Old and Dangerous: Bordering Older Migrants’ Mobilities, Rejuvenating the Post-Welfare State

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Caught in the cross-hairs of perceived crises of aging populations, increasing migration flows, and social welfare sustainability, older migrants are often not welcome in post-welfare states. Employing a feminist border analysis, Canada’s relatively generous immigration policies on parent and grandparent entry are analyzed to show the ways in which older people’s mobilities are bordered, who is most affected, and why this bordering is worthy of attention. We show links between these policies and Canada’s national rejuvenation project that aims to externalize and privatize both the costs and labor of social reproduction, limiting state contributions.

Introduction

In the last decade, post-welfare state rhetoric has proclaimed three related crises that imperil welfare program sustainability. The first is demographic aging, the second is increasing migration flows, and the third is the escalating costs of social welfare provision. In Canada, the antidote to these three crises is a post-welfare state “rejuvenation,” in which immigration policies aim to admit a flood of young, educated immigrants expected to secure a prosperous future for the nation. Yet, their parents and grandparents who wish to migrate to join them are caught in the cross-hairs of policies aiming to stem these crises, and experience significant barriers to entry. Indeed, permanent migration for older immigrants is framed as economically “dangerous” to the post-welfare state, based on perspectives that older immigrants will “take” public health care and pensions, while contributing few taxes. This position, frequently articulated by the former Conservative federal...
government in power from 2006 to 2015, has been maintained by subsequent Liberal government despite a new rhetoric of welcome. The result has been further reductions in permanent immigrations for parents and grandparents (Blatchford 2019), while temporary migration has been both expanded and stratified.

In what follows, we explore this bordering of older migrants and what it reveals about post-welfare state rejuvenation in the context of the global restructuring of social reproduction (Truong 1996). Responding to both calls for “the articulation of labor and family migrations” (Kofman 2012, 151) and the need for “novel conceptual analyses” that can assess “new forms of stratification” resulting from policy responses to migration (Kofman and Raghuram 2015, 5), we develop a feminist border analysis to reveal the border controls that police older migrants’ mobilities while also producing social reproductive stratifications that fall out to divide along lines of age, gender, race, class, and citizenship. This examination of older family migrants’ differential forms of entry reveals that the emphasis on recruiting employable, productive, younger immigrants in Canadian labor immigration policy includes an externalization of state inputs to social reproduction associated with birth, raising, and educating these younger adults. Canada increasingly recruits immigrants as workers produced via external social reproduction inputs of from parents, families, and countries of origin. At the same time, Canadian policy aims to ensure that these parents’ and grandparents’ needed social reproductive inputs associated with later life are maintained external to Canada’s supposedly fragile welfare programs.

Our project both contributes to and addresses gaps in the extensive literature on transnational (grand) parenting (for example, Baldassar 2007; Deneva et al. 2017; Parreñás 2005; Walsh and Näre 2016). Many analyses have shown how transnational families negotiate migration to maintaining kinship networks, stretching their interdependencies between sending and receiving countries (Horn 2017). This research includes accounts of migrating parents and grandparents who both receive and give care (Zickgraf 2016) across and despite borders. These analyses tend to focus on the multidirectional exchanges that maintain transnational families, backgrounding the policies that produce transnational family forms and the interests these policies reflect. Some research has criticized the existing narrow policy definition of who counts as family, due to assumptions that “family” is always a nuclear one (Chen and Thorpe 2015). These authors show how this definition ignores evolving cultural models of grandparenthood, such as the role of grandmothers in Russia’s matrifocal families (Utrata 2018) and intergenerational care in some South African families (Makiwane et al. 2018). There have been some interventions that attend to the swiftly changing, politically contentious policy mechanisms in receiving countries (Askola 2016; Chen and Thorpe 2015; Ferrer 2015) that shape and contain “care circulations” (Baldassar and Merla 2014), but these analyses tend to leave to one side the links between labor and family migration.
policies. Most of this research and analysis points to the gendered nature of transnational parent and grandparent migration, with grandmothers taking on the majority of the physical, emotional, and cultural work involved in supporting their children and grandchildren (Dossa and Coe 2017).

Our analysis begins with a feminist political economy framework, drawn from the literature on social reproduction and migration (Kofman 2012; Kofman and Raghuram 2015; Williams 2010). Feminist political economy understands production and social reproduction as analytic concepts that help to distinguish the production of goods and services for profit from the daily and generational reproduction of workers and their families. These concepts help to unpack the historically situated political, economic, and social relations of global capitalism as they shape and are shaped by everyday life, restructuring both production and social reproduction in the process. Social reproduction, then, includes not only household and community contributions to care and domestic work but also state welfare programs, including health care, education, pensions and social assistance, child care and long-term care, as well as market involvement in this sphere. Taken up with this lens, gender, race, class, ability, sexuality, and age are understood as social relations, rather than categories, that take shape and shift with developments in capitalism (Braedley and Luxton 2010, 2015).

In order to assess how receiving states operate to shape immigration while externalizing social reproduction, we integrate into this feminist political economy framework a variety of insights from the field of critical border studies (Balibar 2001; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013; Ong 2006). Borders are understood not only as a set of control mechanisms but as a set of policies, institutions, and practices that decide who gets to enter, under which conditions, and for how long. We deploy the concept of bordering as an essential activity of nation-states, shaped by and shaping relations of production and social reproduction under capitalism (Mezzadra and Neilson 2013). Borders have long figured in fostering global political and socio-economic boundaries, producing distinctions between “us” and “them.” Indeed, the modern state is predicated upon what Torpey (2000) famously called the “monopolization of the legitimate means of movement.” Borders underpin states’ capacity to enact sovereignty over a territory and its population, which can then be “embraced” by distributing select rights and privileges. Historically, access to state-operated social welfare—including public services such as education, health care, and social security—depended not only on residing in a country but also on becoming an acknowledged legal member of the polity. Borders have therefore operated to produce both social welfare subjects and social reproductive limits.

Drawing on Mezzadra and Neilson’s (2013, viii) suggestion that borders offer an “epistemic angle,” we explore how Canadian bordering practices police the mobility of older family migrants and why it matters. This feminist border analysis allows us to trace how both intergenerational proximity and social
reproduction are differentially produced, limited, and/or prevented for immigrant families along lines of citizenship and immigration status, gender, race, class, and age, shaping barriers to the kinds of intergenerational care exchanges and social welfare benefits that not only support social reproduction but also that are taken for granted by those whose families share a common citizenship.

We consider the borders on immigrants’ parents and grandparents at a moment in which post-welfare states and the supranational organizations to which they belong have joined in producing a discourse that frames the growing proportion of population who are older people as a disaster, with catastrophic implications for economic productivity, welfare state sustainability, and inter-generational solidarity (Gee and Gutman 2000; Kershaw and Anderson 2016; Lee and Mason 2017). Calculations of “dependency ratios” abound, based on the assumption that older people, children and others excluded from or unable to do paid work are a net drain on the post-welfare state (Folbre and Nelson 2000; OECD 2015). At this precise moment, increasing migratory flows have brought many potential welfare subjects to knock on post-welfare state doors (Ugelvik 2013). Finally, the 2008 economic crisis, that both dropped GDP and increased the number of residents claiming social welfare benefits in many jurisdictions, stimulated many post-welfare state governments to introduce austerity programs that continue to constrain social welfare spending while propping up capital accumulation (Adema et al. 2014).

In Canadian portrayals of this triple crisis, immigrants have been configured as both the magic bullet that will solve the problems of aging populations and welfare spending and as an additional burden. An emphasis on younger immigrants has been a hallmark of the Trudeau Liberals, elected in 2015, together with evocations of Canada as a hospitable state. Announcing the most ambitious immigration targets in decades in November 2017, Immigration Minister Ahmed Hussen made the reasons clear. “Our government believes that newcomers play a vital role in our society. Five million Canadians are set to retire by 2035 and we have fewer people working to support seniors and retirees” (Harris et al. 2017). This is not a reference to the increasingly immigrant care labor force in Canada who are employed in various kinds of long-term care work (Browne and Braun 2008). Rather, this is the promise that immigrants will rejuvenate the nation by filling labor market gaps, paying taxes to support social welfare programs, tipping the demographic scale, and catalyzing productivity and innovation. Implicit in this discourse is an assumption that immigrants will be young, working age adults. Canada’s well-known immigration “points” system ensures this outcome, where out of a maximum possible 110 “age grid” points (allotted to those between twenty and twenty-nine), those under eighteen or forty-five and over get zero points (Canada). There are also special provisions to support naturalization for international students studying in Canada (Shen 2016). Furthermore, in the last
decade, recruitment programs have tripled the number of international students, and Canada now ranks fourth in the world for admissions of international students, behind the United States, the United Kingdom, and China (El-Assel 2018).

As a problem, immigrants to Canada are portrayed as using inordinate amounts of social welfare services due to high levels of relative poverty, poor health outcomes, and needs for settlement and education services (Grady and Grubel 2015; Reitmanova et al. 2015). They are also perceived as presenting security risks, especially in the case of Arab and Muslim immigrants (Arat-Koç 2017). These lines of argument are deployed to support both immigration controls and arguments that social welfare programs are unsustainable.

Caught in these contradictions of migration, aging, and social welfare sustainability-related moral panics, older migrants have been rendered “dangerous” to the post-welfare state, first as migrants who may use high levels of social welfare; second as adding to the population of older people who are similarly perceived as high social welfare users; and finally, as undeserving foreigners who have not “paid in” to these social welfare schemes over their lifetimes. In what follows, we situate our case by providing a brief history of Canadian policies concerning older family members and then present our analysis of the tools, processes, and consequences associated with bordering practices that stem the flow of older migrants in light of post-welfare state concerns. We assess immigration policy assumptions together with available data to provide an analysis of the production of differential conditions for social reproduction among immigrants to Canada, with attention to the relations of gender, race, class, and age. Finally, we return to Canada’s rejuvenation project, to consider the contradictions inherent in the bordering of older person’s mobilities.

Limited Hospitality: A Brief History of Canadian Policy on Parent and Grandparent Immigration

The history of parent and grandparent immigration programs is emblematic of Canada’s immigration policy shifts.1 Canada has a relatively generous immigration plan for parents and grandparents and is one of the few countries in the world where this type of family reunification is possible. Indeed, the program is used to market Canada to potential desirable economic class migrants, and one quarter of the economic migrants landed in 2000 have sponsored a family member—a spouse, child, or parent/grandparent—to join them (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014).

Family reunification has been permitted in Canada since 1908, but parents and grandparents were only recognized as a legitimate group for family reunification in 1956 (DeShaw 2006). Since the end of WWII, family reunification has been based on sponsorship, which requires families to assume certain
responsibilities to “care for” their sponsored relatives. Until 1962, race, gender, and age remained overt criteria of selection in immigration policy. Daniel (2005, 685) has pointed out that although there were no age limits for European parents and grandparents, African and Asian Canadians’ parents could not be sponsored when younger than sixty (for women) or sixty-five (for men).

Asserting that family reunification facilitated immigrant integration, Canada’s generous post WWII family reunification policies deployed a family concept that included a broad range of relatives. But during the 1970s, this generosity began to shift due to concerns about the chain migration of non-dependent relatives. Although ethnic and immigrant community activists challenged the shift to a family concept limited to the nuclear family, defined as spouse, children, and grandparents, in 1976, this concept was embedded in a new immigration policy. Family-based immigration continued to make up between 40 and 50 percent of total immigration in the late 1970s, demonstrating an ongoing commitment to reunification (DeShaw 2006). At this juncture, parent and grandparent sponsorship had not yet emerged as a policy concern. “[I]mmediate family and elderly parents and grandparents seemed to have occupied an unquestionable legitimacy in the political project of family reunification” (Chen and Thorpe 2015, 86). Parents and grandparents came to Canada and were able to access social welfare programs once residency was established, including social security, health care, housing, and other benefits.

Meanwhile, economic elites argued that immigration policy should more closely align with labor market needs (Daniel 2005). A further shift in “who counts as family” emerged in a series of policy changes and reports during the 1980s and 90s. Restrictions on parent and grandparent immigration began in the 1990s, at the same time as concerns emerged about Canada’s dropping fertility rate. Since this period, immigration has led population growth in Canada (Ley and Heibert 2001).

A 2001 reworking of the 1976 legislation culminated in the Immigration and Refugee Act (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998) that replaced a concept of “closeness” with “dependence” as a criterion for family reunification (Chen and Thorpe 2015). This Act, aimed to address security concerns emerging in the post September 11, 2001 period, provided only outlines of policy in many areas. Details of design and regulation were left to the discretion of the Executive Branch and especially the Minister of Immigration (Kelley and Trebilcock 1998, 425).

Subsequently, the Canadian immigration landscape became increasingly complicated with a proliferation of immigrant categories and administrative tools at both the federal and provincial levels, designed and implemented without parliamentary oversight. One result has been that the Parent and Grandparent Sponsorship Program (PGP) has become further distinguished from other family class sponsorships, concurrent with a policy emphasis on
attracting economic class immigrants, a related delegitimization of family class immigrants (Dobrowolsky 2017) and, recently, an increasing effort to recruit international students with Canadian education or work experience (Sá and Sabzalieva 2018). Migration possibilities for parents and grandparents have also shifted to promote temporary migration for older family members. The Executive Branch of the federal government has used its regulatory discretion, including the deployment of old and new border controls, to limit and control parent and grandparent migration to Canada in an ongoing effort to border social welfare.

**Bordering Social Welfare**

Social welfare controls are usually understood as the program-specific rules and regulations that limit access to benefits and programs, including rules that prevent access to new immigrants in what is sometimes called “welfare chauvinism” (Banting 2010). But immigration policy and programs are also doing much of this work. We conceptualize border controls as tools that police the limits of the post-welfare state, controls that are increasingly configured through an enforcement and criminalization paradigm. In Canada, this paradigm has increasingly seeped into immigration policy, intersecting with social welfare policy in ways that produce vulnerable migrants as concurrent security and social welfare risks (Abu-Laban 2009; Pratt and Valverde 2002).

It is now widely accepted that contemporary border controls require an analysis that goes beyond traditional understandings of borders as geopolitical demarcations (Jones et al. 2017). Borders have now become complex, diffuse sets of mechanisms, policies, regulations, and technologies that both outsource and internalize migration controls (Menjívar 2014). They involve an increasing number of actors in policing, migration, border, and security roles, all who have a say in deciding who will be allowed in (and who should be expelled), for how long, and under what conditions. As one example, some immigration controls outside territorial borders, such as visa processing, have been outsourced to for-profit companies, with final decisions made by immigration bureaucrats (Infantino 2016; Satzewich 2015). In some jurisdictions where off-shore islands are being used as immigration detention centres, border and correctional officers work together with private security guards to keep asylum-seekers out of the public eye (Mountz 2015). Borders also creep inside geopolitical borders through, for instance, local police involvement in irregular migrant detection (Provine et al. 2016) and increased recourse to deportations.

Thus, bordering is not only about “security”; it is a continually constituting activity of post-welfare states as immigration societies. These states’ significant public investment in internal and external bordering activities is reshaping the politics of belonging within them (Balibar 2001). While much of the literature
on borders emphasizes their increasingly restrictive consequences, a few scholars have examined how borders also favor the mobility of the globally privileged. Border categorizations divide unwanted migrants from “bona fide travelers” (Franko Aas 2011) and then distinguish bona fide travelers into a range of categorizations, dependent on security risk, economic reasons, or other concerns such as easing ever-increasing airport traffic. Bordering activities are worthy of attention in considering immigration matters, as they filter the social at a global scale.

In this feminist border analysis, we push these understandings of borders further. We interrogate the relations of gender, class, race, and age as shaped by bordering activities, particularly in terms of their impact on the social reproductive limits placed on families through restrictions on entry and on access to social benefits; access that in many ways is central to notions of belonging in post-welfare states.

As we develop our analysis of the Canadian case with a focus on parent and grandparent migration, we acknowledge that post-welfare states do not use the same tools to border social welfare, yet social welfare protection is a primary goal of border control. In Sweden, for example, strict border controls barring entry were enacted in 2016, following the arrival of high numbers of refugees. Barkers’ (2018) analysis reveals how Swedes came to see complete border closure as a necessity, aiming to protect an ethnic understanding of the nation and its associated social security system: “the welfare state is a national project for nationals and is dependent upon the exclusion of perceived others to keep solvent. Welfare state preservation is what drives exclusion” (Barker 2018, 13). Furthermore, although we focus on older family members, we are conscious that bordering strategies aimed to “rejuvenate” the post-welfare state have also been used to block entry of those family members with disabilities, HIV, or other conditions deemed likely to put a burden on public health care (and deemed to prevent these members’ participation in wealth creation), including cases where permanent residency requests have been denied on these grounds (Bisaillon 2013).

In Canada, who is seen as worthy of inclusion, and to what degree, is shaped by subtle dynamics. Canada’s immigration past, its economic present, and its multicultural aims foreclose possibilities of going in Swedish directions, although the rise of right-wing politics may influence border controls in future. But current Canadian border controls include a range of possibilities where exclusion and inclusion may be legally restricted or temporally limited (Côté-Boucher 2014).

In what follows, we explore bordering tools deployed to control parent and grandparent migration to Canada between 2013 and 2018. These tools and their effects illustrate how nations securitize social welfare from the threats attributed to older migrants and produce differential forms of entry. Furthermore, we explore who is let in by these tools, to reveal dimensions of
gender, race, class, and age. We then discuss the consequences of these tools for immigrants’ social reproduction and kinship networks.

**Bordering Tools**

In 2013 when 5,000 applications were approved after a two-year moratorium on parent and grandparent sponsorships, Jason Kenney, then federal Minister of Immigration, justified controls on these immigrants, characterizing them as “elderly” and as health care burdens, stating: “Elderly people place a much greater burden on the public health care system, a public health care system that is already in crisis, where costs are growing much faster than the economy, much faster than the population, where emergency wards are overcrowded, where wait times are enormous” (Chase 2013).

Government targets for PGP sponsorship approvals, including moratoriums, are effective bordering tools with a long history. Announcements of annual targets have been accompanied by ideological justifications that reveal the politics of immigration and aging. In 1994, parent and grandparent immigrants made up 44 percent of total family class migrants, or 41,477 people (McLaren 2006). In 2016, parent and grandparent sponsorships made up 21 percent of the 78,000 family class migrants admitted to Canada (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2017). Annual targets have varied from no approvals in 2011 under the Harper Conservatives to 17,041 approvals in 2016 under the Trudeau Liberals, who also announced small increases per year for the period ending in 2020. Problems with the program, outlined further, left the Minister of Immigration Ahmed Hussen on the defensive in 2017: “We had a campaign commitment to double the number of parents and grandparents so that we can reunite more families and we delivered. So we deserve credit for that” (Toughill 2017).

Sponsorship requirements are a second bordering tool. Historically, family sponsorships to Canada have required sponsors to assume the care and costs of their family members for a period of time after immigration, during which these new arrivals have limited access to social welfare benefits. Potential sponsors must show that they are financially able to make this commitment by meeting a list of requirements. The requirements were dramatically raised in 2013 when the federal Conservatives reopened PGP applications after the two-year moratorium, with class-based consequences that severely restrict lower-income households. First, the sponsoring household’s minimum income requirement was increased by 30 percent. Second, the period in which household must have sustained that income was raised from one year to three years. Third, families were required to sign an undertaking that assigned them responsibility for their sponsored parent or grandparent’s income for twenty years, up from ten years. The application guide warns sponsors that “[t]he undertaking is an unconditional promise of support. For example, the
granting of Canadian citizenship, divorce, separation or relationship break-down or moving to another province does not cancel the undertaking. The undertaking also remains in effect even if your financial situation deteriorates” (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2017). Furthermore, sponsorship application fees of approximately $1,040 CAD were imposed. Since the election of the Trudeau Liberals and despite their rhetoric of more immigration, these economic bars have remained in place.

Lengthy processing time is a bordering tool with a long history of deployment. Parent and grandparent sponsorship applications have significantly longer processing times than the other family reunification programs for spouses and dependent children. In 2015, processing times of seventy-five months were reported, compared to twenty months for a spouse and nineteen months for dependent children applications (Wrzesnewskyj 2017). After a five-year contentious court process to settle a class action lawsuit that challenged this difference, in 2016, the Human Rights Tribunal of Canada opened an inquiry to examine whether and how processing times are a form of discrimination on the basis of family status (Levitz 2016). Protection from this form of discrimination is in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In the meantime, long processing times discourage many potential applicants and eliminate others whose health, life, or income situation may change considerably over the processing time period. In March 2019, an immigration website indicated that PGP applications from January 2016 were being processed—a three-year wait that was an improvement on past government performance.6

A fourth bordering tool, newly introduced in 2013, is the Super Visa, a temporary migration program explicit in its aims to externalize potential social welfare costs associated with aging. This “easy-to-apply-for” multiple entry program allows parents and grandparents to enter Canada (and leave it with the right to return) for up to two years and is renewable for up to ten years. It too has class consequences. It requires these immigrants to: pass a medical examination; hold private health insurance with a Canadian insurer; provide proof that their host family is living above the Low Income Cut Off and that the family income is from employment and not social assistance; hold a passport that will not need renewal during the period of their stay, and have sufficient ties to their country of origin to make return viable. Each renewal requires a trip to the country-of-origin and resubmission of proof that these conditions can still be met. While in Canada, those on a Super Visa are considered visitors, without options to work for income, study, or use health care and other social welfare services.

Processing time for the Super Visa is about two months, and the program has been popular. However, it is not an easy entry program. Reports indicate that about 20 percent of applications are refused (Government of Canada 2015). Entry is also limited by the discretionary power of frontline border authorities whose work is increasingly shaped by a restrictive law enforcement ethos (Côté-Boucher 2016). Cases have been reported in which border officers
in airports used their discretion to limit those traveling on Super Visas to six- or nine-month entry periods.\(^7\)

A fifth bordering tool is the regular visitor visa program, which distinguishes between those who may enter without a visitor’s visa (from specific visa-exempt countries) and those who require visas. Visa-exempt countries are the United States, European countries, and Australia, New Zealand, and Japan; countries that have relatively robust welfare programs for aging citizens. Parents and grandparents from these countries only need a passport to visit their children. However, most immigrants to Canada come from other countries, with China and India as the two main sources. At the time of writing, citizens of 147 countries, including parents and grandparents of Canadian immigrants, were required to have visitor visas to enter Canada. These include all African and South American countries, as well as most Asian and Caribbean countries. These differential documentary requirements for some foreign nationals and not others reveal visas as a tool that inscribes the fault lines generated by global wealth and racial inequalities within immigration and border policy. Visitor visas are the most obviously raced and classed bordering mechanism.

Recently discarded from these bordering tools is the short-lived Parent and Grandparent Sponsorship intake lottery system, implemented in 2016. This tool was introduced to address an identified bias with the system it replaced—a “first past the gate” application intake system that gave precedence to those applicants who could either “camp out” at the immigration office doors or afford courier delivery of their applications during the first few minutes and hours of each year’s limited intake window. This delivery, frequently facilitated through high-priced immigration lawyers, made plain a bias that privileged select groups of applicants.

The intake lottery replaced privilege with chance. Those wanting to sponsor parents or grandparents completed an online Interest to Sponsor form. In 2017 and 2018, these forms had to be completed within a thirty-day window beginning in early January. In 2017, 95,000 forms were submitted, and 10,000 applicants, selected at random, were invited to submit a full application within ninety days of the date of notification. As each form could include more than one person, these forms provided applications for approximately 17,000 persons. However, only 1,200 full applications were received from the 10,000 forms selected, setting off a second “draw.” At the end of the year, 9,500 of 10,000 available sponsorships were awarded.

The lottery system came under fire because it did not restrict participation to those who could meet the twenty-year financial and other sponsorship requirements, detailed earlier. Thus, in 2017 and 2018, it appeared that many of those who “won” an opportunity to submit a full application could not meet these restrictive criteria for sponsorship, or their parents and grandparents were inadmissible, or they submitted incomplete applications. Returning briefly to the second bordering tool, sponsorship requirements, the lottery
A policy change in August, 2018 led to the reintroduction of the first-past-the-post application system for 27,000 applicants, but in an online format. This process was no longer a lottery but remained a gamble. Anyone with access to the Internet could submit an application, thus somewhat democratizing the application access. The 2019 PGP sponsorship application window opened at noon on January 28th, closing eleven minutes later with over 100,000 people attempting to submit. Widespread public fury about this tiny window emanated from immigrant communities and exploded in the news (Harris 2019).

These shifts and changes to bordering tools have produced significant turmoil and expense for families pursuing sponsorship or other entry for older family members (Levitz 2016). In addition, entry to Canada for older migrants has been further restricted and stratified. For some with health and wealth, Super Visas provide a smooth entry for short periods but require the maintenance of a home and connections in the country-of-origin and regular travel back and forth. In the event of emerging health problems, entry is likely to be denied. Discretion about length of stay on the Super Visa is delegated to border agents, as it is with regular Visitor Visas, with the consequence that arrival at the border is no guarantee of entry. For families with sufficient means wishing to bring a parent or grandparent to Canada permanently, there is an annual gambling for grandma in the online sponsorship application, to garner a spot on a years-long waitlist. Those families who have not been successful in applying during the minutes-long application “window” must attempt again in the once-a-year competition. For those whose parents or grandparents need care, there are no immigration answers. Parents and grandparents, while ostensibly welcome to Canada, are in fact almost completely blocked from migration, while visiting is monitored and limited. Families must travel to care for their parents and grandparents in their home countries, with consequences for their finances, labor market participation, and other responsibilities.

**Considering Social Reproduction: The Facts about Older Migrants and Gender**

The preceding discussion of bordering tools and aging family members begs two questions. Whose parents and grandparents are admitted to Canada and who are these aging migrants? The available data on those families who have been able to bring a parent or grandparent to Canada produce a tellingly gendered portrait, in keeping with the findings of other researchers (Deneva 2012; Nedelcu 2017). Mothers and grandmothers made up 58 percent of all sponsored PGPs in 2016, consistent with previous years (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2017). Available Super Visa data show
similar patterns. In 2016, of 17,327 Super Visas, 64 percent were issued to women (Immigration Refugees and Citizenship Canada 2017). Furthermore, those who sponsored PGPs were also mostly women, according to an Evaluation Report of Family Reunification (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014). Interestingly, this report indicated that the average age of those sponsoring a PGP was thirty-four years, an age at which many Canadian residents are bearing and raising children (ibid., 10). In contrast, family class sponsors for spouses and children were mostly men between the ages of twenty-five and forty-four years who had arrived as economic migrants between 2007 and 2011 (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014), showing that gender matters in all sponsorships, including parent and grandparent migration.

Why is it mostly women who are both sponsors and sponsored PGPs? Government survey data collected from PGP sponsors suggest that the answer is linked to women’s unequal responsibility for social reproductive labor. Eighty five percent of respondents indicated that their sponsored parent provided child care on a regular basis. Furthermore, sponsors reported that PGPs contributed indirectly to family income, through what is likely to be child care and domestic work. For example, 48 percent of PGP sponsors reported that having their sponsored relative in Canada helped them to work more paid hours, and 34 percent reported that the PGP helped their spouse work additional paid hours. Twenty six percent of sponsors reported that having their PGP in Canada has helped them go to school/college/university or take a training program (Citizenship and Immigration Canada 2014). Indeed, the survey data suggest that the PGP sponsorship program, Super Visas, and visitor visas may function for many families as a child care program, substituting for the absence of public child care programs in all Canadian provinces except Quebec. This report confirms findings from studies such as Zhou (2012), in which Chinese grandmothers were found to support their daughters’ insertion in the job market through providing unpaid childcare in Canada.

Age stands out as an important and often under-considered social relation. It is important to note that almost half of sponsored PGPs were relatively young, between forty-five and sixty-four years of age, while the rest were older. To characterize parent and grandparent immigrants as a group as “elderly” is empirically incorrect. Yet, age in Canadian immigration policy is a line drawn along both a sociodemographic and a welfare contribution divide. At this historical moment, to immigrate to Canada after forty-five years of age is to add to the demographic “bump” of people who are expected to retire in a group, deplete government pensions, and use up public health care. Furthermore, this age allows only twenty years or less of anticipated tax and other contributions to welfare programs. This divide is further justified by the available data that show most sponsored parents and grandparents do not participate in paid employment. Age, therefore, is not so much a
chronological age category but about the relations of age occurring globally, and how these relations are understood, embedded, and negotiated.

An age- and gender-sensitive accounting may conclude that parents and grandparents are not so much a risk to the welfare state as they are filling its gaps for immigrant families. But economic estimates of PGP costs and contributions are biased, in ways similar to other economic measures (Luxton 1997; VanderPlaat et al. 2012; Waring and Steinem 1988). Most economic calculations show PGPs as the only category of family class immigrants who are a net cost to the state (Wrzesnewskyj 2017, 11–12). Significant to these estimates is that the economic value of the significant unpaid socially reproductive work (such as child care and housework) contributed by PGPs is left out of the calculations, while contributions are limited to these immigrants’ tax contributions, which are low. This is not necessarily because PGPs are old, frail, or sick, but because they are women who spend much of their working hours caring for others without pay. Thus, gendered inequities are implicit in the economic analysis of PGP contributions due to women’s lifetime lower earnings, which are attributable to: the unequal gendered division of labor that assigns unpaid domestic labor to women; women’s lower wages in paid work; and restrictions on women’s economic participation.

Of course, sponsored parents and grandparents may stay in Canada beyond the twenty years of sponsorship, thus potentially tapping old age security and other collective benefits of Canadian residency. But this fact highlights another absence in government calculations of PGPs net drain on the Canadian welfare state: the impact of Canada’s bilateral social security agreements with fifty countries. These agreements facilitate state pension portability, including most recently from China and India, which are the countries from which the majority of PGPs enter. Those PGPs from countries that have signed these agreements may apply for a partial federal Old Age Security pension prorated depending on the number of years in Canada and, if they have low income, a Guaranteed Income Supplement (Koning and Banting 2013, 585–86). These benefits are not available to those using other modes of entry, such as visas and Super Visas.

It must not be forgotten that many, even most, Canadian immigrant families cannot sponsor a parent or grandparent, because of insufficient financial resources, the vagaries of application processes, or because their status in Canada is temporary. More and more immigrants come to Canada via one of the proliferation of temporary labor migration programs (Fudge and Strauss 2013; Rajkumar et al. 2012). Super Visas are limited to those who have the financial means to do so, while visitor visas are denied to those who cannot meet the requirements of economic and personal ties in sending countries, or who are deemed likely to submit a refugee claim once in Canada, or overstay their visa. These conditions mean that those from countries experiencing political or economic turmoil are unlikely to gain entrance. While overall, short-term visitor visas for parents and grandparents were granted in 92 percent of
applications, this reporting does not account for those who do not apply as they know they will not qualify.

Barriers to these programs, related to finances, health/disability, citizenship status, and a short list of countries-of-origin, play out for some immigrants more than others. One such group is recently arrived immigrants. The most recent Canadian census data (Statistics Canada 2016) show that 17.9 percent of immigrant households live below the low-income threshold, but 31.4 percent of those who arrived since 2011 are in this category. Racialized immigrants are also at a particular disadvantage. Although the 2016 data have not yet been analyzed for race/ethnicity, many studies using 2011 National Household Survey data show racialized immigrants, and most particularly, those identifying as Arab, Korean, West Asian, or Black are at particular disadvantage. Further, racialized women immigrants have higher rate of unemployment than racialized immigrant men (Block et al. 2014; Block 2017). Thus, the very households that might benefit most from parent and grandparent supports are also those least likely to be able to sponsor a PGP or support a Super Visa application.

Our analysis indicates that immigration policy produces differential constraints to social reproduction for immigrant families and their older generations, by filtering whose parents may enter Canada and under what conditions. Economic class immigrants, welcomed through expanded immigration programs, experience borders to intergenerational exchanges of care with their parents that position older family members as only welcome to the extent that they are the responsibility of themselves, their families, and the sending countries. When this responsibility is not assured, welcome is withdrawn. The resulting social reproduction challenges for immigrant families is documented in growing empirically based literatures, including the economies of remittances (Amoyaw and Abada 2016; Shooshtari et al. 2014), transnational care for older adults and for children (Kilkey and Merla 2014; McLaren 2006; Neysmith and Zhou 2013), and, less often discussed, the development of alternative networks to support social reproduction (Martin 2017).

Rejuvenating the Nation-State: Age and Social Reproduction

We began our discussion by stating that in many post-welfare states, the social imaginaries of a demographic crisis of aging, a migration crisis, and a social welfare program sustainability crisis have been mobilized to justify and support austerity directions for social welfare programs. We have argued that older migrants are caught in the cross-hairs of these imaginaries. Drawing from feminist political economy and critical border studies, we developed a feminist border analysis to support these assertions, using the case of the regulations or bordering tools that restrict entry for parents and grandparents of
immigrants to Canada. We contribute to and push critical border studies via our attention to social reproduction and relations of gender, race and, class that are implicit in, and shaped by, policies and practices that border aging. We showed how these bordering practices produce a range of temporal and status possibilities that stratify immigrant families and their social reproduction possibilities along lines of gender, race, class, age, and citizenship. In a global labor market with hot competition for migrants of working age, these bordering tools allow Canada some claim to “hospitality” while at the same time limiting the danger older migrants are assumed to pose to the welfare state.

Drawing from government reports and available statistical data, we concur with others who have challenged calculations of costs to the state associated with parent and grandparent migration. Our investigation showed that use of immigration programs is gendered, suggesting that parent and grandparent sponsorship and visa programs function to provide supplemental child care and domestic labor for immigrant families. This is not surprising, given other research on transnational families and that Canada has no public, universal day care programs. Our analysis also pointed to the racialized dynamics of these policies that affect immigrants from some countries-of-origin due to both entry restrictions and racist discrimination in the Canadian labor market, with lower wages and income for racialized workers. Furthermore, PGP policies differentiate among class positions, producing the most possibilities for those immigrants and their parents who have property and wealth, with no possibilities for those with low incomes. Citizenship and status are also significant, where in the case of parents, countries-of-origin matter to entry due to the relative likelihood of a refugee claim, or, in the case of an adult child, temporary immigrant status is insufficient for sponsorship or Super Visa. Health status also matters, as a parent or grandparent with health issues will be restricted from entry under all programs.

Our main point, however, is to emphasize that age increasingly figures as a central concern for post-welfare states at this juncture, shaping immigration regimes and bordering practices. Younger educated migrants are increasingly welcome, perceived as the harbingers of prosperity and saviours of social welfare. Some older, mostly women migrants are admitted for short stays, but are bordered as net liabilities to the goal of a rejuvenated nation. This dichotomous division between who is considered “old” and “young” shapes a central tension in the rejuvenation aims. On one hand, immigration policy works to ensure that Canada is rejuvenated by the immigration of healthy, educated immigrants, ready to work. They are deemed to be independent, requiring little support from the state while contributing taxes and productivity. But they are also deemed to be either without need for, or undeserving of, proximate extended family, including the family members who raised these immigrant rejuvenators.
Notes

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1. The Canadian immigration system is divided into three major categories: family, economic, and refugee class. Each class includes multiple subcategories and is limited by yearly quotas established by the Minister of Immigration. Parent and grandparent sponsorships are made possible under federal family reunification policies.

2. Chain migration is a term coined by demographers to refer to the phenomenon where people from the same village or region migrate over a period of time to another location. It is also used to refer to kinship network migration to the same location (Boyd 1989).

3. The Executive Branch of the Canadian federal government is composed of the Governor General (representing the Crown), the Prime Minister, and Cabinet.

4. See a description of the case of the refusal of a Toronto professor’s family because of the health care needs of his son born with Down’s syndrome (CBC News 2016).

5. While sponsored parents and grandparents must pay income and other applicable taxes, they are not permitted to collect Canadian social assistance or old age security for a period of twenty years. They are eligible for Canadian health care after a waiting period of three months.

6. Processing times for the various kinds of immigration applications can be checked at any time at http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/information/times/index.asp.

7. These reports are common on websites where immigrant families share experiences and knowledge regarding visas, sponsorships, and similar immigration matters. See https://www.canadavisa.com/canada-immigration-discussion-board/threads/super-visa-did-the-port-of-entry-stamp-
their-passport.155875/page-2 for an example of super visa woes associated with border officer actions.

Acknowledgments

The research for this article was funded by grants from Subvention Institutionnelle du CRSH, Université de Montréal and from Carleton University’s Development Grant Program. The authors are grateful for the generous comments and suggestions from Alexandra Dobrowolsky and Meg Luxton and from the astute comments of the anonymous reviewers that helped us to focus our argument. The usual disclaimers apply.

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