

## **A social resilience lens to universities' contradictory role in international students' experiences**

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### **Abstract**

Canada has turned to recruiting growing numbers of international students as part of its broader neoliberal 'managed migration' strategy designed to realize economic goals. Within this strategy, international students are discursively constructed as an 'ideal' skilled migrant. In response, Canadian universities have come to the fore not only as key players in the active recruitment of students from abroad, but also as institutions implicated in enforcing migration and settlement policy, and by extension shaping student mobility and experiences. This paper draws and builds on the analytic concept of "social resilience" to examine the role of universities in developing structures and mechanisms that promote and/or hinder international student resilience. In doing so, it highlights the contradictory role that universities play vis-à-vis international students. On the one hand, international student fees are increasingly important to universities as a way to address budget shortfalls engendered by neoliberal policy prescriptions. But, on the other hand, international students have complex needs as newcomers to Canada that are not addressed by existing settlement services; universities are thus increasingly pressed to fill-in and provide them with various supports. The qualitative case study is framed by this contradiction and concentrates on two Ontario universities located in the same city, Ottawa, Canada's National Capital Region, to develop a comparative case-study analysis of student experiences both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. The key differences between these two universities are that one is Canada's largest bilingual university medical doctoral institution (the University of Ottawa) and the other is a comprehensive English language university (Carleton University). The study includes forty qualitative interviews focused on the actual experiences of international graduate students originating from a diverse range of countries, both women and men with English or French as their first official language and enrolled in masters or PhD programs in a range of disciplines, as they navigate various paths at these two Canadian universities – from pre-arrival to arrival, and during their degree to their future plans after graduation. In focusing on the student-migrant subject and how a range of structures (e.g. family, language, on-campus/off campus networks, employment, services and resources) are implicated in social resilience, this paper offers a counter narrative to familiar neoliberal policy rationales that discursively construct international students as human capital to be harnessed.

### **Biography**

**Luisa Veronis** is Associate Professor in the Department of Geography, Environment and Geomatics and holds the Research Chair in Immigration and Franco-Ontarian Communities at

the University of Ottawa. Her research focuses on the social and political geographies of immigration, settlement, integration and belonging from a critical perspective. Luisa has extensive experience in collaborative approaches, the use of qualitative and mixed methodologies, as well as comparative research. Her projects have been funded by SSHRC, IRCC, Pathways to Prosperity, FCFA and SNRF. She is currently leading and/or collaborating on several studies examining Francophone immigration in minority contexts, skilled worker migration decisions and the complex drivers influencing migration flows. She is co-editor of *A National Project: Syrian Refugee Resettlement in Canada* published by McGill-Queen's University Press in 2020.

**Christina Gabriel** is Professor in the Department of Political Science and the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University, Ottawa. Her specific research interests focus on citizenship and migration, gender and politics, regional integration and globalization. She is the co-author (with Yasmeen Abu-Laban and Ethel Tungohan) of *Containing Diversity: Canada and the Politics of Immigration in the 21st Century* (2023), *Selling Diversity: Immigration, Multiculturalism, Employment Equity and Globalization* (2002) and is a co-editor of *Governing International Labour Migration: Current Issues, Challenges and Dilemmas* (2008). She has contributed chapters and articles on issues such as migration, border control, transnational care labour and transnational activism.