

Immigration Ideologies: Ottawa's Cap on Admission of International Students and Canada's Housing Crisis

"Benevolent Inclusion" or Border Imperialism? International Students' Lived Experiences in Canada. Part II

By [Tina Renier](#)

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Read Part I



[International Students' Lived Experiences in Canada. Exploitation in the Labour Market](#)

By [Tina Renier](#), February 01, 2024

"The federal government has essentially thrown a grenade into our admissions process. This is likely going to create chaos that is extremely hard to manage." —Jordan Gills, 23 January 2024, **"Federal Cap on International Students is unfair, N.B. says"**, CBC News.

The federal government's two (2) year cap on the admission of international students in Canadian cities and universities due to Canada's escalating housing crises is matter of intriguing concern and important development in international education that we, as social advocates and human rights civil society, should keep abreast of. I immediately noticed the instrumental, discursive function of the media with respect to its implicit/subtle craftsmanship of framing international students' impact on the Canadian housing market

crisis, as the central problem. International students are viewed as and are treated as “overcrowding” Canadian cities.

The term “overcrowding” carries racist, xenophobic, classist and gendered implications in which the influx of international students are seen as security threats or risks to the Canadian nation-state. This explains the reason for the justification of an unfair immigration policy which places a cap on the number of international students that will be admitted to Canadian universities over the next two year period.

Critical social science scholar, Nandita Sharma (2019:224) comments on the apartheid citizenship regime in Canada by arguing that “anti-migrant ideologies, movements and policies shift the nation-state’s core responsibilities to the primary responsibility of migrants and away from underlying systemic and institutional structures of power and control”. Canada’s Immigration Minister, Marc Miller, policy makers and other stakeholders in the multi-billion dollar enterprise of international education have not adequately highlighted the role that private sector interests in their control over the Canada’s housing market has played in recent decades and as a result, the skyrocketing prices has made housing not only unaffordable but many racialized and marginalized communities including international students experience a gross situation of homelessness.

In my opinion, the era of “benevolent inclusion” of international students in Canadian society, universities and labour market operates under the shroud of humanitarian good will. In fact, Canada has always maintained apartheid citizenship regime that determines rights, duties, entitlements and a sense of belonging of who belongs to the nation-state and who does not.

Through the enactment of this unfair immigration policy, we are able to fully see the mechanics of power relations that is inextricably connected to a term known as border imperialism, which is coined by scholar-activist, Harsha Walia (2013). Harsha Walia (2013: 5) defines border imperialism is an alternative analytical framework that disrupts the myth of Western benevolence towards migrants. She (2013: 6) also notes, “border imperialism encompasses four (4) main structures: a) mass displacement of impoverished and colonized communities due to asymmetric global relations of power and securitization of borders against those migrants whom capital and Empire has displaced, b) criminalization of migrants through severe punishment and discipline for those who are considered as illegal or alien, c) entrenchment of a racialized hierarchy of citizenship whose legitimacy constitutes the nation-state and d) state-mediated exploitation of migrant labour in conditions akin to slavery and servitude to serve capitalist interests”.

We see the exemplification of the exalted status of Canadian nationhood, through border imperialism in key government policy documents such as the old and revised Canadian International Education Strategy (2014-2018 and 2019-2024). Both old and revised Canadian International Strategy documents stress the importance of international education in boosting Canada’s international competitiveness, research and innovation capacity and filling critical labour market gaps while building global ties through exporting education. None of these documents mentions the academic, emotional, physical and psycho-social well-being of international students in Canadian universities as policy objectives in international education. As mentioned in the first part of my opinion response commentary, this international education model is primarily focused on an influx of international students for profit generation. When an education model is built on numbers and profit generation,

we create an unmanageable, dilemma that supports the commodification of knowledge, academic imperialism by treating education as an export product instead of a public, social service that is accessible to all. We also create antecedents to the discriminatory 1976 Immigration Act legislation which laid the foundation for differential treatment of international students from domestic students with respect to paying higher tuition fees. We need to make an urgent and sustained call for an international education model beyond numbers and dollars as this current model contributes to a predicament of provincial, federal and transnational unsustainability.

Border imperialism is not only evident in the state-sanctioned and institutionally-sanctioned violence meted out against international students who are mostly employed in low waged, lack of social protection jobs with deplorable working conditions in grocery stores, fast-food chain restaurants and other service jobs in the Canadian labour market. Border imperialism also extends to the micro-coordination of classroom and university spaces of sites of erasure and silencing international students' diverse histories and knowledge production that is anti-colonial, anti-imperial and anti-capitalist. Border imperialism is embedded in the capitalist organization of the Canadian economy and the global economy that requires a certain class status requirements as part of the study permit package (proof of savings or financial proof that one is able to live in Canada) without being attentive to the fact that most international students are from regions of the world, where their countries experience sharp devaluation of local currencies and the jobs in their countries of origins do not pay enough to take them out of poverty.

The economic policy of local currency devaluation is also linked to the consequences of structural adjustment policies that have been imposed by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) for more than two decades.

We see border imperialism deployed through an implicit-explicit language of racialization, social control and militarization by regulating which group of international students will be admitted into the Canadian nation-state and which groups will be rejected as result of the two year cap. It is the two-year cap that is an instrument of policing because now international students' exponential growth in specific provinces and universities are viewed as a state burden to be ejected with great expedition. Two of the most evident implications of this recent immigration policy of caps on international students in Canada for the next two years are the fact that universities in specific provinces like New Brunswick, Nova Scotia and Ontario will see lower international student enrollment and declining revenue. Universities and these specific provinces will be forced to seek alternative avenues for revenue generation and of course, the predicament at hand will be highly chaotic for all stakeholders in Canada's international education industry.

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