

# Hello World: Protocol

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## I'm submitting my work permit application.

Hello world,

We were told we could double our social interactions mindfully, but what does it mean to be mindful socializing with someone when you have no social and emotional belonging to this land?

I came here to study, but I want to stay for much more. A work permit, permanent residence card, and eventually, Canadian citizenship. The navy blue passport—a tiny book with laminated paper and golden inscribed texts—holds in itself a future of immense possibility, and also a reminder of my father.

“There is no future for you in Vietnam.”

The form is a simple 6 pages, the first page consisting of facts I've had to write over and over again, a few lines that theoretically could sum up who I am as a person, even if almost half of them are not applicable to me. Unable to write my feelings out, I write out these concrete and “permanent” facts: my name, address, study permit number—one by one they fill the blank spaces of my work permit application.

The privileged life given to me by my parents allows me to answer “no” to questions pertaining to the status of prisoner, veteran, or refugee, and affords me the convenience of having to do much less work. The permanent truth is that, up until now, I have been sheltered. I might have had to do my own chores, cook my own meals—tasks I feel lucky to have learned to do so well—but I still lived in the embrace of my parents. They brought me here, and that's an unchangeable fact.

The language I feel most comfortable speaking to you in is English. I apologize more than the average Canadian, though this doesn't mean I'm more polite. I came

into adulthood here, making me, in some ways, more attached to this place than my birthplace where I lived for almost two decades. My experiences have been marked by drastic change, and yet I seek permanence.

Physical documents of citizenship and residency should not, technically, alter who I am emotionally and mentally. And yet, on the path of gathering documents as if they were checkpoints in the video game of life, I anticipate bits of my old self being torn apart. Even though my academic achievements, perseverance, and independence should be enough, a piece of paper that says I deserve to be here, that I am no less than my peers, will only come after years and years of living and working in Canada. Surely that amount of time will have taken parts of me away, replacing them with bits of Canadian-ness.

## Goodbye, World.

Hello world,

When I was a kid in high school, I looked up to designers like celebrities—stars I could never reach. Flipping through a book of typeface, my fingers tracing the strokes of the letters, I would think to myself, “These people must have the coolest job in the world.” Little did I know that to pursue design is to become a tool for capitalism, in the most poetic and visually attractive way possible.

Why is it that an international student gets charged 3 times, sometimes more, the amount of a domestic student’s tuition? Is my existence here so demanding that it requires this absurd amount of money to support? Why do parents pay this incredible fee to send their children off in the first place? To a country no better than their own, a place claiming to be the centre of the world and yet one that fails some of its inhabitants so profoundly?

Paying to be here, getting paid to work here, I find myself caught up in a business model that makes it hard for me to situate myself. While I struggle with my own identity as a “settler,” I consider worlds that exist beyond me, and wonder if I will ever grasp their complexities. Why am I here for a “First World” education, when all I have learned so far is how to leave other worlds behind? ■