international students have tried to access healthcare, both before and during the pandemic. The *Canadian Health Act* (1985) stated that all Canadians have access to healthcare, but this legislation does not apply to international students who study, work, and pay taxes in Canada (Reitmanova, 2008). International students are often required to pay out of pocket for costly private healthcare in addition to their inflated tuition fees. Additionally, private healthcare is not always accessible. For instance, Quebec's RAMQ program

grants Quebec residents access to a large network of healthcare providers, but international students residing in Quebec do not qualify (Quebec Regie de l'Assurance Maladie, n.d.). At the beginning of the pandemic, student clinics at institutions such as McGill University in Montreal closed, leaving many international and out-of-province students without access to affordable healthcare, since insurance coverage is limited once students leave their university networks.

In addition to the omission from services and supports, students also encountered rapidly changing policies. Wong (2020) noted that university administrators were "mercurial" in their responses to the pandemic, since they consistently and quickly changed policies as well as enforcement measures. One heavily critiqued pandemic response was the sudden closure of student residences, which was implemented to help slow the spread of COVID-19 since students live together in close quarters. However, this measure left many international students in precarious and stressful circumstances. In one instance, Concordia University in Montreal only gave students living in dorms four days to vacate the premises (McKenna, 2020). Students were told that if they did not leave the residences, they could be accommodated following a review and subsequent confirmation by the university (McKenna, 2020). Many Canadian students could return to their family homes in Canada, but with closing borders, exorbitant travel costs, and scarce time to strategize, many international students lacked viable options (Morin, 2020). International students therefore had to immediately find secure, new housing that was safe and affordable—even though they were already navigating the challenges of the pandemic and, for many, inadequate finances. Thus, although pandemic-related policies, like the closing of student residences, were intended to protect the health and safety of students, they inadvertently created many more problems for international students (McKenna, 2020).

Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Racism

Access to social protections like financial aid, healthcare, and housing are crucial to support international students. However, students must also feel *safe.* The emphasis on safety has been part of Canada's internationalization strategy to recruit more international students by promoting the country as safe and welcoming. However, before the pandemic, many racialized international students experienced discrimination and racism in countries like the United States and Canada (e.g., Lee & Rice, 2007; Houshmand et al., 2014; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Rutherford, 2019; Verghis, 2009). Furthermore, the pandemic has shifted what notions of safety look like for international students, particularly racialized students from Asia who have been targets of discrimination and harm, as they have been blamed for the spread of COVID-19 (Kong et al. 2021). Such incidents have increased since the onset of the pandemic and contradict the image that Canada aims to promote, namely that the country is safe and immigration friendly (Global Affairs Canada, 2014).

As indicated on Canada's website for newcomers, international students in Canada are protected by the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982), a bill of rights entrenched in the Constitution. Section 15 of the statute outlines equality rights and protections against discrimination. Although *all* individuals living in Canada are protected by the *Charter* (Government of Canada, 2017), the active discrimination against Asian and other racialized students do not align with the non-discriminatory grounds outlined in the *Charter*.

The pandemic has exacerbated discrimination against certain groups of racialized international students. In March 2020, former U.S. President Donald Trump referred to COVID-19 as the "Chinese virus" and introduced the term "Kung Flu" in July 2020 (BBC, 2020). This language was intentionally used to perpetuate the racist and xenophobic view that

Chinese people are to blame for the proliferation of COVID-19. The framing of COVID-19 as the "Asian" virus increased anti-Asian sentiments worldwide, including toward Asian international students, who represent a large proportion of international students in Canada and have experienced higher rates of discrimination and hate crimes since the beginning of the pandemic (Kong et al., 2021; Litam, 2020; Ziems et al., 2020).

In Canada, from March 2020 to February 2021, there were 1,150 reported instances of racism across the country (Kong et al., 2020). Of these cases, 84 % of victims self-identified as or were identified as East Asian (Kong et al., 2020). These manifestations of racism and xenophobia are also present online. Mittelmeier and Cockayne (2020), who analyzed tweets portraying international students, uncovered perpetuation of many negative stereotypes, such as Twitter users claiming to distance themselves from groups of Asian international students on public transit, and professors making discriminatory jokes about COVID-19 when Asian international students coughed during their lecture.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, visible minorities have reported feeling less safe than non-visible minorities (Statistics Canada, 2020). However, feelings of unsafety were more pronounced among Asian populations (Statistics Canada, 2020). Cognizant of the mounting racism against international students, the Canadian government created a guide for international students arriving in Canada, specifically stating that international students should be protected from racism and discrimination in Canada (Government of Canada, 2021a). The guideline urges designated learning institutions (DLIs), which are schools pre-approved provincially to host international students to "ensure that local communities and campuses are safe and welcome places for international students, free of any biases or racism that may be associated with COVID" (section 5, para. 2).

Universities have a responsibility to keep international students safe, but some universities dismissed xenophobic rhetoric against Asian students during the pandemic and appeared unconcerned about how such rhetoric would contribute to Asian students feeling, or being, unsafe. One Instagram post from the University of California, Berkeley stated that xenophobia against Asian students was a "normal" reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic (Asmelash, 2020). The post attempted to sympathize with non-Asian students struggling with the pandemic and listed a number of "typical" reactions, notably, "xenophobia: fears about interacting with those who might be from Asia and guilt about these feelings" (Asmelash, 2020). Wong (2020) retorted that this widely critiqued post "shows that the administration, at best, is failing to tackle head-on an insidiously propagated belief that hostility towards a racial 'other'—for so long somewhat concealed— could be permitted in times of crisis" (para. 11). Much of the racism directed at Asian students, including international students from Asia comes from a place of xenophobia, but also a view that students with Asian backgrounds are potentially dangerous as carriers of COVID-19.

Immigration Flows: Borders and Barriers

It is important to note that, in addition to the vulnerabilities listed above, including those specific to the pandemic, the very status of being an international student can render students vulnerable since their status is conditional and contingent on several factors, such as not exceeding work hour limits, providing up-to-date paperwork, and maintaining enrollment criteria (Government of Canada, 2021c). International students are welcome in Canada, but only under a specific set of conditions dictated by immigration authorities (Government of Canada, 2021c). Being an international student is fraught with administrative and bureaucratic hurdles, such as providing extensive documentation to ensure that their study permits are valid for the duration of

their studies. However, these processes are further complicated during the pandemic. For example, students experienced large delays in visa processing times (Matassa-Fung, 2020). In another case, due to conflicting COVID-specific information, students were fearful about unintentionally violating the terms of their students visas due to uncertainties, such as the number of hours students with essential jobs could work (Rukavina, 2020).

In addition to the bureaucratic hurdles, immigration is not always a steadfast practice, as seen with the swift regulatory changes following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Several factors can impact immigration, such as economic stimulation, workforce shortages, humanitarian immigration, education, and geopolitics (e.g., Government of Canada, 2019; Lee et al., 2006; OECD, 2011; Webster, 2019). The insecurity of immigrant status during the pandemic was demonstrated when ICE announced on July 24, 2020, that international students at universities with online-only instruction would need to depart or be deported from the United States (ICE, 2020).

At the time of writing, Canada's borders are open to international students whose universities appear on the approved list of DLIs assessed to be student ready (Government of Canada, 2021e). This may be a relief to some students who have been eager to come to Canada due to difficult learning conditions such as unstable internet connections and taking synchronous classes with significant time differences. While pandemic-related restrictions that currently allow international students to come to Canada may change as COVID-19 persists, they offer some hope for students wishing to be physically located in Canada. Ultimately, government responses to COVID-19 and the treatment of international students may impact the decision of prospective students wishing to attend DLIs on the approved "student-ready" list.

Recommendations

By revisiting the impact of the pandemic on international higher education and international students, this chapter identifies emergent themes on inequity that international students have experienced before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. Through a critical lens, I examined salient policies, practices, and social media posts that related to issues of international education during the pandemic and highlighted the work of scholars, social commentators, and news media to provide further context of these issues. Though these issues warrant further exploration, I propose some recommendations to better serve international students during and after the pandemic.

Confronting (and Challenging) the Contradictions

Perhaps the most important is an ideological shift in the perception of international students' role in Canadian international higher education. Currently, the institution of international higher education is a contradiction. Naming this contradiction, Patel (2020) lamented, "why is it that today those societies which demonstrate stereotypical, prejudicial and discriminatory behaviours about international student communities are those who embrace the international student dollar with open arms?" (para. 15). The current unilateral approach in which international students are primarily perceived as sources of income creates an inequitable situation, which can lead to exploitation. Throughout history, there have been numerous motivations for promoting international education including global cooperation, innovation, and humanitarianism (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). Emphasis on the economic potential of international students is a relatively new phenomenon not seen until the second half of the twentieth century (de Wit & Merkx, 2012). International higher education must reconcile how neoliberalism has rapidly changed the educational landscape and re-examine both its purpose and its relationship

with students, without whom international education would not exist. Stakeholders must harmonize imagery against execution; it is irresponsible of institutions to spend money and project the image that Canada is safe and welcoming with world class services to international students without investing the same amount of money—or more—to ensure that image is a reality.

Another important step to promote reconciliation and equity for international students is to make international higher education more human-centered. Institutions should prioritize the needs of their international students and provide tailored financial, emotional, and administrative support. Echoing this sentiment even before the pandemic, Choudaha (2017) suggested that, in the future, universities need to find balance between recruitment and "corresponding support services that advance student success" (p. 831). Karram (2013) similarly suggested focusing on the holistic international student experience. Universities should work to ensure that international students feel safe and supported and thrive in their host countries, especially during crises such as the ongoing pandemic. Given the disproportionate financial contributions international students put into institutions, these students should not be disproportionately omitted from being the beneficiaries of student supports and funding opportunities because of citizenship criteria.

Another step for recentering international students and their needs is language. Treating students as "cash cows," "exports," "economic objects," and "blank checks" is inherently dehumanizing, and it detracts from the inherently beneficial virtue of a diverse campus body. Institutions should revisit their policy briefs, internationalization strategies, and other similar documents to ensure that the language does not project an objectifying view of international students and, importantly, that it remains human-centered.

Advocacy, Policy, and Action

While an ideology shift is important, this needs to be accompanied by tangible action—and institutional change cannot happen alone. Change requires collaboration from universities, governments, and community organizations. Community groups like Migrant Students United (MSU) have advocated for the rights of international students studying at Canadian institutions. MSU puts a lot of emphasis on *fairness,* speaking out against immigration injustice as well as work exploitation. For example, MSU (2020) sent a letter to Canadian PMs and asked for better healthcare access, federal income support for international students who lost income during the pandemic, support coping with mounting tuition fees and costs associated with mandatory quarantine, and permanent residency reform. MSU has other ongoing policy recommendations, such as creating easier immigration pathways and abolishing the 20-hour work limit so students can better support themselves financially during their studies[11].

Labor from groups like MSU is particularly important, as many countries with large international student populations do not have specific legislation or policies that protect the rights of international students, and instead embed those protections within broader policies and legislation (Ramia, 2017). Australia and New Zealand are some of the only countries that have legal frameworks explicitly for international students, centered around rights. Canada would benefit from similar frameworks of care and policy tailored toward the dignity and non-exploitation of international students. The CBIE created a Code of Ethical Practice (2013), which asserts that institutions must "ensure that international students have access to support services that promote their adjustment to life and study in Canada, and to assist in areas that could affect their programs, including physical and mental health services" and "promote

[11] On October 7, 2022, Canadian Immigration Minister Sean Fraser announced that the 20-hour limit on work hours was temporarily suspended, effective November 15, 2022, and ending December 31, 2023

understanding among staff and faculty of the special academic, social and cultural needs of international students, with emphasis on the needs of vulnerable groups." This accountability should be enforced and extend beyond CBIE and include all stakeholders in international higher education.

Lastly, in addition to fortified supports, revision of exclusionary policies, and models for best practices, action must be taken to support students who are further marginalized by race. While anti-Asian rhetoric was highlighted during the pandemic, it is just the cusp of a more pervasive problem. Thus, there is an urgent need for educational interventions and research in this area.

Clear, Timely, and Compassionate Communication

International students are often omitted from policy, and when information is tailored to this demographic, it can be confusing, contradictory, or lacking in compassion (Asmelash, 2020; McKenna, 2020). Often when information is disseminated to students, the onus is on the international student to decipher whether the information includes their population or not. With the case of CERB, it was not immediately clear whether international students were eligible as language did not specifically name them. When releasing statements, care must be taken to explicitly indicate whether it is applicable to *all* students, or *some* students to alleviate the additional burden of deciphering when international students are included or excluded. If universities and governments consider the policy-related vulnerability of international students, they can make better decisions and effectively communicate with all their students.

Conclusion

Making sense of competing policies, practices, and social commentary, social media posts is no small feat. Even more challenging, the many policies shaping the pandemic and

consequently international student experiences, are not static documents—they are subject to change, and COVID-19 is a rapidly evolving landscape. Since the onset of the pandemic, the academic milieu has also changed dramatically, and this article was written in the midst of the pandemic as I experienced it. Writing while enduring a life-defining world event is challenging, but also insightful. It can be difficult to get a clear focus when experiencing something from up close, much like understanding the impact of a storm while you're still in it. With time and perspective, I anticipate that research in this field will be enriched further.

On that note, it is important to recognize that this chapter is not comprehensive in its analysis of the policy barriers and marginalization that international students have experienced during the pandemic, nor was it intended to be. However, in analyzing what I believe are the most salient topics, this chapter pushes the field forward and explores some of the most influential and pressing matters in the contexts of Canada and international education.

The pandemic has perpetuated many inequities that international students experience, such as access to healthcare, job security, and cross-border mobility. Through critical analysis, this chapter exposed issues of inequity in higher education, particularly related to neoliberal ideologies, and examined how the pandemic exacerbated existing issues, including financial hardship, limited support services, discrimination, and policy omissions. Listening to student voices like those from MSU will bring some more humanity to the neoliberal-driven franchise of international higher education. Despite the outlined concerns, there is hope that international education can be honest and non-exploitative. For equitable education and general best practices, students need "resources, respect, recognition, love, care, and solidarity" (Lynch, 2014, p. 132). Centering policies and practices around this philosophy will help ensure that international students receive the support they deserve, during the pandemic and beyond.

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Bridging Statement

Spotlighting the COVID-19 pandemic, Chapter 4 titled: "What will happen to us?: Policy barriers and international student marginalization in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic" provided an introduction and foundation to the ways in which policy can function to marginalize international students. This chapter appears in the book*, Pandemic Injustice: Navigating Legal and Policy Lines During the COVID-19 Pandemic,* which provided a unique opportunity to frame policy as a source of injustice for marginalized populations during the pandemic.

The scoping critical review of policy, rhetoric, and ideology impacting international students aimed to map the landscape of international higher education from a position of equity. The analysis yielded four important themes: "the monetization of higher education and the pitfalls of the international student as a "cash cow" mentality, inequities around access to financial resources and social protections, discrimination, and immigration flows, borders, and barriers" (p. 81).

While the policy perspectives were important for providing a broader context for international students' experiences in Canada, I wanted to make sure to privilege the voices of international students in my understanding of how they were impacted by some of these policies and inequities by conducting semi-structured interviews with international graduate students. The policy analysis in Chapter 4 informed how I formulated my interview questions addressing students' perceptions of fairness and equity compared to their home student peers. During my interviews which took place as universities "returned to normal" following the pandemic, thirteen international graduate students studying at a large English-speaking university in Quebec were asked to reflect on their encounters of inequity. Although the themes from the preceding

chapter were used to inform the chapter to come, the process was iterative, as students added important contributions to their encounters with inequity.

CHAPTER 5: MANUSCRIPT 2

Critical Thematic Analysis of International Graduate Students' Conceptualization of Inequity and Fairness

Abstract

With impending changes to Canada's Internationalization Strategy in 2024, and calls to cap international student enrolment, international students are receiving increased attention in the public eye. Following a largely successful internationalization campaign over the past decade, international student numbers have grown significantly. However, there are consequences for this rapid internationalization, particularly for international students who can be considered a marginalized group in the Canadian context. Many of these consequences are centered around equity including access to resources, funding, and discrimination. To better conceptualize how international students perceive and experience equity and fairness, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 13 international graduate students at a large English-speaking university in Quebec. Student responses were analyzed using critical thematic analysis to identify 9 themes around inequity including, the labour of bureaucracy, conditionality of status, information accessibility, access to social protections, status-based omissions, employment and academic funding, economic objectification, race, and international students at intersections.

Keywords: international students, equity, fairness, critical thematic analysis

Introduction

In 2014, Canada launched an internationalization campaign that sought to attract international students to study at Canadian institutions, thus stimulating the economy (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). This campaign, *Harnessing Our Knowledge Advantage to Drive Innovation and Prosperity* was largely successful, rapidly increasing student numbers. As part of this strategy, the country strategically branded itself as a safe, welcoming, multicultural society in a bid to boost international student numbers (Global Affairs Canada, 2014). However, current news headlines paint a different reality for many students. Instances of unhoused international students navigating housing crises, escalating geopolitical tensions between India and Canada creating uncertainty and discouragement for one of Canada's largest international student populations, mounting tuition fees, and impending international student enrollment number caps challenge the nation's "Canada Nice" stereotype for international students. The pandemic also created novel issues for international students who were stuck between borders with diminished access to financial support. International students were simultaneously targeted by restrictive policies, but omitted from receiving critical support (Firang and Mensah, 2022; Hutcheson, 2024; World Education Services, 2020).

Recently, the government of Canada has publicly recognized the consequences of rapid internationalization with the Minister of Immigration announcing that steps are needed to curb the vulnerability and exploitation of international students, stating that there will be:

> Additional measures to protect a system that has become so lucrative that it has opened a path for its abuse. Enough is enough. Through the decisive measures announced today, we are striking the right balance for Canada and ensuring the integrity of our immigration system while setting students up for the success they hope for (IRCC, 2024).

The announcement comes in tandem with similar immigration regulations coming out of Canada's international education competitors, the U.K. and Australia. The ICEF (2024) describes four overarching trends impacting recent international student immigration reform in Canada, Australia, and the U.K.: housing and affordability crises, nefarious recruitment agents, disproportionate infrastructure growth to support newcomers, and public unease with overall immigration.

This manuscript confronts some of the growing pains associated with rapid internationalization—namely the resulting inequity and its impact on international students. It further narrows the lens to look at these experiences for international *graduate* students in Canada. The manuscript is also framed by the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting the experiences of students who studied during the pandemic or started their graduate studies at the tail-end of the pandemic. In addition to providing insights on the graduate international student population, this work counters the extant literature centring primarily on the acculturative experiences of international students, or the attribution of challenges faced by students resulting from a lack of cultural familiarity with the Canadian context (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; George Mwangi & Yao, 2021; Heng, 2018; Madriaga & McCaig; Surtees, 2019). Perceiving there was more to the narrative than students' failures to "adjust" or "acculturate" to life in Canada and other prominent deficit discourses, I drew upon alternative perspectives of equity to understand students' experiences (e.g., Tannock, 2018). In a similar vein, Karram's (2013) scholarship highlighted tensions in international education, noting the stark dichotomy that some researchers and stakeholders seek to understand the daily lived experiences of international students, while others seek to profit. Resonating with the former perspective, I sought to understand these experiences from a perspective of equity.

At present, there are currently 807,000 international students studying in Canada, with over 60,000 of those students studying in Quebec (CBIE, 2024). Compared to the rest of Canada, Quebec offers a unique landscape: It is composed of French-speaking and English-speaking institutions and exerts unique immigration requirements such as international students needing a *Certificat d'acceptation du Quebec* (Quebec Acceptance Certificate) in addition to the federal study permit. On the horizon are new tuition hikes for international students, and new language requirements that have implications for student's immigration. Furthermore, the government has faced scrutiny for the differential speeds at which students study permits are approved, disproportionately impacting international students applying from Africa, sparking concerns over racism (The Canadian Press, 2023). Due to international students' key role in Canada's internationalization strategy, their position in public discourse is often dehumanizing, conveying them as merely "economic objects" (Lomer, 2014). Furthermore, the literature is littered with deficit discourses, portraying students as passive and vulnerable subjects, failing to adapt (Heng, 2018; Lomer et al., 2023; Mittelmeier et al., 2023; Mittelmeier & Yang, 2021; Surtees, 2019).

Closer analysis revealed a more complicated picture—many of the issues that can pose challenges for international students are not these internalized processes of adjustment but rather wider systemic and structural issues that contribute to inequity, which in turn mediate experiences including racism, neoliberalism, and the monetization of higher education. The Canadian Federation of Students (2022) has illuminated issues of inequity for international students, advocating for the Fairness to International Students Campaign, which seeks fairer funding for international students, elimination of differential fees between international and home students, and immigration policies that facilitate rather than hinder immigration. Similarly, Migrant Students United seek to mobilize and denounce injustice for international students,

namely on worker rights, immigration, and human rights (Migrant Students United, 2024). Both of these organizations operate from a position of fairness, insisting that international students are treated fairly. Key university organizations in Quebec also describe a growing worry around the current status of international education in the province. The Confederation de Syndicats Nationaux have flagged the rights of international students in Quebec, particularly around the largely unregulated tuition (CSN, 2023).

Equity for international students can be approached from a number of ways. Within the Canadian context, equity is often discussed alongside the wider landscape of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) (e.g., Buckner et al., 2022; Das Gupta & Gomez, 2023; Legusov et al., 2023). In keeping with a critical lens (e.g., George Mwangi et al., 2018), I conceptualize equity as the ways in which international students have been othered and marginalized by prominent policies, ideologies, and exclusions in the landscape of international higher education. More specifically, I employ an equity lens which "assumes that education institutions and their processes are not neutral and 'makes explicit the political nature of education and how power operates to privilege, silence, and marginalize individuals who are differently located in the educational process'" (Ng, 2003, p. 214 as cited by George Mwangi & Yao, 2021, p. 551). These principles are the overarching motivations of this study, where I interview international graduate students at a university in Quebec on how they conceptualize and understand equity and fairness as mediated by their international student status.

Purpose of Study

As Canadian institutions seek more emergent equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies for its residents, international students have fallen between the cracks of EDI rhetoric, not falling under the purview of EDI initiatives despite clear and pervasive inequity. This gap in the

research was a motivator for pursuing this research. Furthermore, incorporating international student feedback on how they personally experience and conceptualize inequity with the careful nuance of race, privilege, and intersectionality remains limited. Despite this exclusion, international students can face a number of inequities including constrained access to social protections, financial and bureaucratic barriers, and racism (e.g., Buckner et al., 2022; Das Gupta & Gomez, 2023; Tamtik & Guenter, 2019; Tavares, 2021). Identifying the factors that impact these students disproportionately can inform stakeholders how international student status is linked to unfair and marginalizing practices as identified by students. Against the backdrop of international education during the pandemic and increasingly monetized international higher education, there are very specific ways in which inequities for international students persist and were further exacerbated by the pandemic. By employing critical thematic analysis (e.g., Lawless and Chen, 2019) to interviews with 13 international students at an English-speaking university in Quebec, Canada, this study illuminates key questions around international student experiences in Canada including policies that directly impact international students and create or maintain inequity, accessibility of information, social protections, and services, and status-based discrimination and omissions. Specifically, the overarching questions for this study are:

- How does inequity manifest for international graduate students at a Canadian/Quebecois higher education institution?
- How do international graduate students conceptualize this inequity?

Because of the timing of this study, the interviews also provide an understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic functioned to impact these inequities. Analyzing how inequity functions within the wider landscape of policy, ideologies, and practices that prevalently shape

international higher education today provides greater depth of understanding how and why these inequities persist.

While the international student body is diverse at the institution where the study occurred, I wanted to zero in on a subset of the international student population: graduate students. Currently within the Canadian context, there is a smaller body of research that highlights the experiences of international graduate students (Gopal, 2023). Often, students are collapsed into one homogenous group, or the focus is on undergraduate students. However, understanding the perspective of graduate students is important as well. Like all international students, graduate students in Canada are confronted with higher fees. However, other important discrepancies are funding and fellowships to fund education which typically aren't available to undergraduate students at large. Scholars like Al-Haque (2019) have signaled barriers that graduate students encounter, particularly as they navigate immigration pathways. International graduate students also often contribute time to research and navigate departmental dynamics on the distribution of teaching and research assistantships. Furthermore, scholars like Lee (2021) have identified that graduate students, including international students, are reliant on their faculty supervisors for funding and support. They explain that this additional power dynamic leaves international students open to mistreatment. By focusing specifically on international graduate students, we get a narrower, but important contribution in further understanding these experiences as mitigated by inequity.

Methodology

Critical Framework

This study employed a critical thematic analysis framework, guided by the critical thematic analysis (CTA) methodology presented by Lawless and Chen (2019). Lawless and Chen

(2019) created a framework for critical thematic analysis which ultimately allows researchers to thematically analyze qualitative data with a "critical agenda", or understand the marginalization of populations, and the erasure of experiences. In order to approach the data with this framework in mind, Lawless and Chen note that critical researchers must include pertinent questions including, "How are everyday discourses enabled and constrained by social systems, dominant ideologies, and power relations?" and "How do macro-and micro-level discourses, practices, and systems intersect and reproduce dominations and oppressions?" (p. 97).

A critical thematic analysis approach was prioritized to effectively capture and articulate the experiences of international graduate students, allowing their interviews to illuminate the inequities and challenges associated with pursuing studies as non-citizens in Canada. Furthermore, critical methodologies facilitate a careful exploration of inequality and privilege within the context of international higher education (Denzin et al., 2008; Diem et al., 2014).

Reflecting on these questions in my work, I consider how these larger systems, policies, and ideologies impact international higher education in Canada and consequently international students through analysis of their interviews. In the analysis, care is taken to not limit the research to only identifying the prevalent issues, but rather challenging them. Within this study, critical thematic analysis provided a framework for examining interview data on international students' experiences with inequity in Canada. Critical thematic analysis allows the researcher to uncover and understand some of the deeper societal issues and power imbalances that may influence participants' experiences. By prioritizing the exploration of the role of power and structural inequalities within the context of international higher education, critical thematic analysis was an ideal tool for gaining deeper insight on these phenomena and aligned well with the overarching theme of inequity in this research.

Furthermore, critical thematic analysis allowed me to critically engage with the narratives of international students, allowing for their testimonies to be more deeply understood within the current socio-political context that is driving international education. Given the complexity of experiences related to inequity, this approach can uncover discrete themes, patterns, and intersections that may not be included within a broader thematic analysis. Ultimately, applying critical thematic analysis to interview data on international students' experiences with inequity in Canada allowed me to explore important omissions, policy gaps, vulnerabilities, and inequities international students encounter as non-citizens and highlight particular marginalizations as framed by policy, practice, and power.

Participants and Setting

Thirteen international graduate students including 8 women and 5 men were recruited from a large English-speaking university in Quebec to participate in the study (22–45 years in age, M = 28.7 years, SD = 6.59). Participants were recruited through graduate student listservs, international student service provider listservs, and snowball sampling. Additionally, physical flyers were strategically posted on campus, targeting areas exclusive to graduate students. The recruitment process sought participants who had a diverse range of backgrounds and experiences (e.g. race, academic disciplines, level of studies, and time spent in Canada). As an intersectional lens is important for understanding student experience, this representation was imperative. Student demographic data is listed in Table 3.

Student nationalities were comprised of a range of countries including: Afghanistan, Brazil, China, Ghana, India, Nigeria, Peru, Sri Lanka, the United States, and a student with dual American/French citizenship. In addition to nationality, race was also collected as part of the demographic data to contribute to intersectional nuance in the analysis. Referred to as “data

siloing", often, race is omitted in the analysis of international student data (Buckner, 2021; Hutcheson, 2023). Of the 13 participants, 11 identified with racialized backgrounds within the Canadian context, while two of the students identified their background as White or European. To ensure a more representative sample of the international graduate student community, students from across academic disciplines were recruited including professional programs (e.g., Law, Dentistry, Medicine), the Sciences (e.g., Engineering, Chemistry, Mathematics), and the Social Sciences/Humanities (e.g., Education, Languages, Arts). The recruitment strategy also targeted multiple levels of study including PhD programs, master's thesis, and master's non-thesis. To maintain student anonymity, the academic disciplines are defined by the broader disciplines. I also recruited students at different points of their program (e.g., first year, mid-program, recently completed), and students who started to program at different points during the pandemic (e.g. students who started pre-pandemic, during the pandemic with the introduction of virtual classes, and students who started in fall 2022 when the university resumed pre-pandemic activities). Students were compensated with $15 gift cards for their participation.

Table 3

International Graduate Student Participant Demographic Data

Pseudonym	Age	Country	Gender	Race	Program Type	Level of Study
Abe	25	India	M	South Asian (South Asian descent, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean, etc.);	Sciences	PhD
Alice	22	China	F	East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent)	Sciences	Master's non thesis
Desirée	25	Ghana	F	White (European descent); Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent)	Professional	Master's non thesis
Dolly	31	India	F	South Asian (South Asian descent, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean, etc.)	Humanities	PhD
Florence	24	China	F	East Asian (Chinese, Korean, Japanese, Taiwanese descent)	Humanities	Master's non thesis
Joe	24	United States/	M	White (European descent);	Professional	Professional

		France				
John	35	Nigeria	M	Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent)	Sciences	PhD
Lucy	35	Peru	F	Latino (Latin American, Hispanic descent);	Humanities	Master's non thesis
Melissa	23	Brazil	F	Latino (Latin American, Hispanic descent);White (European descent)	Humanities	Master's thesis
Sahar	32	Afghanistan	F	Middle Eastern (Arab, Persian, West Asian descent, e.g. Afghan, Egyptian, Iranian, etc.)	Humanities	PhD
Sarah	25	Sri Lanka	F	South Asian (South Asian descent, Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan, Indo-Caribbean, etc.)	Humanities	Master's thesis
Wally	45	Nigeria	M	Black (African, Afro-Caribbean, African-Canadian descent)	Professional	PhD
Xavier	30	USA	M	White (European descent)	Sciences	PhD

The Interviews

All student interviews were conducted online via my institution's Microsoft Teams platform and recorded with audio and video to facilitate transcription for analysis. Using a semi-structured interview format allowed for structure with the added flexibility to follow-up on statements, gain additional clarity, and leave space for particularities in individual narratives. Students were asked questions centring on 4 main areas (Appendix C). Interviews began with receiving informed consent from the participants, verifying students' demographic data, and building rapport before continuing with the interview. Students were also given the agency to choose the pseudonym they would like to use. The second section involved general inquiries about life as an international student at the specific university of study, in Quebec, and in Canada. Participants were asked about their likes and dislikes of being an international student, along with their perception of the greatest challenges encountered as an international student. The subsequent section focused on framing participants' experiences within the context of the pandemic, particularly exploring perceptions of equity and inequity. More specifically, students

were prompted to reflect on the fairness of their treatment compared to Canadian students. Finally, students were asked about social protections, whether they accessed services during the pandemic, what factors facilitated or impeded access to these services. Participants were asked to share sources of support during the pandemic and identify what services would have been advantageous during the pandemic.

Analysis

As guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006; 2021) process for thematic analysis and Lawless and Chen's (2019) framework for critical thematic analysis, the analysis consisted of six phases or steps: becoming familiar with the data, generating codes and coding data, reviewing and revising codes, "theming" the codes, revising themes, and writing the report in keeping with a critical theoretical framework.

Step One: Familiarization With Data

During the interviews, notes were taken to highlight initial impressions and emphasize key points. Following the completion of interviews, transcripts were auto-generated, and reviewed for accuracy and errors. Transcripts, in conjunction with interview memos were read and reread, with further notation of key insights, ensuring prolonged exposure to the data.
I would like to clarify that it was important to keep the transcript as close to the original speakers' words as possible. However, for readability, repeated words and false starts were removed. Within the context of this research, it was important to honour what students were saying and not focus on the "correctness" of what students were saying. Braun and Clarke (2013) caution against "correct" grammar (slide 10). In addition to transcriptions, non-verbal cues that may indicate affect were also documented (e.g., shaking head, laughing, etc.). It was also important for me to not see the transcripts as disembodied words and demographic data. Because

of the importance of capturing experiences, greater insight to emotions associated with those experiences was important. I created biographies for each student, identifying key statements for reference (sample biography available in Appendix D).

Step Two: Generate Codes and Code Data

Using deductive analysis, or top-down approach as a point of departure for analysis, I created a priori codes (sample codes include: health insurance, housing, financial support, study permit, and funding) from prevalent themes established from a critical policy analysis of barriers impacting international students during the COVID-19 pandemic (Hutcheson, 2024). Using the qualitative analysis software Quirkos, transcripts were coded according to these prescribed a priori codes.

Step Three: Reviewing Codes, and Adding New Codes

While deductive analysis was used as a starting point, Braun and Clarke (2021) highlighted that inductive strategies can be paired with deductive analysis. The deductive analysis at step two provided focus, while the inductive approach at step three allowed for greater understanding of the data without forcing it into conventions as established by the initial deduction. This step ultimately allowed emergent codes not obvious at the outset of data analysis to be applied to interview transcripts. Newer emergent codes included, but were not limited to: microaggressions, waiting, comparison to other international students, and getting one's money's worth.

Step Four: "Theming" the Codes

After reviewing the coded interviews, initial themes were constructed, and shared meaning was identified through the interview transcripts. Using Lawless and Chen's (2019) interpretation of "repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness" (Owen, 1984), the most salient themes

were parsed out, reflecting on how these themes also fit within a wider rhetoric of the context of international higher education. Coded excerpts from transcripts were systematically collated by theme after identifying areas of convergence. A benefit of Quirkos is the ability to physically cluster themes. By moving related themes in space, I was able to more clearly see the connections.

Step Five: Revising, Interpreting, and Defining Themes

An additional review of the themes afforded the opportunity to refine, collapse, and separate them. Through this iterative process, themes were defined, finalized, and incorporated into a thematic map presented in the results below. Here, I was able to provide more description and depth to how I operationalized and understood the themes. In addition to the final description of these themes, connections were established between the themes, identifying how one theme may relate to, reinforce, or correspond to another. The analysis yielded nine related themes centering on: the labour of bureaucracy, the conditionality of status, access to social protections, information accessibility, status-based omissions, financial precarity, economic objectification, the role of race and racism, and international students at intersections. By analyzing these relationships, I created a thematic map to understand inequity as a larger, interlinked framework.

Step Six: Writing the Report

The analysis culminated with writing the report. Here, in addition to interpreting the themes, interview discourses were interpreted within larger ideological frameworks. Given the nature of critical thematic analysis, international student testimonies were analyzed, emphasizing power, inequity, and marginalization. Furthermore, I unpacked how these themes fit into a larger rhetoric of monetization of higher education, neoliberalism, and other oppressive ideologies.

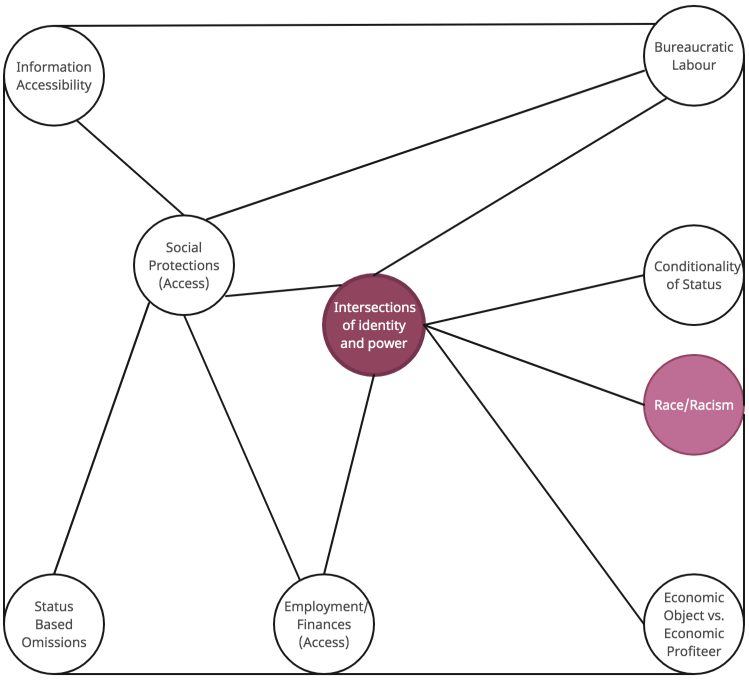
Results

The analysis of the 13 international graduate student interviews yielded 9 prevalent themes (Figure 2) around which students conceptualized fairness, inequity, and omissions as mediated by their international student status. The themes are inextricably connected and function to reinforce each other. The nodes represent individual themes. However, the lines between the themes show how each theme is linked or intersects. Of note, intersectionality, and race are highlighted to demonstrate their centrality and importance as themes. Below, further attention will be given to the relationships between themes and how they reinforce each other. Additionally, I incorporate how the themes manifested within my study, but also how literature and discourse can help us understand the themes in a broader context. These will be reinforced in the discussion for further engagement. Thematic results are described within the context of relevant literature for further depth.

- The labour of bureaucracy
- The conditionality of status
- Information accessibility
- Access to social protections
- Status-based omissions
- Employment and academic funding (access)
- Economic objects, profiteers, or consumers
- Race, racism, and discrimination
- Intersectionality and students at intersections

Figure 2

Thematic Map: International Students and Equity



The Labour of Bureaucracy and Legal Precarisation

Well before their arrival to Canada, there are a number of bureaucratic and administrative hurdles that international students must attend to, with a bulk of the bureaucracy centering on immigration (Hutcheson, 2024). Nearly all of the recounted experiences from participants were marked by bureaucratic labour. Bureaucratic labour within the context of this paper refers to the labour of completing, submitting, and following-up on paperwork to be compliant with the regulations set forth by the Canadian government, the Quebec provincial government, and requirements set forth by local institutions. Ultimately, bureaucratic labour encompasses the labour, time, energy, and administrative steps that are required to obtain the necessary paperwork to maintain legal status in Canada and overcome gatekeeping. Not exclusively limited to immigration, bureaucracy is present at multiple levels of services, extending to the step-by-step processes involved in getting healthcare, mental health service support, financial aid, and the red tape involved in accessing these services. The pandemic added new complexities in how students navigated paperwork. For example, students who applied and immigrated during the pandemic

were subjected to additional screening, to the financial detriment of the student (e.g., stays and quarantine hotels, researching whether their vaccinations would be accepted by the government).

Drawing from Branigan's (2007) work, the "third shift" refers to the additional bureaucratic labour that remains after earning income, caretaking, and supplemental household responsibilities. Branigan highlights the compounding energy that is required to ensure administrative paperwork is compliant in order to continue receiving welfare services. While international students may not necessarily have to complete paperwork for welfare services, Brangigan's research underscores how taxing paperwork becomes in tandem with other obligations of being a student. In addition to the typical pressures of pursuing graduate studies, compared to their Canadian peers, international students have the compounding burden of paperwork that can divert time away from their studies.

Joe signalled that this auxiliary labour and stress can put international students at a disadvantage, saying:

> You have to have some amount of reckoning, understanding of the fact that sort of different circumstances have arbitrarily put people at a disadvantage. Some of them have been put in place by the procedures themselves, I guess is what I'd also say. I think that in terms of the international student side of it, a lot of the bureaucracy of it does put students at a bit of a disadvantage.

Speaking to the cumulative impact of paperwork and the tendency tasks to add up, Sarah noted, "so just small things like that make it a bit harder to adapt to life in a new country." When searching for an apartment, Sarah found she had a higher burden of proof as landlords asked for supplemental documentation because she was not Canadian.

A domino effect emerges in the wake of bureaucratic processes—settling in Canada and studying legally requires many preceding successful steps, and delays at one step create compounding difficulties. Describing her study permit process, Desirée explained that while she made the deadline for applying for her study permit, she did not receive her paperwork until classes had already started. Without the study permit, she couldn't book her flight because of the possibility her study permit could be refused, and without being physically in Canada, Desirée couldn't secure an apartment in advance. When she finally received her permit, she started the year late, putting her at an academic disadvantage. Olanubi (2023) described this waiting period as "life on hold" where immigration bureaucracy results in "life delays, stress and emotional turmoil" (p. ii). Further explaining how the procedures differ for international students, Desirée said:

> It's everywhere you go, it's not so simple. Like you're asked, for example, for your health insurance card, and I don't have a health insurance card, and then it's okay, then I have to start explaining that I'm an international student, then I have to show my study permit. So it's a lot of paperwork, a lot of procedures, a lot of, "oh, okay". So you're not actually from here. Yeah, that's annoying.

Finding support to navigate bureaucracy was essential for some interviewees, with some students resorting to community and comedic relief to cope with bureaucratic labour. Seeking support on how other Brazilian students were withstanding immigration paperwork, Melissa joined a WhatsApp group which roughly translates to "those who suffered but now celebrate it" where students shared advice, knowledge, and difficulties obtaining their documents. Similarly, Joe and his family also found support from a WhatsApp group in their hope to find answers and support, emphasizing the necessity of communal assistance to cope with challenging

bureaucracy. Notably, students like Sahar with complicated immigration barriers due to the political situation of her home country sought the advice of lawyers at additional personal cost. This highlights the lengths to which some international students must go to overcome bureaucratic challenges and underscores the vital role of community support in navigating these intricate processes.

The Conditionality of Status

The bureaucratic labour required to navigate life in Canada also feeds into the *conditionality* of international student status. Awaiting her documents amidst unpredictable delays, Desirée ultimately had to start her semester without having her study permit in hand. While navigating essential paperwork, international students fear not being able to obtain the necessary paperwork to confirm their legal status (e.g., Olanubi, 2023). Furthermore, once the necessary paperwork is obtained, students like Sahar sometimes can worry about losing that status in the bureaucratic shuffle.

International student status is conditional*,* meaning maintaining one's status is not a given, nor is it assured (e.g., Goldring & Landolt, 2013; Hutcheson, 2024). Rather, as non-Canadian citizens, international students must obtain, and maintain criteria that ensure their eligibility to remain in the country legally. These conditions are vast and exist at the international, federal, provincial, local, and institutional levels, and involve having the necessary paperwork (e.g., Study Permit as well as the *Certificat d'acceptation du Quebec*), meeting academic requirements, and meeting conditions for work. This also means greater limitations from health-related factors. For example, if a student has a medical condition that precludes them from studying full-time, they may take a leave of absence to convalesce. However, during this

time, they will be ineligible to work and may be required to disclose why they took a medical leave of absence to immigration authorities.

Participants made a distinction between how the conditionality of their status distinguishes them from Canadian students, noting that while Canadian students may encounter difficulty, they don't have to worry about how their status impacts their place in their program, or ability to stay in the country. Joe described how this precarity can distract from learning outcomes, stating:

> Even if your situation is precarious like that, that can't possibly be good for learning outcomes that can't possibly be good for achievement or a good measure of what you're capable of, in your program versus, again, the Canadians that come in…they don't have to deal with the possibility that they can't actually study in their program by virtue of their status.

Sahar framed the absence of worry as a peacefulness she believes Canadian students may have, saying that:

> They can be a student in peace, or their study period is in peace. But for international students, you need to juggle both. You need to be a student, you need to get good grades, and then you need to worry about your finances, for example. And also like about the system in general, like if something happens to you as an international or as a Canadian, you will be, I think, treated differently.

As mentioned in the discussion on bureaucracy, there are domino effects entrenched in bureaucracy and status. Abe was aware that his status by way of visa was contingent on getting funding, paying tuition, and remaining registered. If one of those steps falters, he could not remain in Canada legally and described the fearfulness of this position, explaining:

> If the student loan office turned its back to me like that, I would have been devastated because my registration at the university would have been in jeopardy. And if my registration was in jeopardy, my visa would be annulled. My CAQ and the Visa are dependent on it…And what does that mean for me?

In addition to obtaining documentation, there is pressure for students to maintain that status, whether that is through renewing documents, or ensuring that paperwork remains up to date. Sahar was facing the stress of needing to renew an expiring passport, further complicated by the fact that her country's political situation made renewal nearly impossible. This also jeopardized her ability to renew her study permit which required a passport that is valid for the same length as the permit recounting that:

> I was really stressed, like my identity taken away from me. It's also that it'll disrupt my education. It'll disrupt my life. And I didn't know what to do and I was trying to like contact whoever I could talk to.

As described by Sahar and Abe, the stakes are high and wholly contingent on bureaucracy working as it should. For some students, bureaucratic hurdles are not merely administrative inconveniences; they pose a direct threat to their education, identity, and well-being. However, amongst differing home country situations, and factors outside the control of international students, the conditionality of their status highlights the vulnerability of their status in Canada.

Diminished Access to Social Protections

Another factor that contributes to the inequity of international students is access to resources, or social protections. Bilecen (2020) defines social protection as "tangible and intangible resources that students can mobilize against social risks, such as social exclusion and discrimination," explaining that access to these social protections became further constrained for

international students during the pandemic (p. 264). Access to social protections is a critical component of living a life with equity and dignity and essential for survival. As many students conceptualized what equity and fairness meant for them, the accessibility of these basic needs and resources repeatedly emerged. Certain social protections identified by students were access to healthcare/health insurance, housing, and mental health. I describe these protections in the following section.

Housing

Securing housing is a priority for many international students first arriving in Canada, however, this is not always a straightforward process. As previously noted, delays in paperwork can cause a domino effect: A late-arriving study permit processing leads to purchasing a later flight date, which ultimately leads to insufficient time to secure housing as observed in Desirée's case. This is exacerbated by the looming housing crisis in many Canadian cities, making affordable and last-minute housing difficult to obtain (Calder et al., 2016; Pottie-Sherman et al., 2023). Furthermore, the housing that is available is not guaranteed to be sufficient. A growing body of research spotlights housing precarity, inequity, and exploitations for international students in Canadian cities and signals the looming housing crisis as student numbers increase (e.g., Arumungam, 2023; Pottie-Sherman et al., 2023). Alice recounted her ordeal securing housing, from overpriced housing, potential biohazards, and couch surfing:

> Everywhere I can find [housing], and I also wander around the street, like walking around. Call everybody. Picture of every sign. I was so desperate. And the thing I find here is that the rent is really crazy and the places near [university] has been fully rented. So all that are left is basements and basements. 1200 a month. And the basement are not cheap. They're around 800 to more than a thousand. That's so crazy. I don't think I can

> live in a basement, so I stayed in the living room, sleeping on a sofa for more than a month.

Alice went on to describe issues with her most recent living situation including mold, broken taps, and leaks where she had to use containers to collect water. She was also made to purchase the furniture from the previous tenant, only to discover that the furniture she inherited was falling apart and that there was visible blood on the mattress. Alice discussed meeting other international students who had shared similar experiences of moving repeatedly due to insufficient housing. Living in these conditions were distracting Alice from her studies, highlighting the importance of basic needs being met to ensure academic success.

> So far I'm still trying to like, fix those things or move out. I don't know. I'm so exhausted moving, takes a lot of energy, time, money…and I'm not being able to catch up with my study because I deal with them. It takes all of my time.

Alice then shared that she had to purchase a mattress to meet her most essential needs, saying that she's "very busy with surviving". From a Maslovian perspective (1954), having these most essential needs met are the foundation for feeling safe, secure and able to thrive.

Beyond the state of housing, students faced discriminatory practices imposed by landlords such as requiring a larger security deposit because they were non-Canadian, or additional paperwork not typically required from renters because they could not provide proof of a Canadian renter's history or background check. Sarah and Joe were both asked for additional paperwork, which Joe described as a human rights violation. He also noted the exploitative practice of asking for security deposit, which is illegal to require from renters in Quebec. He believed that as an international student, the landlord relied on him not having this knowledge.

Healthcare Accessibility

In addition to the necessity of housing, healthcare is an essential service. Navigating healthcare and medical emergencies is stressful for most. However, some of those stressors for international students are compounded when the system is not obvious to newcomers and further amplified when the private health insurance provided by the academic institution falls short of the more comprehensive coverage provided to Canadians. Sarah noted the competition of resources for healthcare and the differences in the availability of resources available to Canadian students vs. international students, saying:

> But I was just thinking that there is a certain difficulty in accessing healthcare that I think is a big problem and I'm not sure if it affects Canadian students to the same level.
>
> I have heard complaints, but just not sure if it's worse for us because we are on a different insurance and there is, I guess it doesn't make sense to have separate services for international students, but just that the competition for resources plus the difficulties that we already have, make it worse.

Alice recounted feeling terrified and scared accessing healthcare, finding navigating a new system challenging, with multiple unsuccessful attempts at seeing a healthcare professional. Speaking with another international student, she realized that her health insurance was limited, which ultimately contributed to her difficulty seeking medical care. Alice explained that she will have a third attempt to finally see a doctor, which she hopes will be successful. Facing a lack of clarity on the COVID-19 regulations in Canada, and what access Alice had to vaccinations due to unclear and inconsistent language around vaccine rollout and accessibility for non-Canadians, further demonstrated disparities in healthcare which are contingent on status. Sahar discussed the extra burden of having to pay for healthcare amidst the uncertainty if services will be covered, highlighting the paradox of paying money for comparatively less services. She posited that the

fear of a surprise bill may encourage international students to hold off on treatment. Some participants only found out about the limitations of their health insurance when seeking treatment for illness.

Challenges in accessing the healthcare system can delay much-needed treatment. Lucy framed negative reflections on the healthcare system for foreigners, recounting how her friend, another international student, struggled to get a cancer diagnosis in Canada and then waited longer to receive chemotherapy:

> …..she was constantly going to the hospital and nobody cared about her. Take this and go home, take this and go home. And until one day she couldn't even stand up. So that's how they found out. So it I think my, my experience was kinda, kinda special in the way because I had to see all the good and bad of Canada within the same year.

Timely and accessible healthcare is a serious issue. While all students in attendance are required to have healthcare, accessibility can differ dramatically between the public healthcare system and *Regie de l'assurance maladie du Québec RAMQ* (RAMQ) that international students do not have access to and the private health insurance they are required to buy into. For example, Xavier, who had broken a bone also needed to receive healthcare, explaining that because of his international student insurance, he was required to pay for treatment up front and wait to be reimbursed from insurance. In this format, international students must be prepared to pay out of pocket and have enough disposable income to await compensation. Sahar also spoke to this additional financial burden on international students with limited health insurance coverage, discussing how caution must be exercised in accessing services, or traveling out of the small coverage network as students risk being supposed with a large bill when the financial pressure is already great for many.

Dealing with unexpected health emergencies can be stressful and costly. Sarah explained that while healthcare access could be difficult for Canadians as well, as an international student she had difficulty getting timely healthcare even during emergency situations. Sahar, who sought services found herself in a loop, bouncing between offices trying to get medical care:

> So we have [name of insurance] and for me, I then went through the booklet that they give you what's covered and all, but that's pretty vague. So I try to reach out to the wellness office. And then sometimes they refer you back to that vague booklet. And then if no, then they ask you to go to [name of insurance] or somewhere. And then [name of insurance] sometimes will not answer you. We'll ask you to send, you, send them an email and then so I would say that you never get the right answer from anywhere, and then you don't know until you face a situation.

When trying to access social protections, the burden can often be on the student to find out the different steps and who does what amid conflicting information. At times service providers aren't sure how to handle those cases that are unique to international students (Zhao & Bhuyan, 2023). As aforementioned, for international students much of this specific access to resources is conditional as an international student. Desirée discussed being caught in the middle of losing her health insurance as she transitioned from student to post-graduation worker, but also lacked the support to navigate these changes:

> …I don't have any support to navigate me. Like my student's insurance, for example, is done right now. It has expired and right now I'm just there. There is no support system.

Information Accessibility

In Desirée's search for assistance and information required to navigate access to social protections, she raised an important point: the quality and accessibility of information for

international students. Whether a new, returning, or transitioning-to-the-workforce international student, there are many new processes that are required, ranging from applying for funding, navigating healthcare, being up to date with the newest rules and regulations around COVID, and more. Furthermore, there are very specific protocols for funding (such as eligibility with international student status).

Based on student responses, international students are frequently not given all of the requisite information specific to their immigration status. Consequently, there is significant labour on their end to ensure that they have the correct information. Furthermore, because certain service providers are not used to assisting international students, or may be uncertain of the particularities relevant to their status (e.g., eligibility, assisting students who don't have RAMQ), students may receive incorrect information. Participants found themselves bouncing between resources offices, platforms, and links, and having to find information pertinent to their immigration status and expressed the desire for a more streamlined system to gain important information. Like with bureaucratic labour, this additional information-seeking adds to the stressors of being a successful graduate student. Incorrect information not only impacts the timeliness of services but also leads to the misallocation of time and resources on tasks for which they are ineligible. Participants stressed the need for a clearer, more user-friendly system to alleviate these stressors and ensure accurate information retrieval. There can also be more serious ramifications such as delayed or inadequate healthcare, jeopardized immigration status, and diminished financial support.

Assumed Knowledge and Canadian Students as the Status Quo

Desirée and Sahar shared experiences of service providers not knowing how to handle their particular cases (around healthcare, funding, etc.) because they are international, which

directly impacted the quality of information or care received. Sahar explained this important distinction between assumed knowledge and information that international students may or may not have access to as newcomers saying:

> Given a certain situation, if that can be communicated with international students too, because sometimes as a local, you know where you are and what to do, but as international you don't, and then that information is not available anywhere either. So at least like a source to give you those information that, okay, in this specific situation as international students you can do A, B, and C.

John described how administrators and faculty are not always aware of the limitations for funding non-Canadian students, encouraging students to apply for funding that may not be available to them. John recounted a situation where he made it to the final stage of a funding competition and was notified that he was the preferred candidate, only to be told that he would not be eligible for the award. The organization had not been aware that his nationality rendered him ineligible. Specifically, John shared:

> I think sometimes they're not aware because they were really, they were really apologetic. saying that they did not know that this is the case, this funding has to be directed towards permanent, resident or citizens. They didn't know until it was when they were getting close to, giving me the letter of what they call it, employment, so to speak. Yeah. So I'm sure a lot of these policies, sometimes they're very explicit, but sometimes they're implicit. So until you get to the stage where you need to know where you need to implement the policy, that's when you realize that, oh, there is this clause that you cannot use this for international students…And it's not their faults, it does come from the top.

International students can often find themselves stuck between policies, and the limited institutional knowledge about these policies. However, it can be difficult for students to have access to this information, particularly if not all stakeholders are privy to this information. Applying for fellowships is an intensive process. If the differential rules for non-Canadians had been explicit, this after the fact omission John experienced could have been avoided.

Onus of Responsibility is on the Students vs. Service Providers

Due to the complexity of some of these policies and procedures, the onus is often on international students to be informed, whether that's for self-advocacy or knowing how to proceed with administrative procedures. Sahar further explains that:

> I feel like there is a gap because as international students, we, or at least I found that you have to rely on yourself to find out a lot of things. They have webinars and all of that, but if you don't dig up information on your own, it's not going to be provided to you, which I think is, it makes sense, but I just think that there's gap there.

In addition to this gap, Sahar found that in her attempts to get assistance during a time of political turmoil in her country, she felt administrators going through the motions of handing her resources that didn't correspond to specific answers. This perspective further illuminates the gap that students run into between their knowledge, and the assumed knowledge many service providers believe international students have or should have. Ultimately, the onus is placed on the students to determine the correct and relevant information for themselves. However, there is a major fault here: International students are required to have all of the relevant information to advocate for themselves, but they are also confronted with deficit narratives, or the belief that individuals from other cultures are in some way deficient on the basis of their Otherness

(Surtees, 2019). In interviews, Sahar and Alice both explained their confrontations with deficit narratives, with Alice disclosing:

> And I wish I could be a Canadian, so I don't have problem with language, so I don't have problem with renting or I don't have problem with cultural because things, the way we do things here is very different comparing to where I came from and I have to constantly ask, what should I do? Like people would look at me and think I'm an idiot, but then I will explain, I just got here.

COVID was a challenging time globally. For international students traveling in uncertain times, there was a particular unease. From new immigration and quarantine procedures, understanding what the vaccination schedule would look like in a new place, and more simply, existing in and navigating a new city during the pandemic. Dolly explained:

> And also for a student who was new to university, COVID brought additional challenges to international students because they were new to country, new to province new to university, new to entire university system. And online, everyone was figuring out a lot of things, so there were not much support system where you can take students like through and through.

Echoing these new challenges, Alice also discussed lack of transparency over the ever-changing procedures, but not finding a helpful centralized way to understand vaccinations, quarantine procedures, and other pandemic-related restrictions as they related to her status.

Status-Based Omissions

Thus far, I shared how international student status impacted the degree to which students could participate in certain opportunities and be eligible for certain social protections (e.g., funding, employment, healthcare). In addition to these eligibility-based omissions, students also

noted times where they were forgotten about in respect to policy rhetoric, or where a policy lacked clarity on how it specifically applied to international students, but ultimately had consequences for them. During the pandemic, there was frequent rhetoric on the news and social media about doing what's best for public interest to keep people safe, emphasizing the need to protect those who are most vulnerable in Canadian society (Hutcheson, 2024; Patel, 2020). Often this language was framed within the context of protecting Canadians. Referring to these early dialogues, Melissa recounted an experience in one of her classes where COVID-19 protocol documents were reviewed:

> And it was like a language of we Canadians, and we have to protect the Canadians and this is like very funny. I do understand that because they're talking like, but there are lots of people that are not Canadian here. It seems weird. It felt really yeah, we don't want you here, please. But we want your money for the tuition. So it was very weird.

Whether intended or not, this language centering on protecting Canadians proved exclusionary to international students and other immigrants. However, Melissa's comments imply that she felt Canada does care about her in a very specific context, particularly when it comes to paying tuition dollars.

Normalized Exclusions

Students came to internalize and almost normalize some of these exclusions, preemptively assuming that certain social protections didn't apply to them based on status. Talking about omissions from services, Desirée mentioned that exclusion was the status quo as a non-Canadian, tempering her expectations saying, "So like I expected it, come in as a foreigner you're not going to be on the same level as everybody else. I dunno."

Participants described refraining from applying for certain funding packages that they were in fact eligible for because they had assumed it did not apply to them. Melissa, encouraged by her partner, ended up successfully applying for funding that she assumed, on the basis of prior experiences as an international student, she would not receive, explaining:

> Sometimes even like when you see the criteria and then the way people talk about certain things, it makes you even not apply. Being an international, I think being a student in general, I will not put that as an international, but because you don't, I think part of it is because you don't know a lot about the context as an international.

Government Pandemic Omissions

Abe, in addition to other students, cited the omissions as being squarely unfair, delineating the difference between home students and international students. He further explained the exclusionary nature of much of the government initiatives designed to lessen the impact of the pandemic saying:

> We didn't qualify for a lot of things that the government was trying to do. At the same time, we were paying a lot, to the university, to the government and in the form of taxes and everything. So felt a little bit like we were left out, of all the assistance that they could have given and that was not a very good situation to be in.

The pandemic had unexpected financial consequences for the world at large. To assist in countering some of the adverse consequences, the federal government issued funding packages including the CERB and the CESB. Many students, Canadians included, could not meet the criteria for CERB (Van Bussel et al., 2023; Kirby, 2024). To fill this eligibility gap in services, the CESB was created to give financial relief to students. However, international students were excluded in this supplemental package.

Due to the initial vagueness and the lack of accessibility of information when these services were first presented, there was confusion on eligibility. International students learned that they could get CERB, but there were many students who did not meet the work criteria (Van Bussel et al., 2023). Ultimately, CESB was less accessible than CERB. Abe noted this exclusion, stating that lack of access to these financial relief programs placed international students in a desperate situation, which put a toll on student mental health. Dolly shared a story about one of her international student friends who was erroneously given the CERB, believing they were eligible, but retroactively had to return the funding with financial consequences. Participants like Abe wondered why they were "left out" of these initiatives, particularly when they were paying disproportionately more than home students.

Employment and Academic Funding

COVID relief schemes like CESB and CERB were just one area of additional income for students. Employment and funding are a central concern for graduate students (Laframboise, 2023). However, for international students, due to the higher fees students pay, having adequate funding is critical for maintaining active student registration and eligibility. Steady employment is often a requisite for funding studies, but also for living with dignity (e.g., adequate housing, access to food and other securities). Funding and employment come with particular conditions for non-Canadians. Having non-Canadian status, students are eligible for a smaller proportion of funding opportunities. Up until 2022, international students were only permitted to work 20 hours off campus, hampering employment opportunities. In 2022, the government launched a pilot program where students were permitted to work off campus for unlimited hours due to a worker shortage. Originally set to expire on December 31st, 2023, this program permitting international students to work extended hours has been extended to April 30, 2024 (IRCC, 2024).

Students shared stressors associated with job scarcity, noting that while school is the priority for many students, the financial constraints associated with paying for education and cost of living, studies became secondary. John talked about the process, saying:

> You have to start looking for external award or you have to start thinking about where you want to work like teaching assistant research assistant to augment your living expenses and all of that, which takes the time out of your study or your research into doing other works and all of that, even though the work is really important to give your experience.

John's reflections are indicative of those competing needs of being a student, but also needing to survive.

Moreover, stressors for funding are further exacerbated for non-thesis students compared to thesis students. Master's non-thesis students Lucy and Alice made the distinction that compared to PhD students and thesis students, they had extremely limited sources of academic funding such as scholarships and fellowships. Speaking to the blanket emails sent to students from administrators, Melissa said it made her feel bad to constantly see funding offers that she was repeatedly ineligible for.

Students at all levels of education highlighted the difficulties of gaining employment, taking odd jobs, and cobbling together multiple positions to make enough income to pay for the cost of living. Lucy discussed her international student friend who worked at McDonalds, emphasizing the need to take any available job to cover elevated costs for international students. Dolly recounted her struggle upon arrival, taking months to find employment on campus as many faculty members preferred to hire students who already had teaching assistant experience or Canadian students.

For Sahar, she noted a number of barriers to working, including her French proficiency. She explained how factors can become compounded, exacerbating difficulties:

> And also like for me as an international student, with my limitation of the hours of work or my limitation of even accessing a job in Quebec because of the French language and everything, like my challenges were way more than someone who already overcome all of these or like being the local or know the language or a lot of other things.

Speaking to this limitation of work hours, Wally critiqued the government changing the policy on international students and their right to work longer hours off campus, noting that the need for students to have more flexibility to work longer off campus was always a need. However, the government only offered this option to exceed 20 hours when there was a labour shortage, with Wally stating that this was not created to give international students more financial opportunities, but to exploit more labour from the students.

Economic Objects, Economic Profiteers, or Consumers?

The financial impact of being an international student, from the high tuition fees, limited funding and economic opportunities, and omissions from government supports is unmistakable. Neoliberalism and the monetization of higher education are centred in these practices, which profoundly impact students (Changamire et al., 2022; Karram, 2013; Lomer, 2014).

International student recruitment is at the heart of Canada's economic strategy, a reality felt keenly by international students who note that at times they feel as if Canada's sole priority is financial, and their recruitment and tuition dollars are means to an end. However, despite paying more, students identified the frustration of paying more for less as Canadian students are prioritized for funding. This disparity can make students feel as if the only perceived value they bring to the institution and to Canada is financial, essentially objectifying them. Lomer (2014)

describes this objectification of students, stating that international students have ultimately been characterized as "economic objects" or the dehumanizing rhetoric of international students existing for the profitability of institutions.

In the media and public opinion, international students have often been criticized as the financial elite, as evidenced by memes depicting caricatures of rich international students (e.g., Nagesh, 2018). There is a prevailing belief that they are single handedly responsible for inflation and the housing crisis across Canadian cities (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2023). Despite these perceptions, the reality is that many international students struggle financially (Laframboise et al., 2023; World Education Services, 2019), including participants included in the study. Participants like Wally felt that they had been inaccurately perceived as trying to take advantage of the system, placing students at the centre of a strong dichotomy: being perceived as economic objects, for the profitability of Canada, but also as economic profiteers, here in Canada to obtain and exploit its resources. Additionally, students wonder why they are paying more tuition, for objectively fewer services, despite the value they bring as students and their economic contributions.

International Students as Profiteers

Referring to the public discourse of international students, Wally discussed perceptions of international students based on their depiction as profiteers, or the belief that international students come to Canada to profit off the system, and use Canadian resources. He countered these depictions, speaking to the ways in which international students enrich Canada:

> There's this construction that is, I don't know, the college, maybe the public discourse of international students that they're just coming here to what, to raid on our economy to come and not leave or something like that. I guess that, I think that perspective, that

> representation is wrong because if look at or consider I think [name of institution] has 12,000 international students. These international are actually bringing in something economy, knowledge, and everything like that. And they're not gonna be sitting, they're not gonna be living off charity.

The perception of international students as profiteers who are siphoning off resources from Canada at large runs counter to their testimonies detailing limited access to resources stemming from status-based omissions such as access to healthcare and pandemic-related financial relief. Furthermore, for the resources that are available, students describe a competitive environment for already limited resources compared to their Canadian counterparts. Linking back to the conditionality of status and the limited privileges of international students and access to resources, Sahar had felt that she had needed to get what she could out of the university because of the limitations on what it has offered her, stating:

> There is no assurance for you, there is no guarantee for you. You are just there to, to pay the money and then get whatever you can and get out of the institution. And I think that's that's something that bothers you as a person, as an international student.

She spoke to how the financial trade-off is feeling the need to get in and get out with what you can, as the services are not commensurate with the tuition that is paid. At times because of this disparity in what is paid vs. what is received, students can feel that their importance has been reduced exclusively to their financial contributions rather than their broader contributions.

International Students as Economic Objects and Consumers

In Canada's strategy for economic prosperity, interviewed students were aware of their role within this strategy. Some students referred to how others see them as "money machines", or identifying how their contribution to campus is seen as financial instead of human was a salient

point for some students. Lucy expressed frustration at institutions "making lots of money out of us," critiquing the income that universities get from international student fees, and the cheap labour. Reflecting on her friend who works for McDonald's and minimum wage jobs that international students can take, she believed that international graduate students need more as they are more likely to have responsibilities (e.g., family). Speaking directly to the objectification of these students, Sarah said:

> I've also come across situations where people have assumed that international students, including me, are here just for the money. So, I feel like that fee structure reduces the importance that we bring as scholars, and we are seen as just like money machines by some people.

Students bring so much more than the financial contributions and this economic object view is reductivist. Students in the study asked to be seen as more: as scholars, members of the community, and as equals.

Within Canada's internationalization strategy, international students are critical for higher education's survival. Countrywide, institutions have "branded" themselves to be desirable study destinations for students abroad. However, if Canada is a brand and students at the institution are paying for the brand, are they consumers?

Students as Consumers? Paying More for Less?

Speaking to their large financial contributions that come from elevated international student tuition rates, students noted the paradox where they felt at times they were paying more for less. An important distinction occurred for students taking courses during the pandemic, particularly for those who started their university studies when distance learning was required. This disparity was exacerbated by tuition rates increasing, yet taking courses online during the

pandemic and receiving limited services. Lucy expressed frustrations around paying for online courses that appear less effective than in-person classes as a student who has higher tuition fees. Abe highlighted this disparity in economic contributions vs. access to subsequent resources during the pandemic, reporting:

> We're contributing to [name of university's] coffers and we contribute, like when we work in the university, we are paying our taxes as well. So we are contributing to things, and yet, like it felt like we were left to try like that, like at least the new international, like the students which came in 2019 didn't qualify for any of the assistance.

Abe's commentary is helpful in demonstrating tensions between the financial contributions to the institution's "coffers" while not receiving reciprocal support from these coffers.

Under the lens of neoliberalism within the context of international education, students are courted and recruited to come study in Canada, and are treated as consumers within this ideology. However, if international students are consumers, are their consumer needs being met, considering what has been paid in tuition fees? Speaking to the pandemic and the disproportionate impact it has had on students, students saw this from the perspective of equity: They would like to receive resources, supports, and care that are proportionate with their financial contributions. Sarah explained:

> So I think that's an outcome of the pandemic, and I feel like it affects international students disproportionately because we are paying so much more to be here. And with that payment, it's not that we're entitled to better services, just that we are entitled to what we paid for. And a lot of people aren't getting it. So like, when you see how much you pay and for what I'm not saying about the quality of education, but the services that you get is a little bit frustrating.

Florence echoed these sentiments, believing that international students should have equal access to resources, and that institutions want international students, not for the sake of having students, but rather because they want to profit.

Race, Racism, and Discrimination

From exploitative rental practices to access to resources, evidence provided in the previous section shows that non-Canadian status can impact how international students are interacted with, and race is another significant dimension that impacts this engagement. However, often within institutional rhetoric of "diversity", issues of race and racism for international students are often overlooked and unnamed (Beck, 2020; Buckner, 2021; Hernandez, 2021; Hutcheson, 2023). Despite this data siloing, where race conversations and data around race are desegregated from international students, for many students in this study, their race impacted their lives in Canada where they are racialized. Racialization is effectively a process of Othering international students by their race, subsequently leading to differential treatment (Foster, 2006; Hutcheson, 2023). Eleven of the 13 participants identified as non-White in the demographic data that was collected. This distribution is compelling in that most participants navigated this dual identity of racialized and non-citizen.

Race Entwined with International Student Status

Race is a social construct created by the social context one exists in, and international students navigate what it means to be racialized in a new context (Foster & Thomas, 2022; Hutcheson, 2023). Sarah, who identifies as South Asian, and was a student during the pandemic shared an example of how her international student status and racialized status are inexplicably intertwined, illuminating the impossibility of teasing those identities apart. Sarah reported microaggressions she experienced, and wondered if people were avoiding her, or moving away

from her in public spaces because she is foreign, racialized, or if people were exercising social distancing. In explaining these microaggressions, she explained that, “again, I guess I’m conflating being racialized with being an international student.”

Conversely, Joe, who identifies as White was also aware of how his race impacted his experience in Canada, believing that his Whiteness differentiated some of his experiences compared to other non-Canadian students, and that his race contributed to not encountering some of the inequities other international students faced. He believed that the BIPOC status of international students is more commonplace and indicative of most international student identities at the institution, stating:

> And I think when I say international, the first thing that comes to mind is like BIPOC individuals, because I don't think of Americans or white Americans as international students, but I'm made to realize that when I talk to like my classmates and they have the same well similar struggles, yeah.

Like Sarah, Joe also saw racialized identities as almost a de facto qualifier of being an international student.

Speaking to how others see him, Wally discussed terminology used to denote race, explaining how in Canada people use “Black” to describe him and other African students, but that he doesn’t identify as Black and doesn’t like that word to describe himself. He identifies as African and Nigerian, and preferred these words as they are more representative of his identity. This same phenomenon is discussed in Asante’s et al. 's (2016) publication that describes the process of African international students “becoming Black” when they immigrate to the United States and are consequently racialized within the North American context. Further nuanced understanding how international students perceive race and are racialized is critical for gaining

perspective in how racialized students perceive and are perceived. Perception greatly informs how students are interacted with, particularly in instances of racism experienced in Canada.

Racism, Discrimination, and Deficit Narratives

Dolly and Florence offered important insights into the complex intersectionality of racism and international student experiences in Canada while recounting racist encounters on public transit. For Dolly, who identifies as a South Asian woman from a marginalized group in her home country, she wondered about the ambiguity of each situation she encountered, assessing if the instance was racially motivated. Florence, who identifies as East Asian, discussed the fear she felt at nighttime when she was told during the pandemic something to the effect of "Go back to China" followed by expletives. Florence talked about how her family felt that discrimination and racism could impact her safety, preempting her that encountering discrimination in Canada was a possibility.

Students described learning about racism as a trial by fire moment, ultimately gaining understanding about racism within Canada through direct experience. These encounters were a formative and scary experience for some of the interviewed students. Dolly recounted:

> I was also scared initially because I was learning about racism here because I was experiencing it…I was on a bus and I was standing there and there was this White person who just came and kicked my grocery bag while getting down from the bus. So I was really shocked. And being in a different country, I was like, I don't know how to react on it…. You need to learn those racist patterns to understanding if the other person is discrimination…. So that was a challenge to learn that pattern of discrimination.

Like Florence, in addition to this altercation on the bus, Dolly also encountered verbal abuse from individuals telling her to "go back to your country," confirming to Dolly "that was a point

where I was being discriminated against on the basis of my color and these other patterns as well." Making sense of the grocery bag incident on the bus, she started to understand this as a racially driven moment. As an East Asian student, Florence's incident was also framed within the pandemic, where students from Asia were falsely characterized as propagators of the COVID-19 virus. Mittelmeier & Cockayne's (2022) analysis of Twitter data also identified the public blaming international students for COVID-19, and publicly posting racist rhetoric.

Students found that discrimination was not limited to encounters with strangers – it was evident in their Faculties and with service providers. Dolly spoke to some of the challenges she had finding employment and funding opportunities and observed a discrepancy between White students and racialized immigrants, or international students:

> Oh, I have seen all the White students basically being hired for a lot of things and repeatedly getting a lot of resources… And these other students I see, they're mostly I know that they're immigrants. They're non-White, so I see them struggling.

Unpacking these inequities with employment for racialized and non-racialized students is an important distinction. While many international students may struggle with employment due to particular administrative barriers, race adds an additional dimension. Understanding how race and international student status interact are important for acknowledging the multifaceted nature of their identities.

Beyond the Monolith: International Students at Intersections

At the centre of the thematic map in Figure 2 are intersections. Much of the research on international students focuses on their holistic experiences as a solitary body of students with identical experiences (e.g., Buckner et al., 2021; Heng, 2019; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023). However, the student interviews revealed a more complex relationship as there is no truly

universal, international student experience. The intricacies of these relationships are encompassed by an intersectional lens, or the idea of the body as a "meeting point" (Ahmed, 2007). Effectively, different identities meet and can subsequently impact how individuals are interacted with, marginalized, or access different resources and social protections.

As evidenced by participant testimonies, racialized identity is just one of these critical intersections that impact international student experiences. While there are some universals for international students in Canada and Quebec, such as requiring a valid study permit and a CAQ in order to maintain eligibility for study, individual experiences can differ dramatically. Often presented as a homogenous group, the student interviews offered insight into the ways their experiences may differ contingent on many factors including racialized identity, country of origin, socioeconomic status, and other intersectional facets. George Mwangi et al. (2018) emphasize the importance of an intersectional view to highlight these unique individual experiences and demonstrate how students can be further marginalized by these intersections. Conversely, students commented on factors that also facilitated their experiences. Joe explained the ways in which he encountered some comparative privileges with other international students in respect to whether he had encountered inequity:

> So I, for me personally, no. I don't, at least I don't think that I've directly had to deal with that [inequity]. And I think in part it's because in a lot of sort of respects, I am the easiest international student to possibly be in this kind of a program. All of the issues that I've had as an international student have mostly been perceptional, I think. But also I'm American. I speak French, I'm White. I come from a reasonably well off background. A lot of, I think sort of the equity problems that exist in [name of program] are not addressed at me.

Because Joe also has French citizenship, he was eligible for reduced tuition rates. While the majority of international students at this institution must often pay three times more than what Canadian graduate students pay (program dependent), those with French citizenship benefit from reduced fees. Furthermore, as an American citizen, he was able to validate his study permit at the border, allowing the flexibility of avoiding long wait times other students must encounter while waiting to obtain the permit online. He also qualified his race and socioeconomic status as a privilege.

Passport Power

Bureaucracy is often the first step and an integral part of one's international student journey. However, a student's passport country can largely dictate how complicated that process is and what additional structural barriers that may be encountered. Passport power was a recurrent theme for students. Referencing Joe's commentary on being American, he discussed how having American citizenship was a privilege for obtaining his study permit. Americans are able to receive their study permits at the Canadian border, while other international students must validate their documents online, which can lead to extended wait times. Also an American citizen, Xavier noted those complexities of not always feeling like an international student, benefitting from certain privileges such as a facilitated process for obtaining student visas due to his citizenship, explaining, "so in some ways it's almost like, oh, are we international students? And of course, yes, we are, but there is a little bit of a different experience." Further clarifying, Xavier explained that he assumed his American citizenship would provide him a similar experience as Canadian students. However, he realized that there were in fact distinctions between himself and Canadian students, rationalizing that "there's some kind of disorientation" when experiences don't align with the preconceived expectation that Canadians and Americans

are similar. He further explains that this American experience may feel different compared to other international students and considers this a learning experience.

Joe and Xavier discussed how their immigration processes might deviate from other students who require study permits due to their American citizenship. Their encounters are not purely perceptual – in Quebec, there are documented instances of passport discrimination, particularly for students from South Asia, and increasingly for students from African nations. Recently, more than 72 percent of study permits for students from African nations were refused in Quebec, prompting accusations of discrimination (IRCC, 2023). Responding to criticism around high refusals, the Canadian government released a statement clarifying that all applications are evaluated under the same criteria (IRCC, 2023). However, the government acknowledged that training may be required for decision-makers and stakeholders to mitigate unconscious bias. Given that these disparities continue to persist, the government requires more concerted practices to eliminate this bias.

This passport bias has a very real impact on the students whose permits are refused or delayed as they navigate immigration channels. Comparing Wally's experience as a racialized Nigerian international student to Joe's sheds light on these inequities. Wally named his additional wait time as an inequity, elaborating that he feels that the longer wait times are due to the additional scrutiny of coming from an African country, hypothesizing that the government thinks, "you're from Africa and you can probably just want to disappear through system and we don't want to." He further clarified that "the gap is amazingly wide" and that African visas are not considered the way that American or French students are processed. In addition to the wait times experienced for his study permit, at the time of the interview, Wally was still waiting to be reunited with his family whose visas had been denied for entry into Canada. Students who

require visas to travel also receive fewer academic opportunities. Graduate students routinely travel for conferences, fellowships, speaking engagements, and other research opportunities. These are experiences that contribute to whether students are likely to be hired or receive funding that is often contingent on the length and diversity of one's CV.

Mirroring Wally's concerns of being targeted for differential immigration treatment based on his nationality, Sahar signaled systemic discrimination, saying, "I think I feel discriminated because of the country I'm coming from. Afghanistan is on the, I think bottom of the list on all of the countries. When you're applying for the visa, you are not even sure if you will get the visa."

The passport index, which ranks international passports based on the number of countries students can travel to shows that passport holders from Bangladesh, Yemen, Pakistan, Somalia, Iraq, Syria, and Afghanistan currently have the lowest passport power, resulting in structural barriers to obtaining the requisite documentation for study. In addition, passport power, like the conditionality of status is not always a given as geopolitical tensions ebb and flow between Canada and other nations. Most recently, Indian students had been discouraged from studying in Canada due to a diplomatic breakdown between the two countries (Friesen, 2023). A Canada-based advocacy group, International Students Overcoming War also acknowledges the additional challenges international students face when they originate from countries under conflict (ISOW, 2021). Sahar, whose country is experiencing conflict, discussed the administrative barriers of renewing documents when the administrative offices in your home country are impossible to access. From a mobility justice perspective, Brunner (2022) touches on how bodies are controlled and limited within the respect of national borders and that these restrictions can be applied differentially, particularly around race. The need to explore different facets such as racism within the context of immigration remains paramount.

Discussion

A group of international graduate students studying in Quebec, Canada was asked to describe how they experienced and perceived fairness and inequity as mitigated by their non-citizen status. Ultimately, this study worked to identify the ways that international graduate students have been marginalized by policies, practices, ideology, and societal perceptions during their studies. Specifically, student perspectives were analyzed to show how inequity manifested for them, to understand fairness and unfairness from their perspective, and to demonstrate how these issues of equity function within the wider landscape of prominent policy that shape higher education within Quebec and Canada. Due to the timing of this research, these questions were contextualized by the COVID-19 pandemic. By allowing students to describe these inequities as framed by their experience compared to their Canadian peers, their testimonies demonstrate the ways in which they have been othered, marginalized, and impacted as international students.

As critical internationalization perspectives encourage research to move away from static, unidimensional depictions of student experiences (e.g., Heng, 2019; Lomer & Mittelmeier, 2023; Tran, 2016), this study instead uncovered a thematic network that demonstrates how one's international student status interacts with structures to impact outcomes and experiences with equity and fairness. These encounters and perceptions of inequity were further mediated by how one's intersectional identities impact one's place in a given society. This research sought to capture some more neglected areas in the field of research with international students to capture the inequities students faced by students and explore these inequities as systemic, embedded in policy and structures, rather than isolated incidents. Furthermore, this research works to counter research encouraging deficit perspectives of international students, or the belief that these negative encounters are a product of deficits possessed by the students by virtue of being foreign

or international, rather than larger systemic issues. Additionally, this work provides an alternative to research that prioritizes the adaptation and acculturation of these students in keeping with other critical scholars (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021; Heng, 2018; Madriaga & McCaig, 2022; Surtees, 2019).

By giving students space to discuss these inequities and corroborating across themes, the testimonies gain strength and momentum to uncover pervasive and systemic issues that comparatively impact their lives as international students. The research yielded 9 themes around which students conceptualize fairness, inequity, and omissions as mediated by their international student status:

- The labour of bureaucracy
- The conditionality of status
- Information accessibility
- Access to social protections
- Status-based omissions
- Employment and academic funding (access)
- Economic objects, profiteers, or consumers
- Race, racism and discrimination
- Intersectionality and students at intersections

Of importance, intersections of identity, or international graduate students' intersectional identity is found at the *center* of the thematic map. The ways in which students encounter the eight corresponding themes around inequity are ultimately mediated and impacted by these intersections, and further exploration of these intersections in the field of international education and research with international students is important going forward. It is helpful to be deliberate

with how we as researchers "slice" and think of these different intersections that may impact students (e.g., Coffey, 2021; Glass et al., 2022; Yao et al., 2019). As the field of research on or with international students leaves more room for critical nuance, countering the monolithic view of how international students are written about and how data on international students is collected is necessary moving forward. In looking at these intersections, this research allows confrontation of the elephant: that race matters for many students, yet remains an overlooked dimension in research with international students (Beck, 2020, Buckner et al., 2021, Hutcheson, 2023). Changamire (2022) asserts that academia "must be accountable for the differential of race on the experience of international students" (p. 519). Making a contribution to this limited area of research on racialized international students is a valuable component of these student interviews.

The critical thematic analysis demonstrated that themes from this research form a network where no one theme functions in isolation; it is a map of interconnected perceptions of inequity with wide-reaching effects. For example, students may have less access to funding and employment prospects because of their categorical status as international students (such as exclusionary policies or discrimination), and therefore may be more reliant on other social protections (e.g., government COVID-19 relief). A loop emerges where students who are reliant on these social protections that bolster basic needs have less access, but also have fewer opportunities that would diminish the need to access some of these social protections. However, a contradiction is exposed where international students are expected to give more to their institutions in the form of tuition to subsidize the cost of less public funding for institutions, but pay more as "economic objects" and assets who are key to Canada's internationalization strategy. Information accessibility also functions as an impediment to already limited resources where

students navigate conflicting information and additional labour to find information. Race is another critical layer that mediates student experiences with inequity (e.g., access to employment, ease of immigration) echoing the research of Changamire (2022), Coffey et al. (2020), George Mwangi et al. (2021), and Nurse (2019). These are just some ways in which the thematic map increases our understanding of how these systems of inequity impact the international student participants. In the following section, I describe main contributions gleaned from this novel study including insights on pandemic-related inequities (before, during, and after), novel perspectives on the paperwork of being an international student, and the importance of understanding race and nuanced intersections around access to equity. The manuscript provides a needed foil to acculturation rhetoric to demonstrate the systemic and structural barriers that impact access to equity. Finally, I demonstrate how these inequities intersect in a thematic network.

COVID-19: Inequity Reinforced or Repackaged?

While the undertaken research occurred against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, having international graduate student testimonies from those who started their studies during the pandemic, before the pandemic, and the first "normal" school year coming back, it is clear that although the pandemic functioned to exacerbate and spotlight some inequities, many of the systemic challenges existed before the pandemic and continue to persist after. This approach contributes novel and valuable knowledge on how the pandemic affected students. Most importantly we learnt that while the pandemic posed novel systemic challenges for students, inequities existed before the pandemic, persisted afterwards, and functioned to exacerbate existing inequities. At the beginning of data collection, I requested information on when students started their studies (e.g., pre-pandemic, during the pandemic, or fall 2023, as normal campus

activities resumed). My results reflected those of Fandino and Banerjee's (2022), whose analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on international graduate students and temporary residents found that the pandemic amplified inequity showing a disparity between temporary residents and Canadians in respect to access to social protections. Bilecen's (2020) commentary also highlighted inequities along the lines of access to social protections, border mobility, and emotional well-being. Inequity has been established across sectors including access to healthcare and vaccine rollouts, financial support, as well as housing security (Fandino & Banerjee, 2022; Zhao & Bhuyan, 2023). In my analysis, it became evident that students categorized their experiences similarly despite their starting points. Students' experiences with inequity were largely shaped and mediated by policy and inequitable access to resources, while COVID-19 interacted with policy to create new barriers such as the additional financial burden of quarantine hotels for students needing to enter Canada, limited employment, and precarious immigration. This research demonstrated greater insight into the barriers to accessing services when one navigates these services as a non-citizen.

As Melissa reflected on Trudeau's COVID-19 messaging that Canadians will be protected, and will receive vaccinations, she called attention to the explicit omission of protecting international students. Trudeau's message was aimed at Canadians designed to comfort them during a period of crisis, but showed how international students would be left out of relief from social protections reserved for Canadians and permanent residents. However, this rhetoric and practice is not unique to the pandemic—international students have been routinely denied social protections prior COVID-19 (Bilicen, 2020; Coffey, 2021; Hutcheson, 2024). The study revealed how pre-pandemic students struggled to find funding, employment, and healthcare. However, convoluted messaging on pandemic-related supports left students in the

dark, particularly for those who arrived during the pandemic. Students like Sarah explain that despite paying more for tuition, she did not feel entitled to better services, but rather the *same* services as her Canadian peers.

Another novel finding was that access to healthcare had very clear consequences for non-citizens during the pandemic. Students like Alice who were new to Canada during the pandemic weren't certain what their access to vaccinations would look like or what the requirements were. This uncertainty extends to healthcare workers. Zhao and Bhuyan (2023) show that healthcare workers and social workers can lack adequate training to work with members of the non-resident community. This became evident during the vaccination rollout where there was confusion on who could receive vaccinations and when. While vaccines were public service, there were misunderstandings reconciling a public service vaccine rollout with international students who navigate healthcare privately through additional non-provincial health insurance. In Desirée's interview, she often found herself explaining her international student status and private insurance to healthcare service providers, showing a gap between services students are entitled to (during the pandemic and otherwise) and service providers' understandings of these rights. It is evident that outside of global crises, international students encounter inequity. But the pandemic supported that this inequity continues to manifest in new ways, particularly in the healthcare sector. More research is warranted to better understand healthcare navigation and healthcare inequity for this population.

Systemic Issues at Work: Neoliberalism and Power

Before engaging in this research, I completed a critical analysis of policies impacting international students in Canada during the pandemic (Hutcheson, 2024). One of the major threads of this analysis was the monetization of higher education and the consequences of

prioritizing profit over the human needs and lived experiences of students including explicit omissions to support services as well as concern for how the pandemic will impact the prosperity of institutions. International higher education as an industry replicates inequity (George Mwangi & Yao, 2021), which was ultimately reflected in the interviews with the international graduate students. As highlighted in the preceding critical policy analysis, salient in framing student perceptions of inequity, are neoliberalism and the monetization of higher education. The relationship higher education has with international students can feel largely extractive to students, despite the enrichment these students inherently bring to Canada. Students are still required to participate in this economy when they study in the country, paying more for less compared to Canadian peers, as framed by their interviews.

The economic motivators of internationalization are clear, and there is growing attention on the resulting financial struggle of students. However, research is missing opportunities to explicitly hear how students are not only impacted by the monetization of international higher education, but how they have internalized the rhetoric of becoming objectified as economic objects and "money machines". This study illuminated these internalizations. Some of the interviewed students demonstrated awareness of their key role in Canada's internationalization strategy. Sarah discussed how these neoliberal perspectives reduce her value as a scholar and that she is effectively a "money machine". Similarly, Sahar said she has felt exploited and therefore would get what she needed out of the institution. Rhetoric has framed students as profiteers, which students are keenly cognizant of. Wally felt that international students have been unfairly depicted as those who want to raid the economy, and that this perception is only magnified as a student coming from an African nation. Changamire's (2022) analysis similarly showed how African international students felt like faculty members perceived them as being "saved" from a

less-fortunate system. Well-documented is the impact of neoliberalism on international higher education, but equally important is to highlight students' perceptions of exploitation and their sentiment to counter the ways in which they are perceived. While anecdotally and within catchy headlines, the term "cash cow" has been used to objectify students, hearing their perceptions on how this translates to their perception of equity and fairness are novel and telling.

This research identifies not only the systemic "isms" and ideological barriers, but also structural barriers that contribute to the inequity of international students. George Mwangi & Yao (2021) also advocate for shifting focus on structural inequalities in pursuit of an "equity driven lens" (p. 549). Many of the reported inequities are structural in nature: from difficulty and disempowerment of navigating bureaucracy, immigration barriers, limited access to social protections, and the conditionality of student status. The power of policies and practices that have become commonplace in the internationalization of higher education has had an obvious impact on students. Due to the conditionality of status, there is a clear power imbalance between students and the institutions that *permit* students to study in Canada and Quebec.

The Labour of Defining and Understanding Bureaucratic Labour

Finding the language to describe the challenges of bureaucracy for international students took care. Not finding explicit terminology, I looked at a study in welfare services which identified *bureaucratic labour*, or the additional paperwork required to obtain services or maintain status (Branigan, 2007). Branigan qualified this additional labour as a "third shift". This bureaucracy is considered a fact and inevitability of life, particularly for international students, but the impact is less understood. In the analysis, I sought to adequately describe the emotional and physical time and labour needed for the requisite paperwork to arrive in Canada and maintain this status. This process and labour was an important dimension as many of the

interviewees framed their perception of fairness around this labour. While many stakeholders and scholars who engage with research on international students are well-aware of the visa requirements students face, further understanding on the depth, complexity, and impact of bureaucratic labour are not well-researched. As it stands, much of the scholarship on this immigration bureaucratic labour focuses on the bureaucracy that accompanies post-graduation immigration (e.g., Schmidt et al., 2023). However, with changing rules as dictated by national and provincial requirements, there is labour required with immigration compliance which can be further mediated by one's race, nationality, and passport power. Furthermore, bureaucratic delays can cause compounding issues such as study delays, increased financial burden, and stress. Considering bureaucracy is often a first point of departure for all international students, including those interviewed, there needs to be more research about this process and how it impacts students will enrich research in critical internationalization.

This study reveals a clear link between this bureaucratic labour, the *conditionality* of international student status, and power. Following acceptance to a university, students must meet a number of conditions, including the visas, work limitations, and more. Students discussed periods of uncertainty: wondering if their visas would arrive in time for the school year to start, or what renewal would look like when they need to receive documents from their home country in political turmoil. The consequences of this conditionality of status have been explored in "The Shadowy Business of International Education" (Hune-Brown, 2022). In this exposé, the exploitation of international institutions in Canada was explored documenting predatory behaviour from employers, immigration agents, and landlords. A main insight of my study is that visas, immigration, and the bureaucracy of being an international student cannot be described as simple tasks to check off the list. These tasks are labour with far-reaching consequences for

students, both mental and physical-from the constrained movement between borders to the mental fatigue involved in getting and maintaining status. Additionally, not all experiences with bureaucratic labour are equal: Students from countries including Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Brazil reported struggles with wait times. Further understanding the complexity of how the conditionality of status interacts with bureaucratic labour, power, and exploitation is essential.

Race, Intersectionality, and International Students

Throughout the course of this research, race became a significant emergent theme. Notably, interviewed students were not asked explicitly about race in terms of how they conceptualized fairness and equity as international students. Yet, despite this omission, this was a prominent theme conceptualizing how students framed inequity. Some students saw their race as a direct factor impacting how they navigated life in Canada, or qualified race as something they saw intrinsically tied to international student status. Other participants were trying to explain how race corresponded to international status, uncertain of whether microaggressions were a function of their race or rather their student status. One student identified how as a White international student, his experiences looked different than those of his racialized peers.

Despite this racial erasure that often happens in research and data (Beck, 2020, Buckner et al., 2021, Hutcheson 2023), a key takeaway from this research is that clear inequities exist for the international students I held interviews with. However, how students experienced, encountered, and perceived these inequities looked different. Race is a mediator of inequity and a compelling reason why race cannot and should not be a "non-issue". Interviewee Florence, a student from China disclosed her encounters with racism during the pandemic, including being told to go back home. Fandino & Banerjee (2022) made a further distinction in how racialized people and international students were differentially impacted during the pandemic through

discrimination, health outcomes and more. I confirm that my study results also support this, as racialized international students shared they were subjected to direct forms of racism and microaggressions, with students like Dolly and Sarah wondering if these incidents were happening because of the pandemic, racism, or both.

Unfortunately, despite Dolly's, Alice's, Sarah's, and Wally's explicit encounters with racism, institutions don't often have the dialogue to confront the racism encountered by non-Canadian students. International students appear in a "gray zone" where students aren't included into EDI frameworks and rhetoric (Buckner et al., 2022; Tavares, 2021). There are a number of reasons why race is omitted from rhetoric on international students including, data soiling, racial unspeakability, and the appeal of "diversity' (Hernandez, 2021; Hutcheson, 2023; Buckner et al., 2022). However, this study worked to meaningfully incorporate race within the analysis.

The mutually occurring racism and neoliberalism show the disadvantages of entering the labour market when racialized. Dolly reflected this in her interviewing, noting that faculty in her department seemed to privilege her White peers. This is echoed in Laframboise's (2023) analysis of international students' financial challenges which found that White international students were the group least likely to report financial problems and Ellis (2022) who found that South/Southeast Asian participants recounted delays of finding employment, relying on precarious low-wage jobs. Being inclusive, progressive, and welcoming on paper is ideal from a neoliberal marketing perspective. However, the university can reify "neoracist attitudes towards their abilities, needs, and socioeconomic statuses" (Changamire et al., 2022, p. 519).

Looking at Figure 2, and the context of this publication, race is one aspect of intersectional identity. As I made connections, pulled lines on the software, and mapped themes,

I realized the model only worked with intersectionality at the very centre. When recruiting for this study, students could be included by virtue of holding a study permit and being registered with the university as an international student, but this status means so many different things to students in terms of how they encounter and perceive inequity. For one student, international status is conflated with race, for others it means long uncertain waits for visas, while for others with American citizenship, it necessitated a drive to the border. No two students are the same and there is no one truth or singular experience. Countering perspectives of a "universal" international student experience found in existing research, as critiqued by Buckner et al. (2021), Heng (2019), Lomer et al., (2021), Lomer and Mittelmeier (2023), this research instead focused on the way that systems, structures, and policies have a differential impact on students. This basic understanding is a helpful point of departure for understanding some of the experiences of international students.

It is not lost on me that while emphasizing the need for an intersectional analysis, I strategically focused on race and nationality. However, in respect to equity, there are numerous factors and facets of intersectional identity that also merit attention. In my collaboration for the book, *Research with International Students*, I had the opportunity to work with international scholars who are equally dedicated to creating meaningful, impactful, fair and *better* research in our field which has too long focused on deficit frameworks, acculturation, and one-dimensional research on international students. In *Research with International Students*, Soorenian (2023) calls attention to the dearth of research on international students with disabilities, Zhang and Mittelmeier (2023) show the importance of gender, Muñoz-Garcia and Yu (2023) dissect the complicated nuance of social/economic class, and Nguyen et al., (2023) call for queering research on international students. Another important dimension is within cultural dimensions.

For example, Marom (2022) approaches intersectionality from within Indian culture, showing how the country's oppressive caste system has been replicated within Canada for Indian international students. Indian students from the historically oppressed "Dalit" caste encounter the same discriminatory practices, replicated in institutions and in interpersonal social relationships when they study and work in Canada. This speaks to a deeper need to confront homogenous views of Indian students and additional opportunities to add care when thinking of these intersectional dimensions. Ideally, future iterations of this work will include these important, overlooked areas of intersectionality and international students.

Recommendations and Final Thoughts

A shortcoming of research on international students within the context of international education is that it often focuses on the internationalization aspect, but not aspects of student marginalization (e.g., Tavares, 2021). Seeing the complexity in the way these areas reinforce each other is essential for our understanding of student experiences from a critical perspective. Hearing students frame their experience as a foil to their Canadian peers strengthens our understanding of international students and equity within the context of Canada and Quebec.

Systematically excluded from EDI rhetoric, this study clearly outlines why these students need to be included. The thematic map exposes numerous areas of inequity and how they are amplified for some students contingent on their intersecting identities. I suggest that institutions must audit how they interact with international students. For example, institutions should meaningfully incorporate international students into their EDI initiatives and examine the ways in which their interactions reinforce inequities. Specific recommendations could include: tailoring information to international students (e.g., eligibility for funding), assisting students as

they navigate bureaucratic barriers, and being deliberate about not replicating racist and discriminatory rhetoric in institutions.

Most evident from this research is the unequivocal need to care about, research, and understand the complex lives and experiences of international students. This research showed the incredibly varied encounters, highlighting how experiences can look different, even as students begin the bureaucracy in becoming an international student. Students have been unfairly conceptualized and stereotyped as a number of contradictions: cash cows when speaking to the ways international students support local institutions and economies, a "burden" to the system when seeking supports their Canadian peers receive freely, and other contradictions. Students have also been racialized, yelled at to go home, and subjected to other forms of discrimination. It is only fair to provide a more subtle and detailed view of students to counter some of this rhetoric sharing the incredibly varied stories of students. Despite these different intersections and perspectives, there is consensus that from a perspective of equity and fairness, interviewed students have perceived systemic inequities.

I conclude this paper with words from Wally, describing what he considers to have equity and fairness and what it means to him as an African international student:

> Yeah, I'm an African, but I'm a global citizen, I'm a human being...we probably speak the same language. [Equity] is opportunity, progress, freedom, pursuit of happiness. Whatever you have, you should be able to have that. Not because, you have a Canadian passport, you can't pursue this kind of happiness.

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Bridging Statement

Chapter 5 is an unpublished manuscript that conceptualized the ways in which international students perceive inequity and reflect on the concrete ways inequity manifests for international graduate students studying at an institution in Quebec. A key finding in this chapter is that race was a very impactful dimension in how these students understand inequity.

Participants described how they have been racialized within the Canadian context. One student discussed how she saw her racialized status and international student status as inextricably tied. Thinking about microaggressions that were reflected at her, she would often wonder if it was the result of being South Asian or being foreign. Another White international student understood his race through privilege, explaining that his encounters with inequity were influenced by the privilege of being White. One student saw race as a barrier for employment, sharing that she saw racialized international students as having less access to funding and resources in her department. Another student talked about how he does not identify as Black, but African, yet is perceived as Black through the process of racialization. Race is one element of intersectional identity, but it is significant within the scope of this research. Despite the clear importance of race and the impact it has on international students' identity and experiences with equity and marginalization, the subfield of research with international students requires deeper reflection on this importance.

Chapter 6 is a conceptual and theoretical piece in which I investigated how the subfield talks about race and international students in this research. My manuscript "Calling race into research with international students: Confronting omissions" was published in the book *Research With International Students: Critical Conceptual and Methodological Considerations.* This book was written in collaboration with the Research with International Students Working Group who

wanted to address key conceptual issues with the way in which research was conducted in our subfield. Our chapters offer novel insights, naming some of these prevalent issues. The publishing guidelines required publications of 3,000 words or less, hence the difference in length compared to the other manuscripts. However, within the word limit, there is a detailed presentation on race and research with international students.

Inspired by Beck's (2020) commentary on how race is treated as a "non-issue", I wanted to document how race impacts international students and map the ways in which this requires our attention as scholars. Frameworks like critical race theory, intersectionality, and critical internationalization provide scope for unpacking some of this nuance. I question the avoidance, and dancing around race, favouring language like "diversity" and "culture" over "race" and "racism". Furthermore, the chapter indicates that even if racism isn't named in everyday discourses around international students, as evidenced by Chapter 5's testimonies, it doesn't preclude racism from happening. The Chapter ends with best practices for researchers on how to meaningfully investigate the importance of race in their work.

CHAPTER 6: MANUSCRIPT 3

Calling Race into Research with International Students: Confronting Omissions

Hutcheson, S. (2023). Calling race into research with international students: Confronting omissions. In Mittelmeier, J.,Unkule, K., Lomer, S. (Eds.). *Research with international students: Critical, conceptual, and methodological considerations*. Routledge.

Abstract

Despite a boom in literature around international students in higher education and their experiences, discourse around international students often lacks specificity, particularly around race. Among the increasing international student population in Canada are international students who are racialized where they study. While international students are often lauded for the diversity they bring to campus, race is often omitted from the discourse. This is a major oversight as international students of colour are marginalized by not only international student status but also race. Understanding these intersections is a critical component in framing how racialized international students experience their destination countries of study. Failure to address the importance of race in research contributes to the erasure of these experiences, untailored resources of international students, and less impactful research. Using a critical lens, this chapter encourages stakeholders and researchers in international higher education to shift the ways in which they think about the intersections of race and international student status by (a) highlighting systemic racism encountered by international students, (b) examining representations of racialized international students in international higher education discourse and important omissions, and (c) demonstrating the need for meaningful, intersectional analysis on international student data.

Introduction

In 2014, Canada rebranded its internationalization strategy, urging international students to study in their safe, welcoming, and multicultural society (Government of Canada, 2019; Marcus, 2014). Despite its branding as a post-racial society, the reality is that not all international students receive a warm welcome at their destinations of study, particularly if they are racialized (Ghaffar, 2020). There are increasing dialogues around international students and racism, but this particular aspect of international students' experiences remains under-studied, in favour of broader rhetoric such as "diversity", "acculturation", "culture", and "adaptation" (Bista & Gaulee, 2017; Buckner et al., 2021; Liu, 2017). International students come to their study destinations from different countries, regions, and formative life experiences, but in using the blanket terminology of diversity and culture, the finer dimensions of intersectionality (Chapter 8) are missed.

Ahmed's (2007) perspective on intersectionality characterizes the body as a "meeting point" of identities, shaping how individuals perceive and are perceived. How these identities "meet" directly impact access to resources and marginalization. Race is a critical factor among the different elements that intersect, interact, and impact how international students experience their host country (George Mwangi et al., 2018). Often obscured by higher education's shaky notions of diversity, race is just one essential component to understanding and researching growing international student numbers globally. Through the work of scholars engaged in critical work in the subfield of international education, it is clear that racialized status can significantly impact how international students navigate life abroad (e.g., Beck, 2020; Liu, 2017; George Mwangi et al., 2018; George Mwangi, 2020). A "colour-blind" approach does nothing for the research subfield and functions to deny the encounters international students have with racism

(Liu, 2017). Furthermore, willfully or subconsciously ignoring race is a question of equity and justice, principles that should be important for all researchers in international higher education. This chapter provides a foundation for how we, as researchers, can conceptualize international students and race, beckoning for a reevaluation of how racial rhetoric has been driven, but also excluded in international higher education. Furthermore, it calls for a more complex understanding of the experiences of racialized students. It should be noted that I, the author of this chapter, am situated in Canada, which inevitably frames my perspective on the intricately connected subfield of international education.

Intersectionality is a unifying theme across many chapters in Section 3, demonstrating forgotten spaces where international higher education has yet to adequately carve out the different interlocking identities of international students. Despite best intentions, oftentimes dialogues on international students centre these students as a singular, monolithic entity, with universal and homogeneous experiences (Lomer et al., 2021).

This chapter highlights race as just one of the many factors that can mediate experience for international students and combats homogeneity discourses. Notions of how race is discussed in international higher education give way to the rhetoric of diversity and the fetishization of diversity in reference to international students (Chapter 1). These foundational arguments provide a basis for the central themes of this chapter: the systemic racism encountered by racialized international students, the racialization and Othering of international students, the representations of racialized international students in international higher education discourses, and important omissions that currently exist in research with international students.

Race and Racialization

Race is a social construct meaning conceptions of race are created by the society one exists in and interacts with (Foster & Thomas, 2022; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009). Foster and Thomas (2022) "recognize race, ethnicity, and racism as social, political, and historical processes" (p. 2). These real or imagined physical characteristics by which race is defined often lead to groups or individuals being targeted for differential treatment, which is the act of racialization (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009). The Ontario Human Rights Commission further defines racialization as "the process of social construction of race" (p. 11). The process component is significant in that there is an act of "becoming" Other. This is captured in Asante et al.'s (2016) article on how African immigrants become Black upon arrival to the United States. This phenomenon is further echoed in Zewolde (2020), who chronicles some of the overt racism encountered by Black African international students studying in the United Kingdom.

Delgado and Stefancic (2012) speak to the everyday "ordinary" nature of racism that defines Critical Race Theory (CRT). This definition is not to negate the severity of racism but rather to highlight how commonplace the occurrence of racism is in the spaces we inhabit. Critical Race Theory (CRT) offers understandings of how race functions to impact international students' experiences. In using a CRT framework, we better understand how race and internationalization collide. Yao et al. (2019) encourage the use of CRT to further interrogate the impact of racism on international students.

For the purpose of this chapter, I define racialized international students as those "who are marginalized by constructions of race within the host countries where they attend university" (Hutcheson, 2020, p. 192). Research often fails to consider how racialized status can impact

students' experiences in their countries of study. A local example in Quebec, Canada, saw racialized international students subjected to unannounced language testing to meet for immigration criteria ('Racialized international students', 2017). While Quebec hosts a number of international students from many nationalities, international students from India, China, and the Middle East were disproportionately impacted. Some scholars have been intentional in their work to explicitly name race as an important mediating factor, demonstrating a track record of systemic racism against international students globally, as well as self-reports from international students that they have encountered racism as international students in Canada (Ghaffar, 2020; Houshmand et al., 2014; Wei & Bunjun, 2020). Additionally, careful critical analyses have shown the marginalization international students encounter, from the objectification as cash cows in a neoliberal marketplace that values the financial value of international students, to the vulnerability of non-citizenship status (Marginson, 2012; Yao et al., 2019). Race adds an extra dimension to this marginalization. We know that there is not one universal international student experience, and a number of factors intersect to change what a student's life looks like outside their home country. However, current research often fails to capture these nuances. Changamire et al. (2022) pointedly implore those in academia to be deliberate about race, stating that "academia must be accountable for the differential impact of race on the experiences of students" (p. 519). Beck (2020, 5:55) echoes this sentiment, critiquing "how race becomes a non issue in internationalization" (see also Chapter 18).

Critical Considerations

One barrier to understanding how race and international student status interact is that we simply do not have data to bolster the research. Buckner (2021) signals the siloing of data on international students, distinguishing the difference between how international student data and

home student data are handled (Chapter 24). At some institutions, students can be counted in the diversity statistics of home students (as defined by that institution's conceptualizations of race) or they can be international, but students who are international and racialized cannot be identified within the data as both. To illustrate, an international student from Ghana who may be racialized as "Black" within the national context of where they are studying will not be counted as "Black" in the demographic data as a home student might be. This siloing contributes to the erasure of racialized international students on campus and an implicit understanding that race does not matter in respect to international students.

Talking About Race? Avoidance and Discomfort

Confronting discourses on race are often avoided as discomforting in international higher education research and higher education at large. Hernandez (2021) signals this "racial unspeakability" and "race muteness", adding the caveat that just because we do not talk about race does not preclude that racism is not happening. This discomfort translates to research and the sub-field of international education. Individuals and institutions avoid these dialogues for a number of reasons, including fear of blundering or misstep or, perhaps more nefariously, the inaccurate belief that international students are a homogeneous group, and, therefore, discussions of race are irrelevant (Auger-Dominguez, 2019; Lomer et al., 2021; Ravishankar, 2021). Far more palatable and approachable is the discourse of "diversity". In fact, international higher education loves performative diversity. Promotional brochures for institutions in Canada and the United States often strategically feature images of racialized students. These images are often paired with flowery language around the diversity of the student body and hand-picked vignettes describing the inclusivity of the institution (Buckner, 2021). This celebration of diversity is largely performative.

The Diversity Dance

In addition to this performative diversity, diversity as a construct has issues. Diversity is often vague and used as a catch-all to describe students who are visibly "Other". The use of "diversity" to describe students continues to create opacity in both research and practice. Surtees (2019) also pinpoints the cloudiness of labels in their critique of the broadly used term "international". Their research suggests that, often, "international" is used as a proxy for race and that in using the term "international" broadly, it may mask very specific instances of racism. Surtees notes that "seemingly neutral labels, such as 'international,' particularly when combined with racial categories, may be used to produce a host of negative or instrumental inferences and may mask race-based and language-based discrimination" (p. 52). The masking and obfuscation of race by intentionally or unintentionally employing codes and obtuse language work to undermine these unique experiences mediated by race.

The Marginalization of Racialized International Students: White Normativity and Deficits

International students contribute to the diversity of campus but conversely are not really thought of in terms of race, although race can define their experiences when they arrive in their countries of study (Buckner, 2021). Non-citizenship status creates inequitable experiences for international students, such as limited access to funding, healthcare, and other social protections (Hutcheson, forthcoming). However, being racialized adds another layer of complexity to the Otherness (Chapter 5) of being an international student. An African international student's testimony from Changamire et al. (2022) shows these intersecting hierarchies of Otherness as they reflect on how their multiple identities impact how they are perceived and treated in the United States. The student reports that "it's not just that I'm foreign. It's because I'm African and

foreign. Because they see a Black person and they think I'm lesser. And on top of that, they see an African and I'm even lesser" (Changamire et al., 2022, p. 513).

Confronting White Normativity in Research: Alternatives to Acculturation?

This "lessness" is also evident in much of the research centred on acculturation rhetoric that saturates research with international students (Chapter 2). A thematic analysis by Bista and Gaulee (2017) found that acculturation was the most prevalent theme among dissertations published in 2016. Acculturation and acculturative stress are still major contemporary focuses in research, highlighting the psychological adaptations international students encounter when adjusting from their home country to their country of study, but these constructs as they are used in the subfield are fraught with issues (e.g., Vasilopolous, 2016). Models of acculturation can imply White normativity, where distress occurs when a student whose culture is distanced from Whiteness "fails" to adjust (Madriaga & McCaig, 2022; Vasilopolous, 2016; Yao et al., 2019). In focusing disproportionately on how students fail to adjust to Whiteness, the critical inverse relationship is omitted: the failure of the welcoming society to adjust to or welcome the students (e.g., Perreira et al., 2017). Instead, we can examine the welcoming context or host environment and ask, "How is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018, p. 233).

In Changamire et al.'s (2022) earlier student testimony, that student has effectively become Black upon arrival to their host country, which has translated to more encounters with racism and discrimination. Shifting the focus from the internal processes of assimilation, adaptation, and acculturation would be advantageous to better capture the external impact of systemic racism, the process of racialization, and discrimination on international students' experiences. Understanding how students experience life in societies that are hostile to Otherness is critical going forward.

Madriaga and McCaig (2022) also signal that Black racialized international students are seen to have "cultural" deficits. We know that racialized international students for whom English is not their first language are often subjected to critique from their home student peers. Wei and Bunjun (2020) spotlight this in "We Don't Need Another One in Our Group", citing that home students sometimes see international students of colour as a burden. But these deficit narratives do not just occur in the classroom, they also happen in research, particularly when research seeks to confirm cultural and deficit narratives rather than combat them. To counter racist, deficit-centred rhetoric (Chapter 7), it is key to focus less on acculturation and deficit-centred research and focus more on the external structural and policy issues that impact students (e.g., Changamire et al., 2022). Furthermore, researchers who do address race must avoid including race as a vehicle to confirm perceived cultural deficits which are often entrenched in stereotypes.

Conclusion: Addressing the Omissions

Perhaps most pressing is confronting the omissions and denials of racism in the subfield of international higher education. For example, many student recruitment strategies promote study destinations as open and welcoming in their branding which omits racism. While it is beneficial to look at what a nation is doing well to support international students, the inherent ways in which systemic racism manifests for students outside of their home countries cannot be ignored in research.

In Beck's (2020) "What's Race Doing in A Nice Field Like Internationalization", they describe "common sense racism" or the act of normalizing the negative experiences of racialized international students. This banalization of racism is witnessed when the University of California Berkeley's Health Services released a statement saying xenophobia was a "normal reaction" to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, prompting backlash from the wider student community

during a period of anti-Asian sentiment (Chiu, 2020). Beck further notes that the Canadian Bureau of International Education once inquired about experiences with racism in their annual survey with international students. Inclusions of race were on the 1999 and 2004 surveys, then subsequently dropped. The erasure of race and banalization of racism in our research and internationalization strategies is simply not the way forward. I, along with Beck, urge our subfield to take up more research about race and internationalization and to not conflate race with diversity in our work (see also Chapter 18 by Beck). Finally, erasure of the rhetoric of race and racialization in our research does not mean racism is not happening (Hernandez, 2021). Many international students occupy the space of being marginalized by race and marginalized by their non-citizens status and understanding these interactions is key as international education expands.

Reflection Questions

- Have I considered race and racialization in my research?
- Ask, "how is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018) and how is race relevant for this research? How may racialized students be impacted disproportionately, or how are racialized international students further marginalized in the phenomenon that I seek to understand?
- How do I talk about international students? If diversity is the central theme to my research with international students, do I actually mean "race"?
- If I engage with dimensions of race in my research, what are my motivations for engaging? Is it to problematically confirm stereotypes, or does it challenge stereotypes and deficit narratives? Have I evaluated my lens for deficit-centred or essentialist

rhetoric? Is the language I use reductivist/and or supporting a monolithic view of these students?

- How do I unconsciously centre Whiteness as the default in my research?

Suggestions for Researchers

Employ Critical Race Theory and intersectional frameworks to your research and investigate how race may function to marginalize international students (see Buckner et al., 2021; Liu, 2017; Yao et al., 2019).

Identify some of the conceptual issues embedded in assimilation and acculturation-based research (see Yao et al., 2019) and consider how alternative models may complement research. Alternatives include looking specifically at how the process of racialization impacts international students (see Asante et al., 2016; Wang, 2010; Zewolde, 2020), or looking at the structural and systemic issues that impact international students (see Marginson, 2012).

Add specificity to how you collect and analyze your data. To move away from the homogeneous view of international students, opportunities to add specificity is advantageous. Avoid data soloing and encourage the inclusion of international students in diversity metrics (see Chapter 24; Buckner et al., 2021; Lomer et al., 2021). These descriptive data are not a "checklist" of diversity metrics but rather provide the opportunity to move behind a colour-blind approach and gain deeper analysis in keeping with intersectional frameworks (Liu, 2017).

Carefully examine your biases and avoid sweeping generalizations, stereotyping, and research that attempt to support deficit-centred narratives (see Surtees, 2019) and remember that "people are not problems" but rather systems (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019;

Chapter 17)**.** Consider the ways in which international students are heterogeneous and the mosaic of intersections that help define their identities and experiences (Hernandez, 2021, p. 11).

Example in practice

Article: Changamire et al. (2022)

Article focus: This article analyzes policy discourse and testimonies from "Black" racialized international students from Sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating how inequities are reproduced and racism proliferates in international higher education.

Article strengths: The authors provide a thoughtful analysis of how policy interacts to reinforce and replicate racism and White supremacy. By centring student voices and testimonies, we gain insight into how race can impact how students navigate the universities where they study and how the university interacts with them. It adequately captures wider societal issues and how the university, policies, and internationalization replicate structures of inequity by centring on Whiteness.

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CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION and CONCLUSION

From anecdotal encounters I have had with peers, and my own insider/outsider reflexivity as someone who researches international students as an international student herself, I felt that many "traditional" perspectives used to conceptualize international student experience didn't capture the full picture, and in some cases, were harmful. In my conversations on the ground, international students were talking about rising tuition fees, navigating the Quebec healthcare system, dealing with immigration hiccups, and having limited funding opportunities. There seemed to be wider systemic issues impacting students, yet, many of these concerns weren't prioritized in the literature or research. I thought to myself that "something has to be missing" as I circled back to the abundant research implying that student adjustment and acculturation were what I should be interested in if I engaged with research on international students. I struggled with the ways in which international students, namely in the U.S. and Canada were categorically viewed in these rigid ways, confined within the barriers of how international students adjust to life in the host country.

Critical internationalization scholars spoke to a need for researchers to engage with "concepts of power, privilege, domination, marginalization, hegemony, and inequality" (George Mwangi et al., 2018, p. 1095). Corresponding to these initiatives, my thesis was a rich opportunity to explore these dimensions with three distinct manuscripts utilizing complementary methodologies within a critical lens to answer the following questions: **What are the ways in which international students in Canada have been Othered, marginalized, and impacted by their non-citizen status and other intersecting identities? How is this marginalization mediated by policy, inequity, and practices in international higher education?**

Through a critical analysis of pandemic-related policies, Chapter 4 demonstrated how the pandemic, while challenging for the global population at large, had a disparate impact on

international students as seen through their limited access to social protections and financial relief during the pandemic. This included healthcare and status-based omissions from receiving much-needed COVID-19 financial relief funding. The pandemic also highlighted racism against international students. However, it is helpful to note that the anti-Asian rhetoric against many East Asian international students is not a novel form of racism, but rather drew attention to some of these differential experiences. Chapter 5 looked to international student voices to describe how they conceptualized fairness and inequity compared to their Canadian student peers, which yielded 9 overarching themes seen in Figure 2 (see Chapter 5). Intersectionality emerged at the centre, highlighting the need to understand how intersectional facets of international student identity converge to impact how they encounter and perceive inequity and fairness.

Chapter 6 gave a conceptual perspective identifying the importance of including race in the subfield of research with international students, and problematized the ways in which race has been omitted from the discourse. It concluded with practical recommendations for how to approach this research, including asking, "How is racism operating here?" (Jones, 2018). The following section identifies key findings and contributions, and implications for understanding inequity, culminating with practical implications.

Key Findings and Contributions

The first priority of this thesis was making a case for international students as a marginalized and equity-seeking group, which in some circles is controversial against the backdrop of rich international student caricatures (Nagesh, 2018). However, in the current context of tuition fee deregulation, housing crises, and growing attention on international student exploitation, this marginalization simply cannot be denied. While this thesis makes many novel contributions, in this section, I identify five key findings and contributions to the subfield of

research with international students: unpacking monolithic views of international students, the nuance of race, enhanced understanding of phenomena that have been alluded to but rarely named (e.g, conditionality of status, bureaucratic labour, and information accessibility), the Othering and omission of international students, and confronting tensions in how international students are perceived through analysis of doubling discourses.

Dismantling the Monolith

If there is one key take away, in the words of my former instructor, "nothing's ever always." There is no one, universal experience for international students, but we can investigate the ways in which structures, policies, and ideologies interact. However, nuance is needed to understand the differential ways in which students can be impacted by marginalization. Chapter 5 offered important insights on international graduate students which can be qualitatively different from undergraduates. These students were navigating funding exclusions, limited research and teaching assistantships, and other dimensions that are particular to graduate students. Explored in Chapter 5's interviews with students, encounters with immigration varied widely. Students with American citizenship had the option of renewing their study permits at the border. In contrast, one student whose country had one of the least powerful passports in the world described the emotional and financial labour of getting and maintaining her international student status, relying on legal consultation. While examining the structures that can create inequity for international students in Canada at large, care is needed to unpack some of those individual differences.

An insightful dialogue happened with a Nigerian participant who shared that when he moved to Canada, it was really strange for him to be called Black. He clarified, Black is a colour, like a piece of a paper, not for skin colour. As someone who is Black and has been racialized as

Black within the American context, understanding our disparate experiences with "Blackness" was really important. Here, we have two people, racialized as Black, with very different experiences around Blackness. Wally was socialized in a majority "Black" context in his home in Nigeria. In contrast, I grew up as a minority in the United States, and my minority, racialized, Black experience continues in Canada. Wally does not consider himself Black despite being racialized this way, while I readily identify as Black because I was socialized that way growing up in the United States. I had read pieces on the process of "becoming Black" (e.g., Madriaga & McCaig, 2022; Mwangi et al., 2018), but hearing it, in real time and speaking with another student who I had erroneously assumed identified as Black is an important distinction. Chapter 6 explores how these nuances of race are critically overlooked in research—failure to not engage with this dimension across my other chapters would have only contributed to this erasure.

Following a member check with a participant who is Indian, she wanted to include that she is not just Indian, but Dalit. Dalit people continue to be discriminated against through the caste system which has been "banned" by law but very much continues to oppress these people. Dolly explained that with the international education diaspora, these systems are replicated in Canada. This was further supported by a Critical International Studies Network talk on caste and higher education where one of the presenters clarified that, "wherever we go, we take our caste systems with us" (CISN, 2024). Additionally, Marom's (2022) research demonstrates the clear ways that the oppressive caste system is replicated in the Canadian context, with students encountering academic discrimination and fearing their last name will reveal their caste status.

Dolly's example speaks to the necessity of understanding not only how race can impact international students, but these intricate cultural factors. Following our interview, I asked if she wanted me to include her Dalit identity in this thesis, because there was potential for it to be

identifiable. She clarified that she wanted this inclusion as there has been a systemic erasure of these experiences, and that nuance was needed to understand that while Indian students may be subjected to racism in Canada, caste discrimination adds an additional layer which can and does affect students. An intersectional approach gives us the lens by which we can understand the body as a meeting point (Ahmed, 2007) and the way in which these identities interplay with how students perceive, are perceived and navigate their encounters in host countries. Dolly's experience in Chapter 5 offers a direct confrontation of the monolith. By privileging individual student experiences, it exposes an important understanding of encounters that are erased from the literature.

Race Matters

Given the previous example, it may feel overwhelming to include conceptualizations of race in one's work, figuring out how important it is to "slice" the data, incorporating elements of race and other intersectional dimensions into our work. This is just one of the reasons dialogues of race are avoided. However, as the preceding section on dismantling the monolith tells us, it is absolutely essential to include these dimensions. Each manuscript provides novel insights on the nuanced ways we need to incorporate race into our understanding of international student experience around equity. In Chapter's 6's manuscript, "Calling race into research with international students: Confronting omissions," I unpack the avoidance of engaging with these discourses. From fear of saying the wrong thing, finding safety in privileging talks of diversity over race, and explicit data siloing that strips international students of these identities. Despite these deeply entrenched fears, international students "are marginalized by constructions of race within the host countries where they attend university" (Hutcheson, 2020, p. 192). In Chapter 5, one participant said that her race was inseparable from her international student identity while

another explained that being White, he was shielded from some forms of inequity that his peers experience. Furthermore, while Dolly had complicated caste motivated discrimination in her home country, she explained how she was indoctrinated by new forms of racism in Canada—learning about racism was a formative process.

Although race has been systemically omitted from discourses around students, it is also helpful to consider the occasions under which race is discussed. Anti-Asian violence and racism came to the forefront during the pandemic. This is one of the few times I saw explicit dialogue on racism and international students with the exception of critical internationalization scholars. However, I am suspect that this inclusion of race came down to racism being "bad for business," another reason why institutions are avoidant to engage with discourses of race, particularly in dialogues around international students who are critical for the survival of many institutions (Hutcheson, 2023). To deny systemic racism against international students is to deny a pervasive reality as seen with the COVID-19 violence against Asian international students, Quebec immigration admitting there were racial biases in the immigration system, and the economic opportunities of racialized students who are subjected to cheap and exploitable labour.

New Perspectives

Two significant areas that my research has contributed to new knowledge are the conditionality of status and the bureaucratic labour of international students. The status of international students is conditional, meaning that a number of criteria must be met for students to obtain international student status, enter Canada, and maintain that legal status. Legal status can be lost for many reasons: lapses in visas, hiccups in bureaucratic labour, and more. Status is *essential* for international students studying in Canada. However, this dimension of status has not been explored thoroughly in the subfield of research with international students, despite them

being labeled as having "precarious legal status in Canada" (Goldring and Landolt, 2012). When thinking of precarious status, imagery evokes those seeking refugee status, people who have overstayed their visas. However, international students can also encounter precarity. COVID-19 exemplified this: In the U.S., when Trump implied that international students would leave, students were fearful of leaving Canada to go to their home countries, fearing they wouldn't be able to get in. Looking to current events, Punjabi students were protesting in the summer of 2023 pending deportation after it emerged that their letters of acceptance were invalid (Rana, 2023). Chapter 6 cues us to also understand the relationship that race plays with the conditionality of status. While the students facing deportation are Indian, as racialized international students we cannot ignore these insights. Examples in Quebec also show differential conditionality of status contingent on race ('Racialized international students', 2017).

With tuition fees mounting and students taking to the streets, protesting is just one way to speak out against tuition fee deregulation. As we witness more mobilization of international students, it is helpful not to forget that international students have been routinely discouraged from protest. Described in the *SAGE Handbook of International Higher Education*, **"**International students from certain countries faced implied restrictions on political activity", with students' visas including Condition 8303: "You must not become involved in any activities that are disruptive to, or in violence threaten harm to, the Australian community or a group within the Australian community" (Marginson, 2012, p. 210). This example is specific to Australia legislation, but it has implications for helping us understand conditionality and the ways it can be threatened. Furthermore, it is important to highlight that in spite of this discouragement, students have been empowered to protest, mobilize, and call out injustices, as

witnessed with the advocacy work of Migrant Students United, and Punjabi students protesting deportation.

Another dimension featured in this thesis is the concept of bureaucratic labour. Closely tied to conditionality of status, bureaucratic labour is a reality for all adults. However, there is additional compounding paperwork from international students. Many tasks are not so straightforward and require extra labour to fulfill those tasks. Getting healthcare often involves a disclaimer that the student does not have local resident status which can be met with confusion from service providers as they interact with international students (e.g., Chapter 5; Zhao and Bhuyan, 2023). Students are also required to submit additional paperwork to have healthcare reimbursed. This additional and cumbersome bureaucratic labour is another vehicle under which Othering can occur. Olanubi (2023) describes the bureaucratic structures that create challenges for students (e.g., waiting periods as permits process and the corresponding stress). However, I uniquely captured the process, the work, the labour, and emotion that goes into the bureaucracy of international student life. Evidenced by student interviews in Chapter 5, and insights in Chapter 4 (e.g., applying for pandemic support) the labour can distract from student responsibilities. Of note, bureaucratic labour was further mediated by passport power, with students reporting different bureaucratic experiences contingent on their passport countries. All of these other bureaucratic needs tied to conditionality of status have to be met before students can engage with coursework and get through their programs.

Othering and Omissions

This thesis revealed several important contributions in how we understand how international students are Othered. Firstly, Othering can be observed in what is considered the de facto default. Often in policy, Canadians and residents are seen as the norm, and anyone who

falls outside of this purview is automatically omitted, and consequently Othered. An obvious demonstration of this is when the Prime Minister declared that the nation would do their best to "protect Canadians" with its pandemic policies, but what if you're not Canadian? Do non-citizens not warrant protections as well? The title of the first manuscript in Chapter 4, "What about us?" was chosen strategically. During the pandemic, international students felt forgotten. Examples include confusion over whether students had access to financial relief funds such as the CESB, and CERB, and the right to vaccines, and the manuscript narratives.

Despite representing large proportions of the student population, students can be forgotten, particularly in policy as shown in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 showed how students must exert labour to find out how a policy applies to them if they are not explicitly named. There is often confusing or conflicting information over what students are entitled to which was seen in Chapter 5 when John was erroneously told that he would be the recipient of a fellowship that was reserved for Canadian students. Anecdotally, this same misinformation is unsurprisingly witnessed in a number of public forums. As someone who shies away from engaging with comments on social media, I felt obliged to intervene when an international student asked if they had access to the vaccine in a Montreal community Facebook group. A community member responded that international students could not access vaccines because they were not citizens and didn't pay taxes, which is categorically false. This belief is not uncommon. International students are routinely excluded from healthcare (Chapter 4 and 5) and therefore it is not surprising that some students believe that not having access to vaccines was just another manifestation of these exclusions.

Another important element from this thesis is: often, what is said, is just as important as what remains unsaid. There is a (silent) understanding that Canadian is the default just as White

is often seen as the default while any deviations from these baselines are Other. Whiteness as the default was explored more in-depth in Chapter 6, where in some spaces there is a quiet invisibility to being Other (explicitly ignoring, data siloing, denying racism because it's bad for business). Chapter 5's observations echo this, demonstrating how racialized students had differential experiences with finding employment. One participant explicitly explained how his Whiteness directly contributed to more equitable encounters. Omissions also contribute to how readily accessible information is. Because students are not always named explicitly in policies despite the disparate impact policies around them, there can be confusion. Barring the explicit policies around immigration, much of the language is created for Canadians in mind. Therefore, students are required to excavate that knowledge to understand how that information pertains to their unique non-citizen status. Reflected in Desirée's testimonies, she found herself having to explain her status so that health practitioners would know how to handle her case. As with the COVID-19 vaccine examples, students often have to do the work to find out what they are entitled to, and also educate. International students deserve tailored information. Moreover, they deserve "clear, timely, and compassionate communication" (Chapter 4).

Doubling Discourses

A number of tensions have arisen in this thesis, particularly in the conflicting views of international students. Throughout the thesis, I have covered many of the dehumanizing descriptors used to describe international students from "economic objects", "economic profiteers", "money machines", and "cash cows". Contradictorily, students are often described in terms of their economic value, yet are simultaneously accused of trying to take advantage of the system. In the scope of this research, it is advantageous to explore these tensions, and "doubling discourses". As explained in Chapter 2, doubling discourses refer to the concurrently held

positive and negative representations enforced on the Other, or international students (Beck, 2023, p. 186). Brunner and Trilokekkar (2024) explore this doubling discourse wherein these students are simultaneously depicted as "problems" and "solutions". The positives are framed by the monetary value or what can be "used" of students. In Chapter 4, students are shown key income resources for Canada's economic strategy, yet were unfairly ousted from residence halls. Notably, in Chapter 5, participants had internalized some of these discourses, particularly around international students as economic objects, and international students as profiteers. Some participants felt as if they were viewed as trying to take advantage of this system by immigrating to Canada, while others felt they were "money machines". Under neoliberalism, students felt objectified for their financial contributions to Canada and their institution. It is interesting to explore how these doubling discourses interplay in the current landscape. Students must contend with the rich international student myth as important revenue streams, yet students are also being turned away from food banks, despite a clear need for students who don't have access to food (Takagi & Keung, 2023). There are also tensions under which race are discussed: Comparing deficit and diversity discourses around international students give insight to these tensions. Seen in Chapter 6, often institutional language privileges talking about international students in terms of the rich diversity they bring to campuses. However, when framed within deficit-centric language, then race comes to the forefront and students' difficulties with adjustment are explained away by cultural and racial differences, instead of the systemic and structural factors (e.g., Hutcheson 2020; Hutcheson 2023). It is clear that these doubling discourses inform international student marginalization as they compete with these simultaneous negative and positive perceptions. My research clearly delineates how through confronting doubling

discourses, we can highlight the contradictions in public perception of international students as well as fundamental issues in how we engage in research with these students.

Applying the Key Findings: A Framework for Understanding Inequity

My thesis demonstrates the ways in which international students have been marginalized and impacted by inequity, and I hope that it provides reflection for anyone reading. To provide further context on how we can understand the ways in which international students are impacted by the key findings, I offer a case study to understand how the above key findings can provide an analytic framework for understanding areas of inequity and international students. Working with iMPACTS, a large grant that investigates sexual violence in university contexts, my colleagues had the task of reviewing university policies on sexual violence which are included in our publications under the *Education and Law Journal* (e.g., Hutcheson, 2020; Hutcheson & Lewington, 2017). As I reviewed these policy documents, I noticed a surprising trend: There were a number of "throw away comments" in these policies and briefs identifying that international students were disproportionately impacted by sexual violence without further information. Wanting to understand how international students were affected by sexual violence and why there were so many allusions to it without further elaboration, my colleague and I analyzed online artifacts, legal cases, and news releases (Hutcheson & Lewington, 2017). Our analysis found that there were some pervasive factors that complicated international students reporting instances of sexual assault. Prominent themes included abuses of power, and lack of confidence navigating a foreign justice system. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) qualifies that while coming forward about sexual violence is difficult for all survivors, "these barriers are multiplied for international students, for whom both support and reporting may seem entirely inaccessible based on language, cultural, or financial barriers" (2018). In 2020, I

revisited some of these themes in my *Education and Law Journal* article, "Sexual violence, representation, and racialized identities: Implication for international students" with new reflections on how SV and international student status interact from a critical, intersectional lens (Hutcheson, 2020). Using case studies of international students and sexual violence in this discussion, we can investigate how the novel and key findings from this thesis can be applied to shape our understanding of international students and marginalization.

Race Matters

When I revisited international students and sexual violence in my second *Education and Law Journal* article, I wanted to be deliberate about inclusions of race. Reviewing cases in the United States and Canada that involved a confirmed case of an international student and sexual violence, I noticed that many of the students in the cases were implied to be racialized. However, when race was discussed, it was an aside comment, or simply a fact of the case without acknowledging how race played a role. The analysis also revealed racist rhetoric aimed at students. In one case, *Commonwealth v Khan*, a prosecutor asked if a Japanese student "seemed to be the type of woman who would jump in the sack with the first man she met after getting fresh off the boat from Japan." The exoticizing and fetishizing of international students also became apparent in the analysis, with students being objectified and othered as "exotic outsiders". Racialized women are routinely exoticized and sexualized which has implications for sexual violence. Essentially, this exoticizing is just one way that othering manifests as international students are depicted as exotic outsiders (e.g., Marginson, 2012).

If sexual violence is impacting university students and international students, why don't we talk about it more? International students are an essential part of the country's internationalization strategy and ike racism, sexual violence is "bad for business". Talking about

sexual violence runs counter to the narrative of safe and welcoming as described in Canada's internationalization strategy (Hutcheson, 2020). In *The Stranger That is Welcomed,* sexual violence against Asian international students in Vancouver was documented, but police were reluctant to confirm the racially motivated attacks. Todd (2018) explains that these negative discourses around international students and safety are often avoided because they run counter to the branding strategy. Here, we see how neoliberalism and race converge: Neoliberal ideology prioritizes the silencing of the racially motivated attacks as they directly infringe on the profitability of international higher education, as well as the safety of the EduCanada brand.

Doubling Discourses

In the example above with the Japanese international student who was subjected to racist "fresh off the boat" comments, it supports a deficit view of international students. A Vancouver crime prevention society created informational brochures including one titled *Sexual Exploitation: It Can Happen to You,* a guide highlighting why international students are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (SVPC, 2013). Within the document, it features pages implying the naivité of international students. Furthermore, it intimates that due to this naivité, international students are more likely to be subjected to this violence. However, one of the pages also states that students should be aware that if someone is making an offer that is "too good to be true", that they should be able to assess this, and further notes that "there is no free lunch in life" and that "there is always a price to stay". By this discourse, if a student is subjected to sexual violence, it is seen as their fault, which is a victim blaming mentality. Here, we see a doubling discourse where students are assumed to be naive and culturally deficient, therefore being vulnerable to sexual violence and exploitation. However, the competing discourse is that students are directly responsible for what happens to them, or a victim blaming discourse.

Othering and Omissions

Due to data siloing, it can be really challenging to understand and quantify how many international students are impacted by sexual violence. In addition to limitations with the data, reporting sexual violence can be challenging for all survivors. However, to international students who are routinely omitted from policy, students can be afraid to report, possibly believing that because they are not Canadian, they may not be entitled to the same rights in the justice system, and in some cases this is true. In one Australian case documented by EROC, an international student seeking support after a sexual assault was erroneously refused a medical exam because they didn't have a Medicare card (EROC, 2017). Further contributing to Othering and deficit discourses, in another EROC documented case, a student was discouraged from reporting sexual violence, believing that what was done to them was simply a "cultural misunderstanding" implying that the situation was misconstrued because of a lack of familiarity of Australian culture.

Conditionality of Status

Conditionality of status can also be seen through a legal case from the United States, *Liu v. Striuli*. Here, an international student encountered visa troubles upon her return from a trip abroad. Striuli, who was the designated campus immigration advisor leveraged his power over Liu's conditional status and subjected her to sexual violence throughout the course of the year as she sought to regulate her immigration concern. Fear of deportation can be a very real deterrent for students to report sexual violence. There are also additional criteria to consider if a student takes a Leave of Absence following an assault. Firstly, students may be legally required to declare to immigration officials why they took a leave of absence. Secondly, if a leave of absence is taken, in Canada, students maintain the right to stay in Canada, but lose their ability to work.

The documentation of the leave of absence also plays into bureaucratic labour where in addition to being a survivor, there is a labour involved with explaining what happened to you via paper trail.

Bureaucratic Labour

Knowing you can report is important, but as we know now, there are caveats to reporting. Armeet explains, "When you come here, you always hear about your responsibilities. But no one tells you what your rights are" (Imam, 2019). Echoing these concerns, in a documentary of international students and sexual violence in, a student explained, "What we thought back then is that Australian law only protects Australians. And if we reported things like this, they'd probably think we're causing trouble for them and we'd probably get deported, can't finish our school" (Al Jazeera English, 2019). I would hope that the public would not be dismissive of this fear and not believe the onus is on students to know local laws to protect themselves from illegal acts, and rather, think of the systemic barriers that create these real and perceived inequities and accessibility of information. Like Armeet says, upon arrival, students aren't presented with their rights. And in lived experiences, international students can find that they are treated inequitably by a number of policies— it can be hard to discern what these basic rights are amidst other inequities.

Limitations

The utility of the key findings from this thesis are seen in its application to the case study on sexual violence. It helps us understand the complex ways in which inequity can proliferate in international higher education, disproportionately impacting international students. While the thesis contributes novel ideas including bureaucratic labour, the conditionality of status, and complicating how we think about race and international students, there are also areas that require

further reflection. The collection of manuscripts provides some understanding of how policy, ideology, and practices can create and reinforce inequity for international students. It was my intent to be as comprehensive as possible in my analysis of these factors, but there are surely areas where more clarity is welcome.

A major challenge arose from the research occurring during a period of rapid transition. Explained in the introduction, it was never my intent to study COVID-19 and international students, but it was unavoidable given the highly impactful consequences the pandemic and corresponding policy had on students. I lamented to a colleague that I felt like a hamster in a wheel, trying to keep up with policy for the relevance of the thesis. Because of the fast cycle of policy change, I am cognizant that I have omitted pertinent policy changes that would provide further insight on international students and inequity. Furthermore, making sense of all of these policies is a large feat as these policies are not static documents—they are subject to change, and we seem to find ourselves in a rapidly evolving landscape. Canada's most recent internationalization strategy *Building on Success* is coming to a close this year, and we will soon see what the newest iteration entails. Moreover, following Immigrant Minister Marc Miller's recent announcement on tuition caps, this strategy may look dramatically different.

Acknowledging the time constraints of the PhD journey, with humility, I learned that "you can't do it all," despite wanting to be more comprehensive. One area that warrants additional understanding is the portrayal of intersectional dimensions in the thesis. This work provided an opportunity to explore race, passport power, and caste. However, there have been some important omissions including class and gender and deeper explorations of class which also hold important weight. While explicit mentions of gender did not manifest in my student interviews, zooming out and analyzing student experiences within this broader context of

intersectional dimensions is advantageous. Additionally, due to time constraints, I was not able to explore all elements of student interviews. Notably, in the interviews in Chapter 5, international graduate students were also asked specifically about suggestions to counter unfair practices. Because of the depth of these questions, in order to give adequate attention, it requires a separate analysis and manuscript to thoughtfully address these questions. While this collection of manuscripts identifies inequities and provides recommendations and best practices, the suggestions from students require closer attention as these contributions are extremely valuable to countering the prevalent issues around equity and marginalization highlighted in the thesis.

Another area that I would like to explore more are the language politics and the impact on international students. Of immediate interest is how legislation like Bill 96 shapes the landscape. Language was a factor that came up in the course of this thesis, particularly around Quebec's language probes designated for racialized international students in the province, spurring calls to cease racial profiling that disproportionately affected students from these racialized identities. Language is certainly a vehicle for discrimination, and extremely topical in light of Bill 96[12] and Bill 21[13], recently passed legislation affecting English-speaking institutions in Quebec. Although English is often perceived as the lingua franca of international education, Quebec offers a unique opportunity to explore policies around competing language dynamics and the resulting tensions. Within the scope of my current research, these dynamics warranted special attention beyond what could be covered in this body of work. In future projects, sharing deeper reflections on how language impacts equity across monolingual, bilingual, and plurilingual contexts will be a priority.

[12] Bill 96: "An Act respecting French, the official and common language of Québec".
[13] Bill 21: "An Act respecting the laicity of the State".

A glonacal perspective was insightful for guiding how I approach this body of work. Understanding the global, national, and local impact of policy gave scope and scale to the inequity. In Quebec, I have outlined a number of violations including Quebec's discriminatory language probe targeting visible minorities from the Global South and predatory housing. In future iterations, I would like to spend more time engaging with "local" particularities, as international education is not just a federal imperative. Each province has different motivations for engaging with international education, and as seen by Bill 96, Bill 21, and impact of the new tuition fee restructuring at Quebec English-speaking institutions, these local and provincial perspectives give insight to the way in which inequity permeates glonacally.

Finally, I welcome additional opportunities to empower international students and show the importance of student agency. This thesis sought to effectively underscore how inequity manifests for these students. However, in countering deficit discourses, it is helpful not just to name the inequity, but to show the empowerment of international students. For example, in Manuscript 2, students used technology like WhatsApp to leverage the knowledge of the wider international student to navigate the systemic omissions of information accessibility. Future iterations of this work will offer more insight into its empowerment and agency.

Conclusion: Structures of Inequity and Calls to Action

Shifting away from acculturation stress and deficit discourses, this thesis highlights underlying structures that create, support and maintain the inequity and marginalization of international students. Overarching contributors to this inequity are policy, research, and omissions. Omissions (silent and explicit) hold just as much significance as explicit language that maintains inequity. Students remain at the centre of my work, but in presenting this collection, it is my hope to shift responsibility to policy makers, institutions, and other

stakeholders to create a more equitable and welcoming experience for international students in Canada and elsewhere. International education is at a breaking point. Many institutions and nations including Canada, the UK, and Australia rely on foreign tuition dollars and it drives policy with far-reaching implications but fail to consider the human impact of this internationalization and prominent discourses in internationalization. In highlighting the current strain and the human impact on international students, I hope that this thesis underscores the urgency of systemic change of how students are treated on the ground, and in the research. Looking to organizations like OneVoice and Migrant Students United, students and organizations are asking for equitable treatment for international students, and it is time to deliver.

In concluding this thesis, I look to some practical suggestions for administrators and stakeholders who work with international students. First, in understanding the structural and bureaucratic barriers for international students and the labour to clear those barriers, I recommend tailoring resources, ensuring that information shared is relevant to the conditionality of student statuses. Furthermore, in understanding the heterogeneity of international students, and the differential experiences within these students (e.g., passport power, race affecting employability prospects) services can be improved. For example, in graduate school, students are expected to attend conferences to disseminate research. However, for students with limited passport power, this may not be an option. Administrators and supervisors must anticipate these needs to better support students. Finally, immigration procedures are just one part of students' experiences. Stakeholders cannot exclusively focus efforts on recruiting international students—they must exert as much care for students when they arrive in Canada as they do in getting students to the country. Revisiting the words from Lynch (2014), I would like to

emphasize that international students deserve “resources, respect, recognition, love, care, and solidarity” (p. 132).

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List of Appendices

APPENDIX A

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Page Range(s)	77-96 CHAPTER FIVE "What Will Happen to Us?": Policy Barriers and International Student Marginalization in Canada During the COVID-19 Pandemic	Distribution	Worldwide
		Translation	Original language of publication
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		Minor Editing Privileges?	No
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Title	International Students in Canada: Equity and Fairness in the Wake of Internationalization	Institution Name	McGill University
		Expected Presentation Date	2024-09-01
Instructor Name	Shannon Hutcheson		

ADDITIONAL DETAILS

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APPENDIX B

Consent Form

McGill

Department of Integrated Studies in Education

Participant Consent Form

Researchers: Shannon Hutcheson, PhD Candidate, McGill University, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, phone: (438) 921-2844, e-mail: Shannon.hutcheson@mail.mcgill.ca

Supervisor: Dr. Shaheen Shariff, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, phone: (514) 398-4527 Ext. 094764, e-mail: Shaheen.shariff@mcgill.ca / Dr. Marta Kobiela, Department of Integrated Studies in Education, phone: (514) 398-4527 Ext. 094466, e-mail: marta.kobiela@mcgill.ca

Title of Project: International Students in Canada: Access, Equity, and Fairness

Sponsor(s): *N.A*

Purpose of the Study: You are invited to participate in a research study on international graduate students' experiences in Canada and Quebec. With an ever-increasing international student population in Canada and Quebec, and a large proportion of international students at McGill University, it is critical to gain a better understanding of their experiences in Canada. It is especially important to understand these experiences in regards to equity, access to support services, and the impact that policy has on them. Furthermore, it is necessary to capture how the ever-present COVID-19 pandemic has impacted these experiences.

International graduate students across graduate programs at McGill will be interviewed about what life is like as an international student. Specific areas that students will be asked about are:

- Demographic information (e.g. preferred pronouns, gender, age, country of origin, faculty, MA/PhD, year in program, time spent studying in Quebec, race or visible minority status)
- Perceptions of equity/inequity as an international student in Canada/Quebec, compared to Canadian peers
- Access to support services, and barriers to access support (including healthcare, financial support to CESB).
- The impact of Canadian policy and Canadian policy on COVID-19 (such as immigration)

Study Procedures: If you are an international graduate student at McGill University and you wish to participate in this research study, you will be able to do so by filling out a google form on the next

page. Before proceeding to the next page, please carefully read, and sign this document electronically.

After this google form is submitted, and you have completed the short demographic information survey (approximately 2 minutes to complete) if you meet the criteria, you will be invited to schedule an interview at a time that suits your availability. You will be contacted within one week to schedule an interview. Interviews will take place on phone, Zoom, or Skype at the student's discretion. If you choose to be interviewed on Skype or Zoom, you can choose whether you would like audio and video recorded, or audio ONLY. You will be asked to find a quiet, comfortable private space where the interview can take place. The interviewer will be interviewing you from their private residence or on-campus office.

Interviews will last approximately 45 minutes to one hour and will include a series of questions about life as an international student, perceptions of equity as an international student, and areas of support. The interviews will be transcribed and analyzed to better understand international graduate student experiences.

At any point in time, you may request to stop the interview. You may also decline to answer a question that you do not wish to answer, at no detriment.

Following the interview, you may be contacted so that the primary investigator may clarify responses, and ensure that your testimony was adequately captured. All participants will be debriefed on the results of the study after analysis.

If interviewees need accommodations for the interview process, please inform the primary investigator and they will do their best to accommodate to the best of their ability.

***If for some reason you are unable to be involved in the interview due to sampling saturation, you will be able to indicate whether you will be interested in similar studies.**

Voluntary Participation: Participation in this research study is voluntary. At any point you are able to stop the interview and withdraw from the study for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the study, your data will be destroyed (files erased). Your data will be de-identified in this research (you will be referred to by a pseudonym of your choosing in the audio/video) and in all subsequent transcriptions. Once interviews are transcribed and primary analysis has begun (1 month after interview), interview data will be stored and can no longer be withdrawn.

Potential Risks: There are no anticipated risks to you by participating in this research. However, participants may find talking about the emotional and financial impact of the pandemic challenging.

There are mental health services that you can be directed to if at any point you feel the need to get mental health support. Please contact the appropriate offices if you are in need of any kind of mental health support.

https://www.mcgill.ca/internationalstudents/health/virtual-health-services

Furthermore, all data will be safely stored on the primary investigator's personal computer and inteviews will remain de-identified and private. As with all virtual platforms including Skype and Zoom, there is always a minimal chance of interception, but the primary investigator will takes steps to ensure your data remains secure (e.g. using VPN, password protected Zoom sessions and computer, de-identified transcripts).

The primary investigator will also remain available for any questions that you may have.

Potential Benefits: Participating in this study has a number of potential benefits including contributing to the knowledge of issues that most impact internationals students in Quebec/Canada, getting a better understanding of how the pandemic has impacted international students, helping to identify ways in which governments, universities, and university stakeholders can better support students, and giving international students a voice and opportunity to share important experiences.

Compensation: All participants will be receiving a $20 gift card.

Confidentiality: *If no personal identifying information is to be collected (e.g., names, health numbers, student ID numbers, email addresses, etc.), and the participant will be truly anonymous, state this clearly. If you are interviewing someone or videotaping or audiotaping, you cannot say their participation is anonymous, it is confidential.*

Your personal information collected throughout the study will remain confidential. Your data will be stored on password protected files on the computer of the primary investigator.

Consent forms and email addresses will be collected, as well as demographic data (e.g. age, country of origin, faculty, MA or PhD, year in program, time spent in Canada, gender and preferred pronouns, racial group).

Your interviews will also be stored on the computer of the primary investigator, as well as transcripts. You will have the option to choose to have only your audio recorded or audio/visual for the phone, Skype, or Zoom interview. On the recording of interviews, you will be referred to by a pseudonym of you choosing. This pseudonym will be your identifier for the interviews. The recording will NOT be for public use and will only be for the researcher and a research assistant under the supervision of the primary investigator.

Yes: ___ No: ___ You consent to be video- recorded.
Yes: ___ No: ___ You consent to having audio ONLY recorded

Dissemination of Results: This research will be published as a book chapter or journal article. It was also used as a manuscript in the Primary investigator's dissertation. Results may be summarized to inform panels and groups working with international students and results may be summarized for conference presentations. Participants will remain confidential in publication.

Questions: If you have questions at any time, you are invited to contact the primary investigator at Shannon.hutcheson@mail.mcgill.ca

If you have any ethical concerns or complaints about your participation in this study, and want to speak with someone not on the research team, please contact the Associate Director, Research Ethics at 514-398-6831 or lynda.mcneil@mcgill.ca citing REB file number # 22-03-031

For written consent

Please sign below if you have read the above information and consent to participate in this study. Agreeing to participate in this study does not waive any of your rights or release the researchers from their responsibilities. To ensure the study is being conducted properly, authorized individuals, such as a member of the Research Ethics Board, may have access to your (your child's) information. A copy of this consent form will be given to you and the researcher will keep a copy.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature: _____ Date: _____

For online consent or anonymous participation without signature (revise as appropriate to the study methods):

Please read this document before continuing on to the demographic information. Submitting your demographic information indicates that you consent to participate in this study. Please save or print a copy of this document to keep for your own reference.

The norm is written consent. If consent will be obtained orally (as approved by the REB), this must be documented by the researcher. In addition, consent may be audio or video recorded. When appropriate, a copy of the written consent document must be offered to participants.

When composing your own consent form be sure to include the version date (month/day/year) in the footer. Change accordingly as revised.

APPENDIX C

Interview Protocol

Pre- interview check:

1. ***NOTIFY RECORD***
2. ***ENABLE TRANSCRIPTION***
3. ***SHARE RESOURCES***
4. ***DOWNLOAD TRANSCRIPTION***

Interview Protocol

Project Title: International Students in Canada: Access, Equity, and Fairness

Pre-interview:

- *Introduction (background, who I am as PhD researcher and international student) -> contextualizing the research and giving a brief description)*
- *Explain that the interview is anticipated to last 45 minutes to one hour and ask interviewee to confirm how much time they have today*
- *Review mental health resources*

Interview Questions:

1) General warm up questions
    a. Verify pseudonym, preferred pronouns to be referred to during the interview
    b. Tell me a little bit about yourself (if student needs prompting, can supplement with questions such as "where are you from" and "when did you move to Quebec?")
    c. Are you currently in Canada? If not, where are you?
    d. Verify information on demographic information sheet if needed.
2) General international student life questions
    a. What is life like as an international student at McGill? In Quebec? In Canada?
    b. What do you like about being an international student at McGill? In Quebec? In Canada?
    c. What do you **not** like about being an international student here?
    d. In your opinion, what are the biggest challenges you or other international students encounter when they study here? What are those that are specific to the pandemic or additional challenges that arose during the pandemic? During the pandemic?
3) Pandemic questions on fairness/equity
    a. Have you felt that compared to domestic or home students (e.g. students with Canadian citizenship who are NOT international) your treatment has been equitable or fair/unfair (in Canada, online, etc.?) Could you give examples? Has this looked different during the pandemic vs. before the pandemic (only relevant for students who started prior to 2020)
    b. Have you encountered issues during the pandemic that you feel your Canadian peers have not? If so, what issues?

    c. Have you ever felt targeted or excluded by certain policies during the pandemic (e.g. access to financial aid/relief programs like CERB or CESB, healthcare, immigration policies? Can you offer examples?
4) Areas of Social Support/ social protections
    a. As an international student what were your biggest sources of support during the pandemic? Were there areas you felt that there were sufficient or insufficient sources of support? If students need prompting, sources of support could include people (e.g. friends, family, supervisors, instructors), offices (e.g. TLS), services (e.g. ISS, financial aid, emergency funding, social assistance, fee waivers), the Canadian government, the university, you home country
    b. Did you access any services during the pandemic from the government, your school, or other sources? Which ones?
    c. If yes, what made accessing these services more accessible or less accessible?
    d. If no, why didn't you access services?
    e. Are there any services or supports you wish had existed during the pandemic for international students? Or do you wish the available services looked different? How so?

Wrap Up:

- *Ask if interviewee has anything that they'd like to add that I hadn't asked them about today or any questions/answers they'd like to elaborate on*
- *Interviews will conclude with me thanking them for their time, confirming details for distributing gift cards, and redirecting towards mental health services. Students will also be prompted that they can contact me for any questions following the interview.*

Is there anything you'd like to add that I haven't asked you about today?

1. **DETAILS ON WHERE TO GET GIFT CARD – MAIL OR RETRIEVE ON CAMPUS???**
2. **PLEASE DON'T HESITATE TO CONTACT ME**
3. **MAY FOLLOW UP FOR CLARIFICATION**
4. **DOWNLOAD TRANSCRIPT/RECORD IMMEDIATELY**

APPENDIX D

Sample Biography

Sarah

Age: 25

Gender: F

Nationality: Sri Lanka

Race: South Asian

Level of studies: Master's Thesis

Faculty/program: Humanities (program redacted)

Year studies were started: Fall 2021

First arrival in Quebec for Studies: Between March 2020 and June 2022

Bio: Sarah is originally from a small town, so moving to the big city of Montreal was a surprise. She already has some family in Canada and Mcgill has a strong program, so those were big motivators for Sarah to study at McGill. She has the financial support of her family which she believes softens the financial blow that she noted international students can experience challenges with. Has dealt with people conflating Sri Lanka with India, not taking the time to understand accent or misunderstanding accent.

Salient points from interview:

- Despite having financial support from family, has focused in on the perception of international students and money machines
- Has had a challenging time navigating healthcare and getting emergency healthcare:
    - Insurance isn't accepted everywhere, and she wasn't always sure where she could go
- Made some interesting points on race and identity and international students
    - Had to figure out if people were acting towards her because of her race or because of Covid- had that second hand doubt
- Noted that international students are at the bottom of the "pecking order" for opportunities and also noted the limited funding in her department
- Has dealt with the assumptions people have about her as South Asian (e.g. -the perception that people don't steal in Canada but that they do in Sri Lanka), and noted other microaggressions she had encountered as an international student/ racialized international student
- International students and competition for resources
- Disproportionate emphasis on funding that international students aren't eligible for

- Small things that add up- e.g. not being eligible for an apt bc they have no Canadian credit history
- Passport power- friends from Pakistan not being able to get a visa to the US, but students from other countries can

Salient quotes:

- “But I've also come across situations where people have assumed that international students, including me, are here just for the money. So I've, I feel like that fee [00:05:00] structure reduces the importance that we bring as scholars, and we are seen as just like money machines by some people.”
- “And I think when I say international, the first thing that comes to mind is like BIPOC individuals, because I don't think of Americans or white Americans as international students, but I'm made to realize that when I talk to my classmates and they have the same well similar struggles yeah...”
- “So I think the fact that people make assumptions and a lot of, [00:10:00] no, I can't say a lot, but some people don't try to educate themselves, at least by speaking to someone from India or Sri Lanka or another country that they're confusing and they just go with their own knowledge. I find that very annoying and I've had my situations of microaggression, like even with friends, and that I think is harder when, but again, I guess I'm conflating being racialized and being an international student. But I feel like they're also linked because there are like Canadian students who have unwittingly said stuff that has annoyed me.”
- “So I think that's an outcome of the pandemic, and I feel like it affects international students disproportionately because we are paying so much more to be here. And with that payment, it's not that we're entitled to better services, just that we are entitled to what we paid for. And a lot of people aren't getting it.”
- “So just small things like that make it a bit harder to adapt to life in a new country.”