Settler Nation-Building Through Immigration as a Rationale for Higher Education:

A Critical Discourse Analysis

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Canada's 'Edu-gration' System:

When Education Becomes an Immigration Pathway

P2P 2023 National Conference

Photo by David Ball, in Fortier, C. (2015). No One Is Illegal, Canada is Illegal! Negotiating the relationships between settler colonialism and border imperialism through political slogans. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society.*

Shifting roles of Canadian higher education (HE)

- Canada **dependent on international students**:
  - expenditures (GAC, 2019)
  - economic immigration and the domestic labour market (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2019)

- International students seen as **'ideal' immigrants**

  - (Tremblay, 2005; Williams et al., 2015; Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017)

- HE institutions now important **immigration governance actors**

  - indirect selection (Ferrer, Picot, & Riddell, 2014; Flynn & Bauder, 2014)

  - direct selection (Brunner, 2017; Schinnerl, 2021)

  - indirect retention (Bozheva, 2020b)

Settler nation-building through 'edugration'

- (Global/border) imperialism
  - e.g., Chen & Barnett, 2000; Bauder, 2003; Enslin & Hedge, 2008; Lee & Kim, 2010; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Blachford & Zhang, 2014; Reisberg & Rumbley, 2014; Stein & Andreotti, 2017; Wyly & Dhillon, 2018; McCartney, 2020
  - Border imperialism: the **process of policing who is included/excluded in the nation-state** through (geographical and citizenship) borders (Walia, 2013)

- (Domestic) settler colonialism
  - e.g., Wolfe, 2006; Johnstone & Lee, 2014; Kaplan, 2015; Chatterjee, 2019; Stein, 2019; Gomez, 2020; Sharma, 2020
  - Migration studies "routinely fails to consider **the constitutive role played by settler colonialism in the development of settler states** and their societies," assuming that "people cross borders, rather than borders crossing peoples" (Ellermann & O'Heran, 2021, p. 21)

Rationales for higher education (HE)

- HE generally
  - Originally to train ruling, religious, military, and other service **elites** (Perkin, 2006), in the service of the state and imperial/colonial power
  - Modern justification for publicly-supported Western HE was **benefit to the public**
  - Post-WWII human capital theories → HE primarily **benefits *individuals*, who should pay for it** (Bloom et al., 2006)

- Internationalization of HE specifically
  - **Revenue-generation** (Viczko & Tascón, 2016) with **symbolic benefits** (e.g., cross-cultural understanding, diversity) (Buckner et al., 2020)
  - Some discussion of an enrolment solution in regions with declining populations (Buckner et al., 2020)

Higher education's involvement in immigration policy formation

- Gradual **increase in lobbying influence** (Bozheva 2020a; Schinnerl, 2021)
  - Faster, less restrictive processing/approval of study permits
  - Pan-Canadian approach to marketing Canada as a study destination
  - Provide easier access to Canada's labour market
  - Advocating for clear/easy pathways for international student permanent residency (PR) options

Methodology

- **Critical discourse analysis** (CDA)
  - revealing/altering inequitable conditions
  - social performativity of language
  - standpoints are never neutral/always contextually-embedded (Mullet, 2018)
- Popular in education research, particularly HE and educational policy (Rogers et al., 2016)
- Used to explore HE discourse re: international students
  - media constructions of imperialism (Rhee & Sagaria, 2004)
  - federal international education strategies (Trilokekar & El Masri, 2017)
  - HE responses to immigration policy (George Mwangi, 2019)
  - university marketing web pages (Lewin-Jones, 2019)

Methodology (continued)

- Modified version of **Mullet's (2018)** Generic Analytical Framework
  - Based on 1990s CDA scholarship (Fairclough, Kress, Van Leeuwen, Van Dijk, and Wodak)
- **Clarke and Braun (2014)** thematic analysis

Table 1. CDA stages and application, adapted from Mullet (2018).

Stage of analysis	Application
Stage 1: Select the discourse	Selected HE institutions' positioning of IS in their responses to COVID-19
Stage 2: Locate and prepare data sources	Selected 48 Pre-budget Consultation Submissions to the House of Commons of Canada Standing Committee on Finance in advance of the 2021 budget
Stage 3: Explore the background of each text	Considered the social and historical context of pre-budget consultation submissions, e.g., its intended audience and purpose, production process, etc.
Stage 4: Identify overarching themes	After reading and re-reading the selected texts, used thematic analysis to identify four overarching (discursive) themes
Stages 5: Analyze the external relations in the texts (interdiscursivity)	Considered the social practices, social norms, and social structures between the texts
Stage 6: Analyze the internal relations in the texts	Considered the 'patterns, words, and linguistic devices that represent power relations, social context (e.g., events, actors, or locations), or … positionalities' (Mullet, 2018, p. 124)
Stage 7: Interpret the data	Put the 'structural features and individual fragments … into the broader context and themes established' (Mullet, 2018, p. 122) and connected them to other discourses, e.g., nation-building

Data source

- **Pre-budget consultation submissions** to the Canadian House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

  - Submitted annually

  - Up to 2000 words

  - Offers organizations a "chance to go on record with what [they] care about" (Johnson & Therrien, 2020)

  - Some previous use in research on the Canadian internationalization policy process (Viczko & Tascón, 2016; Bozheva, 2020a)
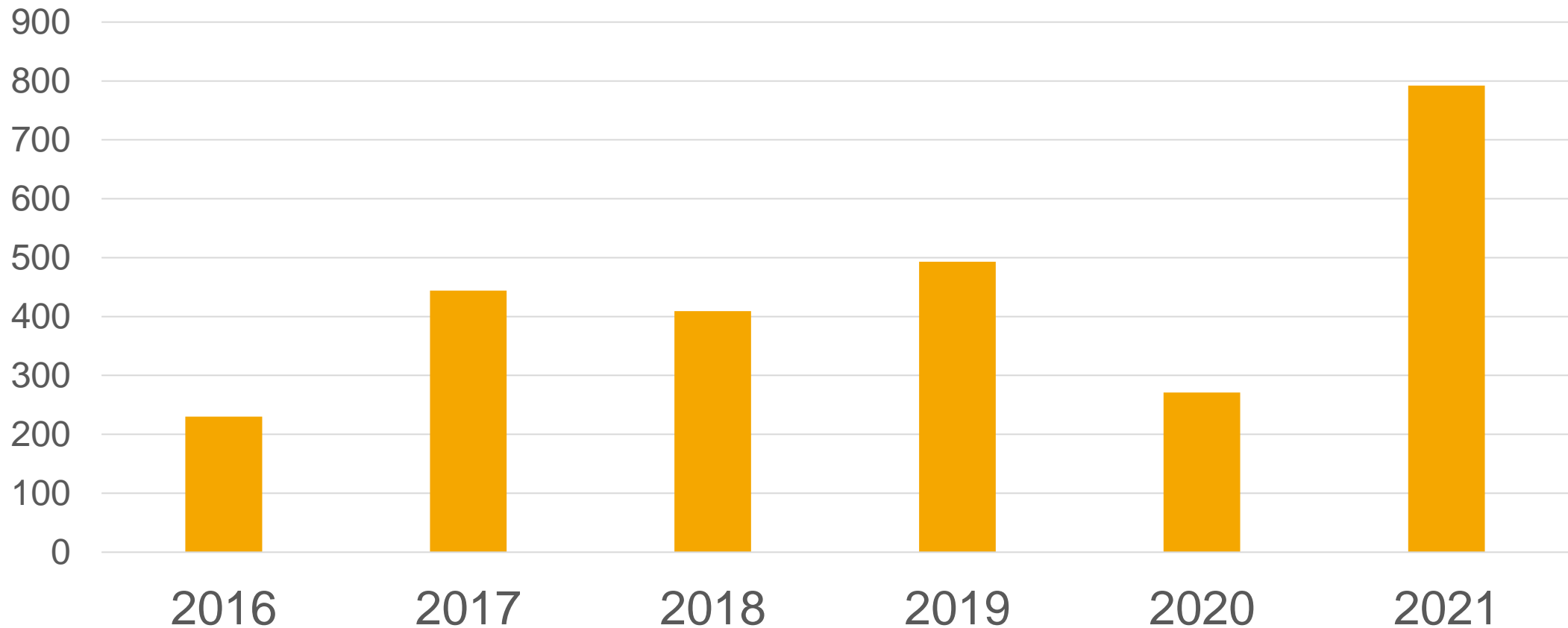
Data source (continued)

- **2021 pre-budget consultation**

  - Due August 7, 2020

  - Theme: "Investing in Tomorrow: Canadian Priorities for Economic Growth and Recovery"

  - "of particular importance," given the COVID-19 pandemic's "tremendous challenges" (House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, 2020, para. 2)

  - 792 written briefs submitted

Number of pre-budget consultation written briefs submitted, 2016-2021 budgets

Source: Canadian House of Commons

Data source (continued)

- Study focuses on **48 written briefs**, submitted by:
  - HE institutions (27, 22 of which were universities)
  - HE associations (9)
  - HE student organizations and associations (6)
  - Additional organizations discussing 'international students' (6)

Limitations

- Not all relevant organizations submitted briefs
  - e.g. Canadian Bureau for International Education, Languages Canada
- Snapshot in time
- Not a comprehensive analysis of briefs; only focusing on the discourse regarding international students
- Particular type of document (rationale for public funding, favorable policies, etc.) for a particular audience (federal government)

# Some had no discussion of 'international students'

- 14 (29%) contained **no** mention of international students
  - 2 funding requests for specific construction projects
  - 2 national associations
  - 2 student associations
  - 6 universities (some with high % of international students)
  - 2 Indigenous-governed institutions

Results:
4 discursive themes

Discursive theme 1: HE's economic dependence on international students
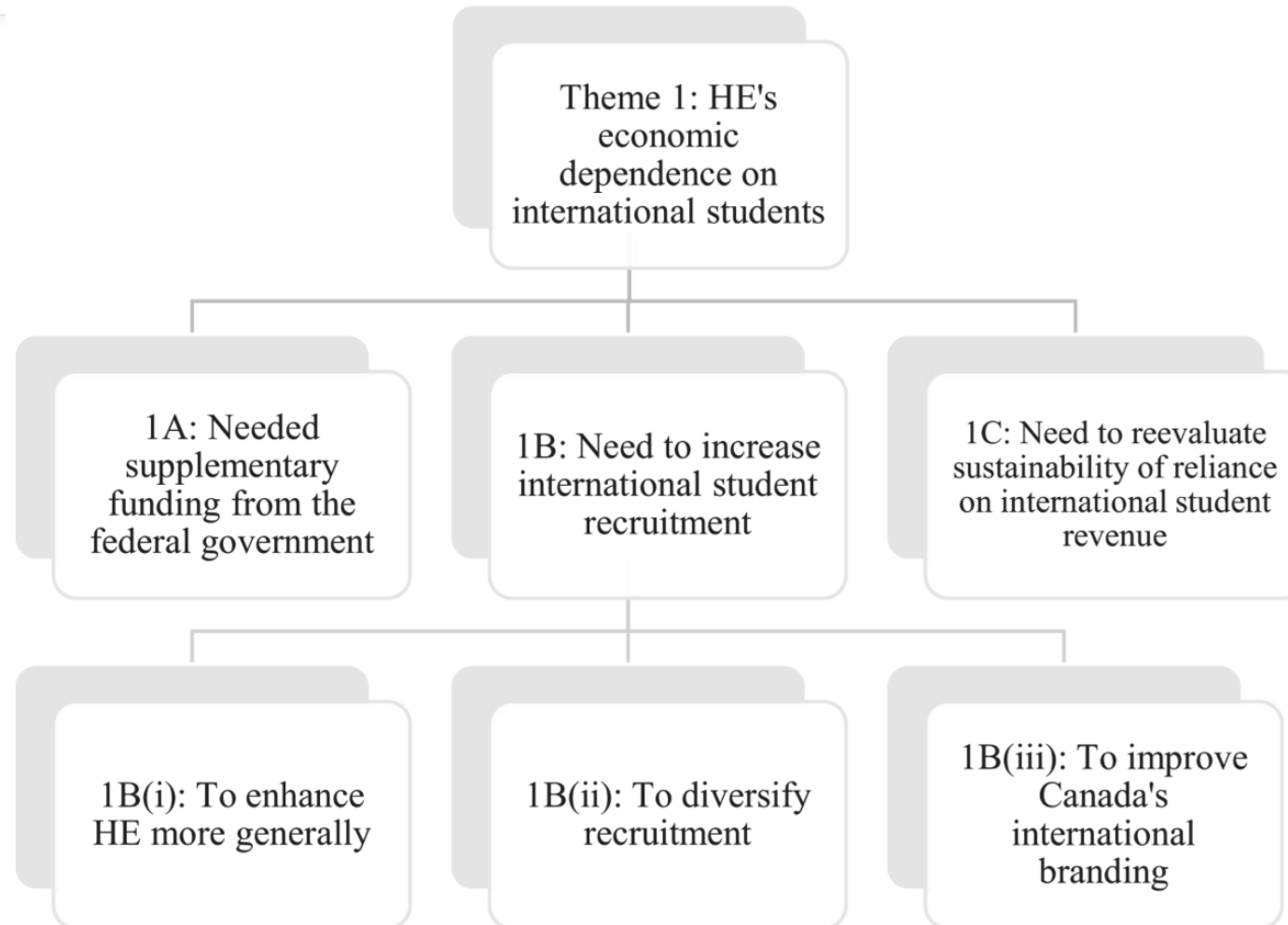
Discursive theme 2: International students as valuable national subjects

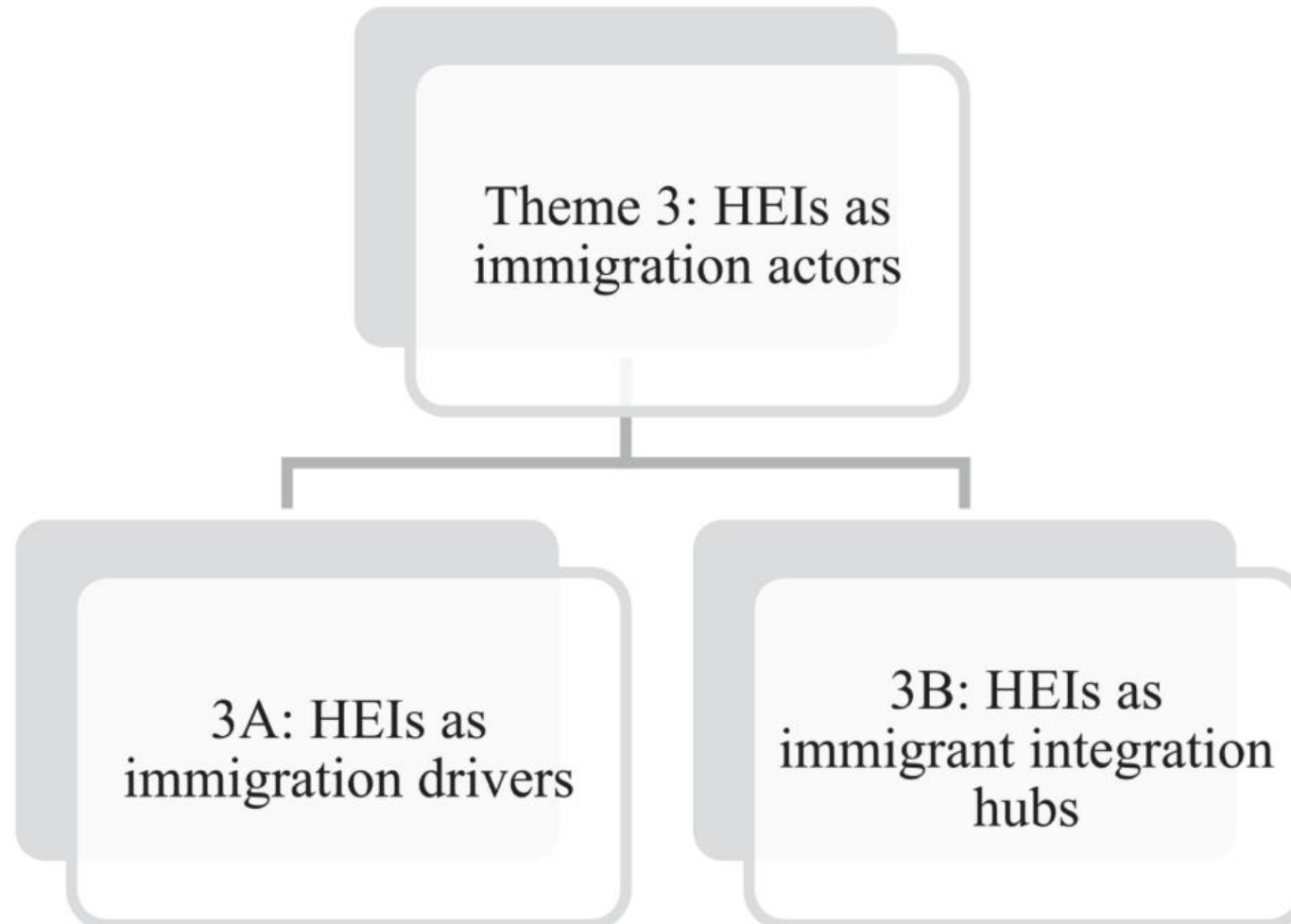
Theme 2: IS as valuable national subjects

2A: To national economic growth

2B: To nation building through immigration

2C: To regional economic growth and revitalization

2D: To Francophone immigration objectives

Discursive theme 3: HE institutions as immigration actors

Subtheme 3A: HE institutions as immigration drivers

Association of Atlantic Universities

- "As Atlantic Canada's universities attract proportionally higher than average numbers of international and out-of-province students, the provision of high quality, smart housing and residence facilities **are critical to our success in supporting immigration** and regional population growth."

Lakehead University

- "Lakehead University has focused on **increasing international enrolment with a goal of developing a highly skilled workforce** in the regions we serve."

University of Manitoba

- "These investments will **bring new students and potential immigrants** to regions of Canada hard-hit by the pandemic and will help stabilize Canadian universities while protecting against future disruptions."

L'Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)

- Its members' "educational mandate...is balanced with its roles as an economic driver and an **immigration hub**"

# **Subtheme 3B:** HE institutions as immigrant integration hubs

Université du Québec,
- "**post-secondary studies helps effectively integrate students into the host society**; these students may then choose to immigrate to Canada"

L'Association des collèges et universités de la francophonie canadienne (ACUFC)
- "**member institutions have succeeded in welcoming and integrating foreign students** [and] continued to improve the structures required to receive more immigrants"

Discursive theme 4: Gaps in international student supports
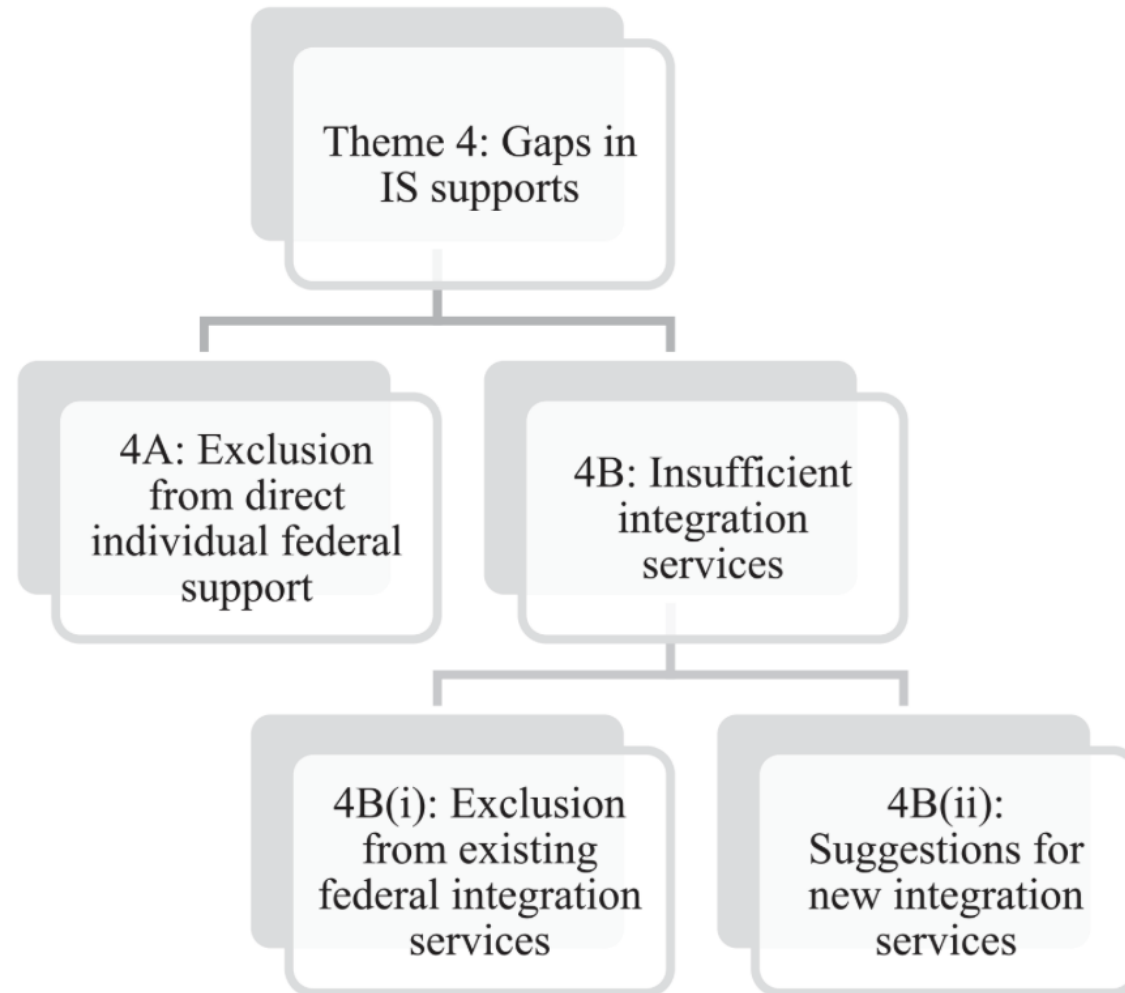
Analysis and interpretation

- Three interrelated discursive themes:
  - the importance of Canadian HE to Canadian society
  - the vulnerability of Canadian HE
  - the centrality of HE in 'building back a better' post-COVID-19 pandemic Canada
- Reproduction of broader neoliberal, state-centric, zero-sum discourses
- Extractive, instrumental, and dehumanizing language used to describe international students as objects/resources

Analysis and interpretation

- **HE institutions instrumentalized international students** to position themselves as vulnerable yet valuable actors
- HE's role in **recruiting IS framed as beneficial to the Canadian settler nation-building project** of attracting 'desirable' immigrants
- HE institutions framed themselves as playing a **partnership-like role in immigration** & **deserving of federal support**
- **Everyday practices of imperialism and colonialism** which have become so common-sense, their constitutive nature can be difficult to perceive (Grande, 2018; McCartney, 2020)

A RECOVERY PLAN FOR JOBS, GROWTH, AND RESILIENCE

BUDGET 2021

Once public health allows, we will seize the opportunity to draw even more talented, highly skilled people to Canada, including international students, to drive growth and create jobs.

Investments in this budget will support an immigration system that is easier to navigate, and more efficient in welcoming the dynamic new Canadians who add to our country's strength.

Building a Better, Fairer Canada

Our government has made progress in righting the historic wrongs in Canada's relationship with Indigenous Peoples. But we have a lot of work still ahead.

It's important to note that Indigenous peoples have led the way in battling COVID-19. This success is a credit to Indigenous leadership and self-governance.

Source: Canadian federal budget (p. 23)

Brunner, L. R. (2023). Settler nation-building through immigration as a rationale for higher education: A critical discourse analysis. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 42(5), 1086-1102. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2023.2193732

Thank you!

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