WHERE IS QUEER?
MIGRATION EXPERIENCES OF SEXUAL MINORITY
INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN TORONTO

by

TREVOR CORKUM

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Graduate Department of Leadership, Higher, and Adult Education
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education
University of Toronto

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Abstract

This qualitative study uses queer standpoint and queer oral history methods to examine the migration experiences of nine globally mobile LGBTQ international students currently studying or recently graduated from post-secondary institutions within the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) and southern Ontario. I employ Lionel Cantú’s queer materialist paradigm to interrogate the ways in which queer international students are subject to and disciplined by dominant relations of ruling within specific educational and queer sites of citizenship. In particular, I attend to the ways in which intersections of race, gender, class, language, and other identity markers mediate experiences of home and belonging in both physical and virtual worlds within these citizenship spaces, and how these students engage in forms of “border-crossing” to consciously re-articulate or redeploy aspects of their identity in order to strategically negotiate particular regimes of power and privilege.
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Queering the Global Century

What does it mean to be orientated? How do we begin to know or to feel where we are, or even where we are going, by lining ourselves up with the features of the grounds we inhabit, the stories that surround us, or the imaginary lives that cut through maps? How do we know which way to turn to reach our destinations?

-Sara Ahmed (Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, 2006)

The twenty-first century has ushered in an age of migration unparalleled in human history. According to the United Nations, 232 million people—or 3.2% of the world’s population—lived abroad in 2013 (UN-DESA, 2013). This era of hyper-migration—embodying globalization’s circuitous flow of goods, ideas, and people—sets the stage for Appadurai’s (1996) “imaginary landscapes” where the invention of tradition and other identity-markers becomes destabilized as the “search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication” (44). Such imaginary landscapes are peopled by migrants of all sorts, the realization of what Appadurai terms ethnoscapes—the shifting “landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and persons” (1990, 7). While many migrants are driven by economic or humanitarian imperatives, one of the fastest growing migration categories of recent years involves the flow of international students. According to UNESCO, over 3.6 million students studied outside their home country in 2010, a 50% increase in just six years (UNESCO, 2012). By 2020, this number is expected to rise to over seven million, making mobile international students a key demographic in global migration flows.
While traditionally these flows have been from South to North, increasingly student mobility is a multi-faceted, multi-modal phenomenon, with “hubs” of international education—Dubai, Doha, Hong Kong, Singapore, and Beijing, among others—emerging in many regions of the Global South (Knight, 2014). And while in years past, many, if not all students might return “home” following graduation, increasingly, host nations facing downward demographic trends are involved in a scramble to recruit international students as potential immigrants (Tamburri, 2013). Indeed, Tamburri and others note a traditional immigration-receiving nation like Canada has overhauled its immigration systems in recent years to give preference to young, educated, highly mobile students through immigration streams such as the Canadian Experience Class and the Provincial Nominee Program. While many scholars argue that such a shift represents yet another turn away from Canada’s traditional humanitarian focus towards a more robust and explicit neoliberal program, many international student groups welcome the opportunity for a fast-tracked path to citizenship. Yet despite these policy shifts, not all international students applicants are eventually admitted as citizens, raising important questions regarding exactly whom these policy shifts benefit, and why and how certain applicants are excluded. Within the nation-state itself, and its various claims and counter-claims to “citizenship”, various communities, collectives, loose groupings, and formal institutions also engage in forms of border patrol, controlling who is defined as an insider and who is excluded as an alien or stranger (See Ahmed, 2004 and Phelan, 2001). While such communities themselves may appear to interrogate or confront the psychic, social, physical and emotional borders of the nation-state, these same communities also exist within Foucault’s (1979) regimes of power that seek to
articulate, police, discipline and normalize certain subjects who make claims on citizenship and belonging, on the basis of certain identity markers such as sexuality, gender, class, and language, among others. These “sub-national communities” exist in dialogic tension with the over-arching power structures of the dominant culture of the nation-state, so it stands to reason that forms of power, exclusion, oppression, privilege, and discipline within such groupings will mirror or exist in tenuous relationship to those of the nation-state itself, as Phelan contends.

For international students who identify as sexual minorities, outside heteronormative definitions—gay, lesbian, bisexual, queer, two-spirited, or otherwise same-sex loving, which I will henceforth refer to more broadly as “queer”—securing an international student visa in a country with relatively robust protections for sexual minorities, like Canada, with or without the intention of settling permanently, may represent for many a chance to live a more “open” life (Binnie 2004; Manalanson 2005; Ahmed 2006), particularly in a large, diverse, and relatively safe city such as Toronto. While Lubhéid (2004), Chauncey (1994) and others have noted how sexuality shapes settlement patterns for all migrants, for queer migrants, the search for home and belonging are often frustrated by state regimes and incomplete incorporation into the nation, offering, at best, partial citizenship (Parreñas, 2001). Some scholars argue that the embracing of certain narrow categories of queer migrants—such as relatively young, able-bodied, middle-or upper-class international students—represents a double turn by the state, incorporating and entrenching what Duggan calls a restrictive homonormative identity (2002) into the body politic while at the same time positioning Canada as a progressive, liberal country who protects sexual minorities against the perceived barbaric,
conservative Global South. Such “rescue narratives” serve to maintain a nation-building project that imagines Canada as a caring defender of diversity even as it tightens its borders and reduces access to citizenship for many migrant categories, such as refugees or other humanitarian applicants. Queer student migrants, then, find themselves in the midst of a new form of homonationalism that can be witnessed in many Western countries, pitting a sudden outpouring of state emotional and identity investment in certain queer subjects, even as it wages cultural and discursive war on “Other” bodies—Muslims, refugees, the homeless and economically disenfranchised, among others (See Puar 2006; 2007). While unpacking the relationship between the formal mechanisms of state power and state citizenship practices is a large, complicated project, I have chosen here to explore the various ways in which power operates and is reproduced within sub-national communities, and consider the relationship between informal types of citizenship and the idealized versions of national citizenship within the Canadian nation-state.

Despite the rapid increase in student flows, and despite the important questions raised by younger queer migrants navigating a globalized world, little research has been done on the motivations, lived realities and settlement experiences of queer international students, in Canada or elsewhere. In what ways is Canada currently positioned in the international imaginary as a safe destination for queer international students searching for a place to explore and live out their sexual identities, and how do accounts of actual lived experience complicate that imaginary? How does migration to Canada—in particular, as part of a privileged, mobile global flow in a highly competitive international student “marketplace”—further elevate certain queer subjects, such as able-bodied, gender-conforming, white bodies, or those most able to be “read” as “good gays” within
particular regimes of localized power, such as queer communities, while disciplining or punishing others? In the process of migration, how do queer international students re-frame, recalibrate or rearticulate their own identity narratives—engaging in what Lionel Cantú calls “border-crossing”—in order to resist, complicate, or comply with “relations of ruling”? How do these queer migrants in particular experience or make use of the material and discursive body as a form of currency to be traded, modified, exchanged, or otherwise exploited in order to gain access to power and loose forms of belonging or citizenship, particularly within Canadian queer spaces, both physical and virtual? And finally, how do queer international students navigate everyday sites of power—universities and college campuses, student clubs and groups, and social spaces in the mainstream gay community, among others—and what might their experiences reveal about Canadian citizenship in the age of global gay rights?

In sum, my research project is guided by the following two questions.

(1) How do queer post-secondary international students in Toronto and Southern Ontario experience migration to Canada?
(2) In what ways do these students engage in “border-crossing” as they engage with institutional, social and political sites of power?

Throughout my research, I use an intersectional analysis that attends to the various ways in which gender, class, race, ability, language, and other identity markers intersect with sexuality throughout the migration process to privilege or penalize particular students. I also use Dhamoon’s (2004) concept of “meaning-making” to understand how power is always exercised relationally, changing from one moment to another, depending on particular circumstances, locations, opportunities, and identities.

As an alternative to the privileging of culture, Dhamoon’s call for a shift towards “meaning-making” as a way to properly account for and understand complex relations of
power embedded within state structures and policies and exercised by subjects. How, she asks, are meanings of difference constituted relationally through discourse? How do forces of power constitute subjects differently? Accounts of meaning-making, in Dhamoon’s critique, deconstruct differences generated socially and historically and then re-contextualize these differences relationally. Relational understandings of power, she maintains, are the surest way to avoid the philosophical divide between essentialist and constructivist understandings of difference. She re-casts Collins’ “matrix of domination” (62) as a “matrix of meaning-making” which might account for intersectional difference, shifting focus away from rigid categories of difference towards the process of differentiation. In this way, the deconstruction remains squarely aimed at naming and unmasking socio-historical processes that continue to mark and divide subjects. Penalty and privilege occur in various forms and degrees; what is crucial is not to conflate categories of difference that homogenize or blur lived experience. Such a lens is particularly useful to my current project, which investigates how an extremely diverse group of sexual minority international students enter, engage with, and struggle to find belonging and meaning in particular sites of power within Canada.

Unpacking Privilege: Location, Worldview, Assumptions

While the focus of my study is on a group of relatively economically privileged, mobile students who have already, by virtue of their student visas, achieved entry into Canada, my research explores the tension between Canada as it once existed as an imaginary for these students—that is, a place of possible safety, a queer homeland or utopia, a space of liberation and belonging—and the complicated reality on the ground. The research raises
a number of important questions, such as: how do queer international students access citizenship and citizenship rights? How do notions of sub-national citizenship and social belonging (such as in educational or queer spaces) coalesce or repel one another in the experiences of these students? What role do online spaces—virtual worlds where identity, desire and belonging are imagined and explored—play in such bids for citizenship? In what ways are some queer bodies complicit in replicating certain regimes of power, through explicit or implied consent? Finally, does economic position or status—class—truly trump differences in gender, race, ability—and sexuality—in how an international student experiences life in Toronto, or is the reality more nuanced?

In order to address these questions, it’s important to interrogate and unpack my own interest in the project. How might I—a Canadian-born, white, queer white male—begin to understand or relate to the challenges, opportunities, fears and uncertainty of migrating to Canada as an international student from the Global South?

Alcoff (1991) asks us to consider what risks are at stake in speaking across difference. Any researcher is faced with the nearly impossible terrain of attempting to make meaning from the experiences of subjects whose lives may be markedly differently—in terms of race, gender, class, language, age, and other markers. For many researchers, according to Trinh T. Minh-ha, meaning-making is often a conversation of “us with us about them” (in Alcoff, 1991). Alcoff asks us to make explicit how the speaker’s social location has a significant epistemological impact on the speaker’s claims. Certain privileged locations may be discursively dangerous by creating “blind spots” in the researcher’s ability to make sense of difference. For Alcoff, speaking “about” others and speaking “for” others are both contested pathways of communication. She invokes
Foucault’s *rituals of speaking* to ask us to consider how both the positionality of the speaker *and* the discursive context of the discussion must be made clear. The “retreat response”, she maintains—asking researchers or others to merely “speak one’s own truth” and refrain from attempts to make meaning from the lives of others, masks a retreat into traditional liberal theory that maintains an essential disconnection and alienation between the self and others. Instead, Alcoff asks us to consider such questions through the lens of Spivak’s speaking *with* one another, rather than for or about others.

It’s in this spirit that I embarked on the project at hand—as a conversation with and among queer mobile subjects. Clearly, it’s impossible to ever inhabit the body or to fully understand the lived experiences or ontology of another person. Yet to shy away from finding common cause or common ground risks casting such attempts or aversions as a series of “Otherings” that only reify and re-trench Ahmed’s (2004) notion of the *alien* whose life experiences, motivations, hopes, desires and dreams are rendered so wholly foreign as to become illegible. This discursive “freeze” rationalizes and leaves intact manufactured borders of race, gender, class and difference. To refuse to understand, acknowledge or avoid the plight of another because of a perceived illegibility is to perpetuate forms of psychic and discursive violence to which Kunstman (2009) and Dhamoon (2004) allude. Yet in order to proceed with such a project ethically and consciously, it was imperative at each turn to recognize my own social location and position of privilege and power as researcher.

My motivation for the study arrived in part from my own experiences as a mobile outsider. I grew up as a queer kid in a white, working-class family who, due to my father’s military job, was always on the move. By the time I “came out” as queer, when I
was sixteen, I had attended eight schools. I also knew, by that age, like most of my research subjects, that what I longed for in life—that elusive world of possibility, openness, opportunity, and acceptance—was somewhere out there, in another physical and psychic location, and that it was necessary, as Ahmed so clearly articulates, to re-orient my body towards that imaginary home. Like most of my research participants, I understood education to be one of the chief methods and means of achieving the autonomy, independence, and the agency that would provide me with the ability to cross and negotiate spatial, class, social, gender, sexual and emotional borders in a bid for acceptance, integration, and wholeness.

While I did not initially cross national borders, I did secure a scholarship to attend a United World College in Western Canada. There, in my formative teenage years, I lived in a global community of two hundred students from eighty countries. While many of my international friends, from both the Global North and the Global South, did indeed come from economically privileged families—many occupied positions within the political, social and economic elite of their home countries—others arrived at our college from refugee camps or from public schools where they’d earned scholarships based on scholastic merit, rather than personal or familial connection. In this education microcosm, in the rainforests of British Columbia, the connections between educational achievement, privilege, mobility, desire, love, the longing for home, and the impossibility of home first became apparent. I witnessed friends and colleagues fall in love and make plans in all manner of “border crossings”—across lines of race, class, gender, language, ability. Beneath our differences, in addition to our relative privilege and educational achievements (every student attended the school on full merit scholarship), there was an
elusive sense of resilience, a kind of psychic capital that allowed the majority of our classmates to survive and thrive far from home.

Fast forward several years, and I found myself working in numerous positions within the K-12, post-secondary and non-government education sectors as an “international educator”, developing strategies for internationalization, student mobility, international partnerships, and the like. In my work as an international educator in a number of postsecondary education spaces, it struck me how certain students seemed to have the ability—whether through social or cultural capital, particular supports or community, or some other means—to more easily navigate systems of power through “border-crossing”—consciously shifting certain expressions or facets of their identity to comply or conform with certain norms or expectations. I became interested not only in why and how certain students were more easily able to “border-cross”, but in how these instances of border-crossing were used strategically, at times even transgressively. Were the experiences of these students symptomatic of a privileged global elite, where those mobile bodies among us engage in what Ong (1999) calls flexible citizenship? Might a fluid, culturally-coded notion of sexuality, where one performs a certain sexual script in one cultural context, and a radically different, even contradictory script, in another context, also be considered a form of “flexible (queer) citizenship”? How do notions of a queer imaginary and queer diaspora, raised by Ahmed and others, explain instances of sexual border-crossing as the mobile queer subject searches for home? Again and again, I returned to my own experiences at the United World College to reflect on these questions.
On a macro-level, I also grew interested in how the relatively recent proliferation of protections for sexual minorities, at least in the Canadian context, might be creating a new hierarchy among sexual minority students seeking to settle permanently in Canada—drawing a line between what Bell and Binnie (2004) conceptualize as the “good gay”—law-abiding, often white, gender-conforming, middle-class subjects—and the “bad queer”. Are all queer postsecondary international students in Canada, by virtue of being, for the most part, privileged economically, and situated economically as ideal, fast-tracked Canadian citizen-applicants, equally welcome in and welcomed by the country? While the data from my study does not explicitly address such questions, I do consider the ways in which the queer community itself—despite its focus on equality and inclusion—privileges certain queer mobile bodies to the exclusion of others, rendering some queers more culturally legible than others, and the ways in which these hierarchies might reproduce dominant relations of power within the Canadian nation-state.

This is the broad terrain on which my project was conceived. Moving forward, based on informal interviews with informants within international student services, immigrant education, and international recruitment departments at several post-secondary institutions within the GTA, I found agreement that researching the experiences of queer international students would be useful in shedding light on how this diverse population of students negotiates and engages with university or college life, and in social and civic spaces outside school. In particular, this type of research, informants felt, would be helpful in understanding queer international students from an intersectional perspective, where experiences, challenges, needs and supports are high personal and difficult to generalize. Anecdotal evidence gathered from these sources and my own experiences and
observations suggested that queer international students, as a population, were often isolated from both mainstream on-campus queer organizations (which may not understand or respect cultural differences or culturally-coded understandings of sexuality) and also cultural-specific support and social groups. Other conversations revealed the degree to which racialized queer newcomers experienced trauma and forms of exclusion based on skin colour, language, accent, and cultural difference, experiences Lubhéid (2004) and others suggest underscore the need to re-write the narrative of the West as a “safe place” for queer migrants. Additionally, many queer international students struggled to find meaningful connections with other queer students and some had difficult with adopting Western sexual identity labels—a form of often quiet assimilation into “shared gayness” that Ekine (2013), Altman (1997) and others critique as a discursive form of Western imperialism.

My review of the literature demonstrates that queer international students are an under-researched population whose particular day-to-day experiences helps pinpoint larger trends in the formation and negotiation of hybrid identities, flexible citizenship, and the privileging of certain bodies and subjects in a globalized, hyper-mobile age. I also illuminate how sub-cultural communities, even so-called “progressive communities”—such as queer communities in Toronto—replicate, resist, or retrench certain aspects or regimes of power from within the overarching dominant culture, also make clear how the “local” is not merely a product of the “global”, but a place where the global itself is constituted, to paraphrase Doreen Massey (Massey in Tancook, 2007). By researching a small but purposefully diverse group of sexual minority students, I demonstrate how
institutional power legitimizes certain forms of identity—and indeed, certain bodies—to the exclusion of others.

How, for example, have race, gender and ability intersected with sexuality to influence the experiences of queer international students in Toronto? In what ways do research participants consciously resist or comply with homonorms and to what end?

My research begins by situating these and other questions within the larger frameworks raised by recent queer migration scholarship. In Chapter 2, I locate my project within Cantú’s queer materialist paradigm, a theoretical framework that borrows both from queer theory’s focus on the fluidity of culturally-constructed identities, and the very real material and historical relations of power explained by Anzaldúa and other borderlands theorists. I consider how Dorothy Smith’s understanding of “relations of ruling” within institutions and communities is adopted by Cantú in the study of border-crossing queer migrants, and make the case that employing a queer standpoint to understand the day-to-day experiences of my participants is the most appropriate way to understand how they confront regimes of power in their quest to access forms of citizenship in Toronto and southern Ontario. Employing queer life history methods throughout my project, I suggest, allows me to uncover and pinpoint the gaps between Canada and Toronto as they are conceived by queer international students, positioned both by the state and popular culture as a queer utopia, and the more complicated reality of their actual lived experiences as queer migrants. Considering Manalansan’s focus on the everyday as a rubric for interrogating how power shapes the lives of queer migrants, and positions their avenues for agency within new physical and cultural spaces, I extend the “everyday” to include the virtual and online worlds which occupy an increasing
amount of emotional, cultural, psychic energy for these queer students and often serve, my analysis shows, as a bridge or overlapping imaginary between home and Canada.

In Chapter 3, I turn my attention to reviewing recent literature according to three over-arching thematic tropes that provide a framework for understanding the broader historical, cultural, and material conditions which give rise to global flows of queer migrants. I situate such flows within a broader historical phenomenon of the rise of national and global capitalism, and more recent the turns toward globalization and transnationalism. Second, I link the particular motivations of queer study migrants within the larger body of literature exploring what Ahmed calls the search for home, including the queer subject’s search for happiness, an exploration of how and why sexuality travels across cultures, and how the proliferation of online and mobile technologies in recent years is implicated both in the hybridization of identities and the ongoing expansion of globalized capitalism, but also as a way station or liminal space in the articulation and realization of complex queer identities at home in the physical world.

In the final section of the chapter, I turn my attention to the ways in which queer migrants navigate space, place, and borders. I consider how citizenship has been articulated, contested, redrawn, and resisted in the modern nation-state, and how citizenship has by definition been an exclusionary project designed to patrol borders of race, class, sexuality, language, and other markers of difference in order to uphold patriarchal, racist, heterosexist notions of the “ideal citizen”. I then examine the ways in which the very recent embracing of queer subjects in certain nation-states gives rise to forms of homonormativity within which queer bodies must contend. Importantly, I look closely at the notion of border-crossing to understand how, why, and to what end queer
subjects choose to cross, resist, complicate, and re-draw borders of all sorts as they move through time and space, and how these acts of border-crossing might simultaneously serve to reinforce or undermine notions of citizenship and belonging.

In Chapter 4, I introduce briefly my nine research participants, and describe how their search for home leads, as Ahmed suggests, their identities to “take the shape of the direction” in which their bodies become oriented. I consider how Canada and Toronto are initially positioned as both queer utopias for research participants, but also how Canada acts in many ways as a blank slate, a terra nullius which in turn implicates these migrants in the ongoing settler-colonial project trespassing upon indigenous lands. I interrogate the moment of migration for my subjects, understanding how their desire to leave and understanding of their difference at an early age compelled each to explore and construct identities in online spaces—often mediated by the powerful currents of North American popular culture—but also to seek out opportunities for study abroad in the glorified West. Lured by aggressive recruitment campaigns by Canadian institutions, I examine how their particular histories of privilege, prior mobility, experiences of trauma, and understandings of difference shape their experiences of arrival into Canada as international students. Once arrived, I look at how their hopes, dreams, and fantasies for belonging and strong, diverse, social networks are put to the test, as the realities of surveilling diasporic communities, normative racism and sexism throughout the city, and closed-off social networks make incorporation into education and queer spaces an ongoing challenge. I explore how the queer body, for these participants, soon becomes a key site—in both physical and online worlds—for negotiating queer citizenship in Canada, through erotic exchange, strategic border-crossing, and ongoing acts of cultural
suppression and erasure. Finally, I unpack how ongoing experiences of racism and exclusion within queer and education spaces point to the ways in which what Mason calls *advanced marginalization*—or the intensification of secondary marginalization—plays out within queer communities to re-entrench overarching homonormative values and to reproduce dominant relations of ruling that privilege white, upwardly-mobile, hyper-masculine performing men.

In conclusion, in an age of the rise of global gay rights, understanding how sexuality can be deployed both to legitimize certain forms of belonging and as a way to construct and legitimize “model minorities” who reinforce certain forms of hegemony within particular institutional regimes shed lights on the interplay between identity, privilege, and the construction of the “ideal” Canadian—or global—citizen. My research also uncovers the various ways queer international students engage in “border-crossing” as a way to resist and trouble homogenizing tendencies embedded within institutional webs of power, but also how their active consent, to borrow Gramsci’s term, to unspoken rules, values and norms—particularly within queer spaces—render them complicit in extending hegemonic power grids that serve to destabilize and alienate core tenets of their own identities.
CHAPTER 2
I begin Chapter 2 by locating and exploring ideas of queer citizenship. In particular, I trace my understanding of the shifting nature of queer identity to D’Emilio’s (1983) seminal work on the link between gay and lesbian identity formation and the particular historical and material conditions arising from capitalist expansion. I situate my project within the theoretical framework offered by Cantú’s queer materialist paradigm, which incorporates both queer theory’s focus on the performativity of identity and a critical understanding of the material conditions experienced by migrating subjects. Borderlands theory provides a context for understanding how the queer migrant is often caught in-between, in liminal, cultural and psychic spaces between real or imagined borders. By anchoring my work in Dorothy Smith’s scholarship on relations of ruling, I’m able to adapt her use of feminist standpoint to argue, as Cantú does, that a queer standpoint provides the most useful method for understanding the particular challenges faced by mobile queer international students as they engage in bids for belonging and citizenship in queer and education sites of power in Ontario. Finally, I conclude by considering the strengths of employing queer oral life history methods in the project at hand, as a way to elicit and trace notions of belonging, queer identity, border-crossing, and “home” across time and space, including in virtual or imagined spaces.

**Locating Queer Citizenship: Towards a Queer Materialist Paradigm**

D’Emilio (1983) has demonstrated how the identity of sexual minorities emerges from particular material and historical conditions, and how non-heteronormative identities began to cohere with the rise of national (and later global) capitalism. Cantú (2009) understands sexuality as an axis of power relations that makes Foucault’s (1979)
“regimes of normalization” visible. For Cantú, sexuality, as a dimension of power, “shapes and organizes processes of migration and modes of incorporation. In turn, the contextual and structural transitions which mark the immigration experience impact the ways in which identities are formed” (21). The identity of the queer migrant, for Cantú, assumes “multiple and shifting meanings” informed by structural variables, institutional policies, cultural influences, and the dynamics of migration. This queer political economy of migration reveals, in trans-cultural settings and through global flows, the always-fluid nature of power operating between and among human sexuality, states institutions, and the global economic process.

For Cantú, queer theorists like Butler (1990) privilege the discursive and cultural formation of identity over the material and historical conditions of the queer migrant subject. His analysis situates the queer “body” as a text that reveals the ongoing “analytics of power” named by Foucault—a text that can be (mis-)read, altered, coerced, punished or otherwise disciplined in both discursive and material realms. While Cantú incorporates many central aspects of queer theory—notably Butler’s focus on the body as a site of performance, where gender (and other identity markers) are “re-signified” to suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of “identity as cause”. For both Cantú and Butler, “acts, gestures, enactments…are performative in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are fabrications manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means” (Butler in Cantú, 35). While Butler’s focus on the performative is anchored in her analysis of gender, sexuality, citizenship, and nationality are also contested terrain, sites of conflict and power where the subject’s body—both discursively, and materially—perform acts, gestures, and
enactments designed to engage in repeated bids for belonging—to the nation, the body politic, and various “communities”. The body then serves both as a performative site of semiotic conflict/contestation, but also the very material, injurious vehicle through which one navigates the perilous journey to “belong” and the many experiences of trauma, both small and large, that occur when that move to belonging is thwarted, revoked, denied, or only partially realized. The body is also, on a transactional level, the particular currency of exchange through which belonging might be acquired, in an erotic as well as cultural sense, through acts of desire, loving, capitulation, surrender, and withholding, as we will see in the case of queer citizenship.

Cantú finds Butler’s focus on the body’s surface limiting, particularly in examining the bodies and experiences of queer migrants. In his study of queer Mexican migrants travelling back and forth across the American border to southern California, he understands clearly that the very real, often dire material conditions of the marginalized queer men he interviews—the experiences of physical, sexual, and emotional abuse; incarceration; harassment at the (national) border, and ongoing conditions of economic, cultural and social exclusion that take their toll physically, emotionally, and spiritually—also alter the “body” in a physical and emotional sense in ways that mediate or limit the conception or expression of identity and belonging. Consequently, many queer migrants exist in cultural and spatial “borderlands”, where lives and identities are under continual assault, a place of discursive, psychic, and often physical violence, to borrow Kuntsman’s (2009) term. Such “impossible hideouts” (See Dasgupta, Gopinath, & Davies, 2010) are tenuous, liminal psychic and physical spaces; temporary, makeshift “homes” that shift and decay over time.
In order to account for the material, historical, political, and social conditions of the borderlands, Cantú turns to Anzaldúa’s (1987) intersectional understanding of the *meztiza consciousness*. Anzaldúa’s work with lesbian Chicana migrants unpacks the structural dimensions of power at the borderlands—how issues such as colonial history, racial and class dynamics, and various cultural dimensions influence experiences of migration. Border-theory provides a conceptual framework that is less about play and more about survival. Nevertheless, Anzaldúa, like Cantú, is also concerned with how the queer migrant enacts, resists, avoids, or evades certain ruling norms, choosing to “perform” certain acts of citizenship at strategic moments in time, toward a certain concrete end. Crossing a national border, for example, might involve performing certain scripts of sexuality and gender, until one is safely across. Applying for refugee status based on sexual orientation might involve “performing” or enacting other identity signifiers in order to have one’s claim rendered successful. Certain bodies are more or less able to “perform” such acts, either as a bid for permanent “belonging” or as a temporary means to achieve a specific personal, political, or economic goals. Cantú points to how citizenship, then, even for the precarious migrant, is always a performance, where certain acts and gestures must be performed *as if the migrants were citizens* and certain claims must likewise be made: how to dress and how to speak, for example. Such understandings of the performative nature of citizenship and the moment-by-moment agency of the subject to perform such acts, in various settings and under differing circumstances, greatly influence my own understanding of how queer international students engage in bids for belonging within Canada, and in particular within educational and queer spaces.
By incorporating queer theory’s focus on performativity and border theory’s concern with material and structural conditions of migration/negotiation, Cantú’s work marks an important intervention in the study of queer migration. His conception of a *queer materialist paradigm* able to account for the particulars of place, history, and the social (36) broadens our understanding of how migration and immigration are experienced by queer bodies. Such a paradigm, he argues, allows identity to be understood not only as a social construction but also fluid—constructed and reconstructed depending on social location and political economic context. The queer borderlands approach—like traditional queer theory—questions binary systems of identity, allowing for fluid and shifting identities that are context-specific *and allow for greater agency* on behalf of the queer migrant. This focus on agency, which borrows from Anzaldúa’s work, is important to my own research project in understanding the various ways globally-mobile queer international students enact, assume, resist, or contend with regimes of power locally, abroad, virtually, and in spaces “in-between”.

**Webs of Power and Relations of Ruling**

Dorothy Smith’s (1987; 1990) conceptualization of how institutional regimes of power shape the actual day-to-day lived realities of people as the “relations of ruling” provides a key lens for understanding how educational actors and social spaces in Toronto shape experiences of belonging and citizenship among queer international students. For Smith, the ruling apparatuses are “those institutions of administration, management, and professional authority, and of intellectual and cultural discourses, which organize, regulate, lead and direct, contemporary capitalist societies” (1990, 2). “Relations of
ruling” are “the complex of extra-local relations that provide in contemporary societies a specialization of organization, control, and initiative. They are those forms that we know as bureaucracy, administration, management, professional organization, and the media. They include also the complex of discourses, scientific, technical, and cultural, that intersect, interpenetrate, and coordinate the multiple sites of ruling” (6). Understanding how the experiences of queer international students are shaped by “extra-local relations” through the framework of “relations of ruling” help pinpoint factors that contribute to both the common and divergent experiences of migration to Canada among research participants.

Importantly, Cantú and others have theorized identity across space, and have incorporated the work of geographers such as Soja, whose conceptualization of Thirdspace as a transdisciplinary project that examines “the simultaneity and interwoven complexity of the social, the historical, and the spatial, their inseparability and interdependence” (3). Doreen Massey (1993) asks as to re-think space as “open, multiple and relational, unfinished and always becoming”. Her theory of transnational history is a useful frame that considers how flows and movements produce historical processes and identities—essentially, how people come to imagine themselves as global citizens or as part of a global community through space. We might extend her understanding to the queer global citizen, searching for and seeking out a queer homeland through which to celebrate, access, and perform acts of queer citizenship. The global “queer citizen”, by Massey’s logic, exists in a tension—both real and imagined—between their tenuous status as a queer citizen “at home” and their imagined/real status as a queer citizen within the utopia of the queer Canadian imaginary. Diffusion theory demands that we attend to
the local, and believes fundamentally that “the global is made in the local” thus allowing us to better understand how identity shifts through the sieve of time and space.

In my own project, I’m guided by queer theory’s focus on fluid identities—both within the dominant culture and within the various queer sub-cultures themselves—but anchored by the strategic imperative (focused on material, lived experience) embedded in Anzaldúa’s borderland theory and Smith’s relations of ruling. I also take guidance from Cantú’s queer materialist paradigm that roots the experiences of queer migrants within particular historical and material conditions. In my current project, I extend Cantú’s work to interrogate how the particular historical and material conditions of robust, privatized transnational education give rise both to opportunity for strategic enactment of identity for some mobile queer international students, but also how these same conditions prove limiting or a marginalizing force in the experience of others. I also examine how complex webs of power operate within certain marginalized or liminal spaces—such as queer clubs and gay online spaces, examples of what I call sites of queer citizenship—to replicate and reproduce relations of ruling within the dominant culture, privileging certain bodies (ie. white, hyper-masculine identified, upwardly-mobile men).

There are legion examples within queer migration scholarship of how citizenship itself, both at the national and sub-cultural, becomes a project in border patrol and policing, securing binaries and borders to mitigate the threat of Ahmed’s (2004) alien and Phelan’s (2001) stranger, so as not to provide a direct threat to existing regimes of power. Scholars investigating the success rates of queer refugee claimants to Canada, for example, have demonstrated that those with non-binarized sexual identities (such as bisexuals), gender non-conforming applicants, and those with culturally-coded, non-
Western expressions of queer identity and experience face greater challenges to a successful application than claimants with cohesive narratives that express their queer identity through Western cultural tropes (See Berg & Millbank, 2009; Lee & Brotman, 2011; Murray, 2011; Rehaag, 2008, among others). What barriers, then do non-Western sexuality minority international students—those from the Caribbean, sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, or China, where experiences of queer identity may follow culturally-prescribed scripts and/or be shaped or restricted by punitive laws and social prohibition—face when attempting to enact or perform certain Western expressions of queer sexuality in Toronto? What particular opportunities and challenges are afforded to gender-nonconforming international students who identify as sexual minorities? How does the grave difficulty of “returning home” for some queer international students—perhaps those who are “out”, or are more visibly gender non-conforming—shape experiences of belonging and citizenship in Canada, compare with those students who arrive from relatively safe countries or who are more able to “pass” as “straight” back home?

A queer materialist paradigm attends both to the ways in which bodies are “read”, labeled, punished or privileged by the dominant culture, but also how the material experiences of particular queer students migrants navigating a globalized world respond to such complex and intersecting questions.

**Queer(y)ing the Everyday**

Manalansan (2005) understands that it’s the seemingly mundane acts and musings of daily life that give rise to identity, and sees the everyday as the vital crossroads between forging intimacy and forming a diasporic queer identity (147). He believes that queer
scholars have over-determined collective and organized acts with little or no regard to how autonomous queer subjects apprehend and negotiate the cultural products of transnational movements of ideas, technologies, and people. Following Appadurai, he seeks to understand “interscalar connections between the lived locality and the larger, seemingly more expansive sites of the city, the nation, the global” (147). His ethnographic study of queer Filipino migrants to the US highlights how queer subjects mediate circuits and flows in the study of queer globalization and transnationalism, emphasizing the various intersectional borderlands of race, gender, class, and sexuality. Cantú also conceives of the everyday as a crucial site of identity formation, and turns his attention (following Foucault) to the family as one site of identity normalization.

Education location—the type, “prestige”, and organization of the post-secondary institution, I argue—is another. For the persecuted, traumatized, or outcast queer migrant seeking a queer homeland—a space to experience safety, find love and social affirmation, and explore and build kinship ties—the queer community is yet another.

Increasingly, as O’Riordan and Phillips (2007) and Kuntsman (2009) demonstrate, such sites of identity formation exist virtually, untethered from place and yet still experienced within the physical body—often as a physical, emotional, or psychic violence, and by or through the body anchored in a particular physical and cultural location. This important tension between the physical and the virtual asks us to attend methodologically to questions of identity and belonging both within and across space, but also simultaneously within and across physical and virtual spaces. For a queer community that relies increasingly on mobile technologies (apps, cruising and hook-up sites) as loosely institutionalized social and erotic meeting spaces, places where identities
are fluidly conceived, articulated, deployed, reconfigured, resisted, performed, and reified in an ongoing series of transactional exchanges, methodological frameworks such as Cantú’s queer materialist paradigm provide enough elasticity to embrace and analyze the dialectical relationship between who we are and how we treat one another online and who we are and how we treat one another in “the real world”. I will argue that such a dialectic (and the thorny, uncomfortable questions it raises about power, identity, desire, and virtual border control) is a central tenet to the experience of queer citizenship for many newly arrived queer international student migrants to Toronto at this particular moment in time.

Both Cantú and Manalansan methodologically borrow from and extend Dorothy Smith’s feminist standpoint theory. Smith and other standpoint theorists argue against positivistic research that reduces lived experiences to a series of disconnected variables such as race, gender, and class. For Smith, women’s standpoint “locates [the] subject in her work with particular others, in a particular local site, her children, her partner, her neighbors, the local grocery store, and so on. It is a working consciousness addressing in daily and nightly practices precisely these particularities” (1990, 9). The insider’s standpoint “addresses from within coordination, the ongoing co-ordering, that brings into being, that is, the social” (10). Thus the mode of inquiry for the researcher begins where people actually are and explores the actual practices engaging us in the relations of organizing our lives. While Smith is concerned first and foremost with the experiences of women, her framework also allows for how relations of ruling exclude and marginalize others:

The ruling apparatus is an organization of class and as such implicates dominant classes. The working class is excluded from the ruling apparatus. It also excludes
the many voices of women and men of color, of native peoples, and of homosexual women and men. From different standpoints different aspects of the ruling apparatus and of class come into view. (1987, 107)

**Methodology**

Cantú integrates Smith’s work to create what he termed a *queer standpoint theory*. For Cantú, the process of understanding the impact of migration across borders on queer subjectivities involves an examination of Smith’s relations of ruling made visible through the day-to-day experiences of queer migrants. Building on Smith’s work, and the work of Manalansan and Cantú, my own research uses queer standpoint in order to understand how “relations of ruling” are (re-)produced through the migration of queer transnational student bodies. I believe, following Smith and Cantú, that attending to the day-to-day and particular lived realities of a small yet diverse group provides insight into how certain arenas of power—institutional, political, and social spaces imbued with certain power relations—shape the experiences of subjects, and reveal larger patterns of domination, exclusion, assimilation, and resistance in the making and unmaking of the ideal queer citizen. Through employing a queer materialist paradigm, which incorporates an explicit acknowledgement of “relations of ruling”, I’m able to consider both how the cultural and material realities of queer students are shaped by the migration process. Borderlands theory provides a critical conceptual framework for locating acts of border-crossing as both material and political acts of resistance and transgression in the lived experience of the queer migrant.

For queer international students, one arena of *institutional* power is the education institution itself. How do queer international students experience daily life in their university or college environment? What barriers or opportunities to “border-cross”
present themselves or are made visible, what are the various ways in which subjects respond to these barriers and opportunities, and to what end?

_Political_ power is perhaps most clearly embodied, for migrants of all sorts, in a country’s immigration regime. While Canada has taken strides to recognize and protect sexual minorities in recent years, and while the current government has been vocal, in certain arenas, in its protection for LGBT rights, the work of Puar, Dhawan and others demonstrates the various ways queer bodies can nevertheless become ammunition in certain homonationalist projects. Canada’s vocal defense of LGBT rights in Uganda, for example, might be perceived as a re-entrenchment of the prevailing Western notion of Africa as backward and barbaric. Such a staunch defense, meanwhile, carries little political or economic cost to the country. In Saudi Arabia and other Gulf States, meanwhile, where homosexuality is punishable by death, and where state governments are just as vocal in their prohibition against sexuality—and, critically, where Canada has strong political and economic interests—the Canadian government has been silent. Furthermore, the work of Lee and Brotman, Murray, Rehaag and others on the narrow scope to maneuver for queer subjects within Canada’s current refugee laws demonstrates the reality that—at the Canadian border—some (gender-conforming, economically privileged) queers are more welcome than others. While data from my current research only indirectly address participants’ experiences applying for citizenship, I do consider how power relations shaped by national borders and citizenship laws are reproduced within sub-national communities and more localized, everyday sites of power.

Exploring how queer international students engage with on-campus or community social organizations is one example of how power relations within _particular social_ sites
shape or condition subjects in various ways. I look closely at how queer international students engage or don’t engage in on-campus queer (e.g. Campus Pride) or culturally-specific organizations (e.g. Jamaican Students’ Association), mainstream (homonormative) gay spaces in the wider community, and other, less formal social sites and spaces. Queer social spaces in particular are an important location for incorporation and affirmation by queer migrants in Toronto. I argue that such spaces, both physical and virtual, serve as important crucibles for the formation of queer citizenship, where queer migrants learn, through direct or indirect means, the norms, values, signs, acts, gestures, and unspoken rules and borders that govern mainstream homo-culture in Toronto.

Standpoint theory and Smith’s concept of relations of ruling provides a powerful framework for resisting the temptation to universalize experience across identity or otherwise provide a grand meta-narrative that homogenizes the experiences of Queer International Students, but rather attends to the minute, shifting ways power is experienced and negotiated daily by various subjects, according to the particulars of his or her social position in relation to the dominant class—whether that dominant class might be embodied or symbolized by the state (immigration system), the school—or even homonormative gay/queer spaces that nevertheless purport to be safe spaces for all. Standpoint not only attends to the particular, but places the subject herself at the center of sense-making, such that ruling relations are understood and revealed through the subject’s active work reflecting on and constructing meaning from her relationship to overlapping sites of power:

A standpoint in the everyday world is the fundamental grounding of modes of knowing developed in a ruling apparatus. The ruling apparatus is that familiar complex of management, government administration, professions, and intelligentsia, as well as the textually mediated discourses that coordinate and
interpenetrate it. Its special capacity is the organization of particular actual places, persons, and events into generalized and abstracted modes vested in categorical systems, rules, laws, and conceptual practices. The former thereby become subject to an abstracted and universalized system of ruling mediated by texts. A mode of ruling has been created that transcends local particularities but at the same time exists only in them. (108)

Methodologically, then, qualitative research attending to day-to-day experiences has provided a rich opportunity for understanding how queer international students negotiate the various social, political and institutional sites of power involved in migration to Canada. By employing a standpoint framework and attending to ruling relations, accounts of the actual lived experiences of these students over time shed light on the particular ways institutional, state, and global(-ized) power work to either validate or discipline certain queer bodies.

**Unpacking the Queer Narrative: Research Design**

In order to better understand how “relations of ruling” are reproduced or challenged in the day to day experiences of queer international students in Toronto, and how queer international students engage over time in acts of “border-crossing” as one strategy to resist or engage with sites of power, my research project uses queer life history methods to explore experiences of home and belonging, with particular attention to the ways migration to Canada has shaped or conditioned these experiences.

Life history methods allow researchers to understand more about individual lives through the experiences of the individuals themselves, in the spirit of Manalansan, Smith and Cantú. According to O’Carroll and Gray (2009), the thick description of context in life history methods allows researchers to better uncover strategies, biographical turning
points, aspirations, and constraints, as well as changing perceptions of identity across time. Holstein and Gubrium (2000) take their point of departure from accounts of experience through time, foregrounding how time, sequence and related concepts are used in everyday life to ground an individual’s experience and stories. Life history interviews also allow researchers to contextualize individual experience with larger social phenomenon, understanding social change over time and demonstrating the relational link between micro and macro processes, as demonstrated by Manalansan’s (2002) work with gay Filipino migrants to the US.

Coughley (2006) is concerned with how life history methods are best positioned to explore complex, even contradictory identities within interview subjects. He believes “…it is productive to conceive of the individual as operating with an extensive set of differing and often contradictory cultural traditions” (13). How we negotiate these multiple cultures—and here, he uses the term “culture” in its broadest sense, to encompass a social grouping based on shared values, such as a particular queer culture—is, he feels, the basic issue that life history needs to address. Life history methods then are able to consider questions of complexity, contradiction, and can uncover meaning over long periods of history and through time and space.

Boyd and Ramirez (2012) contend that the practice of queer oral histories reveal the centrality of the body to the queer lived experience. Their work critically examines the role the sexual body plays in the production of queer oral histories. They demonstrate how the body’s memories are particularly significant for narrators drawn to discussions of sexual consciousness, erotic desire, and gender expression. These “fields of the body” are sites for “productive memory and dialogue about pivotal queer moments of the
lifespan: the first childhood memories of feeling “different”; the first encounter with a mirror of the self; that is, another “different” body in public that communicates back an unspoken yet felt affiliation; or the first instance when a queer body makes explicit its desires to a listening or viewing public” (7). Furthermore, using queer oral history as a method works “to generate a series of intelligible (or predictable) sexual signposts that mark the queer body’s passage through time” and also, I argue, across space. Attending to the particulars of engaging queer oral history across cultures, they believe that:

The gulf between tropological scripts that engage narrators in a predictable articulation of queer desire or identity…and the near absence of scripts that code experience outside or beyond culturally intelligible meanings (non-gay-identified same-sex sexual expressions, for instance) make knowledge production a rich but difficult project. (7-8)

The research at hand involves a series of life history interviews with queer-identified individuals who are currently studying at post-secondary institutions in Southern Ontario or who have completed at least one academic year within the past ten years. I made two small but significant changes to my recruitment process from the initial proposal, decisions which allowed for much richer analysis of the various ways queer migrants experience home and belonging in Canada and/or have the capacity to engage in certain forms of border-crossing.

Initially, I planned to conduct interviews only with individuals have arrived in Canada on an international student visa, even though their migration and immigration status may have since changed (for example, some participants may now be permanent residents or citizens). Once recruitment began, I did eventually include one participant who was born in Canada but moved back to the Caribbean as an infant, and then moved back to Canada for university. For all intents and purposes, while maintaining a Canadian
passport, David identified as a Caribbean national. I was interested in the ways in which holding a Canadian passport, with its privileges and status (even for a racialized queer man) might alter or effect the experience of return migration to Canada, experiences of incorporation and exclusion, and opportunities for border-crossing.

In a similar vein, initially I sought participants only from the broader Greater Toronto Area (GTA), focusing on the University of Toronto, York University, Ryerson University, and George Brown College for recruitment. However, when the opportunity to interview two participants who are or have been international students at university in a smaller city in southern Ontario, I accepted. In addition to enriching the pool of applicants (by including a bisexual woman from West Africa and a gay Jamaican, gender non-conforming man), I reasoned that including participants with close access to the queer and cultural spaces of Toronto (within driving distance) but who experienced their first years in Canada and their education in a small city would provide opportunities to contrast articulations of citizenship and belonging in smaller or larger settings, and how regimes of power might operate differently in smaller and larger cities. How might queer citizenship be experienced in a small city with limited social queer spaces? How might an intersectional lens be used to understand the experiences of a black, bisexual woman in a small city, compared with a racialized, queer-identified woman in Toronto? Does the size of the education institution influence notions of belonging and attachment? Are opportunities for border-crossing more constrained in more intimate locations?
Participants, Recruitment, Data Collection

By the end of the project, I had conducted nine in-depth life histories, using contacts generated through recruitment with on-campus student groups and professional networks. Recruitment took place primarily through emails to key professional contacts and via institutional LGBTQ or culturally-specific social media channels (public Facebook pages, primarily). Each interested participants was invited to email me, at which point I conducted a “pre-interview” (See Appendix A) to solicit demographic information about country of origin, ethnic and sexual identity, education institution, and program choice. Not all interested applicants were selected for interview, as my goal was to design the project to include research participants with diverse backgrounds, in particular students from different gender, racial, class, sexual, and national/geographic backgrounds. As a result, if an interested participant mapped too closely to similar ethnic, gender, sexual, and class backgrounds of someone I had already interviewed, that participant was excluded from the study.

Interviews were conducted in March, 2015 at a location of the participants’ choosing, either in private office space at OISE or in a location convenient to participants (most often in an office within their home institution). Two interviews were conducted in the smaller city (one at the university itself and one downtown). Most interviews lasted approximately 90 minutes with the shortest clocking in at just over 75 minutes and the longest nearly two hours. My questions were open-ended, and the interviews themselves relatively unstructured. I allowed time for silences, for gaps, for critical pauses. My questions focused on two key thematic threads, designed to elicit conversation and reflection on how migration to Canada has shaped life experience.
(1) participants’ experiences as migrants to Canada, explored through understanding their engagement with social, political and institutions sites and spaces in Toronto (both mainstream and “queer”)

(2) how participants navigate and negotiate between the social, political, and institutional spaces, both real and imagined, of their lives in Toronto and the ways in which participants either resist or comply with the specific demands of social, political and institutional sites of power in Toronto (border-crossing).

See Appendix B for a sample list of interview questions.

Analysis

Following each interview, I spent time writing interview notes, typically three-four pages on my reflections and observations. How comfortable were interviewees? Did certain questions or topics elicit particular emotional reactions or changes in body language?

Interviews were transcribed and analyzed for common themes. Certain emerging themes in turn influenced the direction of certain questions—later interviews, for example, placed more emphasis on the family and religion in the development of identity and belonging—two areas largely absent from my initial set of questions. The focus of both the interviews and analysis served to construct a (partial) life narrative for each participant within the context of his or her own life experience. Interviewees were also asked to imagine their life in the future, at either a five- or ten-year span, in order to provide insight into how participants imagined they might resolve certain contradictions
or tensions arising through their migration experiences, and how they might foresee or engage in additional types of “border-crossing” down the line.

**Ethical Considerations**

During my research, participant names and other identifying factors were substituted by pseudonyms. Any data used for other reports, publications, or public presentations was kept confidential and participants were informed of this fact in a detailed consent form. While no more risk was involved in the research than in everyday interaction, group vulnerability was determined to be medium, based on the possible impacts of systemic oppression (based on sexual orientation and other intersectional factors) in both participants’ home country and in Canada.

As a protected group under Canadian human rights legislation, sexual minorities have faced and continue to face systemic discrimination. In my research, these impacts were compounded by the fact that some participants have and continue to experience multiple forms of oppression (based on race, gender identity, and other factors) and may have experienced forms of emotional or physical trauma as a result of their sexuality.

All participants were asked to sign letters of consent agreeing to be interviewed, and were made aware of the fact that they could refuse to answer any questions or could withdraw from the study at any time.
CHAPTER 3
The field of queer migration scholarship is a relatively new and emerging body of work, incorporating a vast interdisciplinary network of thought, including, but not limited to, gender and sexuality, cultural studies, geography, globalization, history, sociology, anthropology, citizenship studies, economics, philosophy, and other rich, complex fields. In this chapter, I take a similarly interdisciplinary approach, turning my attention to three over-arching thematic tropes that provide a broad framework for understanding the historical, cultural, and material conditions which give rise to global flows of queer migrants. I situate such flows within a broader historical phenomenon of the rise of national and global capitalism, and more recently the turn toward globalization and transnationalism. Second, I link the particular motivations of queer student migrants within the larger body of literature exploring what Ahmed calls the search for home, including the queer subject’s search for happiness, an exploration of how and why sexuality travels across cultures, and how the proliferation of online and mobile technologies in recent years is implicated both in the hybridization of identities and the ongoing expansion of globalized capitalism, but also as a way station or liminal space in the articulation and realization of complex queer identities in the physical world. In the final section of this chapter, I turn my attention to the ways in which queer migrants navigate space, place, and borders. I consider how citizenship has been articulated, contested, redrawn, and resisted in the modern nation-state, and how citizenship has by definition been an exclusionary project designed to patrol borders of race, class, sexuality, language, and other markers of difference. I examine the ways in which the very recent embracing of queer subjects in certain nation-states gives rise to patrolled and sanitized expressions of homonormativity within which queer bodies must contend.
Importantly, I look closely at the notion of border-crossing to understand how, why, and to what end queer subjects choose to cross, resist, complicate, and re-draw borders of all sorts as they move through time and space, and how these acts of border-crossing might simultaneously serve to re-enforce or undermine particular notions of citizenship and belonging.

**Capitalism, Globalization and the Queer Migrant**

It’s critical to situate my research within the broader material and social concerns of late-stage, global capitalism. D’Emilio’s (1983) work demonstrates how the construction of a modern gay identity was tied to the expansion of capitalism at the national level within the United States. “Only when individuals began to make their living through wage labour, instead of parts of an interdependent family unit, was it possible for homosexual desire to coalesce into a personal identity—an identity based on the ability to remain outside the heterosexual family and to construct a personal life based on one’s attraction to one’s own sex” (D’Emilio, in Cantú, 29). Thus the advent and expansion of capitalism provided opportunities for labour migration that saw newly arrived men and women workers in American cities begin to create underground, thriving gay and lesbian subcultures. Importantly, these opportunities, while giving rise to greater sexual freedom and ability to explore identity, often meant foregoing community and familial ties to “home”.

Jackson (2009) takes aim at Altman’s (1997) claim that the modern queer movement has tended towards a global homogenization of gay identities, a “McDonald’s of sexual cultures”. Jackson explores how localized non-heteronormative sexual identities
in Southeast Asia interact with global forms of gay identity introduced through the advent
and expansion of global capital. Like D’Emilio, he believes that capitalism produces the
conditions that allow for the creation of local gay identities influenced by Western
understandings of sexuality. Despite the diminished powers of the nation-state in a world
dominated by neoliberal trade regimes and global capital flows, Jackson contends that it’s
still national (not transnational) forms of capitalism that produce local identities, as
capitalism itself is not a singular or monolithic system, but one which mediates and is
mediated by local systems of power and culture. Jackson also makes clear the gendered
nature of capitalism, demonstrating how, in the case of Thailand, the expansion of
national capitalism produced markedly different opportunities for queer men, women,
and trans people (364). Ultimately (and perhaps optimistically), Jackson argues that the
expansion of global gay signs and symbols does not produced a homogenized sameness
of gay identities around the world, but rather newer or hybrid forms of local queer culture
that exist alongside transnational queer culture, an always shifting relationship of
“difference and convergence” articulated earlier by Appadurai.

Exploring the sexual history of the Global South, Wieringa and Sivori (2013) aim
to dislocate sexual studies itself from such a metropolitan perspective, focusing our
attention on “asking the right questions” and making more clear how asymmetries of
power operate transnationally to produce and discipline non-normative sexualities. The
goal of such a project is to interrogate the cultural and historical conditions of the
production of sexual knowledge, paying close attention to colonial legacies in the
creation of epistemological frameworks for exploring sexual studies. Such studies, they
maintain, continue to be part of a power/knowledge regime that privileges Western
modes of naming and knowing, such as global discourses still dominated by the use of sexual identifiers such as “gay”, “lesbian” and “queer”, despite a long and historical record of indigenous or culturally-coded understanding of non-normative sexualities. Like Mbembe (2001), whose analysis of how post-colonial power regimes continue to render the African sexual body “obscene and grotesque”, Wieringa and Sívori are critical of the Western attempts to either medicalize or fetishize non-Western sexualities. At the same time, they trace how the scapegoating of sexual dissidents in newly independent post-colonial states is a form of cultural amnesia that renders invisible the pre-colonial legacies of same-sex desires and female autonomy in many local cultures. Ultimately, they warn against the urge to “purify” language in order to teach/acquire “true” (global) sexual citizenship—a phenomenon that lies to some extent at the heart of my own study.

Grewal and Kaplan (2001) ask us to turn our attention toward understanding migration in a transnational framework. The “transnational turn” attends more closely to the symmetries produced in the era of globalization, bringing together an understanding of the flow of migrant bodies produced by forms of global capital and the demise of the nation-state, as well as the embedded forms of neocolonialism inherent in transnational capital. They consider how, despite the diminishment of the nation-state, the state nevertheless continues to produce sexual identities in an era of globalization. Like Jackson, they understand the local-global divide not as separate binaries, but as being mutually constitutive. For queer scholars, Grewal and Kaplan’s analysis is helpful in understanding how the particular demands and articulations of local social relations destabilize or mutate the homogenizing tendencies of the global(ized) era. Ultimately, such a “complicated model of transnational relations” (671) sets the stage for mediated
power structures, asymmetries, and inequalities to create “conditions of possibility” for new subjects, through movements, media, and travel.

Queer sexual minority students are one population exploiting and engaging with such “conditions of possibility” afforded by their ability to move, access media, and travel. Queer mobile students find themselves enmeshed in this queer political economy of migration, on the one hand, and the relative privileges of mobility offered by their class status that confer “circulatory mobility” (Hennessy, xx) that ostensibly allow queers of a certain class great room to navigate or maneuver the dialectical tension between local and global forms of power. These students also find themselves part of a larger and more recently intensified phenomenon of international student flows within the larger migratory framework of transnational migration.

Flyn and Bauder (2013) explore the material connection between the privatization of higher education in Canada, shrinking public space in the Canadian education system generally, and the robust marketing of Canada as a study destination for international students as a revenue-generation tool for Canadian post-secondary institutions. Such privatization and the need for ever-increasing revenue—plus the cachet attached to branded institutional vision statements emphasizing the merits of global citizenship and international understanding—provide the context for an increased flow of fee-paying international students on Canadian university and college campuses, tilting the focus on internationalization away from earlier international development models (often in the form of generous scholarships for high-achieving international students) towards the recruitment of students able to pay often exorbitant international tuition fees. The creation of a mobile global elite through this form of migration then, sets the stage for the
creation and negotiation of hybrid or fluid identities that by necessity privilege certain aspects of identity (such as class) at the expense of others. Canadian universities and colleges recruiting in key international student “markets”, for example—such as China, Saudi Arabia, and India (CBIE, 2014)—are seeking a mobile, middle or upper-middle class population who will be able to pay these high international student fees and be successfully granted student visas by Canadian immigration officers. Class, then, according to this logic—may trump race, gender and sexuality in both the recruitment and visa-applying stages of the migration process. Without the ability to pay—unless one is one of a small handful of students able to win a coveted scholarship—entry to Canada on an international student visa is a concrete impossibility. More recently, the Canadian government has altered immigration rules to favour international students, valuing their age, economic status, familiarity with Canada, and “entrepreneurial spirit” as valuable “assets” as future citizens.

Furthermore, in the Canadian context, despite attempts by various levels of government to encourage international students to study beyond Canada’s larger urban centres, the majority of international students continue to choose Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver as education destinations. Knight’s (2011) work on “education hubs” as dynamic sites of transnational education and knowledge exchange is an important framing concept for exploring queer student migration flows to the GTA. Knight defines an education hub as a “planned effort to build a critical mass of local and international actors strategically engaged in education, training, knowledge production, and innovation activities” (233). While her work focuses on education hubs in the context of national development and “branding”—a “national plan and priority for a country to serve and be
recognized as a center of education, expertise, excellence, and economy” (223)—I argue that Toronto, as Canada’s largest and most diverse city, with a large domestic and international student population, serves as the “critical mass” embedded in her definition. As a student hub, then, Toronto plays a central role as a nexus—spatially and socially, both real and imagined, in policing the experiences of queer international students as they negotiate the physical, social and virtual sites of the global city. For my study, I interviewed five students whose primary site of study was Toronto, and four who studied in smaller centres located within a few hours’ drive from Toronto.

Where is Queer? The Search for Home

...we learn what homes means, or how we occupy space at home and as home, when we leave home…. (Ahmed, 2006, 8)

Leading queer migration scholars like Bell and Binnie (2004), Cantú (1995), Luibhéid (1998, 2008), Puar (2002), and others have further explored the connections between the expansion of global capitalism, globalization, the rise of global tourism, and the migration of queer bodies. Luibhéid (1998) studies how the age of migration is “implicated in the construction, regulation, and re-working of sexual identities, communities, politics and cultures” (17). Overlapping regimes of power and knowledge throughout the migration process “generate and transform identity categories” (2008, 171). Migrant queer bodies—such as queer international students—are “searching for multiple freedoms” (Luibhéid and Cantú, 2005, xxv) even as the nation-state intervenes to continually redraw boundaries of citizenship “through practices of discipline and surveillance directed at migrants” (xi). Balsius’ (2013) work looks closely at how
sexuality “travels” across culture. Following Jackson, he suggests how “the language of sexual orientation and gender identity, while having a modern Western etymology, changes meaning by travelling, in translation and in coexistence with other seemingly similar ideologies and practices” (218). The focus of my study on a particular cohort of “travelling” queer bodies extends Balsius’ work to illuminate the role of international education as a mediating agent in the “search for multiple freedoms” even as identity categories themselves are rendered unstable and deemed insufficient to properly account for the complexity of lived experience.

Bell and Binnie further explore the connection between sexual politics and sexual citizenship, demonstrating (in anticipation of Puar and others), how nation-states use borders and immigration controls to construct the “good gay” and the “bad queer” as opposing citizenship categories (2004, 38). Queer migrants—while often compelled to migrate for reasons of security and economic opportunity—are also motivated in many cases to flee restrictive or punitive laws that punish sexual expression, a factor that arose with great frequency in my interviews. Bell invokes Manalansan’s *elsewhereness of belonging*—calling this impulse the “freedom to become …something else” (2004, 88). Yet while Bell suggests the motivator for many queer migrants rests in this desire to fully articulate and embody a realized identity, he makes the false assumption that only the (Western) metropole can provide the social and material conditions for the queer subject’s emancipation, suggesting that “in order to produce an identity, one needs to migrate to a big city” (89). Here Bell continues the capitalist logic of D’Emilio and Chauncey, implying that for the queer migrant, the full achievement of identity is by definition an urban, consumer experience, linked to clubs, bars, and other aspects of gay
Western culture. Such longing, he offers, is one aspect of the growth in gay Western
tourism critiqued by Puar (2007), Cantú (2009) and others for its complicity with
hegemonic, homonormative, neoliberal structures that privilege white, able-bodied gay
men from the Global North in queer mobility discourse.

Elsewhere, Bell and Binnie (2000) argue that queer subjects perform acts of
strategic transgression by enacting their sexual citizenship within the tension between
the “moment of citizenship”—acceptance through incorporation into the nation-state—
and the “moment of transgression” marked by subversive sexual and social acts that
betray and destabilize the heteronormative functions and norms of the state (27). My
study’s focus on “border-crossing” and the strategic enactment of queer identity
complicates Bell’s uni-dimensional understanding of the liberated queer subject. In
particular, by examining the diverse range of narratives of queer student migrants, each at
a unique stage along the migration process, one can better pinpoint the relationship
between aspiration (why queer students are drawn to the GTA), actual lived experiences
(the complicated reality on the ground), and “border-crossing” as either compliance or a
form of strategic transgression that complicates, resists, or reifies certain privileged
notions of Canadian citizenship at the sub-national level.

Yet why to queer migrants choose to move through time and space to begin with,
seeking this elsewhereness of belonging?

For many queer migrants, issues of trauma and security related to sexuality
compel the search for a place where lives may be lived openly and some framework of
safety sought. For Rodrigo, a young, gender non-confirming gay man from Brazil,
growing up in a working-class district of Sao Paulo was fraught with day-to-day survival,
including repeated instances of physical, emotional, and sexual violence. Brandon, a young, soft-spoken gay man, growing up in Jamaica with an underground awareness of his own sexual difference was compounded by the smallness of his island and the intense religiosity of his family and community. Both men—and indeed all participants I interviewed—spoke of the call, beyond safety, for happiness, a place where certain dreams, idealizations, and fulfillments related to love, belonging, community, and authenticity—might be explored, integrated, and realized.

For Ahmed (2007), in the case of the migrant, happiness functions as a “displacement of a social wish, and a defense against an imagined future of loss. At the same time, in the age of migration, happiness becomes elusive, always underpinned by this already lived and future loss, such that “happiness is identified with ways of life that have been eroded by the mobility of populations within and between nation states”.

Ahmed interrogates how happiness functions as a promise, which directs towards certain objects, that then circulate as social goods. I would argue that these metonymic objects may be equally immaterial. The promise of love, or the status accorded by a “world-class education” in Toronto, are examples of loci of imagined happiness that become both a journey, or the means to achieve happiness (ie. a currency that permits or allows future transactions or a promised accumulation of further goods/experiences), and a destination itself. The starting point, for the migrant, of locating and seeking out happiness, for Ahmed, starts with “the messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what comes next”. Thus while the dream of happiness and fulfillment begin as ideals and fantasies, they are
quickly mediated, changed, altered, and sometimes erased by this “touch of what comes next”.

Complicating the search for happiness, Ahmed argues that some bodies—what she elsewhere calls alien bodies—are presumed to be the origin of bad feelings in the web of social relations insofar as they disturb the promise of happiness, the social pressure to get along. These “bad feelings”—this vague unease and quiet discomfort experienced in queer and education spaces by my research participants—points to the ways in which the maintenance of power at the social level depends upon the perceived threat of the Other within seemingly innocuous day-to-day encounters, such as David or Shameel’s experiences in mixed-race groups at Toronto’s gay clubs. The “happiness” of the group in such encounters depends on the unconscious policing and maintenance of a cohesive group identity—what Adil calls the “gorgeous pretty white boys”. Happiness then, as a circulating social good, appears to be available to some at the expense of others: social relations of ruling in Toronto’s queer spaces mark happiness as a limited social good that must always be guarded. As Ahmed maintains, happiness is not casual—certain objects are available to us because of lives we have already taken. “Our life courses follow a certain sequence, which is also a matter of direction or being directed a certain way.” For the queer migrant, whose childhood life, Ahmed suggests, is already constructed unconsciously and consciously as an unhappy life, seeking safety and happiness elsewhere become an attempt to re-orient and re-circuit the happiness narrative, but also reveal how the destination, the “elsewhere”, becomes itself a site of banishment and exclusion.
Queer bodies also exist as mobile, intimate objects in time and space constantly relating to other, different bodies. Emotions—happiness, nostalgia, pain, desire, longing—are “directed to what we come into contact with: they move us ‘toward’ or ‘away’ from…objects” (Ahmed, 2006, 2). Ahmed notes how feminist, queer and critical race scholars show how social differences are the effects of how bodies inhabit space with others. How our bodies are “orientated”, and to what they orient themselves, are central questions in the study of queer mobility. Whose bodies are permitted particular orientations—oriented towards the West, or the metropole, or the elite university, for example—and why are other bodies oriented elsewhere? What occurs to bodies continually caught in Anzaldúa’s in-between, liminal spaces?

By this logic, migration, for Ahmed, becomes a process of disorienting and re-orienting as bodies “move away” and “arrive” toward home. Home itself can move, she suggests, as we do. Home becomes, for Ahmed and other queer migration scholars, a location in time and space both always just out of reach, but also a process, an entanglement of times and identities that result in what Ahmed calls melancholy.

Ahmed describes home as

...the ways we have of feeling settled; that is, of inhabiting spaces that in the first instance, are unfamiliar, but that we can imagine—sometimes with fear, other times with desire—might come to feel like home. Such becoming is not inevitable. It is not always obvious which places are the ones we feel at home. [8]

As bodies become directed towards certain goals and locations, they take on the shape of the direction. “The direction we take excludes things for us, even before we get there,” says Ahmed. These exclusions, for the queer students I interviewed, take the form both of voluntary exclusions—giving up certain forms of privilege and punishment back home—such as Shameel making a conscious decision to cut or severely curtail his strong political
ties to Bangladesh, or Brandon’s conscious decision to extract himself from his religious community. The act of “re-orienting” also brings us into new spheres, new places which—by the nature of the existing webs of social power relations—will also exclude things for us, things we may not realize until well after the fact. As subjects, then, we reproduce the lines we follow—what Ahmed calls lifelines. Hope—the futurity of our own lives, the imagined destination and process by which we will be fulfilled and made happy—is therefore, for Ahmed, above all an investment in the “lines” we follow that will get us somewhere. These lines are embedded, always, with Stoler’s (2008) ruins, the material and immaterial debris marking our lives, microecologies of matter and mind that reflect the intersecting phenomena of melancholy and imperialism.

For the queer students I spoke with, that “somewhere”, prior to migration to Canada, was at once both ambiguous and unknown, and a complicated scrim onto which myriad goals and ambitions were projected. In what ways is Canada rendered by these migrants a terra nullius—an empty land onto which, as in centuries past, settlers and explorers of all sorts project their own longings, desires, hopes, dreams, and lifelines? In what ways is the queer migrant complicit in the ongoing settler-colonial project embedded in the post-modern Canadian nation-state?

Our identities, while never fixed, are also not simply rooted and experienced in the body, but increasingly mediated, articulated, reified, and privileged by the advent of complex, highly mobile technologies. One (perhaps not wholly) unexpected finding of my research was the degree to which, both prior to and after migration to Canada, my research subjects used online and mobile technologies to construct, negotiate and perform aspects of identity and citizenship in virtual worlds, worlds that at times intersect(ed)
with the physical world inhabited by their bodies, but which at other times was experienced untethered from either their home country or Canada.

O’Riordan and Phillips (2007) invoke Binnie (1995) in their understanding of how queer geographies, either real or imagined, integrate global and local practices, economic and cultural structures, and collective and individual agencies. They see this “queer project” extending into the frontiers of cyberspace and online worlds. As one example of the intersecting interests of capitalism, online culture, and queer identity, they echo Campell’s (2005) concern with how “Janus-faced…online portals…present themselves as inclusive communities to gay and lesbian consumers while simultaneously presenting themselves at surveilling entities to corporate clients” (Campbell, in O’Riordan and Phillips, 5). Essentially, what may appear as “liberated”, “neutral”, or “liminal” online spaces for queer migrants, are in effect still and increasingly always mediated by state, corporate, and other interests.

Gosine (2007) demonstrates how social relations of ruling governing race and gender hierarchies extend to queer online spaces. A brown queer man (in Toronto), Gosine analyzed his own interactions in online queer dating/hook-up spaces as both “himself”, and while performing/presenting himself a white, blond alter ego. He found that while in “real-life encounters” between queer men, “the moment of meeting is usually the same moment in which racial identification is rationalized” (142), in online portals, this realization can be delayed or transformed. His analysis of other racialized men who attempted to “pass” as white in order to increase their online currency and increase the number of chat encounters found that “passing white is not simply the exercise of desires by non-white people to become white or fetishize whiteness, but,
rather, to experience the privileges afforded to whiteness. Passing white expresses longing for the experience of racial disembodiment that cyberspace promises, but does not ultimately appear to fulfill.”

The virtual world, then, is situated both as a shape-shifting, tenuous “border zone”, a liminal place of “in-between”, where desires, identities, and relationships are constantly performed and re-negotiated, and where certain currency or value is placed upon idealizations and performances of whiteness and masculinity (in the case of queer gay men) that replicate existing power regimes. Gosine finds that while certain characterization of chat rooms—and by extension, the online world—as more egalitarian than the physical world, “anxieties about race—held by both white and non-white men—may sometimes determine who is solicited for conversation, friendship, or sex in bars, but they perform the same function in cyberspace” (147). At the same time, Gosine’s work points to how individual subjects attempt to enact, perform, and alter their identities in order to gain access to certain kinds of privileges accorded to white subjects—the opportunity to be viewed as “active, dynamic, and complex agents” (148).

**Queer Migrants Navigating Space, Place, and Borders**

*The body provides us with a perspective: the body is “here” as a point from which we begin, and from which the world unfolds. (Ahmed, 2006, 7)*

What happens when queer migrants—queer international students in particular—come up against particular borders? What are the ways in which individual queer globally mobile students experience regimes of power within the Canadian nation-state, and how are these webs negotiated? What does the literature tells us about the ways in which
citizenship is constructed at both the national and sub-national level, and how to queer migrants experience these citizenship projects? Who are the gatekeepers in such projects, and why and how does citizenship become a boundary project that renders certain bodies *terrorists* and others *model citizens*?

Spivak (1988) maintains that we must look closely at the micrological texture of power to understand the interplay between global capitalism, the nation-state, and the individual subject. Manalansan (2005) demonstrates how the queer migrant is caught in creative tension between global capitalist expansion and the particularities of the individual’s own life experience. He suggests that for the queer migrant, “everyday life intersects and engages with the intimate, the private, and the search for home in modern life” (148). It is the ongoing struggle for *diasporic intimacy*, he argues, that demonstrates the ways in which “the state, public life, and the “world” outside intrude on and permeate these seemingly bounded, private, and domestic spaces of home and how diasporic subjects confront them.”

Citizenship at the level of the nation-state has always been a contested, gendered, racialized project. Staslius and Bakan (2006) contend that the current age of migration highlights tensions between universalistic claims of the nation-state and its actual particular, inequitable workings (11). Citizenship, they argue, is now contested at the level of the global arena, although the *rights and responsibilities* of citizenship continue to be allocated at the level of the nation-state. The transnational turn, that sees migrants of all sorts moving through time and space to access coveted citizenship rights (primarily from the Global South to the Global North), has altered certain goals, strategies, entitlements and affiliations (13) of migrants, resulting in myriad paths and journeys,
what Portes and Dewind (2007) call the “back and forth” of migration. Ultimately, even as the privileged few are able to don the moniker of mobile *global citizens*, or what Ong (1999) calls the “hedging bets” privilege of *flexible citizenship*, Staslius and Bakan find that “global citizen rights” are still trapped in a web of national sovereignty that govern claims to citizenship and its attendant rights and responsibilities. As Ong suggests, the contemporary migrant figure is always split between an identity that is *state-imposed* and one that is *personal*.

Looking more closely at Canadian citizenship, Dhamoon (2004) builds on Abu-Laban’s (1998) understanding of how the primary purpose of Canadian immigration policy historically has been to “deny Canadian citizenship to the majority of the world’s inhabitants (Abu-Laban in Dhamoon, 70) in order to reproduce, via citizenship law, the white, masculine, heterosexual nature of Canadian citizenship. The white supremacy inherent in Canadian immigration policy means, for Dhamoon, that non-white immigrants always remain *partial citizens* while white immigrants quickly become *natural citizens*. Dhamoon invokes the spectre of Ahmed’s *alien* and *stranger* to interrogate how Canadian immigration practices and policies that shape citizenship, belonging, and nation-building ultimately rest on positioning the immigrant as “stranger” and the host nation as benevolent. For Dhamoon, the “good Canadian immigrant” is always cosmopolitan, adventurous, and a contributor to the economy—all traits either implicitly or explicitly linked the current government’s favouring of Canadian-educated international students within recent immigration policies.

Many scholars have demonstrated the gendered and heteronormative nature of the most citizenship regimes. For Manalansan (2006), sexuality plays a constitutive role in
the formation and definition of citizenship and the nation. His concern in queer migration and citizenship formation rests in “how people as agentive subjects negotiate sexual and gender identities in processes that include immigration” (229). Following Jackson and others, he notes that “non-Western sexual ideologies do not follow a unilinear assimilative process into Western sexual but rather are involved in syncretic processes that create alternate sexual politics, cultures and identities” (230). His research invokes Lubhéid (2002) to demonstrate how, through a study of migrant queer Filipino men in the United States, state migration policies reproduce sexual identity, practices, and categories, an observation noted in Canada by queer migration scholars such as Rehaag, Lee and Brotman, and Murray, who’ve worked extensively with queer refugee claimants. Ultimately, for Manalansan, the migrant body is a site where “racialized, ethnicized and gendered disciplinary measures employed by various states/agents come together” (235).

What’s missing here from Manalansan’s analysis, and remains central to my own concern, is the role of non-state actors—such as post-secondary institutions and community organizations—in reproducing and disciplining normative identities.

McClintock (1993) has demonstrated how the construction of the nation, particularly in the colonial era, rested upon a powerful construction of gender. Nationalism and investment in the identity of the nation sprang from masculinized ideals, where the male body became a metonym for the nation as a whole, and women operated merely as a symbolic representation. Embedded within colonial notions of the nation was a family trope, whereby the family unit itself constituted a microcosm of the nation, with men and women occupying ascribed gender roles, what McClintock calls “hierarchy within unity” (64). Nagel (2000) understands how sexual substructures of nationalist
identities, boundaries and processes intersect with constructions of ethnicity, race, and nationalism to produce *ethnosexual frontiers* that are surveilled, supervised, patrolled, policed, regulated and restricted in order to maintain compulsive heteronormativity and gendered regimes at the national level. Alexander (1994) deploys queer theory and critical race theory to understand how the state marks (heteronormative) inscriptions upon the body by drawing symbolic boundaries around sexual difference. In her analysis of how *conjugal heterosexuality* is enshrined by law in certain Caribbean nations, Alexander interrogates how such laws both conflate heterosexual violence with same-sex relations, resulting in a “neutered invocation of citizenship” (12) that carries psychic remnants of colonization through an implicit call to “rescue/indebtedness” by the outlawed queer subject.

If citizenship as a project and imagined community, to borrow Anderson’s term, rests on a series of exclusions, idealizations, punishments, and policings, normative pressures and power politics also exist within the contested identities and marginalized communities. Within queer migration scholarship, Duggan’s (2002) understanding of *homonormativity* as the process by which hegemonic notions of homosexual identity are created and reproduced is a key concern. Scholars like Berg and Millbank (2009), Lewis (2013), Cantú (2009), Luibhéid (2008), Murray (2011) and many others have demonstrated the state’s interest in patrolling and policing identity norms at the border as a way of reifying entrenched notions of (white, patriarchal, sexually normative) citizenship. The various ways queer international students comply or resist (Canadian) homonormativity within their own particular transnational contexts is central to my current project. In what ways have these students experienced homonormativity? Do we
find, as Altman (1997) suggests, the experience of a gay identity tending toward homogeneity, influenced by Western norms and modes? Or is it, as Manalansan and others contend, an experience of hybridity, where indigenous, culturally-coded understandings of sexuality interact to produce new identity forms? How have sexual minority students experienced various homonormative sites—mainstream gay spaces, queer student groups, and queer virtual worlds—as an extension of their experience of Canada and Canadian citizenship? What do their experiences within these sites have to say about how Canadian homonormativity is embedded and reproduced in the day-to-day?

Puar’s (2006) powerful understanding of how homonormativity and nationalism are linked to create homonationalisms plays out, scholars have argued, throughout the migration process for queer bodies. Puar (2006) in particular demonstrates how homonormativity and state forms of nationalism are linked to create forms of homonationalism that mark certain bodies. Mainstream gay culture, she asserts, is in collusion with American nationalism so that some gay bodies provide “ammunition” for certain nationalist projects (67). The incorporation of homonormative gay bodies into the national imaginary serves to normatize certain subjects away from “terrorist” bodies as an act of patriotism (68). In the process, “certain desired truths become lived as truths, as if they were truths, thus producing all sorts of material traces and evidences of these truths” (68), echoing Stoler’s (2008) evocation of material and psychic ruins. The insidious nature of homonationalism, for Puar, means that even as queers achieve greater incorporation, gay culture is “sanitized” for race, gender, and class. Essentially, state
paradigms—including immigration systems and other sites of everyday power—ensure that “some queers are better than others” (71).

Dhawan invokes Butler’s “normative violence” to explore how “social death” ensues for non-normative subjects who are not culturally legible. Norms influenced and incorporating homonormative values and forms of homonationalism serve both to produce and regulate bodies (198) and determine which lives are worth living. For Dhawan, migration incorporates some aspects of sexuality while quarantining others. Queer desires, and their redirection, in her analysis, are foundational to the project of nationalism, and nations are heteronormative because of, rather than despite, homosexuality.

Unlike Puar, Dhawan places greater emphasis on agency and the room to maneuver for marginalized subjects. The space for agency, she suggests, “emerges in the subtle distinction that while subjects are constituted within normative structures, they are not fully determined by them” (198). My research explores how certain queer international student in Toro have the ability to navigate (or cross borders) within the norm of mainstream gay and education spaces, where those norms manifest as simultaneously “limiting and enabling” (198).

Central to my concern with how queer international students negotiate regimes is Lionel Cantú’s (2009) notion of “border-crossing”—how queer migrants consciously or unconsciously shift (re)presentations of their own lived histories in order to continually re-negotiate the particularized demands of state and other forms of power. In particular, I’m guided by Cantú’s work into how mobile queer subjects can simultaneously comply with regimes of power—through, for example, being “read” as good citizens/gays in one
particular cultural context, but then pivot to re-present their identity in a more fluid, even transgressive manner in still another context. These acts of negotiation and transgression are experienced in the everyday by my research subjects as ways to both conform and resist the hegemonic structures of a given situation, such as Rodrigo’s masking or downplaying “feminine” aspects of his identity in queer erotic spaces, or Brandon adopting a more neutral “Canadian” accent while job-seeking.

Such acts mirror the experiences of Cantú’s own research participants, who, while subject to and disciplined by the particular regimes of power they experience in their day-to-day lives in southern California and New Mexico, nevertheless actively and often nimbly and strategically find ways to navigate both literal (national) and imaginary (social) borders. Their acts of “border-crossing” pinpoint the critical ways they evade and circumvent “relations of ruling” both at “home” in Mexico and at “home” in California.

Cantú builds off Gloria Anzaldúa’s (1987) groundbreaking work on the “borderlands”—those liminal, in-between spaces occupied by queer transnational bodies who remain always in a state of becoming. Anzaldúa’s conception of the borderlands as the site “where the space between two individuals shrinks intimacy” (20) is a useful framework for conceiving of how and why queer bodies negotiate in-between spaces. She mines her own stories and lived experiences as a lesbian Chicana living near the US-Mexico border to explore and conceptualize the borderlands as a psychic, liminal space where identity is fluid and shifting. “Living on borders and in margins, keeping intact one’s shifting and multiple identity and integrity, is like trying to swim in a new element, an “alien” element” (20) she explains, trying to negotiating the demands both of a colonized, hetero-patriarchal Mexican culture and her role as a Chicana outsider, a sexual
and cultural outlaw in American society. As a queer racialized woman, Anzaldúa demonstrates how queer and colonized bodies continually seek freedom and a new “land” in which to integrate various identity threads. Here she anticipates the work of Ahmed (2006) and others who investigate the queer longing for a liberated sexual “home”, a longing experience by many sexual minority students living in countries where their sexuality is illegal or demonized.

Importantly, Anzaldúa also conceives of the borderlands as a physical, material space marked and patrolled by colonizers and enforcers. Yet even this space is “in a constant state of transition. The prohibited and forbidden are its inhabitants. Los atrevesados live here: the squint-eyed, the perverse, the queer, the troublesome, the mongrel, the mulatto, the half-breed, the dead; in short, those who cross over, pass over, or go through the confines of the “normal” (25). Anzaldúa defines the “prohibited and forbidden” in active terms—they are los atrevesados, those who make the decision to act and “cross over” into a new space, beyond and past a demarcated border zone. Here her work anticipates the work of Butler (1990) and other queer theorists who understand gender and sexuality as in motion, situated, never still. Yet Anzaldúa is also keenly aware of the multiple layers of oppression that mark the lesbian Chicana —intersectional issues of race, class, sexuality and gender that position her as an outsider.

Anzaldúa’s work is key to my research by providing an intersectional understanding of how and under what conditions queer subjects engage in “border-crossing” to navigate systems of institutional and national power. While her work (and the work of many borderlands theorists) focuses often on the spatial and psychic tension between national borders, my work looks at borderlands theory in an age of hyper-
mobility, when national borders are paradoxically both less important (for certain highly mobile privileged bodies) and at the same more rigidly patrolled and securitized. I consider border-crossing and borderlands theory in an age of intense globalization. In what ways have international students negotiated both physical and “imaginary” borders—those of social and institutional spaces—in Toronto? How does studying the experiences of queer international students migrating to the GTA illuminate globalization’s role in simultaneously erasing and re-inscribing local borders? Most importantly, in the context of institutional, political, and social regimes of power in Canada and Toronto, what’s at stake in monitoring and policing these borders? What do the lived experiences of “border-crossing” among my research participants tell us about the discomfort, unease, and paranoia felt around borders of race, culture, and gender within queer and education spaces in Toronto?
CHAPTER 4
FINDINGS: ARRIVAL, INCORPORATION, EXPULSION

I suggest that we can only avoid stranger fetishism—that is, avoid welcoming or expelling the stranger as a figure that has linguistic and bodily integrity—by examining the social relationships that are concealed by this very fetishism. That is, we need to consider how the stranger is an effect of processes of inclusion and exclusion, or incorporation and expulsion, that constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living...as well as epistemic communities.

—Ahmed (2000, 6)

If, as Ahmed suggests, migrants find their identities “take the shape of the direction” in which their bodies become oriented, what happens when a flow of queer-identified international students from a wide range of backgrounds and physical locations arrive in Canada? In this chapter, I consider how Canada and Toronto are initially positioned as both queer utopias for my nine research participants, but also how Canada acts in many ways as a blank slate, a terra nullius which implicates these queer migrants in the ongoing settler-colonial project within traditional indigenous lands. I look closely at the moment of migration, to unpack how their desire to leave and a lived feeling of difference at an early age compelled these subjects to explore and shape identities in online spaces—often mediated by the powerful currents of North American popular culture—and later to seek out opportunities for study abroad in the West. Lured by aggressive recruitment campaigns by Canadian institutions, I examine how their particular histories of privilege, prior experiences of mobility, trauma, and difference shape their experiences of arrival into Canada as international students. Once arrived, I look at how their various hopes, dreams, wishes, and fantasies for belonging and strong, social networks are put to the test, as the realities of surveilling diasporic communities, normative racism and sexism in the city, and closed social networks make incorporation into education and
queer spaces difficult. Later, I explore how the queer body, for these participants, becomes a key site—in both physical and online worlds—for negotiating citizenship, through erotic exchange, strategic border-crossing, and acts of cultural suppression and erasure. Finally, I unpack how ongoing experiences of racism and exclusion within queer and education spaces point to the ways in which what Mason calls *advanced marginalization*—or the intensification of secondary marginalization—plays out within queer communities to re-entrench overarching homonormative values and to reproduce dominant relations of ruling that privilege white, upwardly-mobile, hyper-masculine performing men.

**Nine Oral Histories**

Before I consider how and in what ways the stories of my informants reveal the degree to which queer and education spaces reproduce dominant relations of ruling, and the various ways in which these queer migrants negotiate these social relations, I thought it useful to provide a quick outline of each interviewee. While it is impossible to begin to capture the nuances, complexities, and fullness of identity, I have below provided a few key demographic details (particularly with regards to race, gender, class, sexuality, education, and migration status) to help frame my later analysis and provide context for the discussion of findings that follow.

**Adil** is a young Indian man, originally from a middle-class family in Delhi. He pursued his undergraduate studies in engineering and came out as gay to a few close friends in India before migrating to Toronto to pursue an MBA. Now in his early thirties, Adil is entering his second year of his MBA program.
Mark is also in his early thirties and set to enter the second year of his MBA program in Toronto. He’s a black American gay man, originally from a working class family, who pursued undergraduate studies in film.

Obirin is Nigerian by birth, but grew up in several West African countries. The child of a highly-mobile, upper-middle class black family, she was educated entirely in international schools and came to Canada to pursue undergraduate studies ten years ago. She is now a Canadian citizen in her late twenties, identifies as bisexual, and continues to live and work in a small Ontario city.

Brandon also came to Canada to pursue undergraduate studies at a university in a small Ontario city, and recently graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree. A young black, gay man from Jamaica, he hails from an evangelical, middle-class family. He will remain in Canada next year to pursue graduate studies.

David spent his early life in Trinidad. While he was born in Canada (and has always held a Canadian passport), he moved back to Trinidad when he was an infant and grew up in a wealthy, mixed race (Chinese-Indian) family. He identifies as gay and moved back to Canada to pursue an undergraduate degree. Now in his early thirties, he has remained in Canada and works professionally in the GTA.

Shameel is also a professional in Toronto. Originally from Bangladesh, where he was born into a wealthy political family, he moved to Canada a decade ago to pursue undergraduate studies. An out brown gay man in his early thirties, he is now a permanent Canadian resident.

Luka also came to Canada about a decade ago to pursue an undergraduate degree. Originally from a middle-class Croatian family, Luka left Croatia during the war and
spent most of his formative childhood years living with his mother in Italy. He currently identifies as gay. While he is Caucasian, his formative years as a Slavic exile in a xenophobic community in Italy and his experiences in Toronto make him ambivalent and unsure about his “whiteness”.

**Sophia** is an ethnic Chinese, Singaporean young woman currently entering her final year of an undergraduate program in Toronto. In her early twenties, she identifies as lesbian in many instances, queer in others.

Finally, **Rodrigo** is a gay Brazilian man in his mid-twenties who has completed a post-graduate certificate in Toronto. He is currently working and living in Toronto on a post-graduate work permit.

**Odd Be(Longings): Desire, Motion and the Search for Home**

If, as Ahmed suggests, it’s “in moving this way, rather than that…[that] the surface of bodies acquire their shape” and that these same bodies eventually “take the shape of this direction” (2006, 17), it seems important first to explore and understand how and why research participants chose their particular paths to Canada. What were the factors that first compelled their leaving? What role, if any, did Canada play as an *imaginary*, where certain dreams, wishes, ideals, goals, and ambitions might be achieved? How was the particular moment of migration—that pivotal hinge between here and there, then and now, experienced by each participant?

One of the striking findings is the degree to which virtually all participants recognized at an early age not only their relative difference—from peers, family, and the broader culture—but also their *conscious* desire, often at a preciously early age, to want
to leave for “somewhere else”. For some, this difference was clearly tied to differences in
gender expression and gender identity. Sophia, for example, was conflicted and unhappy
about having to wear skirts as a school uniform in Singapore, and felt uncomfortable with
the expectation that she should play with dolls with her female friends. As she entered her
teens, recognizing the relative privilege of her family, she knew education abroad
provided some form of liberation from both fixed gender roles and the general sense of
claustrophobia brought on by the close-knit, authoritarian nature of Singaporean society:

So, from a very young age, I think, in my teens, I decided that, I told my parents,
that I wanted to study overseas. I didn’t want to stay in Singapore, because,
because it was kind of like suffocating, it was very stifling there, it’s a very dense
city, country…so yeah. I told them [my parents] very early on to prepare for me
to move out and go study somewhere else.

Shameel experienced a similar need to leave the confines of family, culture, and
national identity in order to come to terms with hidden or underground aspects of his
identity. His understanding of his sexual difference, explored to some extent during his
time at an all-boys Indian boarding school—plus the vulnerability he experienced as a
gender non-confirming male—were factors that played a role in his determination to
leave Bangladesh to study abroad. “I wanted an out from Bangladesh,” he said. “I
wanted an out from my family household. I just wanted to get out.” Yet while Shameel,
like Sophia, longed for freedom from restrictive gender roles, his motivations for
choosing Canada were mixed. In addition to being aware that it may be a place to
consider alternate expressions of sexuality, his political ambitions, post-university, also
made Canada an attractive choice because of its perceived human rights record and what
Shameel saw as a complex, heterogeneous political culture he might one day replicate
back home. “I picked Canada not only for the gay piece…it was a small factor…But the
bigger factor was for me to…Canada was…not so much about the multicultural piece, but Canada’s human rights report…all of those things were so good, I wanted to copy it.” Here we begin to see a common thread among participants, the linking of their own personal freedom with particular professional ambitions and goals. Most participants among my group expressed a desire to not only “find themselves”, but also to develop marketable, concrete skills and abilities through their educational pursuits that might serve them materially later in life. The decision to choose Canada was, in most cases, made very strategically, a combination of first recognizing the desire to leave the home country; and then selecting Canada from among a web of competing destination countries actively marketing to international students (See Knight, Flyn and Bauder, Tamburri).

Adil’s decision to leave India to pursue an MBA was a long time coming. “I always wanted to do post-graduation, and I did not want to do my post-graduation back home. I always wanted to do it outside my home country. An important factor for me was to go to a country which would be an LGBT-friendly country,” he said. After looking closely at a long list of MBA programs in both the United States and Canada, he chose Toronto:

I could go to the US, and go to really good schools, but certain states in the US may not be as LGBT-friendly as Canada is. … So I think my personal and professional goals are closely tied because I want to get education in a country in which I would be comfortable being gay as well. Right? So that’s why I chose to come to Canada.

For other participants, while personal and professional motivations for migrating to Canada as international students were clearly connected, issues of personal safety were also paramount. Rodrigo, for example, felt the daily threats of physical and emotional violence in his neighbourhood in Sao Paulo. Growing up as a “feminine” boy, subject to
sexual abuse and physical bullying by older boys in his working-class neighbourhood, he experienced severe anxiety and depression, culminating in drug and alcohol abuse in his early adult life. A series of major life setbacks—the end of a relationship and being fired from his job—proved to be the catalyst for his first sojourn to Canada:

And I got back to work, I got in a relationship and everything, and then one day all of a sudden everything just ended. I got dumped and I got fired from my job. So that’s when I decided to sell everything and come to Toronto for the first time. Then I came to Toronto in 2012, stayed here for six months, and decided that I wanted to live here. But…especially because I didn’t have contacts with a lot of people. I liked the city. It was the whole pressure of violence that didn’t exist here that really sold me on the idea of moving to Canada. Because in the city I was living in, things were getting a little bit creepy. Especially because…I ran away from people beating me up.

For Rodrigo, as others, the move to a new country with few ties did not present as particularly daunting. Many participants expressed a high degree of mobility or movement in their early lives. For some, this took the form of moving frequently with their families. As the child of working-class parents, Rodrigo experienced both the comforting, communal nature of street life in Sao Paulo, and also its dangers. “[M]y parents both worked full-time. So I was not raised by my parents, I was raised by my entire street. I would stay one day in one house, another day in another house, and that’s how I would…that’s how I grew up.” That communal, exposed nature of the streets meant he was never entirely safe on a physical level. Unlike those who live in gated communities in other parts of the city, for Rodrigo, the streets near his home are also the place where he is beaten up, harassed, and threatened.

Like Sophia, he pinned his hopes on leaving on education. But while Sophia’s parents pay for her studies at university, Rodrigo (like Adil), had to work and save in order to afford the exorbitant international student fees charged by postsecondary
institutions in Canada. Canada became a consideration for Rodrigo chiefly because of his ability to work here as an international student:

I decided I wanted to leave Brazil when I was sixteen. So that’s when I started to looking for exchange agencies... My parents told me that they would never be able to pay for it, so I would have to work for it myself. So just started looking for destinations and where to go, and how—the best place that I could go to that would be easiest for me to stay, or that I would be able to, for example, work while I studied, because it was something that I had to do.

Importantly, then, while personal and professional goals are connected for all participants, these intersections are experienced and articulated differently according to class positions. The relative degree of material sacrifice involved in deciding to uproot their lives and pursue studies in Canada is greater for Rodrigo and Adil, who must either work for many years to save (as in the case of Adil) or find ways to work part-time and otherwise self-fund their education (Rodrigo).

Yet how do queer migrant students perceive and imagine Canada, both in relation to their own identity narratives and as a place of what I call educational and queer citizenship? What desires, dreams, and hopes animate their inner conversations, and how do these fantasies influence the process of migration and identity development prior to arrival in Canada?

Sánchez-Eppler and Patton (2000) note that queer bodies do not remain stably in place until a discourse overtakes, agitates, and names their desires. Rather, “bodies pack and carry tropes and logics from their homelands; they seek out an “imagined community” of intrinsic queerness, which they read about in the lines of international policy and media” (10). For Brandon, coming to Canada was a chance to develop what he imagined would be a fulfilling, supportive identity as a black, openly gay man:
So, I think at the time I was focusing more on the gay part. And it was…I’ll be able to tell my peers that I’m gay without the fear of violent attacks. Or it will be relatively easy to find someone who I can go on a date with, or there will be like the equivalent of a gay-straight alliance where I can meet people.

He chose to study at a small university in southern Ontario in part because of its reputation as a gay-friendly campus. “I Googled [the university] and I could find articles and stuff from what students had said, and I got the impression that it was the gay school in Ontario, and I’m like, oh my God, I’ll find my people here, it’s going to be great.”

Similarly, Mark was drawn by Toronto’s reputation as a liberal, cosmopolitan, gay-friendly city. “I also knew Toronto was hosting World Pride, because that information was available years ago. So I also just assumed that there would be this great support system and this network of people.” Sophia also saw Toronto as offering the cultural comforts of a large, diverse city with an openness towards sexuality. “Before moving, I mean, I looked at how queer-friendly the city was, what the community was like, and from my research, it was like Toronto is very multicultural, it’s great, people are generally accepting.” As with Mark and Brandon, she also imagined that a key part of her transition to queer and educational life in Toronto would be the availability of supportive networks where she’d be able to be herself. “I imagined I would have a lot of queer friends, and yeah, just be really, really fun.”

Social networks, then, at both school and within the queer community, were an important part of how research participants imagined their lives as queer international students in Ontario. For most, having concealed their sexual identities “back home”, there was a pent-up desire to be able to explore and share the fullness of their identities in a safe space—in short, to be seen and witnessed for the full complexity of who they are. As Adil says, about anticipating his time in Toronto:
So, I thought that it would be really easy for me to be out. I thought that… I always had that in my mind, that once I go there, I will try to find people who will be LGBT-friendly as well, and like take small steps and be out to them, and then, eventually I’d imagine that I’d be out by the end of my course, to everyone. I don’t know if that’s going to happen or not. But yeah, that’s what I imagined. And then, the other was, I imagined that there was going to be a big community here of a lot of LGBT people and I will be able to make friends with them… There will be a group of lots of people who will be out, and they’ll be doing things together. I can just go and meet them and be friends with them.

Here, Adil imagines the role of friends, social networks, and supports as critical to his own continued “coming out” process.

For David, choosing to study in Canada similarly provided a space where he imagined he’d be able to live a more authentic, integrated life.

I guess my expectation, what I thought it would be like, it would just be this place where you could be walking around and people would know [about my sexuality] and it would be okay, people would be happy and there would be people I could meet and talk to and ask questions. And just be myself. That was really what it was. I never had these big ideas of concrete things of what it would be like, but just going to Western, going to this place, being with all these white people, would be this welcoming environment for people like me.

David’s desire to “just be himself” rests both with an openness about his sexuality, but also by being a proud and out Caribbean at a university with a historically large Caribbean student population. Tellingly, David conflates a “welcoming” environment for queer sexuality with whiteness, a theme that arose in many of the participant interviews. In another part of the interview, David makes clear that his earliest connections with queer sexuality were drawn from the online world, where North America was positioned as an open, liberal space with regards to sexuality, and where queer sexuality was embodied by white, masculine men:

So the earliest messages that continued in my time [at home] was that this [homosexuality] was all coming from North America. You know, the States,
Canada, America. This is the place where it was okay to be gay, because all of this was happening. You could see—these people were naked on the Internet and stuff—so that was really where those images came from and was really what fed my imagination and my desire to immigrate to North America. Because I thought, hey, white people can be gay, that’s awesome. I want to be white. So, yeah.

David’s experience underscores Gosine’s (2007) assertion that the virtual [queer] world unconsciously privileges the white male body as the ultimate expression of queer identity, embodying ideals of sexual liberty, openness, and personal acceptance. More broadly, David’s experience within this queer virtual space unmask how queer citizenship reproduces dominate racialized citizenship values privileging white bodies. As Dhamoon suggests, invoking Baaba, while in both formal and informal citizenship spaces, at both state and sub-national level, white bodies quickly become “natural citizens”, non-white subjects always remain partial citizens, subject to discipline and exclusion.

For Obirin, studying in Canada was a way to begin to articulate herself on her own terms: “Once I come to Canada, I’ll be able to speak my mind. Not to re-invent myself, but to be my full self. Like, without any shame or hesitation about that.”

As a young, closeted gay man in Jamaica, Brandon also imagined the connection between North American sexual freedom and whiteness. He talks about how North American television shows with white, gay characters, like *Will and Grace* and *Queer as Folk* fueled an image of North America as an accepting, open, laid-back home for queer people. Yet like David, Brandon has difficulty reconciling queer sexuality and his own racial identity. Commenting on his wariness of black diasporic communities in Canada, he says:

I guess, someone who is black and Jamaican, my default assumption is that they [black people] are homophobic in some way. And that’s been primarily my
experience. Because if I grow up in a primarily, in a country where it’s primarily a black country and homophobia is this thing that everyone does, I come to Canada which I assumed that everyone is quote/unquote “progressive”, at the same time, the black people that I met are similarly homophobic, my whole aim is to get as far away from that as possible.

So Brandon’s experience of travelling to Canada is one where he simultaneously hopes to explore and come to terms with his sexual identity, but also, through the process of migration, transcend or erase part of his racial identity, or at least particular connections to his racial community. Partly it’s an issue of representation, but also of feeling confined by what he understands as the limited possibilities open to him, as a gay black men in a white-dominated cultural space.

Because when we think of gay culture, it’s often a white face that’s in front of it. So, that’s what I know. The only things that I’ve ever seen or heard reference too with a gay person is if they’re talking about the myth of the sexually dominant black man. And that’s not something I want to identify with.

In part, this discomfort may stem from the ambivalence and tenuous connection Brandon has always felt about his identity as a Jamaican man. Because of growing up labeled a “sissy” for displaying what was interpreted as effeminate behaviour, Brandon always felt disconnected from family, from normative ideas of masculinity, and from a national identity as Jamaican:

So not being the typical kind of man, I guess, was a big thing for me. In terms of talking to my parents or my siblings or my relatives, they’re—expressly as I got to high school, having conversations with them became a little bit more difficult, because I would be bringing up topics or trying, or using vocabulary, or bringing up subject matter that they wouldn’t really understand, because neither of my parents went to university, so, there were certain things that I couldn’t really talk to them about, because I feel like they wouldn’t really understand. But, yeah I don’t know. I think for the most part growing up it was just not being the typical Jamaican guy I guess.
Thus migration to Canadian, via the scholarship he earns, provides Brandon with an aspirational opportunity to escape the demands of family and country, sidestepping the *conjugal heterosexuality* and *neutered invocations of citizenship* Alexander (1994) sees in post-colonial Caribbean nations. Once again, we can see how racist and heterosexist values embedded within the postcolonial nation-state, including Canada, and formalized within state policies are reproduced at the local, sub-national level.

For her part, as a young, closeted lesbian in dynamic Singapore, Sophia relied on images gleaned from North American popular culture in order to fashion her imaginations of what life might be like in Canada as a queer woman. A self-described pop culture and Internet “geek”, the allure of North America was in part shaped by its image as a free-wheeling, open-minded space, echoing Altman’s (1997) linkage between the spread of homogenizing queer cultures and global capitalism, though one mediated by virtual and online technologies. “You know. I always…I grew up watching American TV. I grew up with the Internet. The web just looked so appealing, and so nice, and so free, that I just wanted to leave the country.” Later, Sophia reflects on how her openness to Western culture stemmed in part from her ambivalence and disconnection, like David, Brandon, and others, towards her home country. “So, I grew up with a very Westernized view, and I always wanted to leave my country, so I always felt detached from my community or my fellow citizens there. So leaving there and coming here was a little scary, but not really.” Sophia, then, finds the liminal in-between borderland world of the Internet a critical way station on her migration journey from Singapore to North America, echoing Tang’s (2012) understanding of the critical role the virtual world plays in the creation and reproduction of transnational lesbian identities in Singapore. Such identities
are never fixed, but rooted both in the limits and opportunities offered by the Singaporean nation-state and also mediated by Western capitalist influences, as per Jackson’s (2009) observations of the tension between local and global influences in the formation of queer identities in Southeast Asia. Here, global capitalism and Canada’s formal immigration policies (privileging globally-mobile students as temporary citizens) both propel and mediate Sophia’s experience in the borderlands.

Interestingly, although Sophia was determined to study in North America, and consciously chose Toronto as her best option—a combination of the size and multicultural reputation of the city, plus the high global ranking of her university, and despite her affinity for living online—Canada for her remained something of a mystery, a blank slate. “I had no concept, before coming to Canada, or you know, decided to come here…what is Canada? Does it even exist? It wasn’t in my head, on my mind.” In spite of his globetrotting ways and keen intellectualism, Luka also had a very limited notion of Canada as either a nation or imaginary:

And I knew nothing about Canada, except it’s very cold, and part of it speaks French. That was the extent of my knowledge about Canada, back then. Oh, and that Inuit people are, and First Nations are systemically abused by the Anglo population. Those are the three pieces of information…everything.

Obirin—although she had known she would study in Canada for several years, in part due to having an older brother already living here—nevertheless gave little thought to the actual lived experiences she would encounter in the country. “But honestly, I didn’t know what living…I didn’t think about it. Which is a thing I do. I jump into things without thinking it through…But no, honestly, I didn’t think about it.” Instead, her dreams, ambitions and notions of social citizenship focused mainly around the
educational world she imagined herself inhabiting, decontextualized from Canada as a political and cultural nation-state:

I definitely thought it was going to be, you know, the college type movies you see. I definitely thought there would be a lot of—I didn’t think I would be partying a lot—but I thought there would be a lot of partying going around me, people having sex, left right and centre, and I thought, Great! This is my chance to experiment and really find out what is happening

Critically, however, Obirin knew instinctively to delay certain aspects of exploration and identity formation—related to sexuality as well as her articulation and understanding of her own social and political values as an activist—until she had arrived in Canada. “I remember thinking, wait till you get to Canada to deal with this. Because I wasn’t in the right environment to think about it. And I didn’t allow myself to be in that environment either. So I remember clearly thinking, just wait, two more years, and then you’ll be able to deal with this.”

Canada then, to the queer student migrant, serves as a place intertwined personal and professional/education goals may be realized, where bodies and subjects continue their process of becoming, of finding new ways to “be at home”. As Ahmed suggests that “it becomes possible to re-form or re-animate our perceptions of home, without then assuming home is fixed prior to the experience of migration” (2006, 8). Canada is rendered as both a queer utopia mediated by the dominant tropes of whiteness—where one may need to perform conscious or unconscious acts of racial erasure in order to access the privileges and benefits of a full queer identity—and simultaneously as a blank slate, a *terra nullius* onto which dreams, aspirations, strategic priorities, and other forms of personal and professional occupation of the land/construct take place. In this way, the queer student migrant is both part of an ongoing settler-colonial project re-shaping and
contesting certain notions of the nation by the act of even imagined border-crossing, but also already, even prior to “contact”, re-negotiating core parts of individual identity to comply with particular notions of citizenship, so as to hopefully limit or assuage alien encounters. Crucially, belonging and affective connections to this still-in-the-future Canada are achieved and imagined via online technologies and the powerful lens of globalized North American popular culture, such that local identities and modes of belonging are already fractured, partial, hybrid in nature. So invested are certain subjects in idealized representations of citizenship—in seeking and constructing what Ahmed calls lifelines to the future—that the physical act of border-crossing, the plane ride itself, become almost an after-thought. Consequently, imagined citizenship and belonging, for these participants, is not constructed via the nation-state, of through mediations of Canada in the abstract, but in very particular and localized imaginings—in the classroom, the university residence, the queer bar, the dating world. What I will call sites of education citizenship and queer citizenship, then, serve as metonyms for the ongoing, evolving experience of Canadian citizenships for these queer migrants. As we’ve seen with the experiences of Brandon, Sophia, and others, immigration laws and citizenship values that have historically valued whiteness and compulsory heterosexuality (named by Dhamoon, Alexander, and others) still linger as historical ruins within sites and mechanisms of formal state power. Almost imperceptibly, these values filter down into non-formal, everyday spaces and mediate how citizenship is experienced within sub-national spaces.

Against this backdrop of imaginings, longings, virtual and physical moving towards, and certain articulated desires—how have the experiences in education and
queer citizenship been realized for these participants, and what does this tell us about the state of social relations in Canada at this moment in time?

Is This *The Real Me? Citizenship in Education Spaces*

*Because I’m always negotiating my identity and how I live in the world. How people view me, how I view people. Why should I care? Why do I care?* - Sophia

While hopes and dreams were high for all research participants that their arrival in Canada may constitute a new beginning, or at least a reframing of home according to new modes of belonging, the landscape of Canadian citizenship proved complex, frustrating, demoralizing, and often re-traumatizing, excluding and repelling subjects away from the body politic in a myriad of subtle and powerful ways while eliding authentic and meaningful discussion of difference and power. Phelan (2001) calls citizenship “the central concept that calls for inclusion” with regards to “recognition and participation and desirable goals” (3). While citizenship “does not require the active approval and communion of others…it does require the affirmation of one’s space in the political community”. Phelan maintains that distance from *cultural membership* implicitly inherent in forms of citizenship makes one “continually prey to renewed exclusion and scapegoating”. Further, she maintains that “citizenship is about participation in the social and political life of a community, and as such, it is not confined to a list of protections and exclusions” (6). Visibility itself, then, is no guarantee of citizenship or equality. “A group that…has not part in the national imaginary…cannot participate in citizenship no matter what rights is members have come to enjoy”.
As we turn out attention to how participants experience citizenship within educational spaces in Toronto and southern Ontario, it’s important to keep Phelan’s analysis in mind. If the guarantee of equality and equal rights, and visibility itself, do not guarantee citizenship in its full social and political sense, are there forces or relations at work that mask or occlude difference in such a way as to render certain bodies or subjects more worthy of inclusion and incorporation into the social, political and cultural life of postsecondary spaces under study?

Luka knew almost immediately, upon arriving at university, that the reality of his experience would be much different than he had imagined:

Oh…it was just so sad. I don’t know. The buildings were too big, it was overwhelming I think. I really badly didn’t want to be here. But there was nowhere else. And the first day, the day after…because I had to work up to three days before I came, in order to have enough money. The first day I had an orientation meeting at the…Department, myself and several others, and I knew I wouldn’t hang out with any of those people. They were all from Richmond Hill, Markham, from very affluent families. Most of them were at least a few years younger from me. And they were all so cool. They were speaking about lenses and everything. I wanted to change the world, because the world is unjust and there are children dying! And people are like, you’re weird. So, it was horrible, I knew I would not make friends. I was very, very disappointed… [A]nd another weird thing that I noticed right away is that everyone in my class was white. Every person in my class, except one other person, was white.

Upon arrival, Luka feels “weird” and different, positioned as an outsider because of both his sense of class and his worldview. Although, unlike his classmates, Luka has had to work to save for his studies abroad (and would continue to work legally and illegally for the duration of his studies), he has nevertheless, due to having lived in four countries by his arrival in Canada, developed a cosmopolitan view of the world. Studying in what feels like a homogenized, “white” environment is limiting, even stifling.
For David, much of the shock of his first few days at his university came in the form of a re-entrenchment of normative gender roles and the unexpected influence of a large diaspora from his home country. Arriving in residence to meet his three Canadian roommates, he realizes that his dreams of exploring his gender and sexuality will have to be put on hold or continue to be explored surreptitiously:

I think I knew [that it would be difficult] from my first night in residence. So first day I moved in, orientation night. And scared. Nervous. Petrified. And I met my three roommates, because I was in a suite with three guys. And they were three best friends from Etobicoke. White. Athletic. Jocky types. And within the first five minutes of meeting them, I could tell that this was not going to be okay, to be little flighty flamboyant David in this environment. Yes, it was not an open space in this room. I knew from the minute I got there that this room was going to be traumatic.

Consequently, although one of David’s primary motivations for choosing to study in Canada was to be able to live more fully and openly, he makes the early decision to continue to outwardly live as a straight man. This decision is compounded by the large number of Caribbean students at Western:

Well, it turns out I was on a floor—gratefully, I remain friends with some of them—another...guy, who I didn’t know, but from Trinidad nonetheless; there were two people from the Bahamas, and from I can’t remember what Caribbean islands. But there were lots of other Caribbean people around on my floor. And immediately I knew. So I can’t be out here on this floor. Because they’ll know...

This unease and sense of surveillance within and among diasporic communities within educational spaces is a common theme among participants, often reinforcing particular scripts of gender, sexual, and cultural performance they had been largely determined to avoid or transcend. Obirin, who had been longing for many years to travel to Canada to be able to be “herself”, found herself unwillingly placed with another Nigerian student during an orientation activity by a university staff member who felt
they’d have a lot in common since they were from the same country, despite the fact that Obirin had spent little or no time in Nigeria over the course of her life.

Right off the bat, I didn’t really feel like I identified with a lot of them [other Nigerians]. And I remember trying to talk specifically to students from West Africa. There was a difference, the way they spoke was very different. Because I had gone to international schools, and a lot of them had gone to local public schools. There is definitely a difference. International school kids are kind of like, you know, they’re, of a different economic strata and typically more wealthy…The way they spoke was very—not that they didn’t speak proper English, they did—but they spoke the cultural English of the countries, and they used slang that I wasn’t accustomed to, and they talked about things that I didn’t…I had different experiences from them…I remember somebody called me an Oreo, and I’m kind of like, okay, I guess that’s what I am.

Like Luka, her class position, language, and experiences of prior mobility put her at odds with other Nigerian nationals. Interesting here is the way in which Obirin’s presumed identity as an “Oreo” is ascribed to her by members of her diasporic community within her educational space in Canada. Mark describes a similar sense of being pejoratively labeled an “Oreo” by members of the black community in his American hometown who felt he identified more with upward social mobility and what were construed as “white” values.

Adil had a similar experience of feeling under surveillance by members of his own diasporic community during his first year in his MBA. While Toronto was to be the place where he’d be free to come out fully, negative experiences with an Indian classmate cause him to be wary of opening up and forming intimate friendships:

So there’s this guy now in my program who’s Indian, and…he said certain things. He said, “I think he [Adil] is gay”. He put percentages on my sexual orientation. He said, I think he’s forty percent…or sixty percent gay. And then he said “Have you seen him? He’s not married… He comes from a backward cultural background…He comes from a backward religion…Have you seen the kind of clothes he wears. He wears such tight clothes” and things like that, which made me upset.
Adil struggled through his childhood and early adulthood with being taunted and harassed for his appearance and dress, and for intimations around his sexuality, so these insinuations and gossip had a profoundly negative effect on his sense of community by replicating some of the trauma and unease he’d felt in India. As Ahmed suggests, “regrounding can entail forms of mourning…as well as physical sickness and experiences of trauma”, but while Ahmed frames trauma and sickness as a result of detachment or loss, Adil’s experience suggests the trauma of queer difference and alienation can be re-lived within diasporic settings, even within educational spaces. Sophia, while open about most aspects of her life to her peers in Toronto, is similarly guarded with other Singaporeans. “When I am hanging out with people from my country, I never mention anything about my sexuality, ever…I’m less willing to talk about anything queer with people from my country.”

While experiences within diasporic communities have an effect on bids for belonging and experiences of citizenship within educational spaces, racial differences and being read as racially different had a profound effect on how participants experienced incorporation or exclusion in the classroom, residence, and curricular life of their institutions. Brandon, prior to leaving Jamaica for Canada, had been focused on finding community based on his queer sexuality, such that “[t]he Jamaican part, in terms of my racial identity, I guess I hadn’t really thought about it too much at the time. Because I assumed that [my university] was going to be a relatively diverse place.” The reality, however, was far more complex:

I’ve had to become conscious of my own skin colour, having been in classes where I’m likely the only person in colour who’s there. Or having been in discussions where they’re talking about issues of race or Third World countries, and they have a kind of cultural distance from those conversations. I’m like, that’s
my life. That’s been an interesting process for me. It hasn’t been super validating in terms of having people that I can surround myself with who understand because it’s predominantly white area, and some people don’t understand, but yeah…I think race, if anything. And the idea of citizenship too, because I find as an international student, or as black international student, there’s this weird distinction where some students at [my university] will automatically assume that you’re—that I’m from Toronto, if—because I don’t sound like I’m from somewhere else. Whereas there are other people who will assume, who will particularly assume that I’m from somewhere else, because I’m black. So that’s been like an interesting distinction.

As a black student in a predominantly white campus in a small city in Ontario that draws its student body both from the Greater Toronto Area and small-town Ontario, Brandon has the experience both of being assumed to be a racialized Canadian and also an international student. In both cases, he’s considered an outsider.

And I think that’s just…[this city’s] residents’ own understanding of what a Canadian looks like…But I know that [my university] has a lot of students who come from small towns, who come to [this city], and it may be the first time that they see someone who has a different skin colour than they do. So it’s kind of like, oh, where do you come from? Oh, oh, okay…

Brandon’s experiences of exclusion based on his skin colour are complicated by what he describes as his own “internal racism” that finds him actively seeking out white students for on-campus friendship and social networks:

So, in an attempt to get as far away from the international community, partly because of my own internal racism, I guess, I immersed myself into the college community, which was primarily composed of white, social students. I’ve worked in the college office. I’ve done campus tours and stuff. So I guess my social networks are primarily the kids—or the students—who are relatively involved in campus life.

This strategic, racialized relationship-forming is also part of Brandon’s vision for long-term connection to Canada, and the development of both a sense of personal belonging, intimate connection, and professional opportunity:

So, I’ve seen darker skin as kind of a hindrance, in some ways. In high school, there was a point where I tried to bleach my skin…And then coming to Canada,
where, like whiteness was seen as the apex of all that was good in the world, I guess it’s kind of like okay, this is something that I should aspire to…The other thing is, I think in some ways I aspire to be part of a particular community, whether that’s in the queer community or in an economic sense. And I guess the people I envision being in those places are usually white. So in that sense, having white peers or white partners might bring forth more rewards, if you will.

Critically, here, it’s Brandon’s active turn toward Canada, where whiteness is seen as the apex of all that was good in the world the underpin his desire to form networks of white peers and partners, echoing Ahmed’s assertion that as we orient ourselves and move through space we come to be that which we are orientated towards. Brandon is clear both that he’s internalized the colonial racism of Jamaica and the racism he experiences at university in Canada. Despite this, he’s willing to at least partially accept these terms of citizenship as a way to “bring forth more rewards”.

Elsewhere, he is more critical, however, of how racism, and the erasure of race, contribute to his own marginality within both the classroom and extra-curricular life:

Well, yeah. So…I think, just for me, I don’t think we should equate or reduce culture or cultural diversity or ethnicity or racial issues…Because diversity is something that’s part of Canadian identity, so I think in terms of a lot of the programming that’s provided, it’s very much focused on kind of the white, cookie cutter experience. In terms of a classroom setting, we discussed Huckleberry Finn, the book. And we spent the entire seminar without talking about the issue of race…For me, it was like, you can’t talk about that book without talking about [race]! So, I think for me it’s the erasure that happens with issues of race and marginality that makes it all the more visible for me.

Shameel faced this same sense of erasure during his time as a volunteer for diversity office at his home university, where he received training from the Positive Space team that felt like it was “all white people talking about their sexuality…it’s not related to me at all”. Similarly, Obirin attended a few events within her university’s queer collective, but felt like an outsider as the lone black woman in the space:
Oh, it was also a lot of, I would walk into the room, and just, like, I didn’t see a lot of queers who looked like me. And they—the people in the room, like even just the way they dressed, it was very, you know, different from the way I dressed…So it just seemed like everything was different. The way they spoke, the way they dressed. I didn’t see any black people in the room.

As a black American man in his MBA program, Mark was also felt marginalized in educational spaces, both formal and informal. He also became aware of his status as both an outsider (black, American) and partial insider (North American) able to bridge the domestic-international student divide within his MBA program. So even though he initially felt that Canada was “more or less the same thing as the States”, certain nuances in how racial identities are ascribed, read, and mediated in Toronto soon became apparent:

So Toronto has a large population of people from other—I hate the world immigrants, because immigrants has such a negative connotation where I come from, so I don’t want to call it immigrants. But a large international population. And…from what I’ve seen, I think there’s a disdain of that in some capacity, in some respect, and people don’t really address it, and if my school is like a microcosm of what’s going on in Greater Toronto, then the issues are fucked up [with great emphasis] in a lot of ways.

In particular, Mark finds that racialized and international students, as well as women, are largely absent from positions of power within the student community, despite the fact that purportedly fifty per cent of the population in his program are international:

Because again, even as we talk about race, and we talk about people, international students, professionals, they’re very closely related, right? People are treated differently just because…(pause)…of very arbitrary, superficial difference. And I think what makes it even worse is what I feel is this very passive-aggressive culture that doesn’t even address, like won’t even be honest about it, and wants to skirt around, pussyfoot around the issue. Like, deal with it. You know? It’s the reason why I look at our [student government]…and all the executives are white men. How is that possible, when fifty percent of the student body is from another country? How is that possible when thirty percent of the people here are women?
Critically here, Mark links the white patriarchal nature of his student government, the erasure of international students from what Phelan (2001) would call the social and political life of the community, and the development of the emerging professional business class. As one of the top business schools in Canada and North America, his business school is a space and place where ideals of power, commerce, leadership and management are taught and reproduced. Its graduates in turn go on to occupy extremely influential positions of power within the Canadian business, media, and cultural elite.

Mark, like Brandon, seems aware that as he continues his upwardly-mobile professional ascent, he will more regularly confront differences of race, class and sexuality, and the struggle to fully integrate and articulate the fullness his identity in particular spaces and places. Ruminating on this imagined future, he says:

Well, the reality is, I don’t...(pause)...the reality is, something’s going to give, right? Like, I’m not going to have the opportunity to have all of my issues, all facets of my identity met with any one situation, or any one space in which I live. And by space, I do mean physically and mentally. I think…it depends on where I will be in life. Like, what kind of mental/emotional/spiritual space I’ll be in, in life, that will dictate and determine what’s important to me…moving forward.

Nobody Here Looks Like Me: Queer Space and Place in Toronto

And actually, as I talk about and think about that, and say this out loud, I’m not sure if I’ll ever find that space where I belong. [Pause]. And if I do, what will my happiness actually be? What will that look like? I’m not sure. It’s actually very frightening. -Mark

Lubhéid (2004) invokes Foucault (1979) in understanding how sexuality becomes an especially dense transfer point for relations of power. As a lens, sexuality can reveal or uncover the ways in which power operates at both the discursive level and in its embodied forms; how power is experienced, negotiated, policed, and ultimately inscribed by and within the physical body itself. For certain marginalized subjects, such as queer
student migrants, already subject to forms of erasure, punishment, concealment, and trauma at home, the act of migration in search of belonging offers the possibility to re-define or revise the script of concealment, subterfuge, and shame through the powerful possibility of belonging to and flourishing within a diverse community where identity may be lived and articulated more fully. As most participants described, many of their deepest hopes and wishes for connection to and incorporation within Canada rested with aspirations for finding love, friendship, community, and support within Toronto’s queer community.

Yet what do queer international students’ interactions with and experiences within gay spaces, in Toronto and elsewhere, reveal about how power operates in these spaces? How does what I call *queer citizenship*—the various ways in which queer migrants are incorporated or excluded from the Canadian queer body politic and its attendant spoken and unspoken rules, norms, values, and modes of belonging? How does queer citizenship intersect with broader scripts of Canadian citizenship and how do examples of *homonormativity* and *homonationalism* on display within queer Canadian cultures reflect or inform these scripts?

Participants in my research experienced queer citizenship within Toronto and Ontario in markedly different ways. These divergent experiences in part can be attributed to differences in race, class, language, and gender. The seven male participants all described a wide range of experiences interacting within gay spaces and seeking romantic and sexual partners and/or gay friends through gay clubs, LGBTQ sporting events, LGBTQ professional networking events, volunteering through organizations within the LGBTQ community, on-campus LGBTQ clubs and activities, as well through online and
virtual queer spaces in Toronto (primarily gay dating/hook up apps, such as Scruff, Grindr, and Jacked). The two female participants primarily described experiences of queer citizenship mainly through political and cultural events within or on the fringes of the LGBTQ community, such as film screenings, lectures, political events, discussions, and musical/cultural events, with little mention of seeking out romantic and/or sexual partners within explicitly queer social spaces, either physical or virtual.

The most strikingly common feature of male participants’ experiences within gay spaces (clubs, cafes, bars) within the traditional LGBTQ community (centred largely around Church and Wellesley streets in Toronto, and to a lesser extent Queen Street West) were the pervasive experiences of racism, racialization, racial exclusion, and fetishization based on race. These exclusions were experienced in a myriad of ways, both overt and implied. Adil, for example, had expected queer spaces in Toronto to reflect the broader cultural diversity of the city, and felt it would be easy to meet men from all different backgrounds. Instead, he found most gay clubs were divided along racial lines:

This whole thing…it’s new to me. I’m adapting gradually to all the culture. Yeah…but yeah, I’ve been to these spaces. I usually see a bunch of white guys together. I have not seen a lot of Asians interacting with white people, or brown people interacting with a lot of white people. But, I see a bunch of white guys together, and the rest of them together. Which is not what I imagined, actually.

After several attempts at breaking into these circles of white men, Adil appears to lower his expectations for future encounters:

So I have felt excluded, I guess. And again, it’s like…[sighs]…how do I put it? There is a group of, like, pretty white guys who will be together…they would not want you to be a part of that group. It is reality. You have to accept it. I have to accept it. There is a group of Asian guys who want to stick together. They are together. You have to accept it…So, yeah, those are the times when I’ve felt like I am excluded.
Although he arrived in Canada with high expectations of developing strong, supportive connections within the gay community, his experiences have left him doubting himself:

I think that has made me a little reserved, I guess. Like, when I came here I was very open to talk to anyone, but know, as I said, out of the fear of rejection, I would not want to approach a lot of people….I would never talk to an incredibly gorgeous white person. I would never do that.

For Adil, these experiences within the queer community have changed his opinion of Toronto as a whole, unmasking the gap between how the city presents itself to the world and how it is experienced in the day to day:

Because when I read online and everything, whatever I read was, this is a really diverse city. People from all over the world actually come into this city. So I never imagined that people…that there would be groups like that. But now that I see it [racism], it could be subtle, but it’s there.

Adil’s experience of repeated exclusion within a gay club, while highlighting the racial divide within the city’s gay spaces, also demonstrate clearly how certain norms and values of queer citizenship become internalized and reproduced. Initially, Adil believes and feels comfortable interacting with a range of men from diverse backgrounds. After being repeatedly turned down or ostracized by groups of “pretty white men”, his confidence dips, and he begins to accept what he calls the reality of such divisions, to the point that he no longer feels comfortable speaking directly to a “gorgeous white man”. His experiences in turn shape how he views Toronto and his own agency and sense of belonging within the city. Compounded by his unease with the sense of surveillance he feels at school by other Indian students, Adil feels his room for agency and exploration shrink dramatically.

Mark also frequented gay bars in part to develop a sense of community and meet peers from a broad range of backgrounds, and was equally disappointed:
So, the first thing I notice when I went out to the bars is that...again, the gay village is all white. It’s very [great emphasis] white. And that was my point of reference for, like, where to find gay people.

The white men who did approach him tended to be older, and were interested in sleeping with him because the assumed he had a “big black dick”. After repeated interactions of this nature, he grew suspicious of the intentions of the white men he was meeting:

And, sadly, I have to second-guess myself if a non-person of colour wants to engage with me. Because it’s almost as if I need to feel out if I am this “thing”, this experience to you, versus you just genuinely wanting to get to know me.

Luka, despite being white, also experienced exclusion in gay clubs, a phenomenon he attributes to racial and cultural differences. His background as a Croatian migrant to Toronto, his dress and appearance, and his Slavic accent and inability to understand particular cultural references all marked him as an outsider, Ahmed’s alien:

It was weird, because I...well, first of all...[pause]. I find it incredibly hard to connect with any white people. Like, Anglo-Saxon white Canadians...I just...I mean, right now, I know how to conform—Hi, how are you doing today?!—I didn’t have the finesse to know how to do Anglo talk.

This status as an outsider made it difficult to read and replicate the rituals involved in socialization within these queer spaces:

Well they have this entire way of talking—Hey girl!—and I didn’t know what that was. Why are you calling me girl? It was just really weird. And there were...there were all these rituals that I had absolutely no idea of...it was just very confusing. But specific ideas, is when I would try to approach someone and be really friendly—I tend to be really talkative and friendly—and I remember one time the guy was like, oh my God, he’s like, he wants to talk to me! Can you imagine! He just walked up to me and talked to me! Like, who does he think he is? It felt really hurtful.

Luka eventually gives up trying to connect or fit into spaces within the gay village, in part because he perceives he is no longer attractive and not able to capitalize on his looks:
And the gay scene, I don’t fit. Well, now that I’ve gained a little bit of weight, I can’t capitalize. I’m going to get old soon. I don’t capitalize on my appearance to make friends in the gay village, so I don’t think I want to go there.

For Sophia, issues around cultural difference have less to do with race, but around a shared sense of values within the queer community, and her inability to conform to those values:

For some reason I feel very isolated from…not isolated…I just feel that my personality does not fit the kind of…the kind of personality that would work well in a young community…I do not like…you know, stuff like drinking, partying, clubbing. I hate those things. And I feel like a lot of people focus their social life on that here. Especially the queer community. It’s always dancing-bars-clubs that they go to. I never like going there. So that’s why I feel that I’m isolated and cut off from the community.

Shameel, also, feels perpetually excluded from the gay community, even years after living in Toronto. Here he touches on issues of body type as one way he feels he does not fit in:

But I always felt very inadequate in the gay scene. Partly it is because of the body image that I have. It’s also because, you know, I feel like, can I bring my whole self to this space? And most of the time I feel like, no, I cannot not. I also feel that there’s a strange confidence in gay men in Toronto, especially in the Village, where, people who are living on the edges, it’s a very scary experience for them. So even today when I walked in the Village, I still feel the same sort of Shameel as the first time I walked in there. That out of place.

The ability to read, perform, enact and reify certain notions of gender are also experienced by research participants as a key means of accessing or being excluded from certain forms of queer citizenship. Rodrigo presents as a stereotypically “masculine” gay man, but feels conflicted about how the pressure he feels to perform his gender in Canada. Inside, he feels he is much more feminine, and finds outlet for this part of his identity through his pole-dancing classes. However, within gay spaces—such as his gay
volleyball league or in clubs—he feels a pressure to act more masculine, a trait he pins on repression and passive-aggressiveness within LGBTQ spaces:

I thought I would have more of a free environment. No. It’s one of the most repressed things I’ve ever seen in my entire life. It freaks me out. I’m really about to drop it [volleyball] because everyone tones themselves down and is this passive-aggressiveness, and then they start being bitchy behind each other’s backs. In a very bad way, sometimes the gay community is like watching *Mean Girls*. It’s like they’re sixteen-year old girls being bitchy to each other.

Elsewhere, he connects the version of the idealized masculine gay male in Toronto to whiteness and class, suggesting that the white, upwardly-mobile, masculine-acting gay male is the model of success within Toronto’s gay community:

I watched *Queer as Folk* a long, long time ago. But now when I think about it, it’s like the entire city they’re in love with that fucking Brian Kinney, the masculine guy that fucks everyone. And…it’s kind of what they [gay men in Toronto] focus on. I think it’s kind of the image of the strong, gay man thing. When a person is inauthentic with their sexuality, repressed in a way that society makes it acceptable, and has a very respectable job making a lot of money, so no one really cares what he does. It’s kind of what people have here as The Holy Grail of [gay] life in Toronto.

Here, Rodrigo’s experience pinpoints how, as Cohen (1999) observes, when certain members of previously marginalized communities (such as the LGBTQ community) begin to access economic and other forms of power, *advanced marginalization* takes place, where elite members of marginalized groups act in ways that intensify secondary marginalization within stigmatized communities (Cohen in Phelan, 2001, 6).

Normative enactments of gender and race and discipline and exclusion for those who don’t perform idealized race and gender script appear with even greater frequency in online and virtual spaces, where the unspoken “social contract” governing respectful discourse appears largely absent. Kunstman (2009) explores complex notions of *violence* and belonging as experienced by queer subjects in postmodern cyberspace. He
understands violence not only in its physical manifestations—torture, rape, warfare, and so one—but also as shaped through cultural knowledge, what Kaplan (2004) calls “notions of humanness and forms of dehumanization” (Kaplan, in Kunstman, 3) that extend into virtual worlds. Quoting Mason (2012), he understands violence as more than a practice that acts upon individual subjects to cause harm and injury, “but also, metaphorically speaking, a way of looking at these subjects” (Mason, in Kunstman, 3). Violence then is a result of ways of seeing and reading one another—similar to Ahmed’s notion of how the alien/stranger as constituting as a defense to maintain boundaries of the privileged self—but violence also becomes a collective endeavour, an accumulation of particular, individual acts and moments performed by individuals within distinct and overlapping spheres of citizenship.

Brandon notes a typical feature of gay mobile hook-up apps, whereby men indicate and name overt racial exclusionary criteria for meeting other men. As Gosine has noted (2007), such spaces value whiteness as such a powerful currency that some men will attempt to mask their racial identity in order to generate more interest in their profiles. In Brandon’s experience, being honest about being black either marginalized him completely, or positioned him as an object of fetish:

I was using, for that one I was using Grindr, and…my general experience in [this city] has been…or, okay, so my…I’m either seen as not attractive, because I’m black. And some people actually indicate “whites only” or “no blacks or Asians” or whatever on their profile.

This objectification extends across virtual platforms:

And Plenty of Fish. The other side of it is I’m only seen as attractive because I’m black. There’s this fantasy of the black man and what he can do to you. So that has been very difficult, because I’ve gotten messages, mostly from older men, basically soliciting me for sexual favours, I guess. I’m like, okay, this is my life! And that’s been hard.
As with Adil’s experience in real-world gay spaces, here Brandon appears to internalize the experience, to accept that this is his life.

Rodrigo has also found that part of his identity become fragmented and dislocated online, particularly with regard to gender and gender performance:

But it’s very compartmentalized [online], which is pretty much what I see from people here. It’s kind of like you go on Scruff, you go onto all those profiles that say, yeah, I want to meet someone who is masc[uline]. MASC for me has become a pejorative adjective, that I tell people. It’s like, oh, you look so masc! Right? Because it’s apparently it’s the biggest, it’s the best thing you can be!

Repeated positioning of white, masculine bodies as most desirable within queer online spaces, then, entrenches Duggan’s (2002) understanding of how homonormativity is produced within normative regimes. Here, the very obvious denigration of non-white, non-masculine bodies serves as a violence that effects and touches everyone involved in the online “transaction”. As Kunstman notes, “texts can create violence not only on the level of discourse and narrative…; violence is also part of the lived experience, of both those who produce and those who consume the texts (23)”. Regular exposure to and participation in online and virtual queer spaces that elevate whiteness and masculinity and penalize those who deviate or fail to live up to the norm enacts a violence that also reverberates and is made manifest in the physical world, for such social relations are co-constituted in ways that both transcend and exist in symbiotic relation with on and off-line worlds.

One final, but by no means exhaustive, example of how queer citizenship is experienced by research participants involves the ways in which their sexual identities and professional lives intersect. In what ways does being a queer international student in Toronto help or hinder professional aspirations? How does sexuality intersect with other
identity markers within professional spaces in the city? What might these interactions reveal about the ways in which power is exercised, hidden, or reproduced within corporate or community environments, and how do these interactions punish or privilege certain bodies and subjects?

Rodrigo found it difficult to read and navigate the unspoken social and cultural expectations of queer professional networks in Toronto. Out on Bay Street, for example, is a network of out LGBTQ business and community professionals who gather for formal and informal events on a regular basis. While Rodrigo understood these events as an important opportunity for advancing his own professional and employment goals—particularly as he attempts to remain in Canada on his post-graduation work permit—he nevertheless felt frustrated by what he saw as the inauthentic and performative demands of the group. His position as an outsider, in terms of both race and class, allow him to see such performances for what they are:

[In Out on Bay Street, everyone is just gay, and you might have had sex with people inside, and it’s just weird, because everyone is posing. And I’ve never ever been much of a poser. Pretty much the opposite. Because I come from poor people, I’m not posh at all. And I hate posh. I can wear a suit. But don’t ask me to make up the pretentious laugh where you throw your head back. And that’s what they do.

Rodrigo is also aware of how corporate notions of citizenship are experienced and reproduced within queer settings:

People are just trying to put an image, because that’s what the corporate world said that how professionals behave. They are not sexual…Sex just does not exist in a corporate environment. That’s pretty much what I’ve seen. Because I’m also volunteering with the Ontario Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. It’s pretty much the same thing. However, young people that are on Out on Bay Street, they are more repressed and trying harder to live up to this image of a corporate person.
Rodrigo also sees these types of repressions and performances play out in queer community venues, even those with an explicit mandate to promote and celebrate equality, such as Pride House:

So I was volunteering for Pride House Toronto, and people are so focused on protocol, agenda, and so many things that just…the fact that I’m a newcomer and Brazilian, people totally don’t see that. It’s like they expect me to be Canadian already. To be from Toronto. To have that thing. And it’s not like that. I demand time. And it’s not like I’m going to be slow. It means that in the beginning of it, I will have to learn the dynamics of things. And it’s like people don’t have the patience for that. It’s not like they don’t have the patience because of how they are, but because of the pressure. Because of the life they are pressured to have in Toronto. Of being, you know, the professional one…I’m not talking to you about that, because I’m not allowed. So…but we can see each other at Woody’s! [gay bar in Toronto]. And that’s the kind of thing that pushed me away from people, because I don’t like that.

Here, Rodrigo displays an exceptional analysis of how corporatization within the queer community marginalizes newcomers, and the expectation to already be and have that “thing” that defines belonging and citizenship in Toronto. While displaying a willingness to learn, to navigate such systems of power, he is nevertheless treated as an inferior. Moreover, later in the interview, he discusses how some of the men he meets in such corporate community environments, while dismissing him professionally, solicit him in other queer venues for sex. The dynamics then of race, gender, class, and status work fluidly and covertly within queer settings to privilege those already occupying positions of power.

Importantly, then, while all participants explore and engage with everyday spaces where values of equality (according to sexuality, race, gender identity, for example) are embedded within cultural signs and signifiers (for example: mission statements and organizational purposes), and even celebrated, their personal experiences reveal how
power operates invisibly and imperceptibly, in small acts, gestures, forms of speech, and unconscious exclusions to privilege certain subjects and bodies. These experiences of the “everyday” within sub-national queer spaces highlight Phelan’s contention that equality before the law does not guarantee full inclusion into the body politic or particular social spaces. In such a way, we can consider how such gaps between stated equality and actual lived experience reveal the various sways in which formal citizenship laws operate to reproduce asymmetries of power and privilege within sub-national spaces, as Phelan argues.

Negotiating Borders

If the experiences of this group of international students describe ways in which sites and experiences of educational and queer citizenship replicate existing relations of ruling in Toronto, in what ways do these subjects engage in Cantú’s border-crossing as a strategic means of negotiating these webs of power? How are identities consciously masked, altered, re-framed and re-calibrated in certain moments and spaces, and to what end?

We’ve already looked at how Brandon consciously forms groups of white peers and networks in order to gain perceived (and future) cultural and economic benefits. Brandon is also aware that developing strong relationships with his professors is important for advancement in his career. In fact, he feels closer to his professors than anyone else in his social group:

I think the most valuable experience for me is the relationship I’ve built with my professors. We talk a lot about having personal connections with professors, but I don’t think other students get that. And I’ve been able to have really great conversations with all of my professors...they’re comfortable enough to share some of the stuff that’s going on in their life. So it’s like, wow, I’m being treated, like an equal level...And part of it is that I can have conversations with my
professors that I can’t necessarily have with students, because again, I feel like they wouldn’t necessarily get it. But I think the other thing that would be for me this year is getting into grad school. Mores because of what those opportunities present for my own academic and social life, but it’s kind of like everything that I’ve worked towards and done so far has meant something I guess.

Here, Brandon recognizes that the personal and collegial support he’s developed with professors in his personal life also serve him in his aspirations for graduate school. And while Brandon downplays his Jamaican identity among his university peers, hides his sexuality from his family and within the Caribbean diaspora in Canada, and chooses not to disclose his international student status when applying for off-campus jobs, in case it negatively impacts his experience, when applying for graduate school, he chooses to highlight both his racial and sexual identities as a way to improve his chances of admission:

The international student status thing has been really interesting in terms of when I mention this and when I don’t. When I was applying to grad school, I made sure to mention that, hey, I’m an international student, who’s racialized, and also queer. Because I think in some cases, like marginal identities are seen as valuable for the purposes of, just in terms of student bodies and having different students, or, I don’t know, increasing their portfolio in terms of academic departments. So it was useful for grad school applications, in that sense.

Sophia also felt it was important to mask part of her identity in order to achieve an on-campus job. While in general, she dresses in non-gender conforming ways (including wearing a suit and tie to a formal dance), for her interview as a lab assistant at her university, she made a specific attempt to dress conservatively:

The one thing I could think about is when I was interviewing for my current lab position. I didn’t know what people there are like. So, I wore a nice shirt. I wore a pink nice shirt. That was all. Just to see... just to be sure, you know. You never want to present yourself as too gay.
Mark, too, notes the pressure to present more conservatively in quasi-professional settings, such as networking events where he may encounter prospective employers. Within these spaces, he feels compelled to enact certain normative sexual and gender scripts—or at least certain forms of homonormative scripts that incorporate professionalism and “appropriate” behaviour:

So, for instance…there was a marketing event that I needed to be at, because one of the companies that I’m interested in, American Express, was there. And, I remember speaking to the representative, and literally just having to, like, bring it down three notches, because, you know, I’m trying to mirror your energy…or lack thereof [Laughs], and so I do remember…and I do it all the time…like, in professional settings, I actively tone it down just a little bit.

Sometimes in professional settings, participants are asked either explicitly or implicitly to conceal parts of their identity. Shameel, for example, while working as a professional within the GTA, was asked not to disclose his sexuality to international clients in case this part of his identity made them uncomfortable. The irony is the request came from his supervisor, also a gay man.

Examples of border-crossing also occurred frequently within personal, sexual, and romantic encounters within the queer community. Luka, for example, entered a difficult and dysfunctional relationship with a Canadian man that creates great emotional, financial, and physical havoc but ultimately resulted in helping him secure permanent residency. Shameel crossed class lines in his small university city—a city where he has little economic or cultural status—in order to have sexual encounters with “truckers”. In Toronto, meanwhile, he “is a big shot within the Bengali community” and has found greater opportunity to date men from his socioeconomic class, although the majority of those men are also racialized. Meanwhile, in order to appease his extended evangelical
family with Canada’s diasporic Jamaican community, Brandon often “plays the role of the committed Christian”. When going out, he sometimes “butches it up” by dressing in more masculine clothing and adopting a tougher persona, one that is read as more “typically Jamaican” within Canadian culture.

In order to find acceptance and visibility within the queer community, David chose to try to sever ties with or hide aspects of his Caribbean identity. This disavowal—an active distancing of one’s self from one culture or community in order to gain acceptance and admission into another—is a common trope among research participants.

I would remove…I don’t know what the best way to say this is…there must be a word for this. To take away my [Caribbean] identity. To try not to identify with anyone who was [Caribbean] or West Indian anymore.

This erasure takes many forms, including actively trying to change his accent:

And the only way for me not to be part of that community was for me to change my accent, because the minute someone recognized my accent, I was immediately labeled, and immediately somebody would come up to me and ask me a question and say “Oh, you’re from [the Caribbean]!” and I wanted nothing to do with it. I didn’t want anyone to know. So that’s where I changed the accent to be more Canadian. More white, if you will.

Rodrigo is often conflicted by his identity as a gay Brazilian man in Toronto, in part due to stereotypes within the queer community about Latin men being stereotypically masculine and dominant. While he’s often had to downplay his feminine side and play up his masculine side in professional settings, he’s also realized that playing the role of the masculine Latin male has great currency within Toronto’s queer culture, though this comes at the expense of concealing his more feminine side:

I find it, in Toronto, much harder to find people that are actually okay with their identities in the sexual identity. I know that I’m not a hundred percent honest with my sexual identity. Not my sexual identity…I do become more feminine when I speak Portuguese, for example…But then it’s the kind of thing, that every time I act more feminine, I get looks. I play volleyball in the volleyball league. And
every time I do….I play volleyball in Brazil, and everyone’s a queen. Like the
guys, if they have this female player that they love, they call themselves the
player, and when they are going to serve, they do like the flick of the hair before
they serve it. No one really cares. Here, people care. People care about you being
feminine. It’s like, oh, it’s a feminine guy from Brazil! And then one day, the
whole sexual culture about being tops and bottoms. I find that everything is so
dichotomized here. Either you’re a top or a bottom. Either you’re feminine or
masculine. That…and I’m never at those extremes. I’m really in the middle. And I
like playing back and forth in it. So, yeah, and then I compartmentalize a lot of
my feminine side because of this pressure in masculinity in the gay community.

Rodrigo echoes many observations from participants about queer culture in
Toronto being dichotomized, either by gender, sexual, or racial identity. Rodrigo’s ability
to “play back and forth” is reminiscent of both Sophia and Brandon’s ability to express
gender differently according to the situation at hand. Rodrigo’s border-crossing within
spaces of desire extends to his current relationship with an older, white man in Toronto.
After several earlier failed relationships, Rodrigo insists on a polyamorous relationship
with his current partner as a way to avoid what he feels is the compartmentalization and
dishonesty of many gay relationships in Toronto, which are focused on an outward
veneer of middle-class respectability that hide deception, betrayal, and mistrust:

And I’ve always—not always—but he told me about the concept of polyamory.
And I started to search for it. And I really really have that kind of feeling that I
did not want to compartmentalize my affection towards other people, which didn’t
exactly mean that my feelings toward one person would totally change with
another person in my life.

Rodrigo’s experience as a working-class queer many in Brazil—an identity he
shares with other queer Brazilian men whom he comes into contact with in Toronto—
make him well aware of the potential for queer relationships in Toronto between older
and younger men to revolve around the power exchange between money and youth.
Within Toronto’s gay culture, both have certain forms of currency, and Rodrigo notes
that he sees many young gay men negotiate arrangements of mutual benefit with older
“sugar daddies”. His desire to lead his own life honestly and authentically—traits that have made it more difficult for him to navigate the queer and corporate worlds, unlike David or Mark—nevertheless bring him personal comfort:

But I don’t have a problem of saying that the relationship between sugar daddies and their, like, boys, the power in the relationship is exerted through money. I see this a lot in Toronto. That’s a lot of like, people judge, and everything—the whole stereotype. But that’s what I see happening. The guy who has the money kind of gives it to the guy who doesn’t have money and that leads to an attachment to it, and that’s what I’ve always wanted to avoid.

Rodrigo’s experience, and those of Mark, Sophia, Brandon, and other participants, underlines Cantú’s assertion that identity is not only a social construction, but fluid and contingent, actively constructed and reconstructed according to specific social and spatial locations and the particular political economic context in which the subject finds herself. Certain spaces, places, moments, and relationships provide both discursive and material opportunities for Rodrigo to express certain aspects of his gender and class identity. In other situations, Rodrigo and others leverage moments of opportunity, small fractures and gaps within webs of power, in order to achieve particular emotional, sexual, social, or material goals. While certain forms of cultural capital allow some participants to more easily understand and spot these opportunities—Sophia and Mark, for example, have had prior education opportunities and mentors who have helped shape their understanding of upward mobility—others, like Rodrigo, have traded on the illusory performative aspects of their own bodies in order to negotiate such moments of strategic opportunity. In still other situations—like the case with Brandon—have a very clear, distinct vision of the desired future provides a type of sensitive antennae to opportunities that may be available along the journey.
CONCLUSION
QUEERING THE BORDERLANDS

Cantú and Anzaldúa both understand that for queer migrants, the “borderlands” between national and cultural boundaries provide moments in which “the incongruities of binary systems are made visible, as are the intersections of multiple marginal positions and relations of power” (Cantú, 29). The marginal queer subject, negotiating multiple and simultaneous webs of power, consciously and unconsciously re-draws his or her identity in order to comply with or resist ruling relations, and as an attempt to access the privileges and opportunities afforded by certain forms of citizenship.

My project demonstrates that regardless of sexual, gender, racial, class, or other identity markers, queer international students migrating to Toronto and southern Ontario face forms of implicit and explicit exclusions that act as barriers to accessing full citizenship and belonging. Using Smith’s concept of relations of ruling, we see how the construction and policing of what I term education and queer citizenship seek to replicate existing systems of power that privilege insiders and reify notions of ideal citizenship based on “Canadian-ness”, whiteness, idealized versions of masculinity and femininity, and a sense of corporatized, upward-mobility. Whether in the classroom, in the residence hall, in student clubs, at a gay bar, or within queer social spaces online, participants who did not conform to normative ideas of race, gender and class faced blatant or subtle barriers to inclusion and incorporation.

For many—though not all—students, Canada was initially positioned in the global imaginary as a queer utopia, an imagined egalitarian society where cultural, gender and sexual differences are respected and celebrated. Despite migrating to Canada in part to live more fully and more freely, all participants found their opinions of Canadian
diversity challenged and undermined upon arrival. Over time, both in education and queer spaces, in physical and virtual realms, participants grew to incorporate and in many ways internalize dominant values around whiteness, masculinity/femininity, and mobility. While some participants—such as Brandon and David—more wholeheartedly engaged in forms of cultural erasure and disavowal at certain moments as part of a process of adopting particular norms, others—such as Mark and Rodrigo—more actively resisted these normative pressures. Participant histories also demonstrate the surprising degree to which *homonormative* values elevating whiteness and rugged forms of masculinity are reified, policed and maintained within Canadian queer culture.

At the same time, stories of border-crossing among this cohort demonstrate the degree to which the body itself becomes a commodity to be traded transactionally within queer spaces in order to access more fully the benefits of queer citizenship. The degree to which skin colour, body type, and expressions of gender can be manipulated, altered, masked, or re-articulated provide significant opportunities to navigate a complex world of power that affords certain privileges, perks, and benefits. However, the punishing cost of such exchanges were also deeply observed. Feelings of inauthenticity, shame, disconnection and disembodiment are described at all stages of the journey of incorporation and exclusion. In some cases, acts of border-crossing, while resulting in particular material or social gains, came at the cost of reliving certain forms of trauma and experiencing profound alienation within and across social networks.

What do these lived experiences ultimately tell us about the intersection between queer migration and the global century?
For one, for young, privileged bodies, motion, movement, and mobility—Ahmed’s *lifelines* as the queer subject re-orientates itself in time and space—occur in both virtual and physical spaces. The virtual *imagining* of new ways of being and living and examples of renegotiating and rearticulating identity through border-crossing occurred for most participants well prior to the moment of physical departure, through engaging in online research, chat rooms, forums, video conversations, and other forms of virtual citizenship untethered to particular borders of the nation. Freed to *some extent* from national surveillance, these virtual spaces act as incubators where identity and forms of movement can be imagined and experimented with; where certain (be)longings can be explored; and where imaginings of home and community are multiple. These virtual *imaginaries*, however, are further examples of how Western cultural production and forms of global cultural capital mediate and re-inscribe local understandings of sexuality and sexual identity, particularly when local expressions of queer identity are cloaked in shame and silence. In the vacuum created by such silence, global forms of queer sexual identity take root, altering local forms of sexual expression, as Cantú, Jackson, Tang, and others have documented.

Importantly, this work takes into account a cohort of queer migrants whose relative privilege creates greater access to circular and flexible modes of mobility, as well as to online spaces, signaling how, in a future where surveillance and border policing only increase, certain forms of identity—such as class, educational attainment, and gender performance—may permit greater latitude for border-crossing than others. What happens to those bodies not able to follow certain *lifelines*? Or to those disconnected from the “promise” offered by the virtual world? Further research and conversations with
other categories of queer migrants—refugees, family-class migrants, or undocumented migrants—would explore this claim further and further illuminate the connection between economic privilege and flexible identity. Such a project would also provide a means for gauging how and in what ways queer bodies migrating to Canada may be used as “ammunition”—to use Puar’s term—in certain forms of homonationalism embedded within Canada’s current immigration regime, its foreign policy, and other bureaucratic structures constituting formal political power within the Canadian nation-state.

The findings here, while limited to an exploration of sub-national power regimes, nevertheless demonstrate with some clarity how homonormative forces—the unspoken, very powerful privileging of white, hyper-masculine, and upwardly mobile bodies—operate within and across Canadian spaces, even in so-called “progressive communities”. Such privileging positions an idealized form of the “good gay”, the ideal homo-citizen, whose path and access to informal types of citizenship in queer and education worlds, based on the embodied characteristics noted above, is much easier than his racialized, gender non-conforming peers. Such an observation is entirely consistent with the exclusionary practices of citizenship—often covert and hidden, sometimes explicit—identified throughout Canada’s history by Dhamoon, Staslius and Bakan, and others. The contribution of this study suggests that even while relatively economically privileged, young, highly educated, mobile bodies—those targeted by Canada’s immigration system as “ideal citizens”—may find themselves on a fast-track to Canadian citizenship, significant challenges remain in feeling “at home”, finding home, or developing an integrated, authentic sense of belonging within Canada and Canadian spaces.
Put differently, while many participants—Sophia, Brandon, Rodrigo, Shameel, and others—were drawn by the allure of the Western metropole, positioned by Western popular culture and global media as an egalitarian space of sexual freedom—mobile queer bodies continue to carry with them traces and echoes of home, as Ahmed has observed. These embodied forms of home, these cultural and social memories of belonging, seeing, and being in the world—the various *queer ontologies* that mark us both as unique individuals and members of various collectives, whether cultural, national, religious, or otherwise—do not disappear when we cross national or virtual borders. Rather these memories, these psychic and emotional *ruins*, to borrow Stoler’s term, continue to animate our conscious and unconscious desires and experiences of love, home, family, and the future, remaining deeply embedded within our moment-to-moment experiences of the world. As queer international students come into contact with often hidden regimes of power within education and queer spaces within Toronto, and experience ruling relations according to particular intersectional axes of difference, they draw on this storehouse of experiences and memories—often coded and embedded within the body itself—in order negotiate and barter for hidden and unspoken citizenship privileges routinely denied on the basis of skin colour, gender expression, body type, accent, and other markers of identity. Why certain bodies and certain subjects have a *relatively* easier time accessing certain forms of citizenship and belonging rests both with the ability of the individual to identify and locate gaps within such power regimes—an ability developed through leveraging already existing forms of education, cultural, and social capital—but also with the subject’s ability to exploit such gaps through acts of conscious border-crossing. In this way, as Smith, Cantú, Anzaldúa, and others attest, the
subject is an active agent, resisting power in one context, complying in another, according to the situation, but always with a conscious or unconscious strategic imperative in mind.

In the end, what seems to set this cohort apart is a certain resilience based on their ability to imagine and narrate a future version of identity. This futurity aligns with Ahmed’s understanding of how bodies move towards objects and experiences and in turn become, in part, that which we align ourselves with. Similarly, this ability to reconsider and rearticulate future versions of ourselves carries Stoler’s ruins forward into Manalansan’s elsewhereness of belonging, an always unknown space and place that nonetheless provides a quiet, underground sonar signal for who we are set to become.
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APPENDIX A: Pre-Interview Questionnaire

The following will be used as a short, pre-interview series of questions designed to select a sample size as outlined in the Methods section. Questions will be asked through a brief telephone or in-person conversation.

1) If you are currently a university or college student, please indicate the following:
   - Institution
   - Program
   - Year of Study

2) If you’re a university or college graduate, please indicate the following:
   - Institution(s)
   - Program(s) completed
   - Year(s) of graduation

3) Which country/countries did you live in prior to studying in Canada?

4) Which country/countries do you consider “home”?

5) Please describe your ethnic background.

6) Current status in Canada
   - Citizen
   - Permanent resident
   - Student visa
   - Other

7) Gender
   - Male
   - Female
   - Other
   - Prefer not to say
APPENDIX B: List of Sample Interview Questions

Opening

Tell me about yourself.

How long have you been in Canada?

What do you do now?

A: Experiences of Migration to Canada

1. Why factors influenced your decision to study in Toronto? Had you been considering alternate locations? [PROBE: How did you find out about ____ ?]

2. How would you describe your sexual identity before you came to Canada? [PROBE: Were you out to your family and friends? Did you identify with any particular label? Do you remember when you first became aware of your sexual identity?]

3. Were there challenges you faced with your sexual identity in ____ ?

4. In what ways, if any, did your sexual identity intersect with or come into conflict with other parts of your identity? For example, race, gender, class… [PROBE: Can you talk about a particular experience when you felt parts of yourself were in conflict before you came to Canada?]

5. In what ways, if any, do you think your sexual identity played in your decision to study in Canada?

6. How did you imagine life in Canada as an LGBTQ student? Were there certain images, dreams, hopes or expectations you carried? [F/U Were there
certain experiences you hoped to have in Canada that you could not have at home?]

7. In what ways has your impression of Canada and its treatment of LGBTQ people changed once you were living here as a student?

8. How would you describe your sexual identity at this point in time? Has this understanding changed over time? [Why, how, can you give an example?]

9. Thinking about your social life and sense of belonging in Toronto, what’s like to be an LGBTQ international student here? [PROBE: In what ways did your sexuality play in these memories?]

10. Are there particular highlights or memories you want to share?

11. Were there identifiable low points or challenges, specifically related to social networks or your own sense of belonging? How did you respond?

12. What role do you feel your status as an international student played in your sense of belonging in Toronto? [PROBE: Can you think of a particular experience or memory that illustrates this experience?]

13. In what ways do you feel your identity as an LGBTQ person played in your sense of belonging in …? [PROBE: Can you think of a particular experience or memory that illustrates this experience?]

14. Tell me more about your social and personal networks in Toronto—both queer and non-queer—during your time as a student. How did you meet and connect with other people?
15. What types of campus organizations or support groups did you access?  
[FOLLOW-UP: If none, why not? If yes, what was your experience of connecting to these groups as an LGBTQ international student?]

16. How did you or do you connect with the “gay community” in Toronto? What experiences have you had in this community?

17. Have you felt connected to the broader community? [FOLLOW-UP: If not, why? Are there other communities you feel more connected to in Toronto?]

18. How, in your opinion, has the experience of living in Toronto as an LGBTQ international student changed over time?

19. What has the experience of applying for permanent residency and/or citizenship been like for you, with specific regards to your identity as an LGBTQ international student or graduate? (if applicable)

B: Border-Crossing

1. How would you identify your sexuality at this point in time? [PROBE: particular label or understanding?]

2. How does your sexuality intersect with or come into conflict with other parts of your identity at this point in time? For example, do you feel you need to make particular allowances

3. Can you tell me about a time when you’ve had to hide or protect a part of yourself in Toronto? (PROBE: Experiences based on sexuality, gender, race, or other forms of identity?)
4. Can you talk about a specific way you feel you’ve needed to make an adjustment to your life here in order to succeed or belong? Were there any trade-offs or sacrifices have you felt you’ve needed to make?

5. When you were/or while you are at university/college, can you think of a time you’ve needed to present yourself in a way that felt inauthentic? For example, have you had to hide, play down, or alter any parts of your identity to fit in? Can you talk about that?

6. If and when you’ve attending or been part of events in the gay community, what ways have you felt included or excluded? How have you responded?

7. Has your status as an international student played a role in how you interact with others in the LGBTQ community?

8. How do you feel about your life in Toronto when you return home? [F/U: What role do you think your sexuality plays in this understanding?]

9. Do you feel your understanding of your sexual identity has changed since the time you first arrived in Canada? Does how you present your sexuality change when you return home?

10. What is it like to return to Toronto after you have been back home?