

Hidden Voices in Transnationalism:  
International Post-Secondary Student Experiences of Precariousness and  
Belonging in Ottawa

by

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## Abstract

International post-secondary students have been highlighted as potential solutions to the skill and talent gaps in the Canadian economy by federal and provincial governments. Despite this, there are gaps in the literature surrounding these students in relation to their lived experiences during their stay. By applying a theoretical framework composed of transnational feminism, precarious immigration and belonging and citizenship literature, this study contributes to the current research by exploring the factors that affect the experiences of international students. Additionally, through semi-structured interviews with international students and associated staff at Carleton University and policy analysis, this study investigates whether federal, provincial and post-secondary institutions are instrumental in producing a sense of belonging or precariousness for these students. The findings indicate that though there are many resources available to foster a sense of belonging and safety, the lack of integration and knowledge across institutional scales produces precarious environments for international students.

*Key words:* international post-secondary students, belonging and citizenship, security and well-being, racialization, transnational migration

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# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Research Background

When I was deciding to do this project, I was uncertain about the relevance of having international students as a study group. Having been an international student myself in both the United States of America and Canada, I knew that there were differences among international students in terms of visa restrictions and finances, and that we were considered a more elite economic group. With international post-secondary students, there has often been the rhetoric that they are either ‘cash cows’ that contribute to the economy and are rich, or ‘backdoor migrants’ because they are just trying to use the system to eventually migrate (Robertson, 2011). In my own experiences and conversations with other international and domestic students, there was a reoccurring theme of confusion because of the financial status of international students due to their ability to travel for education, the length of the visas they were given to study abroad and the lifestyles they lived at home and abroad. Some received study permits that covered the entire duration of their programs and some had to renew every year. However, on further reading of the literature surrounding both international students and transnational migrants as a whole, coupled with my own experiences in both countries, I began to see the gaps and areas of potential research in the intersection between migration, geography and studies in international education.

International education in Canada, as a body of literature, reflects the connection that educational policies have to federal, provincial and institutional policies and practices. This sector has become a union between immigration policies and financial and educational interests at the post-secondary institutions and provinces that house international students (Johnstone & Lee, 2017; Robertson, 2011). In Ontario, this is even more evident in looking at the representation of students and the province’s revenue from international tuition fees.

International student representation in the student bodies of Ontario universities increased by 88.5% between the 2010/2011 and 2016/2017 academic years (Crawley, 2017). An estimated \$11 billion is generated for Canadian universities annually, with \$5.4 billion of being spent in Ontario alone (Crawley, 2017). Additionally, with the proposed Ontario domestic post-secondary tuition fee freezes, for the 2019/2020 academic year, there is the added risk of increased pressure and reliance on international student tuition fees (Friesen, 2019). At Carleton University, my study site, the effects of this can be seen through the proposed 2019/2020 tuition increases for international students, including 3% and 8% increases depending on the program (Carleton University Board of Governors Secretariat, 2019).

Despite these recent changes in funding and education structures, the provincial strategies that are being developed to attract and retain international students in Ontario emphasize the significance of these students for employment and funding policies for the province. In 2016, the Ontario Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development started the process of developing a comprehensive international post-secondary education strategy for Ontario to keep the system competitive globally and to present Ontario as “a leader on the global stage” (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016, para 5). This need for global competitiveness is a repeated theme in the report and presents international students as a means of promotion and advancement for Ontario specifically, rather than Canada as a whole. They are framed as an avenue for filling the need for skilled and talented workers to contribute to Ontario’s economic prosperity (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016).

This apparent demand for international students as revenue and skill generators does not reflect a complementary knowledge of the experiences of students while they are in Canada or how those experiences differ according to factors like gender, race and class. The strategies to

attract these students give little attention on the actual experiences of the international students once they are living in Ontario or the effects that something like unregulated tuition fees have on student stability and well-being (Friesen, 2019; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016). This study involves the participation of a small group of international students, which does not represent the entirety of those who travel to Ontario for study. However, the experiences expressed by this subset of students provides better insight into the overall conditions of international post-secondary students, and the provincial and institutional strategies that influence their lives.

## 1.2 Context and Justification

The shifting climate in international migration as a whole is also important, with increasing benefits for Canada's recruitments of international talent as global phenomena such as Brexit and populist movement have changed potential students' opinions. This can be seen in the surge of applications to Canada for the 2017/2018 academic year following the US presidential elections in 2016 (Coughlan, 2017; Harris, 2017). Despite this benefit, and the aforementioned tuition needs of the province and universities, there is still a lot of concern about international student welfare in terms of livelihoods and events that are difficult to control. In 2018, students had to be reassured at Algonquin College that their status would not be affected because of a teacher's strike, an interesting question because of the potential consequences on applying for the Post Graduate Work Permit, their ability to continue to reside in the country without studying, and their ability to work off campus to sustain their livelihoods (The Canadian Press, 2017; The Government of Canada, 2019).

In academia, research on international university students has focused primarily on their mobilities (Cairns, 2015; Finn, 2017; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Tan & Hugo, 2017) and the

integration of international students into the economy, whether through invitation into permanent residency for work or the mistreatment of students in under-the table, or irregular, revenue streams or having to work longer hours than permitted, which puts them at risk (Bhuyan, Jeyapal, Ku, Sakamoto, & Chou, 2017; Johnstone & Lee, 2017; Nyland et al., 2009). What both of these streams on international student research have in common is the need to examine more critically the varying experiences of students in the post-secondary sector that are affected by class, race and gender (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Sweetman & Warman, 2014; Waters, 2012). Within the larger scope of how international post-secondary students live their lives in their host countries, there can be large variations in experience due to any combination of race, gender, class, religion and culture as factors during their time as students.

While there are many studies that explore the lives of international post-secondary students, many of those focus on their vulnerability in the work sector and their post-graduation mobility and migration (Johnstone & Lee, 2017; Nyland et al., 2009; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Even in the broader discussion on international student mobility, these students are often linked with highly skilled, economic migrants or precarious migration rather than being their own independent subset (Goldring, Berinstein, & Bernhard, 2009; Waters, 2012). A good example of this is how in defining what illegality and precariousness is in the Canadian context, international students are mentioned briefly and are acknowledged as temporary, but their vulnerability as temporary migrants is not explained in detail (Goldring et al., 2009). This precarious status and my aforementioned links to the international student experience drove the course of this thesis project. I have already discussed the need for an exploration of the variation of lived experiences of international students but within this thesis, there will be an expansion on

these experiences based on the factors of safety and precariousness that are discussed by participants.

The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), a major student-led organization with national coverage and connections to student unions on campuses across Canada features prominently as a point of reference and advocacy for students on the provincial and federal level within this thesis as well. Though this research project is not affiliated with them, their campaign, Fairness for International Students, identifies international post-secondary students in universities and colleges as major academic, cultural and economic contributors to the communities they are in (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018a). The CFS (2017) also identifies issues in the tuition fee differences between domestic and international students, the differences in healthcare coverage, and generally advocates to ensure easier livelihoods for international students by improving immigration policies in Canada.

The urgency with which the CFS presents these issues highlights a need to investigate what it means to improve international students' lives not only in the context of their contributions to their host countries, but also because the lack of access to rights and privileges for international students can lead to detrimental situations (Li & Whitworth, 2016). Some of these cases may involve them working 'cash-in-hand' jobs that do not provide the safety and regulation of government enforcement that regular jobs do (Li & Whitworth, 2016) As international students continue to be an important part of Canada's, and in particular Ontario's, educational agenda to fill talent and skill gaps, it is important to evaluate the experiences, adaptations and strategies students employ and what affects their stay (Hari, McGrath, & Preston, 2013; Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016). I chose to focus this study in Ontario because it is a significant province in the research surrounding international students

and immigration. Ontario has the highest number of international university students, with 43% of international students in Canada attending an institution in the province (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2016). Additionally, there was a 127% increase in the number of international students in the province between 2008 and 2015 (Canadian Bureau for International Education, 2016). This increase shows the significance of conducting more studies in this already small field of research.

### 1.3 Research Questions

Though the lived experiences of international post-secondary students are important, studies on this have been few and far between. Specifically, the literature that investigates how those lived experiences are affected by immigration policies in Canada is scarce, though on the rise. For this reason, the main question this study investigates is how Canadian immigration policies and institutions at the federal, provincial and university levels affect the lived experiences of international post-secondary students in Ottawa. This research represents a preliminary foray into this question, through a pilot study with students at Carleton University. The following sub-questions guided this research:

1. How are institutional policies and practices at the university, Ontario provincial and federal levels implicated in the production of precariousness for international post-secondary students?
2. Do international students feel a sense of belonging in their environment, and if so, how does it develop?
3. How do students feel or define a sense of precariousness or security in their daily lived experiences, and is there a connection between those senses and belonging?

4. What are the variations in experience among international students in relation to race, gender and class?

By addressing these questions, I hoped to learn, and emphasize, what the variations are in the experiences of international students and how that affects their sense of belonging. This was done through the use of feminist methodologies, policy analysis and employing my theoretical frameworks of belonging, precarious immigration and transnational feminist studies. The diverse methods I used in this study reflect, in part, the mixture of tools that are essential in understanding these international student experiences and how this group fits into the structure of the immigration and education systems within Ontario.

#### 1.4 Thesis Structure

The chapter that follows, Chapter Two, provides a detailed literature review, tracing the two main streams of international student and education related literature that this project contributes. This chapter also discusses the theoretical framework of the thesis, specifically belonging and citizenship, precarious migration and transnational feminist studies as the lenses through which those gaps in the literature can be addressed and evaluated. Chapter Three focuses on the methodology employed within the research, describing the data collection method and analysis techniques used within the fieldwork process. Feminist methodologies are illustrated by my intentional use of reflexivity in my fieldwork process and post-research reflections. Through journal entries that I highlight in this chapter, I showcase how I processed my interview data and positioned myself within my research. I also discuss my use of semi-structured interviews and policy analysis.

For the analysis portion of thesis, I divided my discussion into two chapters, each covering a full aspect of the analysis from the rich data I was able to collect from interview

participants. Chapter Four discusses the findings of my interviews with organizational contacts and combines that with the policy analysis of key documents to present and analyze the infrastructure that supports international students. Chapter Five documents the experiences of international students through their own lens and situates them within the aforementioned infrastructure, while presenting information relevant to the broader literature. Both Chapters Four and Five provide potential avenues for study. Finally, Chapter Six provides some post-research reflexivity, limitations of the project and suggestions for future research.

## 2 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Introduction to the Literature Review

International students are a heterogeneous group and one could argue that you could find international post-secondary students in almost every region of the world. In Canada, the experiences and treatments of the various transnational migrants that contribute to the economy and social structure of the country are quite well documented in the geographic literature. Within this literature, however, there is an emphasis on economic transnational migrants and often international students are tied together with that category of migrants (Waters, 2012). While international students do contribute significant economic revenue to the Canadian economy regardless of their employment status, because of their tuition fees (Crawley, 2017), they technically differ from those in the highly-skilled migrant category and should be treated as such in research and policy (Waters, 2012).

The objective of this chapter is to present the established literature on international students and its gaps, and to highlight the theoretical framework that guides this thesis. The chapter is divided into two main parts: the review of the literature and the theoretical framework. The literature review highlights the two subdivisions of international education literature: international student mobility and the neoliberal view of students, while the theoretical framework is laid out in its three encapsulating components: belonging, precarious immigration literature, and transnational feminist studies.

#### 2.1.1 International Student Mobility

International Student Mobility is an evolving body of literature within the field of geography, as scholars continuously add new dimensions to the complicated reasons international students make choices to move, stay, or other related decisions post-graduation for

work, livelihood or educational purposes. Of the major themes surrounding research on international students within their host countries, international student mobility is one of the most investigated. It is a relatively large body of literature that primarily examines the post-graduation plans of international students and their mobilities within their host countries. Specifically, these scholars often research whether or not these international students will stay in their host countries or return home (Cairns, 2015; Sweetman & Warman, 2014; Tan & Hugo, 2017; Wu & Wilkes, 2017).

International Student Mobility (ISM) speaks to, primarily, this stay-return binary of international students post-graduation. Though, there are many studies emerging that tackle these moves and the additional factors that complicate them (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Tan & Hugo, 2017; Wu & Wilkes, 2017), the original concept of staying or returning has a prominent role in the literature. The progression of ISM stems from the idea of the push-pull factors that govern international students' decisions to study and potentially stay abroad, with the evidence even being in some of the titles of articles within the field of ISM going back to the mid-90s (Cairns, 2015; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). From Wu and Wilkes (2017), a few of these titles are 'To return or not to return?' (Zweig, 1997), 'Visitors or immigrants? International students in the United States' (Hazen & Alberts, 2006), 'Should I Stay or Should I Go? An Analysis of the Determinants of Intra-European Student Mobility' (Van Mol & Timmerman, 2014), reflecting the pervasiveness of the stay-return dynamic that occurs in research surrounding international student lives. This is not to say that these ideas are completely wrong or that the literature has not progressed beyond this, as these ideas even arose in some of my own student interviews, but that this concept is quite significant even in more recent scholarly articles and works like Wu and Wilkes (2017).

While the stay-return binary is still a distinct concept within ISM literature, there are different branches within it that expand upon this framework. Some authors add to this framework by discussing the complex nature of the factors that are associated with the push and pull of international students by investigating the larger structures that affect international students beyond their own decisions (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). The introduction of the mobilities and immobilities within the framework showcases the different privileges among the various international student groups and how those affect their post-graduate movements within their host countries, to their homes, or elsewhere (Finn, 2017; Waters, 2012).

In all these cases, the concept of staying, returning and the option of going elsewhere create cracks in the perceived stay-return binary. This emerging critique of the stay-return binary has involved defining the various mobilities of students as well as incorporating long and short-term aspirations (Cairns, 2015; Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Wu & Wilkes, 2017). Although this literature is broad and quite comprehensive, it is still an emerging field in terms of its consideration of the various socioeconomic and political factors that affect international students in myriad ways.

This need to explore more nuanced situations in the lives of international students has not escaped scholars within this body of literature who have done a lot of work to represent the truly complex nature of this group of people. Perkins and Neumayer (2014) investigate how long-term goals and contextual factors, such as the economic conditions of the host country, influence the plans to stay or leave (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Perkins and Neumayer (2014) further challenge this binary by stating “distance, common language, colonial linkages, and previously

ignored in other quantitative studies, pre-existing migrant stocks are therefore all found to exert a substantively large impact on spatial patterns of international student mobilities” (p. 257).

Cairns (2015) contributes to that challenge by considering factors such as gender, parental occupation as a proxy for class, and dependents in and outside the country as these could affect the decisions of international students to move to other countries post-diploma/post-graduation. One dimension of his argument is that there should those factors that affect the students’ decisions to move should be considered within the larger framework of international student mobility (Cairns, 2015). He goes so far as to call this period of time for international students a crisis period, and links the mobility decisions of the international students in his study in Portugal significantly to their economic decisions (Cairns, 2015). Cairns (2015) also highlights Erasmus, a publicly-supported international mobility program for supporting student travel and exchange, which often benefits those from the more stable European countries rather than those from what he terms the “precarious periphery” (p. 21). Here, Cairns (2015) is referring to the non-Anglophone and non-core European countries, such as Portugal, where the economy, job security, and other opportunities weigh heavily on students’ mobilities, making them precarious and peripheral on the scale of the European Union and within their own countries. All of these factors are further complicated by exploring the different types of mobilities involved in the broader context of international student mobility.

Finn (2017) redefines international student mobility by classifying it as a hyper-mobility, composed of three specific mobilities that change with each situation: the elite, the traditional and the new. In doing this, Finn (2017), moves away from solely examining the post-graduate mobility of international students, and focuses on a broader scope that encompasses their everyday mobilities as well. The elite, interestingly named for what it represents, consists of

those who feel the need to get away from their family, the traditional signifies that pull back towards home with the journeys between home and the host country, and the new describes the unsure and tentative nature of some students' mobilities, and how the uncertainty of the future can affect them (Finn, 2017). All these ways of viewing international student mobility combine to provide a complex picture of the international student experience. They do, however, also point to the room for growth that this field still has. Some of this is filled by the literature on neoliberal immigration policy literature.

### 2.1.2 Neoliberal Immigration Policy: The Economic Benefit of International Students

In neoliberal immigration policy-related literature, international post-secondary students are often framed as economic subjects. The framing of them as economic subject is used as both a critique and as a way to discuss the policy implications of neoliberal education systems. This body of literature is far less consolidated than the international student mobility literature. However, there is also an important shift from examining international education as being solely within the education sector to a recognition that it occupies a nexus between the immigration sector and the education sector (Robertson, 2011; Waters, 2012). While it may seem intuitive that immigration and education are interconnected when discussing and maintaining international education, the alliance between the two policy sectors speak to a larger structure of neoliberalism that affects education policies (Robertson, 2011; Waters, 2012).

This neoliberalization of education shifts the identity of the international student from just a student to a consumer – specifically a consumer of education and thus a contributor to the economic structure of the host country (Robertson, 2011). Robertson (2011) found that Australian immigration policies tended to favour international students as skilled migrants which created an image of them as “backdoor migrants” (p. 2197). Robertson (2011) provides an

interesting point about the framing of international students according to their intrinsic economic value. Such an approach means that the perception of these students can shift if they become less economically viable in the future (Robertson, 2011). Specifically, the portrayal of international students as “cash cows” and “backdoor migrants” moves them into the category of temporary foreign workers rather than students, creating tensions beyond the university institution to the scale of the city, the region and the country (Robertson, 2011).

In the Canadian context, there is a similar construction of the international student as the valuable immigrant and economic contributor. The value of international students lies within their ability to build the host country’s economic base without the additional costs that the country would have to incur for citizens and domestic students (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). These additional costs are related to public education, healthcare and other such investments and rights of citizens, that international students would not have had access to, or used growing up in a different country (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). There has even been the creation of specific immigration programs as incentive to attract foreign students such as the Canadian Experience Class in 2008 (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Johnstone & Lee, 2017), the Federal Skilled Workers Program in 2013 that provided a fast track option of PhD candidates to obtain citizenship, and the Provincial Nominees Program, also in 2013, that provides the opportunity for international graduate students, among other skilled migrants, to be nominated by their province for citizenship and employment (Johnstone & Lee, 2017). These programs make it easier for foreign students to become part of the society but primarily in an economic capacity, and not necessarily in a fully permanent way, with some exceptions.

The Canadian Experience Class (CEC) is a heavily discussed option for international students, especially in the context of how it incorporates non-Canadians into the Canadian

system through their qualification of having, specifically, Canadian work experience. While it may seem to simply prioritize work that has already contributed the economy, it is hard to ignore the roots of the system that eventually created this avenue for international students and other economic migrants. This immigration pathway is rooted in the transition of the Canadian national identity from one of White settler domination prior to 1970 to one of multiculturalism and tolerance (Bhuyan et al., 2017). Rather than being judged on acceptability due to more racist systems, Canada transitioned after the 1970s to a more neoliberal model of admitting people based on their economic value and investment in Canada, creating a more universal model (Bhuyan et al., 2017). The need for economic migrants, and the strategies to improve economic integration, precipitated the need to restructure immigrant policies (Sweetman & Warman, 2014). While the CEC might provide better returns on international students' education (Sweetman & Warman, 2014), the problem with the discourse that the CEC advances is that it “constructs immigrants as deficient without referring to their racial or social characteristics: their problems are seen as a result of their ‘lack of skills’” and that it “whitewashes the racist undertones that have always been fundamental to both immigrant selection policy and the structural barriers that racialized immigrants face in Canada” (Bhuyan et al., 2017, p. 51;60).

### 2.1.3 Gaps in the literature

The literature on international students is still growing and we need to pay attention to some the facets that the previous authors have questioned. For instance, Sweetman and Warman (2014) have mentioned that the Canadian Experience Class could be beneficial to international students but admit that there will be variations in experiences according to gender that need to be investigated. While racial context has been brought up as a significant factor in some

international student experiences (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Daniels, 2014), there is still much to be done in understanding how these shape the experiences of students, both while they are students and when they become workers, because racialization is ubiquitous and shares common threads, but it is not homogeneous.

International students are an interesting case in terms of immigration categories because they do not fit neatly into any particular group, though they are often categorized with highly skilled migrants even within the literature (Waters, 2012). Their ability to work as teaching assistants, research assistants and other general workers within the economy to support themselves makes them fluid in their categorisation to some extent. They are a privileged group by means of their ability to travel internationally for education, but there are variations in that privilege related to race, ethnicity, colonial linkages, gender and class once they are in the host country pursuing their education (Daniels, 2014; Le, LaCost, & Wismer, 2016; Waters, 2012). Additionally the complicated nature of the stay-return question needs to be considered in the lives of international students as they have to decide whether to take the options provided for them or pursue other opportunities, or whether those opportunities even exist for them (Wu & Wilkes, 2017). These are the gaps that my research explored to fill at least partially. I aimed to explore those variations in privilege and experience that are categorized by race, class and gender and even national origin. I also hoped to merge the discussion of neoliberal immigration and educational policy with the issues within international student mobility literature. My theoretical framework, with the components of belonging, transnational feminist studies, and precarious immigration literature, guided my analysis of the everyday experiences encompassed with international student mobility and neoliberal immigration literature by digging deeper into the nuanced and varied aspects of students' lives.

## 2.2 Introduction to the Theoretical Framework

The everyday experiences of international post-secondary students, as influenced by the Canadian immigration system, are complex and underexplored. This project examines this complexity, with a focus on belonging, citizenship, and precariousness. There are differences in the experiences of migrants, and specifically international students, depending on factors such as gender, class, race and many others and this needs to be considered when investigating and understanding the varied experiences that international students have while in Ottawa (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Sweetman & Warman, 2014). The transnational feminist literature is the final, and crucial, component of this theoretical framework. This body of literature examine the migrants who traverse global spaces by highlighting the differences and often disregarded perspectives in their journeys.

Belonging can be applied analytically through various lenses but for the purpose of this study, I am defining belonging in terms of citizenship, to emphasize the ways in which people are categorized, excluded and included. Specifically, this refers to the discourses and politics of inclusion and exclusion through membership and recognition of groups, and consequent claims of ownership of places and land (Antonsich, 2010). Similarly, the literature on precarious immigration status explores the systemic production of illegality, irregularity and insecurity for those who do not have access to full permanent resident or citizenship rights (De Genova, 2002; Goldring et al., 2009). This chapter will explore these two bodies of literature to situate international students in discussions of power, and people in relation to the policies that govern their lives and transnational journeys. Transnational feminism provides a nuanced, multi-scalar perspective on these otherwise gender-neutral bodies of literature.

### 2.2.1 Belonging and Citizenship

Belonging can be defined in different ways when you consider scale, people groups, who is being given the authority to belong and who is being left out of the group and/or discourse. The idea of ‘who belongs’ is already complex, which is why I am connecting it to the larger concept of citizenship. While citizenship does involve the political recognition of a group of people, it does not necessarily mean that the people within those groups will feel a sense of belonging in the sociocultural and economic aspects of life (Antonsich, 2010). However, within these various components of belonging, the politics of belonging has the most influence. The politics of belonging, not to be confused with political belonging or citizenship itself, involve “two opposite sides: the side that claims belonging and the side that has the power of ‘granting’ belonging” (Antonsich, 2010, p. 650). Belonging is thus a negotiation and a discourse – something that is fluid and changing depending on the circumstances (Antonsich, 2010).

By framing belonging and citizenship as a discourse, the citizen-non-citizen and us-them binaries are complicated because it inspires a closer examination of the fluidity of people’s identities and perspectives. Statuses like citizen or immigrant are important ascriptions in the lives of ‘non-citizens’ because of how they influence non-citizen access to certain rights and privileges like healthcare and voting (Varsanyi, 2006). International post-secondary students in Canada are a prime example of how these binaries do not fully explain lived situations because while they are not citizens, they are given more opportunities to receive permanent residency status than some other temporary foreign workers (Bhuyan et al., 2017; Johnstone & Lee, 2017). The way citizenship is negotiated by non-citizens, and by institutions governing the citizen rights of people, speaks to the broader questions within the discourse of belonging such as rights of access versus the contribution of those people groups to the economy and society. In other

words, the discussion of citizenship by these scholars highlights the grey areas that non-citizens can access to better navigate the countries and systems they are situated in (Johnstone & Lee, 2017; Varsanyi, 2006). All these come together in the larger scope of belonging as citizenship because the two are intertwined through the control of spaces and bodies. Control, in this context, refers to the ways in which citizens and non-citizens are governed by, and navigate, the rules and regulations associated with the governing body they are under (Rygiel, 2010). This involves the fluidity of their identities within the space, which can change due to their own actions or external regulations, and the ways in which access to resources, rights, mobility and politics are reconstructed (Isin, 2008; Rygiel, 2010). In these ways, control is an indicator of power, both for rulers of the infrastructure and those within it.

For international students, transnational migrants, and even citizens, belonging at different scales can have a big impact on their day-to-day lives. Urban citizenship, for instance, reflects the multiple senses of belonging that can occur on a more local, city scale as opposed to the national, monolithic scale (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012). It highlights the social processes within citizenship and reveals the ways in which non-citizens are able to negotiate the title of citizen and claim certain rights in nuanced situations. Undocumented persons in some cities in the United States are one example of people who were able to access the right to vote in some local elections and gained the right to in-state tuition in various states (Varsanyi, 2006). The politics of belonging and citizenship are expanded beyond the scope of the nation-state when daily life interacts with matters of citizenship on the smaller scale of the city, and the level of the province, or the state in the United States (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012).

Political belonging is defined as the connections between political practices, political communities and political identity (McNevin, 2006). These different components highlight the

complexity of political belonging on even a national level, and force us, in a sense, to reimagine what that political belonging would mean for transnational migrants at the various scales of being that they encounter (Secor, 2004). At the urban level, belonging can become entrenched with movements of resistance on multiple, intersecting platforms, with the city as a battleground for these claims (Isin, 2008; Rossi & Vanolo, 2012). In Istanbul, Kurdish women challenge the limitations that group-based identification and belonging produce, and make the city a place of relation across multiple associations (Rossi & Vanolo, 2012; Secor, 2004). The household is another stage on which political belonging, and consequently the politics of belonging, is exhibited. The scale of the household and the intimate relations held therein are often influenced by national immigration policies in transnational homes (McNevin, 2006; Walton-Roberts, 2004). These different dimensions showcase the discourse of citizenship and how it is enacted by both citizen and non-citizen actors. In my research, I have focused on the different scales of governance that affect the students' lives in the interview questions to organizational contacts, international students, and through the policy documents I incorporate in my analysis.

With this background in mind, we can now turn to how citizenship is used by governments as a tool of enforcement, and leaves room for resistance by non-government actors. Rygiel (2010) outlines a Foucauldian understanding of citizenship as “the practices, discourses, technologies, forms of power, and political subjectivities used in the governing of individuals and populations” (p. 11). In this way, citizenship can be examined in terms of the power relations embedded within it rather than just as a legal status that is awarded to some by means of earning it, whether through birth or meeting some criteria that defines a nation-state and its subjects. Rygiel (2010) also recontextualizes citizenship by asserting that it is a globalizing regime, making the scale of the global something beyond the nation-state and the international and yet

something that can pervade local scales as well. Such is the case with international students, since they relate to the economy in more elaborate ways than just being temporary residents. In the globalizing citizenship regime, international students are in a complex power relationship where their access to certain privileges are restricted even though they contribute greatly to the societies they live in.

Citizenship as a globalizing regime reveals how the regulation of mobilities, access to resources and various other rights are reconfigured and reworked by governments and subjects under the regime (Rygiel, 2010). Because of this, citizenship is relational and contains multiple natures of power including bio-power, or bio-politics, which examines how life is managed through government (Rygiel, 2010). Specifically, citizenship “is based on a politics of life and death that determines in the very first instance whose life is even worthy of recognition as a political subject” (Rygiel, 2010, p. 112). This has several implications for the lived experiences of non-citizens and their sense of belonging. Citizenship acts as a way to control the experiences of those it deems subjects and non-subjects, meaning that it values life based on the political status of a people. People without the status of subject, then, not only have to affirm their belonging to the place they are in, but also their worth as people. In France, the *Sans Papiers* protested changes in immigration and citizenship laws that rendered them outside access to citizen rights by negotiating French national discourse and affirming their long-term presence in the country (McNevin, 2006). These spaces of tension and resistance to the globalizing regime accentuate the power relations embedded in belonging and citizenship.

McNevin (2006), and Secor (2004), among others, use a feminist multi-scalar lens in their analyses of belonging and citizenship, which connect to the final component of transnational feminism in this framework. The everyday experiences of transnational migrants

and non-citizens are influenced by, and influence, the discourses of belonging and citizenship. Transnational feminism deconstructs mainstream ideologies of globalization and transnationalism as gender-neutral and inherently freeing by incorporating gendered, racialized and classed experiences (Freeman, 2001; Mountz & Hyndman, 2006; Pratt & Yeoh, 2003). Transnational feminist approaches problematize the perception of dominant scales as given, rather than constructed, and involve looking at the intersections of the larger global scale and more intimate scales of the household and the personal (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006; Yeoh, 2005). The intersectionality of transnational feminism and the heterogeneity of international students are complementary in their exploration of the transnational experience. I incorporated this by weaving the larger scales of policy and practice with the individual student experiences and professional opinion and observation of the current condition of international education in Ontario and at Carleton University.

### 2.2.2 Precariousness

The precariousness literature explores the insecurities that occur when a person, or political subject, is living or working within a country without full access to rights and resources (De Genova, 2002; Goldring et al., 2009). Particularly, it examines how immigration laws produce and reproduce the status of illegality and precariousness for those whose statuses are fluid (De Genova, 2002). Precariousness has two main foci: precarious migrant status and precarious employment. Precarious migrant status includes both being without status and having status that can be taken away or is in transition (Goldring et al., 2009). In all these cases, precariousness leads to feelings of insecurity and lack of access to resources such as healthcare (Premji, 2018; Strauss & McGrath, 2017).

The legislative status of being illegal, or not quite fully legal, creates social, economic and political instability. Geographers have explored this insecurity in precariousness by in both context of employment and immigration. Precarious employment is a large facet of immigration because migrants populations are prone to exploitation and excessive lack of freedoms in their work environments (Premji, 2018; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). Because of the insecurity that migrants feel in their daily lives and in their places of employment from lack of resources, they are unable to fight the exploitation that they may face from an employer who, in contrast, has access to the full rights of a citizen (Strauss & McGrath, 2017). The Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP), and its various streams of employment, in Canada is a prime example of this precarious labour. Seasonal Agricultural Workers, for instance, might have access to certain labour rights under the contract of their stay in Canada but are often unaware of what they are entitled to, how to access those resources, or if they are even being oppressed or exploited at all (Basok, 2004). Additionally, the only stream that allows migrant workers to apply for permanent residency and then citizenship is the Live-In Caregiver Program, which has implications of valuing labour that may be considered 'higher skilled' over 'lower skilled' labour, and thus creating more disparities and insecurity among migrant worker groups (Raghuram, 2004; Strauss & McGrath, 2017). International students also fall under the banner of this insecurity as any jobs they take during their stay would be temporary foreign work that is under the restrictions of their visa requirements (Daniels, 2014; Nyland et al., 2009).

This precarious employment, which encompasses insecurity, low wages, limited rights and protections, and feelings of powerlessness (Premji, 2018), is only one facet of the experience of precarious immigration status. Precarious migrant status is defined as precariousness

associated with the absence of the following elements usually included in permanent residency or citizenship:

“(1) work authorization, (2) the right to remain permanently in the country (residence permit), (3) not depending on a third party for one’s right to be in Canada (such as a sponsoring spouse or employer), and (4) social citizenship rights available to permanent residents (e.g. public education and public health coverage)” (Goldring et al., 2009, pp. 240-241).

This definition creates a picture of insecurity and risk beyond the illegal/undocumented-legal binary and exposes other situations in discussions of immigration as a whole. It also reveals the subtle distinctions of risk the immigration system produces. Immigration laws create ‘illegality,’ or ‘irregularity,’ for temporary migrants that affects the physical, emotional and economic well-being of migrants because of their lack of access to housing, healthcare, work and the fear of being deported (Goldring et al., 2009; Villegas, 2014). International students fulfill at least three of the four criteria given by Goldring et al. (2009) in their definition of precarious migrant status, with the fourth, absence of work authorization, being only partially given and under strict rules and monitoring. The above-mentioned effects on well-being could have large impacts on the lives of students, many of whom are in their late teens to early twenties when they arrive in Canada.

The major strength of the precariousness lens is that it examines how the system of law creates the irregular and insecure status and lives of migrants. Migrants are often restricted in their ability to challenge difficult and potentially dangerous situations in their work, highlighting how precarious work is linked to precarious status (Villegas, 2014). That connection between precarious work and status exposes the consequences that can occur when you equate the value of people in a society with their economic contribution to said society (Robertson, 2011; Villegas, 2014). Due to the economic status that international students are classified under, one

of the ways to they claim access to certain rights is by locating themselves “within neoliberal economic discourse through the positioning of their value as economic subjects as evidence of their worth as political subjects” (Robertson, 2011, p. 2206). The examination of the systemic production of precariousness provides the opportunity to explore the different facets of the immigration system (Goldring et al., 2009). In Canada, there is little knowledge about people with precarious status as defined by Goldring et al. (2009) which could have implications for policy and for the people who are not being counted (Bernhard & Young, 2009). This is specifically true for international students as the literature surrounding them and their experiences is limited in its connection to their precarious immigration status.

Immigration policy cannot be seen as solely gender-neutral even in the scope of creating risk and danger in people’s lives. Policies enact gendered experiences of transnationalism through their selection processes. For example, Raghuram (2004) argues the Live-In Caregiver Program (LCP) produces the image and experience of the Filipina woman as the global caretaker through its policies with the Philippines. Even though the LCP provides a pathway to permanent residency for participants, it still creates precarious situations of employment for women who choose to participate (Raghuram, 2004). By challenging gender-neutral lenses and dominant scales, transnational feminism examines these silences and gender regulations in policies (Raghuram, 2004; Silvey, 2004). The same can be applied for other life experiences like race, class and other categories.

### 2.2.3 Transnational Feminism

While belonging and precarious immigration literature are the primary basis for my theoretical framework, transnational feminist studies is the crucial piece that fills in the gaps of both bodies of literature. What I mean by transnational feminist studies is the specific literature

that relates to how the factors of gender, race, class and more, affect the experiences of transnational migrants such as international students. Transnational feminism also emphasizes the ways in which local and everyday experiences are intertwined with global experiences for transnational migrants on almost daily basis (Freeman, 2001). The ways in which transnational migrants move through space, or their daily mobilities, are influenced regularly by their gender, sexuality, socioeconomic and political relations, and race on various levels (Dixon & Jones, 2015). All these nuances of lived experience are critical in feminist and transnational feminist literature and to this study.

These lived experiences can often involve navigating the local landscape and environment while also managing the global connections that tie the people to their homes or what they consider to be their places of origin. That blurry spectrum of home and place of residence is what Antonsich (2010) refers to in his framework of belonging. Transnational feminists would take that context that Antonsich (2010) presents and examine it even further by incorporating a gendered lens to the argument. Gendered analyses of the global transcend the ‘objective,’ masculinist nature of global research and highlight the concepts that are taken as given and fixed such as scale, the issue of borders, the influences of international decisions and agents on the everyday life of people and the gendered, classed and other such divisions of labour that occur (Mountz & Hyndman, 2006). Transnational feminism, in this way, seeks to rework the dominate narratives and highlight the varied transnational experiences that exist in day-to-day life (Freeman, 2001; Mountz & Hyndman, 2006; Yeoh, 2005) and this is what I attempted to display in this thesis when bringing these heterogenous and complex experiences to the forefront.

In her travelogue on her adventures in Germany, Stehle (2005) reports the different experiences and borders that can be drawn within the small physical space of a telecafé<sup>1</sup> and its surrounding areas in Berlin. Though she was German, Stehle (2005) entered the space of the telecafé because she was an international student in the United States at the time and had connections elsewhere. The café represented a place where people could access their global connections and a kind of haven for those who might be seen as outsiders or foreigners in the city (Stehle, 2005). That telecafé, and many others like it in the city, shift the dynamic of access to the global while highlighting the differences that arise between the patrons of the café – like the conversation between the Turkish-German owner and Stehle (2005) that revealed to her how the emotional, physical and religious borders they both had to cross to be in the same café. This is what transnational feminism does - its need is to “expose ourselves to multiple, clashing narratives” (Stehle, 2005, p. 47). In particular, here, Stehle (2005) is talking about how, through the lens of transnational feminism, she was able to see the various boundaries that had to be crossed in a conversation about why she was using the café. A normal conversation about where she is from and why she is using the telecafé carries underlying implications of who feels safe within the space, and which people are allowed, or introduce themselves into that safe space (Stehle, 2005). It also reinforces the complex nature of power relations, as the owner does have the ability to question her, but she has the power to enter an international space as a white citizen of the country it is in, among other aspects of power and multivariate narratives (Stehle, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> The telecafé, as described by Stehle (2005) is a space where people are able to make international calls in phone booths and use the internet. While it provides those amenities, sells various products and typically has longer hours, it represents more than just a space for services. These telecafés, that are usually cheaply furnished, provide a safer space to ‘foreigners’ or non-White Germans, in this case, so they can conduct their business and contact relatives far away without feeling monitored or different (Stehle, 2005).

While transnational feminism calls attention to the gaps in the traditional, objectivist perspectives of globalization and transnational migrant experiences, it is still a field of literature that has gaps of its own. The feminist methodologies implied within transnational feminism, such as self-reflexivity, the examination of the relationship and the participants in transnational feminist studies, could all lead to misconceptions about power and agency within research because of assumptions that could be made in the relationships between the researcher and the research participants (Blackwell, Briggs, & Chiu, 2015; Miraftab, 2004). Miraftab (2004) confronts these assumptions and their implications within her own fieldwork in Mexico. Likewise, while researching and formulating this project, and even through the fieldwork process, I have had to confront these questions of my own place within the research. Like Miraftab (2004), who did her fieldwork among women in Mexico while being a “Third world woman” herself from Iran, the questions of being both an insider and an outsider in the field further complicated the delineations of race, ethnicity, class, and gender in her own perceptions of her project, as it did in mine. The idea of myself as a researcher in an already heterogenous group that I had been classified under by the government and have no concrete connections with is something I struggle with on a daily basis. Transnational feminist literature as a framework has the potential to challenge dominant narratives, especially within the other components of my framework. It, however, also has the potential to essentialize certain people groups with its basis in neoliberal, Western philosophies, and assume a more dominant gender narrative despite the emphasis on intersectionality (Blackwell et al., 2015; Miraftab, 2004). The paradoxical nature of transnational feminism is that it changes the focus to a more decolonial and expansive frame of thought, it also carries with it the image of being white, Western, liberal and connected with imperial pasts and present (Blackwell et al., 2015). These are the dynamics that I am constantly

engaging with as researcher from the “Third world” doing research based on Western philosophy and research methods. This struggle using the a Western-based method of analysis is evident in my reflexivity process for this thesis and is something I identified during the student interviews – the blurry struggle between the home, or place, they have left and the place they are currently in.

#### 2.2.4 Conclusion

Belonging is an increasingly relevant issue in light of transnational migration and acceptance or rejection of various groups of people (Antonsich, 2010; Gilmartin, 2008). Transnational feminism, belonging and precarious immigration literature all provide a lens to critically examine how laws and policies affect the lives of migrants in a broader sense, and in the everyday (Goldring et al., 2009; Mountz, 2011; Walton-Roberts, 2004). Where belonging and citizenship and precariousness question the bigger structures of social, economic and political inclusion and exclusion, transnational feminism attempts to understand the intricacies of that exclusion and reveals the silences that exist within those systems of immigration by acknowledging that they exist and analyzing the power relations within those systems (Mountz, 2011).

Recognizing that international post-secondary students are a diverse group of migrants who can be categorized as student, transnational, and temporary worker simultaneously, and the heterogeneity within this group, incorporating aspects from these three bodies of literature serves to help understand that diversity of lived experience. By including international students more explicitly into the precariousness and belonging framework, the issues that they face in periods of transition can be understood more clearly. These bodies of literature have not focused primarily on international students, which is why it is valuable to include them in several dimensions: as students, as contributors to the economic systems of their host countries with

possibly minimal return, and as future possible permanent residents, in the case of Canada (Johnstone & Lee, 2017; Sweetman & Warman, 2014). The situation of international students is complicated and still being explored in terms of lived experience in Canada (Bernhard & Young, 2009; Hari et al., 2013), and these bodies of literature provide a strong framework to understand and unearth the experiences that students face with integration in the communities they are in.

This theoretical framework brings the people under the banner of transnational migration into the forefront by emphasizing the nuance in their lived experiences and acknowledging the systems that influence those lives. In this way, the theoretical framework of this thesis helps answer the primary research question of whether Canadian immigration policies at the provincial, federal and institutional levels affect students' lived experiences while they are in university. By acting as a guideline for analyzing and exploring those political nuances, governance and identity formations, it links back to the gaps identified in the literature review in relation to lived experience.

## 3 Methodology

### 3.1 Feminist Methodologies

The aim of this thesis is to explore the heterogenous lived experiences of international students in terms of race, class, national origin and gender as factors that can affect their lives. While the factors for this study were defined by the terms above, other factors that highlight difference were exposed by students during the interview process. Feminist methodologies explore these areas of difference among people by examining power relations, reflexivity, positionality, and the interactions of the everyday in the research process (Dixon & Jones, 2015), and as such, this type of methodology complements both the theoretical framework and the nature of the study itself. The transnational feminism component, in particular, complements the use of feminist methodologies in this project because of the emphasis on the participant being empowered and heard (England, 2015).

My research has been guided by the concepts of reflexivity and positionality. By concentrating on these aspects of feminist methodologies, I hoped to highlight the experiences and voices of the research participants above my own while acknowledging the role I play within the research. There is no one definitive way to practice feminist methodologies but in general, it is agreed that these methodologies are political, reflexive, incorporating of various gender, class, and racial identities, place, religious and other inequalities, and typically they speak to the various research power relations and the position of the researcher (England, 2015; Johnson & Madge, 2016). This makes conducting research through this lens admittedly challenging as those power relations and positionalities are often changing and adapting themselves to the discipline (Johnson & Madge, 2016). Since power and agency will always be a part of the ways in which

research is conducted, researchers will always be required to balance between recognizing and challenging these structures, and not contributing to them (Johnson & Madge, 2016). As a researcher, these are some of the issues I have contemplated during my own process and it is essential to be accountable to the participants and those who impart in the knowledge that is produced and reproduced.

Due to the heterogenous nature of the group of students, it would be hard to quantify the vulnerability and power dynamics in these interviews, but I recognise my own positionality and the power relations in this study. As a racialized, female international student, I could be considered an 'insider' with the international student community but that was only made evident to interview participants once we began the interview. During the recruitment process, it was not necessarily evident to participants that I was an international student unless they asked for my motivation behind the project, thus obscuring the potential for that insider comradery. Often student participants assumed I was a domestic student presumably because of the way I presented myself and the American accent I have employed since my time as an international student in the United States. This was a reflection on my own comfort as a researcher and what I believed was part of that persona. Additionally, my lack of connection to the international student community through ethnic or cultural groups, as well as my role as a researcher, gives me an outsider perspective. Ethically, these statements on my positionality have shaped my reflection on the research process and how I approached analysing the data from interviews.

As someone who is an international student again in my second host country and is at another level of tertiary education, the weight of the experiences of different identities in different places has increased in my academic and personal life. Whether it is about financial issues or visa requirements, coming from the position of a racialized female student from a lower

income West African country, the differences in lived experiences between students became more apparent to me as I progressed with my research on this topic. This is what makes me an insider in the community, though I would argue that the international student community is quite segmented, and it is difficult to be a member of that larger community in large school settings. However, in my time as an international student at Carleton, I have not been connected to the larger community and am thus an outsider, in addition to my position as a researcher. Unlike many of my student participants, I also do not associate with a specific cultural or ethnic community, or even with other international students. As a researcher and a person, I have been more divorced from these groups than my student participants, further cementing this outsider status in relation to the types of communities highlighted in this study. Robin Mohammad (2001) and Tracey Skelton (2001) articulated this divide in their research and how the line between insider and outsider can be very ambiguous and sometimes even problematic. The us/them and insider/outsider binary in itself can be limiting because, as in my case, the lines blur and can change depending how the researcher is viewed by the interviewee (Mohammad, 2001). For Mohammad (2001), though she was interviewing people in her culturally identified community, her authenticity was questioned until she showed that she spoke the language of the community, Urdu. Before that, her Western education and appearance labelled her as an outsider, thus creating a border that had to be crossed through her fluency in Urdu (Mohammad, 2001). Mohammad (2001) uses feminist methodologies and feminist theory to negotiate her positionality within her fieldwork and among her research participants, finally re-examining her place as a researcher in order to best represent her interviewees.

Further complicating these relations is the fact that international students range across various cultures, ethnicities and national origins. Here, the cross-cultural aspect of feminist

methodologies and research, which involves presenting the research in a format that is easily understandable to the research participants, being aware of the ways in which the research can do harm to vulnerable or non-vulnerable populations, and acknowledging the various sensitivities and complexities therein becomes especially important (Skelton, 2001). The diversity of international post-secondary students is a reflection of these complex relations, which have served as a guide for my research. I aimed to capture this questioning of social processes with the semi-structured and conversational nature of my interviews. My interviews were conducted in two different groups of participants as outlined in 3.2 and 3.3.2 below, and I subsequently applied some policy analysis of government documents, outlined in 3.3.1 to give a greater context to the political atmosphere and rules that influence international post-secondary students' lives.

### 3.2 Recruitment

The recruitment process for this project underwent some changes as my fieldwork session progressed. Overall, I followed the criterion sampling method, which involved creating an elimination criterion for participation in interviews and selecting cases based on that (Stratford & Bradshaw, 2016). Originally, I had planned to use two main organizational contact offices as distribution channels to recruit students. As fieldwork progressed, the recruitment strategy as outlined by the original ethics application had to be changed due to extenuating circumstances that are explained in sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2 below. This change led to using a different recruitment strategy that was relatively more successful in recruiting international students. There were two phases of the interview process for this project: the interviewing of staff of organizations that serve international students in some capacity, and the interviewing of international students at Carleton University.

Carleton University is my only study site, which, while it does not represent the entirety of the international student community in Ottawa, is a significant site because of its connection to the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), a national student union, and my own familiarity as an international student with this institution. The CFS was founded at Carleton University and has frequently been a proponent for improving the livelihoods of international students vis-à-vis tuition fees, healthcare and working visas (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2017, n.d.). Additionally, Carleton University experienced an almost 50% increase in international student enrollment based on statistics from November 2010 and November 2016 (Student Record Database, Carleton University, 2010, 2016), indicating the favourable view of Carleton as an institution of learning. All this, and Ottawa as a centre of federal decision-making, makes this area an interesting space considering the ways in which cities can be an arena of contestation (Isin, 2008; Rossi & Vanolo, 2012).

### 3.2.1 Recruitment for Organization Contact Interviews

For the recruitment of the organizational contacts, I planned to interview 5-6 individuals in various offices throughout Carleton University. These offices included the International Student Services Office, the two main student associations, and offices that have contact with international students such as the Student Experience Office. This began as soon as ethics clearance was approved in June 2018 (See Appendix A). I emailed various contacts at these offices in order to request an interview and, as stated in my initial ethics application, I planned to use the various organizations/offices as avenues to recruit international students through their distribution channels. The criteria for these organizational contacts were that they either had to have been involved in campaigns pertaining to international students or they had to have been

involved in immigration or cultural exchange related processes that international students are engaged in.

Unfortunately, it was difficult to get responses in the summer and some contacts in the reviewed offices did not align with the aforementioned criterion. There was an added layer of difficulty with bureaucratic procedures and precautions that prevented communication or the granting of an interview. Due to the nature of the study, reaching out to certain offices like the International Student Services Office was difficult, presumably because they are responsible for all international students in the school. Even with the review of my interview guide, I was only able to get a document generally stating the services that the office provides. Attempts to reach beyond the Carleton community to attend a conference or meet with outside contacts were equally stalled. As a result, the interviews skewed towards the contacts that were reachable within the Graduate Students' Association and the Canadian Federation of Students. The International Student Services Office provided a document with information of their operations. These challenges highlight the longitudinal needs of this kind of study to be able to establish contacts within these offices. The letter of invitation for international students (See Appendix D) was summarised and distributed by one office but as the other channels fell through, a Change to the Ethics protocol had to be submitted for new recruitment options (See Appendix B). Overall, as the first stage of the interview process, it was very informative for me and quite positive. The insight from the people I was able interview was invaluable.

### 3.2.2 Recruitment for International Student Interviews

The interview process for international students was largely dependent on recruitment through organizational contact avenues of distribution. When that fell through, I unfortunately had to revise my protocol to include recruitment posters that were placed around the school to

engage participants (See Appendix G). Due to this change in protocol, I was unable to start recruitment until early October 2018 and this caused about a month's delay to my original timeline. Given the structure of the school year, this timing was unfortunate. Interviews were generally scattered through the rest of fall semester and the winter semester, with much fewer participants than anticipated, though the original goal was quite high.

I did employ some amount of snowball sampling within the recruitment process. Snowball sampling involves the participants in a research project becoming new branches of recruitment for other possible participants through their social networks (Elliot, Fairweather, Olsen, & Pampaka, 2016). Through the fieldwork experience, I can say that while poster recruitment can be effective, it is highly dependent on the positioning of the posters and the timing of the recruitment period. This is why snowball sampling can be helpful in trying to get contacts within a community, and for my project that involved the sharing of my contact information to potentially interested friends. The international student interviews were overall very enlightening. The variety of experiences I was hoping to document were brought out through both processes and the nature of the spontaneous change in the sampling method reflects, to some extent, the nature of fieldwork and the group I was examining.

### 3.3 Research Methods

#### 3.3.1 Policy Analysis

Policy analysis as a method of data collection or data examination has been quite underutilised in the field of geography. While undertaking this project, I had to restart this phase of my research many times because I had to rework the strategy that I used to code and analyze the policy documents as outlined in Appendix H. I associate this with the confusing nature of policies related to immigration and the fact that policy analysis is a method that is not used

widely in the field of geography. In particular, the relative lack of policy-related research in geography can be attributed the lack of a ‘policy turn’ when other such ‘turns’ like the cultural and mobility turn have occurred in the discipline (Martin, 2001)

In geography, policy research is not just focused on researching what affects policy or policy-makers, but also about what the impacts of those policies are (Pain, 2006). While it seems that policy research tends to be skewed towards social and economic geographies, and planning (Martin & Sunley, 2011; Pain, 2006), the ways in which these geographers tackle policy can be beneficial across the wide spectrum of geographical research. For instance, social geographers often work along with policy-makers while blurring the lines between dualisms like critical and applied geographies, activism and academia and other ways geographers may present in policy-oriented research (Pain, 2006). There is still much to be learned and applied in order to develop strategies for conducting policy research and analysis in geography (Pain, 2006), which is something that I have found true in my own research.

As previously mentioned, this phase of my research was transformed during the fieldwork process. My theoretical framework is centred on bodies of literature that evaluate the effects of laws and the discourse of those laws and policies on the lives of migrants. As a result, using policy analysis as a mode of data generation and project contextualization was an essential part of my research. Specifically, by examining the discourses of immigration law and citizenship as a regime of governance and the policy documents that produced from these laws as tools of implantation that reflect and reinforce certain ideologies, I used this method to explore the sub-question of how federal and provincial institutions are implicated in precariousness and feelings of belonging (Rygiel, 2010).

Due to the aforementioned limits in geography in regard to policy analysis, engaging in this method required researching beyond the discipline. I engaged the help of the Legal Studies reference librarian at Carleton University, Sally Sax, who directed me towards the Westlaw Next Canada database that provides policy documents, regulations, cases and statutes based on key word searches. The key words I focused on emerged from themes in my organizational contact and international student interviews. These themes were employment/work, health and study. Employment and studies were often linked in discussion. Through these search parameters, the major documents that were found relevant to international students were few (see Appendix H).

Due to the nature of these documents and constraints on the timeline of this project, the ensuing analyses will be linked to the interview data analysis. In addition to these documents, I examined the research documents and timelines of the Canadian Federation of Students. For the analysis aspect of the policy research, I partially used Foucauldian discourse analysis techniques in part to place the policy documents within the context of the students' experiences and vice versa. Discourse analysis does this work by examining not only the texts themselves but also the effect those texts have on people directly and indirectly, and the circumstances that surround the creation and propagation of those texts (Waitt, 2016). In particular, "discourse simultaneously produces and reproduces knowledge and power (**power/knowledge**)" (Waitt, 2016, p. 288, bold and parenthesis in original text).

In order to use discourse analysis effectively, I have applied some of the strategies that Waitt (2016) outlined in their explanation of the method. Waitt (2016) highlights some audiences and contexts to pay attention to: 1) the researcher's own choice in texts/source materials, 2) being reflexive of your chosen text by acknowledging their positionality, 3) thinking critically about the chosen texts and immersing yourself in the texts, 4) organizing your texts through

coding and then interpreting, 5) examining the power relations and structures in the texts, 6) looking at the inconsistencies, and finally, 7) how silences in the texts are discourse themselves and how discourses silence. A few audiences are highlighted just through the previously outlined steps: the international students, the government, organizations such as the CFS, university offices, and the domestic students. Looking at these documents, along with the ways in which organizations like the Canadian Federation of Students and the students themselves challenge and adapt to them are all part of my strategy to perform this policy analysis through the lens of discourse analysis. While discourse analysis is not usually categorized as part of feminist methodologies, I find it complements the ideology of feminist methodologies by highlighting power relations, positionality, and silences within the text, just as feminist methodologies does with its emphasis on reflexivity, power dynamics and the positionality of the researcher.

### 3.3.2 Interviews

The fieldwork component of my research was composed entirely of in-depth semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted in two stages, as mentioned before, with organizational contacts as the first stage to gauge the political, economic and social atmosphere surrounding international students, and with the students themselves as the second stage to document their lived experiences. Four total interviews were conducted with organizational contacts and fourteen were conducted with international students. Of the organizational contacts, one was female, and the rest were male, and of the students, two were male-identifying and eight were female. The interviews did not require collection of specific demographic data, but I did ask each participant where they were from in the interview process. Of the fourteen, one was from Latin America, two were from Europe, three were from Africa, two were from the Middle

East region, and the final six spanned the East, South and South East Asia regions. The students ranged in terms of their time at Carleton and interviews with the organizational contacts ranged from 30 minutes to an hour, while student interviews lasted from 15 minutes to about an hour and a half.

I debated the best method of data collection for understanding and exploring lived experiences from oral history to ethnography, but ultimately, given the transient nature of being a student, the constraints of the project, and my desire to value the time of the participants, I settled on interviews as the vehicle of data collection. Interviews often provide a more detailed, focused study of a smaller sample to understand a phenomenon or a people group (McDowell, 2010). Interviews allow you to collect a diverse range of opinions and experiences and explore the motivations people have for the things they are discussing (Dunn, 2016). One thing I discovered is that while there were some common themes within the interviews, no two interviews were alike in how participants interpreted the questions asked, and how their experiences and time at Carleton shaped their view. I chose to use the semi-structured interviews as my format because it has the element of incorporating a pre-existing guide of questions to tackle key themes and ideas while allowing for organic conversation and possibly important deviations that the researcher may not even have thought of in regards to the topic (Dunn, 2016).

In line with feminist methodologies, I viewed my interviews with the students as opportunities for them to talk about the things that they had been through in a space that they are comfortable with, while also providing crucial information. The interview guide (see Appendix F) contained questions that broke down the major themes of money, work, study, health and housing in order to explore the various impacts of these factors on people's lives. While a longer relationship and establishment in the communities would have been beneficial to imply more

responsibility and commitment to the people you are interviewing (Johnson & Madge, 2016), and that could have been negotiated through ethnic, national and religion associated organizations, the difficulty found in trying to reach even the broader umbrella of the international student group proved challenging enough. The wealth of information and insight received through this small study could point to longer, future projects as well.

When participants agreed to take part in the study, we arranged a place and time to meet based on the comfort and availability of the participant. Each participant was given a consent form, which was tailored to organizational contacts and international students respectively. Before the interviews started, a summary of the project and the consent forms were given, and I asked if there were any additional questions. Once consent was given to audio-record, which was agreed to by every participant, the interview started. After the interview was concluded, the participants were asked again if they had any questions or requests and the audio files were transferred to a secure USB drive and a secure online server. The organizational contacts were assigned pseudonyms based on the Ghanaian day naming system, which gives children names based on the days they were born and their biological sex. International students were given pseudonyms as well and the transcripts were done by me, and also stored on the secure USB drive and secure online server. Signed consent forms were locked in a drawer in a card-accessed room and all information was kept only between my supervisor and I. Student participants were compensated with a \$10 gift card that was given regardless of whether they chose to remain in the study or not.

I used NVIVO 12 to code themes for the student and organization contact interviews in two stages. For the first stage of coding, I drew out themes that had both been marked by the interview questions and had reoccurred in each group's interviews. For the organizational

interviews, it was easier to see where certain themes intersected on further reading of the responses and on organizing each participant into their respective profiles. The initial 9 coding points identified were consolidated into 5 themes. The international student interviews were more difficult to sort. As you will see in Chapter 5, I decided to use an unconventional way to convey and analyze the experiences of the student interviewees. I took a similar approach and consolidated the original 11 groupings into 5 main themes. This was difficult to do because of how interconnected these themes are.

### 3.4 Reflections on the Research Process

In the spirit of feminist methodologies and feminist geographies emphasizing the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher, I am including this section to reflect on the research process and my place within it since it is something I have had to contend with during my fieldwork. From discovering my research topic to the implementation of my fieldwork, I have constantly engaged with the consequences of my decisions and how I came to be a part of this research. Johnson and Madge (2016) outline a multi-layered reflexivity as part of conducting research in an empowering way which involves self-reflexivity, interpersonal reflexivity and collective reflexivity. While this project could have done more in terms of empowering methodologies, this has been a critical part of the research which I have documented through journal entries and in my own moments of reflection and interaction with research participants.

Self-reflexivity is defined as the researcher being asked “to explore the hidden assumptions about the research that originate within disciplinary structures of funding streams that enable work to proceed [and] the epistemological and ontological assumptions that the researcher brings to the research...” (Johnson & Madge, 2016, pp. 88-89). While I am engaging participants, and this topic, from an academic point of view and from my own personal

experiences of being an international student in two different Western countries, I still carry with me the Western ideologies that created this research and framework though most of my student participants were not from Western countries. During the interview stage, I also carried the assumption that the terms I used would be interpreted in certain ways or were implicitly simple, which was challenged when I encountered students from different departments. An example is from a journal entry:

I didn't take any interview notes for this one. It was my shortest one yet. I think it's the difference between disciplines and experiences across gender, and social associations and interactions. Even though there wasn't much said, I feel like it was revealing, especially compared to other interviews (1<sup>st</sup> November 2018).

Additionally, I had to re-evaluate what would be triggering to some participants as opposed to others. Though my questions seemed innocuous from my point of view (See Appendix F), with some potential for triggers, I did not consider the full extent of impact it could have on some participants as indicated in the journal entry below:

I had to restructure my interview because of the questions was triggering. We had to take a break for a second and kind of just ditch the questions and have a conversation. I think I have to consider that depending on the experience, even the most ones can be very triggering (6<sup>th</sup> November 2018).

These are just some of the interactions that shaped my self-reflexivity process through the fieldwork and writing stage of this research project.

Another level of the multi-layered reflexivity process is the idea of interpersonal reflexivity, which involves examining the role of the researcher within the institutions, communities and the situations that they find themselves in (Johnson & Madge, 2016). Essentially, the researcher evaluates their role in these institutions and relationships in order to “reflect on their ability to collaborate as opposed to lead, control, or delegate” (Johnson & Madge, 2016, p. 89). This is something I have had to navigate in terms of the ethical dimensions

of my project and reaching out to research participants for the organizational and student interviews. I wanted to make sure that I was within the ethical demands of my research protocol to protect the participants and myself, but I did feel the pressure to recruit as many students as I could to have a sufficient amount of data. The method of allowing people share my email address to possibly interested parties or friends to contact me often led to disappointing results. Overall, it was interesting to see how student participants self-selected themselves for this study. My thesis aims to fill a potential gap in knowledge on international students in Ottawa and in the future, extend that knowledge to investigate student experiences in other cities and provinces.

The third and final layer in the multi-layered reflexivity strategy is collective reflexivity, which asks questions about the origins of the project, the people involved in it and their motivations, the voices heard and removed, and the possible transformative, social, empowering and practical effects of the research (Johnson & Madge, 2016). As with normal masters and PhD theses and dissertations, the research project usually forms as a result of some intersection between the supervisor's interests and the primary researcher's, who is also shaped by their own experiences, knowledges and phenomena they may have noticed in academia and everyday life. For me it was also a combination of these things. I have already mentioned several times in this thesis that I am an international student, but I was hesitant to pursue this line of research and questioning because I did not even realize that it had relevance politically and I was worried that my own biases would colour the research. As I delved more into it, I realized that the experiences that I had were a good starting point for embarking on this research and that my experiences were valid, and others should be showcased and validated as well.

This integration of my own experiences emerged early within the research process and continued to shape my introspection and my analysis of my own place within the research as this journal entry shows:

The entire process has started a bit slow, but I am hoping that things will pick up – especially with the policy analysis. I myself am going through all this while trying to extend my own student visa so things are a bit challenging (26<sup>th</sup> June 2018).

What is interesting about this is that I was navigating an issue that did not come up in interviews at the time though it was one of the questions on my interview guide. This was my own misinformation about the study permit process and my program. The fieldwork process came with many challenges. Often, I would not hear back from potential organizational contacts or our interests would not line up. Sometimes I would not hear back from students after they offered to participate, and I would be at a loss as to whether to check back in with them or not contact them for fear of violating ethics. What I would offer in these reflections and this exercise in reflexivity, is that the process is not linear, and it does involve emotions, triumphs, failures. The restructuring that often happens in these processes, however, can enrich a project even when the timeline has to shift multiple times.

## 4 Analysis of Sociopolitical and Economic Resources

### 4.1 Introduction

Due to the nature of the interviews that were conducted for this project, my data analysis is divided into two chapters. This is because, as explained in Chapter Three, I conducted my interviews in two stages: the first stage with organizational contacts and the second with international post-secondary students. This first section of my analysis will discuss the findings from the interviews conducted with organizational contacts who work with international students at Carleton University, from June 2018 to September 2018. These interviews were conducted to get a sense of the major gaps and progress that has been made in the realm of international post-secondary student experiences and the infrastructure supporting students in Ontario. The participants in these interviews, as mentioned in the previous chapter, were the Graduate Students Association and the Canadian Federation of Students, and their views show one part of the general sociopolitical atmosphere involved in what international students face and benefit from in Canada.

This insight on the resources and structures related to international student experiences has been organized into five main categories: (1) resources and recruitment, (2) work and funding, (3) healthcare, (4) safety and well-being, and (5) unasked questions. Most of the interview participants agreed that these categories overlap in the daily lives of students, but overall, I decided to use these categories by thinking through both the interview guide questions (See Appendix F), and recurring themes during the interviews. Pseudonyms were assigned to the interview participants using the Ghanaian system of naming, partially to highlight the nature of being part of the international education system and to normalize names that are often seen as foreign, different and difficult to pronounce. Furthermore, the use of Ghanaian names reflects my

own background and symbolizes the adjustment that some students have to make on coming to Canada for post-secondary education. In conjunction with the interview data discussion, I incorporated policy documents at the provincial and federal levels, as well as school websites and documents, to assess the practices and policies that are relevant in the lives of international university students. This provides some preliminary context to the areas of stability and precarity in international student lives.

## 4.2 Resources and Recruitment

One of the key issues that arose from the interviews with organizational contacts was the insufficient state of resources available to international students. Some even commented about this against the backdrop of increased recruitment efforts of international students. Mainly, the two issues that were raised were that students were not aware of the resources that were available to them and that those resources, such as healthcare, were not sufficient. These issues were raised in the student interviews as well. Other than finances and funding, resources and recruitment tended to be one of the more important issues that reoccurred during the interviews. It is one that I particularly wanted to investigate with regards to institutional resources and resources outside the university.

Crawley (2017) discusses the fact that between the 2010/2011 and 2016/2017 academic years, international student representation increased by about 88.5%. For Carleton University, between the same time period, the number of enrolled international students at the beginning of the academic years mentioned increased from 2,713 to 4,051 representing an 49% percent increase in enrollments for international students, full-time and part-time, in that five-year span (Student Record Database, Carleton University, 2010, 2016). While searching for this data through the Office of the Institutional Research and Planning, it became clear that there were

gaps within this data. This information is accessible to the public through the Carleton website or a quick Google search once you know which key words to look for such as “Carleton university enrollment data,” but overall, this information on enrollment is intended for a more institutional audience, which can then represent the data in ways accessible to students and everyday audiences. The information recorded in these documents is collected at the beginning of each academic year, in November (Student Record Database, Carleton University, 2010, 2016).

In terms of resources, though there are many avenues to support international students in the various offices and organizations associated with them within and outside the university as an institution, the access that students have to these resources is questionable. The International Student Services Office (ISSO) provides healthcare, scholarship and money-related information to students, as well as workshops, events, peer mentoring, and immigration support (Carleton University & Aulenback, 2018). They are the central point for information for international students at Carleton, and in addition to them, there are various resources such as the Graduate Students Association (GSA) and the Carleton Undergraduate Students Association (CUSA). In an interview with one of the staff members of the GSA, it was stated that the organization provides two distinct types of services to students in general and international students, consequently:

... one is uh providing representation for graduate students on campus and the campus environment and, so, how that happens is that there's the providing services aspect. So, some stuff like healthcare provision, uh you know campus pub - that's a service like for cheap food and drinks [...]. Yeah and all other, and all sorts of other services like the lounge, the space, and all sorts of things like that, but also an important part, and equally important part is the advocacy component [...] making sure the student voices are heard and, listened to, vis-à-vis like the camp - the university administration, the province, the federal government and all these spaces pretty much. ([Kweku], personal communication, 27 June 2018).

What I understood from these interviews, and from the ISSO itself was that these offices operate separately from each other. The lack of connection to the office and other resources became

particularly apparent during some of the student interviews, which will be addressed in Chapter Six. The other organizations or offices were silent in each other's representation of resources, partially due to the questions being asked (See Appendix E) and partially due to the lack of connectivity between them.

This lack of connectivity resounded when I asked about the availability of resources outside the university for international students. [Esi], a representative at the CFS, was the only interview participant to note the resources outside of the university for international students, summarizing the condition of these:

...I think that's sort of like part of the international student strategy with the province. How do we integrate and make it easier for international students to access those supports off-campus as well? Um, because they do exist, and the reality is, is that they're not well advertised. I think even on campus we have resources that people don't know about until they're almost done, or after they graduate, right. Um, so I guess part of it is, how do we ensure all of these resources are well advertised, easily accessible, and really, also, and like the languages that people feel most comfortable in. So yeah, they do exist. (Esi, personal communication, 21 October 2018).

Some places that [Esi] noted were Meal Exchange, the Ontario Coalition for Better Childcare, and the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario as organizations that invest in the umbrella of students rights and thus encompass international students in their mandates, acknowledging that international students are more vulnerable in regards to food insecurity, childcare and housing (personal communication, 21 October 2018). The questions of language, accessibility and integration within these offices inside and outside of the university are reflected not only in the interview data but in the ways that these resources might be presented to international students as a whole.

While students did not mention their issues with language in relation to documents in their interviews, the problem of language and culture in academia and in everyday life was a reoccurring theme. As [Esi] noted, the issues with off-campus resources, and general documents,

is that they need to be made more known to students and represented in languages that make the students feel comfortable (personal communication, 21 October 2018). It may be difficult to have all languages represented for students, but for those less comfortable in English and French, having more languages would show a more concerted effort to aid in international student integration in and outside of the university. Additionally, increasing accessibility to those resources through knowledge reduces vulnerability and could play a factor in increasing the sense of belonging that some students did not feel as they spent most of their time in the university.

### 4.3 Work and Funding

I chose to combine the sub-themes of work and funding because they were very related in terms of student livelihoods and sustenance. As previously mentioned, all the themes are interconnected but the significance of scholarships, funding, assistantships and work weave into each other in the experiences of international students and what is available to them on an institutional level and beyond. Generally, the consensus among interview participants was that international students receive insufficient funding and knowledge about work conditions. This coupled with the financial constraints some of them may face contribute to the precarious status of international post-secondary students in Canada.

In terms of the ‘victories’ that the Canadian Federation of Students (CFS) mentions in their timeline of campaigns and fights for students, work features prominently for international students in particular (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018b). The victories that the Ontario branch of the CFS notes in on their website have implications for all students in Ontario, but with the seven victories that directly mention international students as the target audience, six of those refer to work-related victories. Of the recent victories, which were in the late 2000s and

mid-2010s, the one that [Esi] in particular focuses on is the one in 2014, where they CFS won the right for full-time international students to work off-campus without needing an additional work permit as long as their study permit was valid (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018b).

The language of victories from the CFS reflects their nature of advocacy for students and the timeline that they present of these victories has been a useful tool in assessing the significant points of reference for policies and practices relevant to international student lives. The rights to work off-campus for international students and their spouses, the victory of establishing the Post Graduate Work Permit program, which allows qualifying international students to obtain an open, three-year work permit, and the ability for some students to apply online for work permits, visas and renewals, only in 2014, highlight the progress of the systems supporting international students and the gaps that were quite glaring as well (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018b). To only be able to apply online in 2010 for visa renewals and permits, even for some students, while good, is quite an alarming display of sufficient access to better resources being available only nine years before this thesis was written. Using the CFS as a guideline aids in establishing a coherent timeline and presenting another perspective on the issues and benefits that affect international post-secondary students and students as a whole.

With the knowledge that 2014 was the first time international students were allowed to work off-campus without the need for an additional work permit (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018b), we can now focus on the rules and regulations governing the work lives of said students. In the Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations sections 186(f) and 186(v), as of the current amendment to the regulations, full-time students are allowed to work without a work permit on two main conditions: unlimited hours if they work on campus and up

to 20 hours per week during required school sessions off campus (*Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*, 2018). The regulations are explicitly indexed and have accessible search functionality, but when I was investigating this information, it was not found directly under the student section of the regulations, but rather the work section. The links between these sections as they pertained to international students were not clear. The regulations themselves are available on the Justice Laws website of the Government of Canada but the succinct information that the Government of Canada general website and the International Student Services Office (ISSO) are easier for the average student to understand (Government of Canada, 2019; *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*, 2018; International Student Services Office & Carleton University, n.d.). Unfortunately, the only discussion on those succinctly presented websites on students' lives as workers is the regulations and restrictions that they have to maintain rather than their rights as workers or how they would go about keeping in line with these rules so as to not risk their status (Government of Canada, 2019; *Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations*, 2018; International Student Services Office & Carleton University, n.d.).

The aforementioned risks to employment are solidified with the experiences that organizational interview participants have seen arise in relation to finding work. [Kofi], an executive at the Graduate Students Association summarizes this point of risk for international students in the job market when discussing the significant barriers to international students, as well as employment and immigration law and practice:

Speaking of employment, speaking of barriers, speaking of immigration laws, there is an inherent notion of uh, there is an inherent notion that students who come from a different country, are willing to do jobs that could be considered as risky. I have myself done that when I was an international student in a different country, where I've had to graveyard shifts that could be difficult, that could be insecure in many ways. It takes a lot of risk and you put yourself in a lot of danger. And given the inherent notion of racism that can also form a part of barriers that are created for international students to be able to gain some sense of permanency in Canada. ([Kofi], personal communication, 6 July 2018).

The notion of precarity is clear in that inclination to take less than desirable jobs or accepting and not knowing the less than ideal work conditions presented to the student. This theme also resonates with [Kweku]'s experiences of working with international students and has been mentioned in relation to at least one international student interview participant.

This brings us to the Employment Standards Act, which I was actually led to by [Kweku] in the process of the interview. This act was not on the Government of Canada website related to off campus work or the ISSO site, which highlights the disconnect between federal, provincial and institutional resources as the Employment Standards Act referred to in this thesis is an Ontario act. I was initially unable to find this act in my search of provincial laws related to “international students” or “foreign students” because it does not explicitly refer to them but encompasses them in its definition of an employee. Specifically,

**3** (1) Subject to subsections (2) to (5), the employment standards set out in this Act apply with respect to an employee and his or her employer if,  
(a) the employee's work is to be performed in Ontario; or  
(b) the employee's work is to be performed in Ontario and outside Ontario but the work performed outside Ontario is a continuation of work performed in Ontario. 2000, c. 41, s. 3 (1) (Employment Standards Act, 2000, 2019, Part III, subsection (3)).

The exceptions listed in subsections (2) through (5) in Part III detail special circumstances under which a regular international post-secondary student would not be found working off campus or on campus not in some special mandated program designated to a specific program (Employment Standards Act, 2000, 2019). Since this applies to all international post-secondary students, though not mentioned directly, these students are within the rights mandated in the law including having a poster that designates their rights provided by their employer within 30 days of their employment and in any language translation requested in Part II (Employment Standards Act, 2000, 2019). In his introduction of the Employment Standards Act to me, [Kweku]

mentioned that he had seen many students, in his work in general, not knowing their rights and not having their privileges to breaks, the correct hours and other such entitlements, which put them at risk because they were afraid to speak up for themselves (personal communication, 27 June 2018). Here, this document plainly establishes its audience and goals but the way it is silenced on the institutional level speaks to the lack of its enforceability, which further endangers student employees. It leaves room for more insecurity among students as their access to their rights are diminished.

Funding often complements this job search, as the availability of funding the high amount of fees can influence a student's ability to sustain their own livelihoods. One victory that was alluded to by the GSA staff and executives was the reduction of PhD tuition for international students. Johnstone and Lee (2017) discuss this prioritizing of certain skillsets in order to improve the Canadian economy and the reduction in international tuition fees at the PhD level is an example of this, though it is helpful for creating financial security in students' lives. [Abeiku] goes into detail on this in by commenting on how cost has been a major barrier, while talking about the international collaboration in work and funding that happens with international students:

I'm speculating a bit but for the previous provincial government, the liberal government, when they put some money into supporting more international PhD students, which is why universities like Carleton are dropping the international PhDs to domestic tuition rates. I mean, one of the reasons for that, I would suspect, is just the need for more international collaboration. But it's also bringing people to Canada who, good chance they'll stay here. And Canada has paid nothing for their healthcare, their education, anything. All of that has been paid by someone else. We just get them at the PhD level where they're actually, from an economic perspective, um, a huge asset. And it's cold to talk about people in that manner, you know, but I mean, certainly in terms of government policy those sorts of conversations happen, right. I mean, I can only see international recruitment increasing, at least for a little while. ([Abeiku], personal communication, 27 June 2018).

On further research, there is no mention of this reduction of fees, leading me to believe that this is being implemented through awards granted to specific international PhD candidates, or has yet to be put into effect (Carleton University, n.d.). There were similar sentiments with [Kweku] as well in relation to the relaxation of work permit laws with the changes in government, and possibly the shift in political priorities. This speaks to the union between policy priorities at various institutional levels and the production of safety or precariousness for students. Due to the new provincial framework for domestic tuition, the Carleton Finance Committee has calculated that, with the reduction and freezing of domestic tuition fees, there would be estimated negative impact of \$20M on the school's operating budget (Carleton University Board of Governors Secretariat, 2019, p. 96) In the case of PhD internationals here, Carleton's prioritization of them at their own financial expense promotes a provincial and federal benefit to draw in potential PhD students from abroad to fill those talent and skill gaps (Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities, 2016).

At the same time, such policies reduce the risk of financial insecurity for those students by allowing them to seek financial support both inside and outside the university.

However, while the relaxation of work regulations for international students is broader and equalizing in its effects, the tuition fee changes benefit PhD students more. It excludes other graduate students and undergraduates and showcases how different skillsets are valued even within this highly-skilled group. As a set of regulations within the university institutions, it is only the beginning of success in an ever-changing political atmosphere.

#### 4.4 Healthcare

Healthcare, on its own, was a major recurring theme within all the interviews in a substantive way. All the participants were able to speak to it whether in terms of the resources

provided or in terms of the specific political and real-life implications of the health plans available to students. Unlike the other themes of work and funding or resources and recruitment, healthcare is no longer directly related to any provincial or federal law or act. The major discussion on healthcare, from these interviews, was that the current state of healthcare provision or requirements for international students had become more costly since the repeal and replacement of the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) with the University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2017). As [Esi] discusses when talking about the Canadian Federation of Students’ advocacy for international post-secondary student healthcare:

Prior to 1994, international students had free healthcare, and then it was cut out by the government. So, we propose a variety of different, um, models for them to be reintegrated. So, that's one of main priorities. Because international students, sometimes, have to make the hard decision between you know, paying for food and rent, and things like that, and being able to access healthcare, because their healthcare can be upwards of \$700-\$2000 extra on top of the tuition fee that they spent (personal communication, 21 October 2018).

[Kofi], additionally, recounts the tale of a student who passed away and his role as an executive of students’ union to provide support to the journey of said student back to their home country. Unfortunately, this required extensive bureaucratic processing and overall, it was stated that if the student could had been assured or known of their access to the right kind of healthcare, the tragedy could have been prevented ([Kofi], personal communication, 6 July 2018). This all reveals that the potentially prohibitive nature of the healthcare available to students, which can contribute to insecurity in their lives.

The University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP), though mandatory for post-secondary international students to pay for and have as their health insurance for the duration of their university career, is a private plan that was introduced after OHIP was repealed in 1994 as

mentioned above (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2017). My search to understand the changes in UHIP required a different route through the print index of the debates in the Legislative Assembly of Ontario Hansard, as the healthcare infrastructure had switch from government to private jurisdiction before 1994. This was the least accessible search to a general public because it required knowledge of record systems of Ontario and still yielded indefinite results searching in the time range of 1993 to 1994 to discover how and why OHIP had been repealed for international students, and even searching through the index for the year, UHIP was not found in the Hansard Index of Debates (Legislative Assembly, Ontario, 1995). The information that is easier to parse is through a main provider of UHIP, Sun Life, on a website that details the price ranges for single and dependent plans, eligibility, and the differences between UHIP and OHIP (Sun Life Assurance Company, n.d.). On average, UHIP covers many of the same services as OHIP, according to Sun Life, and international post-secondary students pay between \$624 and \$1,872 per year depending on the number of dependants (Sun Life Assurance Company, n.d.).

With these high costs and gaps in access to healthcare, the Graduate Students Association representatives highlighted the services that they provide, which include additional health insurance to cover dental costs, prescription drug coverage, and vision and physiotherapy, among others, for international students and domestic students, and their dependants ([Abeiku], personal communication, 27 June 2018). The additional health plan provides coverage outside of Canada for 60 days for those under the plan ([Abeiku], personal communication, 27 June 2018). While these are at cost, it is important to note that when you are temporary and might not have networks established in the country, having health coverage for extra events is essential and invaluable. The Carleton Undergraduate Students Association offers a similar additional health

insurance plan for undergraduate students called Student Care (Carleton University Students' Association, 2019).

#### 4.5 Safety and Well-Being

Safety and well-being can be hard to categorize because its definition, and the factors attributed to it as a concept, can differ for students. As a result, this next theme is a combination of a few factors that can affect the well-being of international students. The previously discussed themes all contribute to the safety and well-being, but this theme relates to other sub-themes that were discussed on a smaller scale during the interviews. The conditions that define precarious migrant status are as follows:

(1) work authorization, (2) the right to remain permanently in the country (residence permit), (3) not depending on a third party for one's right to be in Canada (such as a sponsoring spouse or employer), and (4) social citizenship rights available to permanent residents (e.g. public education and public health coverage) (Goldring et al., 2009, pp. 240-241).

Under these criteria, number (4) is particularly interesting. All these are factors in the safety and well-being of a transnational migrant, especially one like an international student who, while mentioned in Goldring et al.'s (2009) examination of precariousness, are not expanded on beyond a mere mention.

Other than the issues associated with tuition and healthcare cost, the exploitation that can occur with finding and maintaining housing was noted as one of the most influential factors affecting international students' safety and rights. With housing in the forefront, other pressures that are prominent are whether they feel as though their voices are heard, external family pressure and not having an adequate support network according to interview participants. Housing is connected to many of the previous factors. [Kweku] mentioned that often students are taken advantage of by landlords who know that they are unsupported and are unaware of their

rights in terms of housing (personal communication, 27 June 2018). [Esi] corroborates this idea by telling of the stories she had heard as an executive of the Canadian Federation of Students, speaking of some landlords:

So, what they'll do is they'll ask an international student to pay 12 months up front or six months up front, so that they know that their rent will come in easily. And it's just like students don't have that kind of money. I just like don't understand. [...] Or international students will end up living with multiple people in a house, and I've seen this across the province. Like, what will happen is that these houses aren't maintained properly. Or that they are um, in like, there's so many people living in the house that it's actually not legal, because there's legalities behind how a house should be if there's multiple tenants in it (personal communication, 21 October 2018).

[Kofi], an international student himself at one point, recounted how he was bewildered by having to provide his paystubs and bank statements to get an apartment, which he found quite invasive (personal communication, 6 July 2018). These are just a few instances of housing, the physical spaces where students are supposed to find rest, become an arena of precariousness and insecurity through potential exploitation. Their voices are not heard, and their lives are put at risk in some cases, with bad housing conditions, which can impact mental health as well as physical health. As with the Employment Standards Act, 2000, the Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, does not refer to international students in particular but students living off campus are encompassed within the definition of who the applies to which is mentioned to be “**3** (1) This Act, except Part V.1, applies with respect to rental units in residential complexes, despite any other Act and despite any agreement or waiver to the contrary. 2013, c. 3, s. 22 (1)” (Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, 2018, Part I, Application of the Act). The exceptions, especially for international students in this case, would be if they lived in a non-profit housing co-op, care homes, mobile home parks or land lease communities (Residential Tenancies Act, 2006, 2018, Part I). As a result, international students, so long as they are occupying residential units in Ontario, are subject and privileged to the rights and responsibilities of this act. I came to know about this act

through [Esi]'s discussion of the Advocacy Centre for Tenants Ontario, which references this act in its advice for tenants but, much like the Employment Standards Act, 2000, there can be a tendency for international students to be unaware of these resources. As a result, the International Student Services Office and other offices should emphasize this for international students, just as student unions have been engaging in.

Racialized experiences also factor into international students' security and well-being with [Kofi] noting that the identification as a person of colour can make students aware of themselves and their surroundings in a different way. He spoke to this briefly as a barrier to permanency in Canada ([Kofi], personal communication, 6 July 2018). In addition to that, and the discrimination that can be difficult to negotiate in academic and housing settings, there are the additional layers that add to student insecurity. This is noted in my interview with [Abeiku] and a few student interviews as well. [Esi] mentions that there is also an emotional burden, for some international students, that come with meeting family expectations, being supported by those parents while they are abroad, and meeting standards to prove themselves because of the financial and cultural burden.

Despite these struggles of being far from home and not knowing rights in terms of advocating on the academic level, institutional level, or even for housing rights, the Graduate Students Association provides a physical space where no documentation is required and where they can come to receive an advocate for representation of their issues (Kweku, personal communication, 27 June 2018). Other than the additional health plan and the physical space, the GSA also provides services such as their peer support mentor program and the legal clinic. These types of spaces on campus provide a sense of security and safety, as resources continue to improve, though, as [Kweku] has stated, there is always room to improve (personal

communication, 27 June 2018). This kind of space is important because, while the lounge is not large, it represents a place of cultural relevance and legal advocacy for students. It also represents a space of freedom, especially when contrasted with the physical space of the International Student Services Office (ISSO), which was described as more isolated and restrictive by some student interview participants. This, combined with the fact that it was difficult to coordinate any ISSO interviews due to concerns about the nature of this research, makes spaces like the Graduate Students Association lounge embodiments, in part, of security and belonging for international students.

#### 4.6 Unasked Questions

This section of the research project refers to the final question that was asked of each interview participant before closing the interview. This was a way to recognize whatever may be significant to the participant that I, the researcher, would not have thought of or given space for within the interview guide. It opens the doors for possible future research informed by the participants themselves. I found this the most interesting section because with the organizational contacts and with the international student interviews, aspects that I did not uncover in the literature or in thinking of my own experiences came up that surprised me. While the organizational contact interviews were in the early stages, it would have been difficult to incorporate some of those unasked questions in the scope of this research project. This is why I am incorporating them here as part of the analysis as they raise interesting questions and highlight some still uninvestigated gaps in the literature.

Three out of four of the interview participants had answers to the last question: “is there anything else you think would be useful for me to know that I have not already asked?” (see Appendix E). What was interesting about the answers is that they cover different spatial scales of

issues in international students' lives. The three answers span the scope of the intimate, everyday scale, the global scale and the institutional scale. At the level of the global scale, [Abeiku] mentioned that students from countries like Iran and China who sometimes feel like they are being monitored, saying

I have had people ask me to remove their names from documents like in terms of an attendance list just because they have this fear of someone from their home government finding out they were at a particular meeting. Um, I imagine that's probably not very common but it's a thing. I mean it makes me rethink a few things sometimes, like if I'm talking to someone and you know, they're, you know, in Canada and coming to Canada, having, managing to get the political freedom to come to Canada against certain odds and not knowing what will happen if you go back. There's so many different situations that can come up (personal communication, 27 June 2018).

When we think about student insecurity and precariousness in Canada, their relationship with their home country and the effect the government attitudes and relations might have on the everyday life of a student should be considered in the discussion of lived experiences and precariousness. Something as simple as going to a student event could become complicated because they are even more precarious due to their transnational relations. The relationship between the global and intimate are prominent in such situations (Freeman, 2001).

On the scale of the institution and the personal, the ways in which university itself contributes to and aids in ameliorating the precarious status of international students can have global implications for those students. [Esi] asked if I had considered looking at academic policies because in one of her earlier roles in her academic institution, she noticed that international students were often charged with offences but did not necessarily understand the codes and procedures of the university:

And part of that was because we're coming from so many different places around the world, where we have different standards of work. I mean once we enter university or college, when it comes to plagiarism, it's a very sharp curve and um, very sharp consequences to these academic, you know, violations. And it often resulted in these international students being suspended for a year. And because of them being

international, they'd be sent home, and then wouldn't end up continuing their studies ([Esi], personal communication, 21 October 2018).

While the institution does treat students equally, it is clear that the sanctions on students, especially those who are temporary, would have greater effects. For instance, to qualify for the Post Graduate Work Permit, you need to have been enrolled full-time for the duration of your program and suspension from misunderstandings could have nullify that eligibility (International Student Services Office & Carleton University, n.d.). In the same vein, [Kweku] and [Abeiku] noted that when it comes to issues of discrimination with students, especially noting racism and sexism and dependent relationships on supervisors at the graduate level, it can be even more insecure for students.

Overall, the interviews with the organizational contacts revealed two main points: (1) the resources and infrastructure that support international post-secondary students have been trending positively and (2) that there is still room for improvement in terms of accessibility and the protection of rights. This is particularly evident in the policy documents that generally refer to students, worker, and tenants in Ontario. There is a lack of integration of information across the federal, provincial and institutional scales and this gap contributes to the precarious status of international students though there have been improvements in those systems over the years. The findings in this chapter point to the gaps in institutional resources and the potential for the institution to protect students' rights and well-being by being the central point of integration for those resources.

## 5 Analysis of International Student Experiences

### 5.1 Introduction

The second part of the aim of this research project was to explore the varied lived experiences of international post-secondary students and the discussion of this is presented in this second analysis chapter. It was in cataloguing the interview data from the international student round of interviews that I realized that the analysis of these two stages was too substantial to be discussed in one chapter. This also happened to fit with the structure of the interviews and the hope that the organizational contacts would provide a context for what international students might face before I delved into exploring those experiences with student participants. The range of experiences from the students who chose to participate was fascinating, with students from different stages in their academic careers from the first year of their undergraduate programs to the third year of their PhD.

Due to this range, and my desire to respectfully portray the experiences that were shared with me in an empowering way, I had to employ an unconventional method to present the findings and discussion of this information. To protect the identities of the student participants, after each interview I assigned the students pseudonyms that were closer in naming convention to Western names. I found this representative of my own experiences of considering adopting a common name to the host country that was ‘easier’ for others because of how my name is often misspelled and mispronounced, an experience I know was not unique to me. I used NVIVO 12 to transcribe and identify themes within the transcripts. For the students who were more forthcoming in their anecdotes, I decided to stay as true as possible to their narrative style by using longer quotations to convey their emotions and the impact of their stories. Feminist research acknowledges the agency of the researched as “not passive; they are knowledgeable

agents accepted as ‘experts’ of their experience” (England, 2015, p. 363). In trying to engage the research participant through a collaborative approach, feminist researchers build relationships with their participants on the basis of respect and empowerment (England, 2015). To respect the stories of the students that were entrusted to me for this research, I decided to hinge some of the broader themes of these stories on the major anecdotes I was told and let the words of the students speak for themselves to the reader.

Initially these different experiences were consolidated from 11 initial themes into five main ones. These themes were (1) race, safety and community, (2) resources, (3) finances, (4) healthcare and (5) things to consider. These final topics were prominent throughout the interviews but because of their interconnected nature, the story and short anecdote format encompasses them also entirely. The themes that do not have specific stories associated with them have the more conventional format similar to Chapter Four. There are two main sections that present portions of three narratives from three different interview participants that portray a broader intersection of the themes noted above. In presenting the narratives in such a way, I relate to the decolonizing method of storytelling that Indigenous researchers employ, noting that storytelling as a mode of research preserves the representation and voices of the storytellers (Kovach, 2009). I did not use Indigenous methodologies in this project, but I do want to acknowledge that the use of longer quotations to convey an anecdote does not necessarily originate in the Western methodologies heavily used in this research. While there are many more stories to tell, these three story sections portray powerful moments in the students’ lives that cannot be handled in a traditional manner. To keep it simple, I have selected three main stories from my participants to highlight some of these themes and the rest will be handled in a more

traditional manner. Just like this chapter, international student experiences are complex and require a multi-layered approach to understanding and representing those experiences.

## 5.2 Access to Healthcare

During the interviews, there were some themes that were extensively discussed by all students. One of these themes was the access to and knowledge that students had about the healthcare system in Ontario. These discussions did not fall into the realm of longer accounts related to healthcare but did highlight gaps and discrepancies between what was available to students and what the information they had about the system in many cases. During the interviews, five out of the fourteen student interviewees had questions about how to access UHIP and the differences in coverage that I did my best to answer. Other students talked about not needing to use the healthcare plan at all or going to the campus clinic, which usually involved complete coverage for routine visits and consultations. One student, [Jesse], an undergraduate student from Sri Lanka, mentioned that if he needed to do anything related to healthcare, like dental work, he would simply do it at home because of lower costs (personal communication, 1 November 2018).

What was astonishing in the discussions related to healthcare access and understanding the way UHIP works was that many students were quite unaware of their rights. The International Students Services Office (ISSO) at Carleton University does provide this information about UHIP at orientation and has UHIP administrator for the purposes of helping students navigate this system, but as noted in the organizational contact interviews, there needs to be an integration of this information throughout the university in the offices that support international students. The combination of adapting to a new country and understanding a healthcare system that can be difficult to do and very confusing. [Suzie], an undergraduate

student from Malaysia, commented that during her time working on campus, she saw this disconnect between the offices and departments that were supposed to be helping international students, and students in general:

I worked move in weekend, this year, for residence kids, and I was standing just like, greeting people, and like showing them where the line was to get their cards. And, people next to me were housing services, so, they had all the [residence fellows] kind of like, sitting around and answering questions. Two international students from China come and ask about their UHIP. 'What is this? How does it work? I got this great email with a PDF. I don't know what I'm supposed to do with it,' okay. The printer's right next to them. Five people had absolutely nothing to say to them (personal communication, 11 October 2018).

She went on to note that even the residence fellows' superior could not answer the students' questions and she had to step in, which could have serious implications for international students who live in residence ([Suzie], personal communication, 11 October 2018). [Carly], an undergraduate student from Macau, who had spent time here as a high school student mentioned a mix-up with her healthcare where she was accidentally recorded as being on OHIP and had to correct the problem herself because she was not eligible for her insurance plan anymore. Furthermore, [Carmen], an undergraduate student from Kenya, mentioned that she had gone to the campus clinic to get an explanation of the health plan and the system, but they simply gave her a flyer.

The interactions of students with the healthcare system and with UHIP coverage were not entirely negative. Other students who had used the healthcare system, despite long waiting periods, described their experiences as simple during their visits to the clinics or doctors, especially if those visits were on campus. The main problem with UHIP proved to be understanding what it was, what it covered and how useful it was to them in the course of their stay in university. The repercussions of lack of knowledge and division across school offices can be dire, or as Suzie commented about those in the residence offices, "...if there was an

emergency at night, and someone needs to go to the hospital, if they were an international student, do you even know what they need?...” (personal communication, 11 October 2018). This speaks to the overall precarious status of international students as transnational migrants within the school system. They require different healthcare and are insured by a private plan, which does not limit their access to services in terms of coverage, but does limit their access to properly utilize the system and be supported by the resources that should be available to them according to Goldring et al. (2009)’s definitions of precariousness.

### 5.3 Finances and Finding Work

The theme that was of greatest concern to students during the interviews, with the exception of a few, was about financial security. As with the organizational contacts, the employment aspect of student life was a significant component of the funding and financial situation of most of the interview participants. However dire or benign the situation was for students financially, the comparison between domestic and international fees, finding employment and the availability of bursaries and awards were all prominent in discussions related to finances.

A sub-question of my research is “what are the variations in experience among international students in relation to race, gender and class?” For this research, one of the more challenging aspects was asking students about class in a direct and not suggestive way. Post-1980, the field of geography evolved past the former Marxist definition of class to definitions that focus on the exploitative nature of capitalism and how class is actually related to factors related to identity and its constructions in society such as gender and race (Castree, Rogers, & Kitchin, 2013; Duncan, 2009). Class is a complex concept that evolves with the changes in society but is fundamentally based on a socioeconomic basis (Castree et al., 2013; Duncan,

2009). Considering these characteristics of class, it was difficult to ascribe any singular proxy as class within this research process. I found this to be especially true during the second round of coding for the international student interviews. I have chosen to situate class in the broader theme because of the connection between economic structures and class, though I will not be discussing it explicitly (Castree et al., 2013; Duncan, 2009).

The financial and work situations of each of the student participants varied from positive to negative. Some, like [Jesse] and [Joel], who is about to start his PhD after having spent many years of schooling at Carleton, and an international student from India found that their work experiences on and off campus were normal and positive, though they mentioned the high costs associated with their tuition fees (personal communication, 1 November 2018, 29 November 2018). Out of the fourteen students interviewed, eight talked about the high cost of tuition fees. Additionally, some made the comparison between the international student and domestic student fees at Carleton, mentioning that the international fees were considerably, and in some cases unfairly, higher than the domestic ones.

The effect of these high fees varied for international students depending on the funding and the support they were able to receive from the school, relatives and work. [Cindy], a graduate student from Norway, noted that her financial situation was fine, even with a her significant other, but if they had children, healthcare and general finances would much more difficult (personal communication, 25 January 2019). When asked about bursaries, scholarships and other financial assistance, students often mentioned that there were few options for international students, with [Jesse], an undergraduate student from Sri Lanka, saying that he once went with a Canadian friend to ask about bursaries at the corresponding office and realized there were far more for domestic students (personal communication, 1 November 2018). Teaching

assistantships were a common discussion point with graduate student participants, with three out of the four being able to find a teaching or research assistantship to supplement their financial status. [Isabel], a graduate student from Korea, pointed out that after she found out about her department not having enough spots for TAs, she had to apply to other departments and thought that it was her grasp of English that was stopping her from getting any positions, which is unfortunate since it is an online application (personal communication, 23 November 2018). She noted that another friend, who was also international but from a primarily English-speaking nation also had no success with applying for out-of-priority teaching assistantships even in other departments ([Isabel], personal communication, 23 November 2018).

The discussion on employment also varied widely between positive and negative experiences, with the divisions between on and off campus work not being too clear. Some students found their employment situations to be fair and good, regardless of whether on campus or off campus. However, even with the good, there were some moments of discomfort. [Isabel] mentioned that though she was not able to get a teaching assistantship, she was eventually able to get a part-time job in the school library which was a good experience overall (personal communication, 23 November 2018). One problem, however, was that she noticed that her racialized and foreign coworkers treated her with more respect, especially with her use of English as her second language, than her white and domestic coworkers ([Isabel], personal communication, 23 November 2018). [Suzie] noted that in her workplace off campus, her employers required more work than was permitted according to her rights and what she was allowed to work, and she was not aware of this for a while. A friend from Kenya told her that the reason they were able to keep defaulting to her to cover shifts was “Because they know you don't

have anyone. Like, they know you don't know anything, and you don't have anyone to fall back on..." ([Suzie], personal communication, 11 October 2018).

The unfair treatment highlighted by [Suzie] and the discomfort felt by [Isabel] speak to the gaps in knowledge that affect international students. For [Suzie], her lack of knowledge, and her employers being aware of her situation, forced her to work in less than ideal conditions. In [Isabel]'s case, she did not have the resources available to help her in her workplace, and her coworkers with less intercultural experience made her feel uncomfortable. These serve as examples of the consequences of these gaps in knowledge on the institutional scale.

Overall, finances were mentioned as one of the most difficult things for an international student. In order to study in Canada, you need provide proof of additional funds which, outside of Quebec, was estimated by the Government of Canada to be the cost of tuition in addition to an estimated \$17,000, \$7,000 of which was for two additional family members (The Government of Canada, 2017). [Karen], a graduate student from Nigeria, calculated that considering tuition, winter gear, room and board, among others, for a year, "you're looking at minimum, like CAD \$30,000 per year, right. For you to be mentally comfortable, and not take any other job..." (personal communication, 22 January 2019). Undergraduate fees in Ontario are much higher than graduate fees, so the amount required would be higher than even what Karen suggested in some cases (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2017). Conditions in the home country and administrative problems can further exacerbate these financial difficulties, as [Emily], an undergraduate student from Turkey recounted:

Well the scholarships, the top they'll give you is \$4,000 a year and then our whole tuition is like over \$20,000. And like, with like, right now the economy in my country is crashing. Like, the Turkish lira is like um diving [...]. Yeah so, we were just talking - I was just talking to my dad, we're trying to pay the second semester. And now, the site that the school provides to make international payments, they took Turkish lira off that,

like completely. So, you have to transfer the bank to an American institution and then institution and then they transfer it here, so (personal communication, 7 November 2018).

Some students, like [Jen], an undergraduate student from the US and [Allison], and undergraduate student from the Czech Republic, have not felt this financial pressure and have secure enough to live without employment during their tenure at Carleton. Nonetheless, tuition clearly plays a role in affecting security in the lives of international students during their time in their programs. The repercussions of high fees could be high, with students being forced to make difficult choices between well-being and being able to pay tuition, as [Kofi] and [Esi] noted in the organizational contact interviews. The proposed 2019 cuts in tuition for domestic students, for instance, could put a strain on already unregulated international tuition fees, which would create more difficult situations for students who are not as financially secure (Friesen, 2019). These discussions with the students contribute to the fact that institutions at the post-secondary, provincial and federal contribute to precariousness and instability in their regulations related to work and the finances of students.

#### 5.4 Racialized Awareness, Culture Difference and Community Connection

Goldring et al. (2009)'s definition of precarious migrant status focuses on the lack of access to the rights and privileges that citizens and permanent residents have. This is a legitimate statement of how precarious migrant status can be determined, but one element I would expand on is the effect of racialization and cultural difference. Canada's immigration system is no longer based on racial quotas but rather on point systems based on skills (Bhuyan et al., 2017). Despite this change, experiencing racialization and discrimination based on cultural difference for the first time can be traumatic and many racialized interview participants mentioned this as part of their experience. This ranged from microaggressions to the account that is portrayed below. I was not able to include the entire narrative from [Suzie] about her first memorable experience

with this, but this point in the poignant story she told encapsulates many themes of racialization, community and well-being. She recounts this from her gender studies class on intersectionality, where they had discussed, as part of response for their tutorial, their racial experiences:

...and this girl said, 'yeah, if you think about it, and notice about it, most of the people who are talking in the class, taking up space and giving their opinion are white women. And the other students aren't talking.' I'm sitting adjacent to her, right there. The TA says nothing. Decides, to say nothing to turn the conversation, to mediate the conversation, to open it up as a question. That's literally your entire job in gender studies, because it's discussion and like, disagreement. And then, all of the, like because I was telling you the prof is trying to get the majority white students to realize they were being racist to people. And you can't just be like, 'oh people like, think I like to go to Starbucks 'cos I'm blonde.' Like, that's not racism, sorry. Like, that's discrimination. That's prejudice a little bit, but no ... That's kind of a compliment, so, just take it, like. And then, basically everyone proceeded to go tell us about their black friend, right. And I was like, it's 2018... and you're still talking like this.

And so, I was like, really, really stressed because one girl was like - she was talking about how, she, she was super close to this black girl and they both tried to get on the bus, the OC Transpo bus. And, or was it in high school? I don't even know. And basically, they both didn't have their bus passes but the driver, who was a white man, let her on, didn't let her friend on. That was her story, and I was like, 'no, no, did you get off the bus or did you stay?' What did you do for your friend? And I'm like, that's the question no one wants to ask in this room, because, no one's, first of all, thinking of it. 'Cos they're thinking of it in her point of view, which I'm like, if you say you have a black friend, it's still your narrative. I don't care how many friends you have. And then, the problem with Gender Studies, or Humanities at Carleton, is that no one knows how to think with their own brain, or critically. So, the first person who starts, everyone takes that contagious... They assume that that's a politically correct, like, thing to say, let's keep going with that. So, everyone tells their black friend story, and I'm like, how do I begin to share my answer to the question, which had a lot to do with, well, first of all, we're in Canada. So, it's pretty irrelevant to bring in US politics into this, because you're talking about black people as in African-American people, who have heritage of slavery. And you're talking about, black people who are like, like in really messed up, confusing diasporas, who come here, and they're not from a heritage of slavery, but they still, they still carry that burden whether they like it or not, because they're a political statement walking around. Do you wanna talk about that? Or do you wanna talk about, like internal community colorism and racism within the Indian community, South Indian community, in Malaysia? 'Cos that's what I wanna talk about. But there's no space. Yeah, it will break your brain, if I start talking about that, 'cos you can never, ever think there's anyone else who's not either black or white.

So, I was really exhausted. And I remember leaving that class, um, and I broke down, and like, for a week, I was really confused. And, I was walking down the UC stairs, 'cos my class was in Tory, and people were passing me by and like, looking at me. And I was like, so, am I brown in Canada? 'Cos I've never associated with that term.' I

didn't even know that was a term, until I came here, and half my friends were like, 'why are people calling my black, what the hell does that mean? Like, I'm clearly from Africa, why am I black. I'm not a colour, I'm a person with a rich, cultural heritage or...'" ([Suzie], personal communication, 11 October 2018).

[Suzie] provides a good context for how confusing it can be to experience racialized experiences in this kind of society where race is still a very prominent in discussion and lived experience.

There is also something to be said about the ways in which race is discussed in academic settings. In [Suzie]'s account, the discussion was limiting for the racialized and non-racialized students due to the white, settler perspectives of those in-charge. The politics of Canada, colonization and Indigenous peoples within Canada also play a part in this experience.

Unfortunately, the perspectives that fall beyond this kind of perspective were harshly excluded, leading to [Suzie]'s account. [Suzie] had already been here two years and before she was confronted with this, and when it happened, she confided in a friend who encouraged her to continue the conversation (personal communication, 11 October 2018). In her story, she did not fit into the framework of her gender studies class on intersectionality because the various people in charge did not have the resources, training or knowledge to include her and help her feel safe in the institution. This point was raised by other students who found that in their interactions with people in the city or within certain associations, the differences in treatment were apparent and difficult to figure out for students, adding to any sense of instability. A first year undergraduate student from India, [Marisa], noted that she had had one negative racialized experience off campus since moving to Canada, which surprised her, but mentioned that "I just don't pay heed to it, because the moment I start reacting, it will grow big. And then, I have - I don't have resources to tackle to such big problems" (personal communication, 6 December 2018).

Racialized experiences can vary greatly from what Suzie has described in her narrative, but the impact is still the same. The two main experiences recounted in this section related to race point to the variations in lived experiences that international students can have because of their racialization, which relates to my fourth research sub-question. In the student interviews, I asked every student about whether gender, culture, ethnicity or other such factors affected their experiences, and race and culture were reoccurring themes in the answers. Some had no experiences at all, and some were really shocked by what they encountered. From [Suzie]'s account, and [Marisa]'s mini explanation, it is clear that racialized experiences should be a considerable factor in any exploration of international student experiences, as some of those experiences can be distressing.

### 5.5 Safety, Resources and Well-Being

This section contains two stories, much like the previous section, that illustrate various connecting themes within the international post-secondary student experience. During the second round of coding in NVIVO, I consolidated the sub-themes of housing and 'immigration and visa' under the larger umbrella of resources. This larger theme is significant within the interviews, so I chose to centre this section on the following two stories because of how they encompass numerous aspects within them that reflect that threat to safety and well-being through the resources that are available, in ways that are not always easy to see at first glance. Though the stories do not explicitly talk about immigration or housing, the sentiments that were associated with those themes and the stories are the same – there were elements of vulnerability and insecurity that resonated parallel to other stories from student like that of [Cindy] and an unnamed colleague facing great difficulty in finding housing in Ottawa (personal communication, 25 January 2018).

The first story comes from [Isabel], who explained that she was no longer able to go to the building where her department was housed because of a traumatizing experience with a professor. She discusses what led her to find refuge in the library and starts with this anecdote at the beginning when we discussed the places on campus and in the city that she finds most comfortable or like home (see Appendix F):

I'm a PhD student but yeah. But in my first and second year, in two years, around two years or less than two years, I spend my whole day in my office, in the Richcraft building. That time it was the River Building though. But I find that place is really uncomfortable. I have kind of traumatic experience in there. Yeah, as an international student, of course, my first language is not English. So, at the same time, many international students, I think, finish with Master or Bachelor in here or in other English-speaking country, and then they do their PhD in here. But my case was different. I finish everything in [Korea]. Yeah, so, the first, language barrier was serious. And then the second, I thought I didn't expect something from professors but, in retrospect, probably I expected something. So, the professor's attitude to me was not - did not meet what I expected. So, I can say that it's uh kind of discrimination. Yeah, so kind of the, pent - the time that I spent in my office was, yeah, it was - still I don't want to go to enter the River Building. It's traumatic. So, I spend my whole time in the library ([Isabel], personal communication, 23 November 2018).

The story continues later when talking about differences felt because she was an international student (see Appendix F):

I felt the professors actually don't know well how to treat international student. Because I think they were just grown up and educated here so, regardless of whether they are kind or they are good people, or not is different issue. But... yeah, they don't know how to, for instance, how to make their facial expression in front of me. That is also very, probably different experience. And then, that's why I felt like it's uh discrimination because language issue is, in some sense it's kind of the defect of international student but in the, the other sense, it's very matter of course, right. But one professor usually let me know that - ask me to write kind of several sentences in front of him and then he's gonna check how my, kind of English writing is good or not. It's very unpleasant experience. He can advise me but not that way, right. [...]. Yeah, I have a lot of that kind of experience in my department. And then, another curious thing, uh, interesting point was, even my friends in my department, they are not international students but immigrants, who just finish their Masters or Bachelor in other country. UK or other, Bangladesh or other countries, but anyway they are Canadians. When we talked together about those professors in my department, I have found our experiences, or our emotional...and experiences are almost the same. Almost the same because - I think because they are, they have their accents, and even though they are Canadians, but their English are not very full, and not very

perfect, you know, not very, you know. So, my experience and their experiences are very similar, but other students who were born here and educated here, and they were - it's totally, it's really clearly divided. Uh separated ([Isabel], personal communication, 23 November 2018).

This traumatic experience, in [Isabel]'s own words, convey the true confusion and lack of safety that she felt and still feels from that experience with a professor. [Isabel] is one instance of such an occurrence in this interview process, but the story bears a lot of weight. The professor was a primary resource in the institution that created such an unsafe environment that [Isabel] no longer feels physically safe in the same building. What is especially shocking about the story is that there were no resources that [Isabel] was able to turn to and had to find a different place to continue the work of her program. It reflects a power dynamic that can be oppressive, which [Abeiku] and [Kweku] discuss as increasing the risk students face as dependents of professors and supervisors, which relates to Goldring et al (2009)'s definition of precariousness (personal communications, 27 June 2018). That dependency and risk especially for a transnational migrant such as an international student, introduces an additional element of precarity and vulnerability.

The problem with the infrastructure provided for students as a whole, as previously discussed, is the lack of connectivity and access to international student-specific resources. Not knowing where to go for help can be detrimental when the very resources that are supposed to be guides are the ones causing the problems as recounted above. In [Karen]'s case, after she was able to surmount the barrage of immigration problems that prevented her from starting her program on time, with the help of her department, she found that though she had a lot of experience with presentations and a professional life, this did not translate into her program (personal communication, 22 January 2019). In her own words:

Ha, so it's bad, like, can't forget that Friday - it was a Friday, and I had just finished a presentation for a seminar class. Before that presentation, I spent like two weeks agonizing, reading, you know. And, this is coming from, a whole - and that's why I

agreed to this 'cos I just wanted to like, tell my story, so that it can be out there, so that other people can learn. Not come here, after working for 14 years and think it will just be a walkover. I came here, and all the readings that I was exposed to just felt like they weren't written in English. Seriously, why do people write like this? I'm coming from a place where we read, like, what people put in newspapers, you know, and you understand it. You read articles that are easy, that are about contemporary issues, that are written by people that you even see on the news. Now I'm reading theoretical jargon written by dead, white guys, you know. So, all of that, I was stressed. Really stressed. And then, I sort of prepared. I was doing all night to prepare for this presentation, and after the presentation, I really just think that I did badly at the presentation. I mean, someone else approached me like, two weeks after, and said, 'wow, your presentation was good.' And I was thinking, me? It's because they don't know me in Nigeria. Me, that I used to - I was like a star in my office, eh. I was making presentations for my organization. I was presenting before senators, House of Reps. As in, when I look at myself now, I'm thinking to myself, 'seriously? You've brought yourself to come and suffer or what?' In Nigeria, and I'm not boasting - you don't even have to put that on record. If you're listing gender experts in Nigeria, and I'm not lying, I'm not boasting - before you count 30, my name is among. And I'm here, I'm presenting to people who are, and this is not about ageism, right, but now I know that I'm the oldest everywhere that I go on this campus. Apart from the professors. I'm presenting to people that I certainly sort of know more than, in terms of pragmatic oh, but they more than me in terms of theory, right. And I'm so unsure of myself, and everything. I just got home that day and broke down.

I cried. I cried. I - I just saw myself, like, you have totally derailed. Like, you should have just continued with your career, looked for a short course, maybe one in Harvard. You know, one of these policy-related courses, finish, and then - you know, like, then you can be the director general of an agency like you - you've wanted to be. like, I just thought to myself like, I'm so dumb, I don't know what I'm doing. I said all the nasty things you can say to yourself. And - well, unfortunately, my husband traveled that day. He went to Toronto, so, I was alone in the house. So, I had time to cried, ah. I really understood people who are going through depression, like, I really felt like dying. I just felt like, no, you know, there's nothing to live for anymore. But I thought, okay, the children will be back from school. So, you know how reality checks in, like, okay, you can't die now. You can't kill yourself, now, you know. Who will open the door for them? You kid, and, it was so bad that, even after my kids came back from school, they could sense that something had happened. They asked me, and I just started crying again. Like, I was crying, like, 11-year-old and 8-year-old, they're like, what's wrong with her? 'In school, I just don't understand anything. It was really bad, and my son sat down, he's 8 years old, and he said, 'you know, mummy, you will get over it.' And that made me cry more... ([Karen], personal communication, 22 January 2019).

I listened to this section of her story completely uninterrupted because it was so compelling.

[Karen] continues this narrative with the fact that her discomfort in the system was not completely related to her as an individual but as a part of a larger systemic issue, saying:

...because I'm a feminist, I know that such things are institutionalized in a way that you begin to self, inflict it on yourself and think that you are the one that no, the school is supportive. You are the one that is feeling less than, less competent, eh. But it's because it is institutionalized. It's because at the helm of affairs, your, you are assessing yourself against whiteness. You are assessing yourself against a standard that is clearly just whiteness, you know (personal communication, 22 January 2019).

[Karen] points out that the reason she knows this is her feminist knowledge of systems. This information may not be as widely available to other post-secondary students who are trying to measure themselves by a certain standard and individually blaming themselves for what may be systemic. The standard in question disregards cultural differences, the richness that can come from different knowledges and the adjustments that have to be made to new environments by transnational migrants. The self-blame that results can be harmful because it puts pressure on the individual and can have significant negative impacts on mental and physical health, as well as their futures post-graduation.

This is hard lesson to learn for anyone, and through the intensity of [Karen]'s words, I believe that much can be learned for anyone experiencing something similar. What strikes me in particular is within this account is that there is even more than a lack of resources to deal with in such cases, but there is a larger discussion about the how transnational migrants fit into this specific Western framework. As Miraftab (2004) states, there is “the almost exclusive focus in the literature on the privileged world of the researcher (often assumed to be Western or Western-trained) erases the influence of the researched in the relationship that emerges in the field” (p. 602). [Karen] even noted this in her own studies in her department that the dominance of Western philosophies does not leave room to question them or incorporate other frameworks, adding to the pressure of that standard she mentioned before (personal communication, 22 January 2019). There needs to be an examination of the actual Western framework, not only as between the researcher and the researched, but also as a larger discourse of the erasure that can

occur within such a society, especially in the context of a multi-cultural society such as Canada (Banting & Kymlicka, 2010).

## 5.6 Things to Consider

In a similar fashion to Chapter 4.6, this section presents the questions that international students thought were valuable additions to the study that I was conducting that were not featured in the interview guide (see Appendix F). This provided an avenue to recognize the gaps and pathways for future research beyond the scope of this project. Ten out of the fourteen student interview participants had additions to the project that had not been discussed or presented directly through the interview guide (see Appendix F). Much like the additional questions of the organizational contact interviews, the international student span multiple scales that affect their everyday lives and experiences, particularly the global, the federal and provincial, and the intimate.

The ten additional things that I was asked to consider in relation to these experiences were: (1) the different diasporas within this framework and the distinction within *those* diasporas between low and high-skilled workers [Jen], (2) the confusion of the immigration system post-graduation [Suzie], (3) how they relate to their home country and how they feel about it [Kate], (4) the struggles with language in their experiences [Emily], (5) the changing concept of home, having been in a different international environment before [Allison], (6) the difference between how people feel and act if they know they are leaving Canada versus how someone might feel otherwise [Isabel], (7) assessing cultural fit with universities from abroad [Joel], (8) immigration policies taking into account those who came in their high school years [Carly], (9) the comparative fee structure of domestic and international students [Marisa], and (10) how people are placed within the institution in terms of race and culture [Karen].

What is particularly interesting is that all these considerations are different from each other while still being quite connected. The thought of different diasporas and how they interact with each other could have impacts beyond the scope of the institution, or within the institution, creates an uneven power dynamic for the people of that diaspora. At the same time, the confusion of the immigration system, the diaspora discussion, the changing concepts of home and its features and the uncertainty of staying or leaving Canada post-graduation are major points of the discussion of multiple mobilities and factors that international students face in their daily lives (Finn, 2017; Silvey, 2004; Waters, 2012).

### 5.7 Policy Suggestions and Analysis Conclusions

The primary goal of this research was to answer the question of how Canadian immigration policies and practices at the federal, provincial and university levels affect the lived experiences of international students. That was broken down into four sub-questions that explored: the contribution of those policies and institutions to the production of precariousness for students, how a sense of belonging develops for students and how they define precariousness or security in their everyday lives, and finally, how race, gender and class affect their lived experiences. Through the interviews and policy analysis all these points were addressed in this pilot study except the explicit influence of gender.

The question of how institutions and policies produced a sense of belonging and precariousness was a heavy theme throughout the interviews with both the students and the organizational contacts. It was evident that while the universities, the province and the federal government have measures in place to protect international post-secondary students' rights, the lack of awareness of those rights often led students to situations to precarious situations in their everyday lives. The factors that contributed to this for each student varied but the most common

themes were related to tuition, work and healthcare regulations. At the university level, it is especially clear that the disconnect between offices and student unions has added to this insecurity of international students in many ways, some of which also include dealing with negative racialized experiences.

After careful examination of these policy documents, in conjunction with the experiences related by the students and the organizational contacts, my main suggestion is that there should be regulation of both international student tuition fees, as there are currently no regulations. This will not be an easy task but could be beneficial in attracting and retaining international students. Offices such as the International Student Services Office (ISSO) need to work student unions and groups on campus to enhance the lives of students. As they are the central point of information for international students at Carleton University, it needs to be clear that the office is place of refuge, advocacy and everyday resources. The ISSO already provides many services that benefit students greatly (Carleton University & Aulenback, 2018) but, when many student interview participants including [Suzie], [Isabel], [Karen], [Cindy], had issues related to housing, work, discrimination and mental health, the ISSO was not one of the places they turned to. [Marisa] had to be quite proactive and innovative to deal with her financial issues, and found help with the office, but this is not the case for all students. The ISSO has the potential to be one of the best central places to increase accessibility to these different kinds of resources that are essential to student life.

The issues that international post-secondary students face are influenced by both provincial and federal laws. Despite the fact that these two levels of government have different jurisdictions, there should still be a bridge on the platform of the everyday life of international students. The Canadian Federation of Students (CFS), for instance, advocates for students on the

provincial and federal stages and has campaigns like the Fairness for International Students, which tackles issues of healthcare and tuition fees in Ontario (Canadian Federation of Students–Ontario, 2018a). However, other related issues are under the broader banner of the other student campaigns they run. Taking into consideration how the additional issues that international students face in their everyday, compared to domestic students, and their precarious status, there should be more campaigns through advocacy groups and through offices that target matters like mental health and work resources from an international student perspective.

## 6 Conclusion

### 6.1 Post-research Process Reflections

Throughout my research process, I attempted to emphasize and respectfully portray the lived experiences of international post-secondary students at Carleton University as a smaller pilot study. It was my aim in this project to not only answer the question of what the variations are in the lived experiences of international post-secondary students and what affects their sense of belonging, but also to make sure that the experiences that they talk about are well represented and acknowledged. While I had to rework my strategy during the research and writing process, I found that employing feminist methodologies and theories, including my theoretical framework of belonging, transnational feminist studies and precarious immigration guided this representation of the lived experiences of students and honoring their words and time.

I believe that by examining the questions I posed for this thesis through these methods, I found detailed answers that would provide foundations for further exploration. Much like in Chapter 3, I am using this section to engage in some post-research and thesis reflection. As Johnson and Madge (2016) state, there are multiple layers of reflexivity, and I believe this is the case with research all throughout the process. Reflecting on the ways in which you produced your research and processed it are essential parts of bringing the research to a close and as Johnson and Madge (2016) express in their book chapter, there needs to be an examination and acknowledgement of the multiple ontologies present in research and the politics that need to be debated, discussed and reworked.

The process of engaging in this research was quite complex and required critically examining my methods and motives throughout. Though this was challenging in many ways, I found that it enriched my research process and the final product, which is this thesis. I conducted

18 interviews and learned that the best way to represent this information was through a mixture of the conventional quote analysis and the collaborative, empowering nature of longer storytelling (Johnson & Madge, 2016; Kovach, 2009). Due to the changes in recruitment, I was forced to reanalyze the ways I wanted to reach out to participants, while maintaining a non-imposing front, and maintaining my ethical protocols. As an international student and a researcher, especially when engaging with students, I needed to keep a balance between interrupting with knowledge or filling in the gaps based on my own experience and allowing participants to speak freely without being influenced in some way. To correctly convey the information, I consulted with my supervisor and with other master's colleagues across the field of geography. I found that engaging with colleagues who are experts in both the physical and human aspects of geography gave me insight into multiple ontologies and relevant points that I had not previously thought of (Johnson & Madge, 2016).

In terms of my goals for the project, I had four main sub-questions that I believe the project addressed through the interviews and the policy analysis. In the beginning, I had organized my interviews into two stages with the organizational contact interviews giving context to the policies and practices at various institutional levels in relation to the production of precariousness for international students, and the student interviews would address their sense of belonging, their definitions and feeling of security or precariousness and the various in their relationships in terms of race, gender and class. In the end, all these interviews and the policies, practices and resources associated with these students provided information that was more interrelated than I had imagined delving into this study. It was quite difficult to have proxies for class, belonging and security, but I believe talking about community, safety, finances and work contributed to the discussion of those elements. Some discussions carried more implicit meaning

– for instance, many participants described experiences with perceptions in dating, relationships and others that seemed to indicate some amount of influence from gender as a factor. I had hoped that gender would play a more significant role in the study, but it was possible that there was not enough clarity in the way the question related to gender was phrased. It could also be that the implicit gendering that happened in these interviews from the perspective of the students, and myself, was not explored fully enough. The ways in which implicit gendering play out in lived experiences is complex and would have had to be handled delicately and efficiently. Generally, though, it would be interesting to see whether a study with more variations in participants or questions related to gender would yield different results.

## 6.2 Limitations

As with any project, there were some limitations with the scope and implementation of the desired recruitment and research methods. These limitations were related specifically to recruitment and access to interviews for certain participants, the time and scale of the project itself, the types of questions that could be asked of students, and the methods of collecting information from organizational contacts and international student participants. There was a tendency to highlight the areas of precariousness, which led to the more positive trends being obscured and I found it difficult to portray the tension between institutional responsibility vis-à-vis the responsibility of the student to navigate differences. I hope, however, that I have painted a complex picture, to some extent, the infrastructure and experiences involved in international student lives. Overall, though these restrictions were quite constraining, and not everything could have been discussed, I find that the project accomplished its goals and the limitations themselves are avenues for future project developments. As a pilot study, the limitations showed me the potential areas for future research and the areas of improvement for methodology and fieldwork.

One of the issues I have spoken about was my need to switch recruitment and fieldwork methods. This did prove difficult, but this deviation resulted in more student participants than my original means of recruitment. My main limitation here was not understanding the hubs of student communication, which were not with the larger student unions and offices but with the smaller student service centres and departments. My choice to do semi-structured interviews were appropriate for the timeframe for the project but there is a richness that could have come from having more than one round of interviews with key identified contacts, especially with the students who provided more in-depth stories.

I have already mentioned that the timeframe was short but good for an exploratory pilot study, but such research would benefit greatly from a long-term study. The benefits of something more longitudinal would be seeing how the impacts of certain factors change over time just like [Isabel] mentions in her interview that her already known decision of leaving after problem changes her perspective. There is also the possibility of looking at more than just a snapshot and exploring these different factors in-depth, giving more detailed, nuanced profiles of key figures and how sense of belonging and security can vary over time (Waters, 2011). Just as Waters (2011) does in her paper, it should be noted that time is a factor as well as space though time varies in its impact.

### 6.3 Suggestions and Future Research Ideas

When I started the literature review for this project, especially in trying to define what would count as my factors that I focused on in the lived experiences of students, my focus lay in the gaps in the research as discussed in Chapter Two. In particular, scholars mentioned their own courses for further research including the differences in gender, between those of different national origins and the power differential for students who are from developing countries, and

other internal differences that can occur within international education and mobilities (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014; Sweetman & Warman, 2014; Waters, 2012).

In the process of talking to students and staff, I asked about what they valued as additions to the discussion and this yielded many interesting results documented in Chapters 4.6 and 5.6. Many of those poignant questions should be investigated on a larger scale and require a multi-scalar approach, incorporating the documentation that affect students at multiple levels, including at their universities themselves. As students have also expressed that racial and cultural difference coloured their experiences, these are worth investigating in the internal differences between international students and how some students can be “cast into a low grade of cultural citizenship - a 'racialized sub-citizenship' - in an urban context characterized historically and currently by racial divisions and hierarchies" (Daniels, 2014, p. 856).

I would also suggest in terms of method, as mentioned in the limitations above, that the method of data collection and analysis employ a mix of traditional and collaborative methods to enhance the study. Though the scope of my project was limiting, I employed storytelling in a small capacity, from an Indigenous decolonial methodology, which proved to be very enriching. Indigenous geographers and scholars mention that storytelling is empowering, collaborative and decolonizing in their subversion of the researcher-researched power dynamic (Johnson & Madge, 2016; Kovach, 2009). While international students are not Indigenous within the scope of Canada, I believe there is merit in relating stories as a way of collaborating with students, so to speak, by empowering them and representing them in a more full light, as well as convey the things they have gone through and acknowledging them as ‘experts’ of themselves and their experiences (England, 2015).

## Appendices

### Appendix A – Original Certificate of Ethics Clearance Text

Office of Research Ethics  
5110 Human Computer Interaction Bldg | 1125 Colonel By Drive Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6  
613-520-2600 Ext: 2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

#### **CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE**

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) has granted ethics clearance for the research project described below and research may now proceed. CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

**Ethics Protocol Clearance ID:** Project # 108950

**Project Team Members: Dzifa Binka (Primary Investigator)**

Jennifer Ridgley (Research Supervisor)

**Project Title:** Hidden Voices in Transnationalism: International Post-Secondary Student Experiences of Precariousness and Belonging in Ottawa [Dzifa Binka]

**Funding Source** (If applicable):

Effective: **June 07, 2018** Expires: **June 30, 2019**.

**Please ensure the study clearance number is prominently placed in all recruitment and consent materials: CUREB-A Clearance # 108950.**

***Restrictions:***

This certification is subject to the following conditions:

1. Clearance is granted only for the research and purposes described in the application.
2. Any modification to the approved research must be submitted to CUREB-A via a Change to Protocol Form. All changes must be cleared prior to the continuance of the research.
3. An Annual Status Report for the renewal of ethics clearance must be submitted and cleared by the renewal date listed above. Failure to submit the Annual Status Report will result in the closure of the file. If funding is associated, funds will be frozen.
4. A closure request must be sent to CUREB-A when the research is complete or terminated.
5. Should any participant suffer adversely from their participation in the project you are required to report the matter to CUREB-A.

Failure to conduct the research in accordance with the principles of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans 2nd edition* and the *Carleton University Policies and Procedures for the Ethical Conduct of Research* may result in the

suspension or termination of the research project.

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please contact the Research Compliance Coordinators, at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca), if you have any questions.

**CLEARED BY: Date: June 07, 2018**

Andy Adler, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Vice-Chair, CUREB-A

## **Appendix B – New Certificate of Ethics Clearance Text**

Office of Research Ethics

5110 Human Computer Interaction Bldg | 1125 Colonel By Drive Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5B6

613-520-2600 Ext: 2517

[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

### **CERTIFICATION OF INSTITUTIONAL ETHICS CLEARANCE**

The Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (CUREB-A) has granted ethics clearance for changes to protocol to the research project described below and research may now proceed.

CUREB-A is constituted and operates in compliance with the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS2).

**Ethics Clearance ID:** Project # 108950

**Project Team Members: Dzifa Binka (Primary Investigator)**

Jennifer Ridgley (Research Supervisor)

**Project Title: Hidden Voices in Transnationalism: International Post-Secondary Student**

**Experiences of Precariousness and Belonging in Ottawa [Dzifa Binka] Funding Source (if applicable):**

Effective: **September 28, 2018** Expires: **June 30, 2019**

Upon reasonable request, it is the policy of CUREB, for cleared protocols, to release the name of the PI, the title of the project, and the date of clearance and any renewal(s).

Please email the Research Compliance Coordinators at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca) if you have any questions.

**CLEARED BY: Date: September 28, 2018**

Bernadette Campbell, PhD, Chair, CUREB-A

Natasha Artemeva, PhD, Vice Chair, CUREB-A

## Appendix C – Letter of Invitation for Organization Contacts



Letter of Invitation to Participate in In-depth Interview

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Dzifa Binka and I am a Master's student in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Prof. Jennifer Ridgley.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled "Hidden Voices in Transnationalism: International Post-Secondary Student Experiences of Precariousness and Belonging in Ottawa." This study aims to understand the varied experiences of international students here at Carleton and relate that to broader immigration policy. This project is not affiliated with any other organization and is an independent Master's thesis.

This study involves one 60 minute interview that will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

Care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until two weeks after the interview has taken place. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed. All data will be destroyed five years after the project is completed.

As a token of appreciation, I will be providing you with refreshments during the interview along with any volunteer time your organization might need to reciprocate the time you have offered to participate in this interview.

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research.

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at [dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca).

Sincerely,

Primary Researcher  
Dzifa Binka, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies  
Carleton University  
Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, K1S 5B6  
[dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca)

Supervisor  
Dr. Jennifer Ridgley  
Assistant Professor, Department of Geography and Environmental Studies  
Carleton University  
[jennferridgley@cunet.carleton.ca](mailto:jennferridgley@cunet.carleton.ca)

Carleton University Research Ethics Board  
Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board  
613-520-2600 ext. 2517  
[ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)

## Appendix D – Letter of Invitation for International Student Participants



Letter of Invitation to Participate in In-depth Interview

Dear Sir or Madam,

My name is Dzifa Binka and I am a Master's student in the Department of Geography and Environmental Studies at Carleton University. I am working on a research project under the supervision of Prof. Jennifer Ridgley.

I am writing to you today to invite you to participate in a study entitled “Hidden Voices in Transnationalism: International Post-Secondary Student Experiences of Precariousness and Belonging in Ottawa.” This study aims to understand the varied experiences of international students here at Carleton and relate that to broader immigration policy. This project is not affiliated with any other organization and is an independent Master's thesis. **If you identify as an international student registered at Carleton University in at least second semester standing, and over 18 years old, you are eligible to participate in this study. Please note that all interview questions will require a level of working English proficiency.**

This study involves one 60 minute interview that will take place in a mutually convenient, safe location. With your consent, interviews will be audio-recorded. Once the recording has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

Care will be taken to protect your identity. This will be done by keeping all responses anonymous and allowing you to request that certain responses not be included in the final project.

You will have the right to end your participation in the study at any time, for any reason, up until two weeks after the interview has taken place. If you choose to withdraw, all the information you have provided will be destroyed. All data will be destroyed five years after the project is completed.

As a token of appreciation, I will be providing you with a \$10 Starbucks gift card. (The compensation is yours to keep, even if you choose to withdraw.)

All research data, including audio-recordings and any notes will be encrypted. Any hard copies of data (including any handwritten notes or USB keys) will be kept in a locked cabinet at Carleton University. Research data will only be accessible by the researcher and the research supervisor.

The ethics protocol for this project was reviewed by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board, which provided clearance to carry out the research.

If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

If you would like to participate in this research project, or have any questions, please contact me at [dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca](mailto:dzifabinka@cmail.carleton.ca).

Sincerely,

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Carleton University Research Ethics Board  
Dr. Andy Adler, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board  
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## Appendix E – Interview Guide for Organizational Contacts



### Interview Guide and Checklist: Organizational Contacts

#### To begin:

- Introduce myself and the project in more detail than the letter of introduction or recruitment letter
- Read and distribute the consent forms and have them signed
- Answer any additional questions or concerns

#### Questions:

1. What does your organization do?
2. Does your organization work with international students? What work does your organization do with international students? Are there any benefits you have seen for international students in your field of work?
3. Since you started working here, and in this field of work, how have things changed in terms of policy and practice regarding international students since you started?
4. Do you have any context on these changes that you noticed, like how they came about or the atmosphere at the time of the changes?
5. What are the most significant immigration laws and policies affecting international students and your work with them?

6. Are there any specific programs or policies at Carleton that are also affecting the students? If so, why?
7. What additional policies or practices affect international students in Ottawa and in the Canadian system in general?
8. Can you describe any challenges you have seen for international students in terms of housing and financial security?
9. Have you come across any challenges in terms of immigration and can you describe those situations?
10. Can you describe any issues that international students have faced with regards to healthcare that you may have observed in your work?
11. What do you believe are the most significant barriers to security and stability that an international student might face in Ottawa or at Carleton?
12. How does your organization help students deal with these barriers?
13. Are there resources outside of the university for international students that you know of? How do they impact the lives of students?
14. How do you see conditions changing for international students in the future? What possible advantages or benefits could you see happening?
15. What possible issues do you think could emerge for international students in the future?
16. Is there anything else you think would be useful for me to know that I have not already asked?

**To Conclude:**

- Explain the role the participant will be playing in the study
- Thank the participant for the interview

- Answer lingering questions or concerns and provide contact information for any follow up

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## Appendix F – Interview Guide for International Student Participants



### Interview Guide and Checklist: International Student Participants

#### To begin:

- Introduce myself and the project in more detail than the letter of introduction or recruitment letter
- Read and distribute the consent forms and have them signed
- Answer any additional questions or concerns

#### Questions:

1. How long have you been at Carleton and/or in Ottawa?
2. Do you travel back to home or where you originally were before Carleton frequently?
3. Are there places on campus or in Ottawa that you feel most at home or comfortable?
4. What have your experiences been with the International Student Services Office?
5. What are your most memorable moments in Ottawa and at Carleton so far?
6. Have you had any issues with your visa or immigration support since being here?
7. What is your history as an international student? How long have you been one in Canada and what was your journey to this point?
8. What have your experiences been with finances and things like scholarships?
9. What have your experiences been with employment such as teaching assistantships, research assistantships, or work on and off-campus?

10. What have your experiences been with housing on or off-campus?
11. Similarly, what have your experiences been with access to healthcare?
12. Do you feel like your experiences have been different because you are an international student?
13. Do you feel like you have a sense of community at Carleton and in Ottawa?
14. How safe do you feel at Carleton and in Ottawa?
15. Research has shown that gender, culture, ethnicity, and other such factors, affect the experiences of international students. Have any of such factors affected your experiences?
16. Is there anything else you think would be useful for me to know that I have not asked?

**To Conclude:**

- Explain the role the participant will be playing in the study
- Thank the participant for the interview
- Answer lingering questions or concerns and provide contact information for any follow up

Primary Researcher

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## **Participants needed for study on international student experiences!**

To participate in this study, you must be:

- ✓ An international student at Carleton with at least second semester standing
  - ✓ At least 18 years old
- ✓ Comfortable in the English language

This study will take 60 minutes. You will be asked to answer interview questions based on your experience as an international student in Ottawa.

Participants will be compensated with a \$10 Starbucks gift card. The ethics protocol for this project (#108950) has been reviewed and cleared by the Carleton University Research Ethics Board. If you have any ethical concerns with the study, please contact Dr. Bernadette Campbell, Chair, Carleton University Research Ethics Board-A (by phone at 613-520-2600 ext. 2517 or via email at [ethics@carleton.ca](mailto:ethics@carleton.ca)).

Please contact the researcher, Dzifa Binka, for more details on this study at [Dzifa.binka@carleton.ca](mailto:Dzifa.binka@carleton.ca)

**Appendix H – Table of Policy Documents and Research**

Table 1: Policy Documents Relating to International Students

<b>HEALTH</b>
The University Health Insurance Plan
<b>EMPLOYMENT AND STUDY</b>
Employment Standards Act, 2000
The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act, 2002
The Immigration and Refugee Protection Regulations

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