

Violence Against International Students on North American University and College Campuses

An Intersectional, Structural and Global Analysis

HIJIN PARK

La plupart des actions contre la violence examine inadéquatement le degré de violence locale et quotidienne au niveau national et global, qui est systémique et structurelle. Cet article situe la violence envers les étudiantes venues d'ailleurs et qui fréquentent une université nord-américaine et les des collèges dans le contexte du pionnier colonisateur et néolibéral.

The recent government, media, and public interest in the problem of sexual violence on university and college campuses in North America primarily constructs the violence as gender-based violence against young women (see “School of Secrets”; *The Hunting Ground*; Bielski). Obscured are how all young women are also racialized, sexualized, classed, and ableized; and how racialized, indigenous, two-spirited, trans, and disabled women are more vulnerable to various forms of violence than, for example, white gender-conforming middle-class women (see Wortley; Francis et al.). The violence that marginalized women experience may be informed by and support white heteropatriarchal supremacy, transphobia, islamophobia, anti-black racism, saneism, and white settler genocide, as well as patriarchy. This article attempts to contribute to the scholarship on violence against women in white settler states in the neoliberal context by focusing on sexualized violence against female international students on North American campuses. I begin by briefly examining how violence against women is largely conceptualized in dominant discourse. I move on to highlight cases of violence against Asian female international students on university and college campuses. I end by drawing on the work of activist scholar Angela Davis to provide some exploratory suggestions

on how to understand and in turn dismantle gendered sexual violence.

Conceptualizing Violence

As a university educator who conducts research on violence against and by racialized women in Canada, I examine violence in its multiple and interconnected forms, and how this range of forms of violence shapes the specific violence that racialized women experience and may perpetrate on others. These include the more everyday and local forms of gendered violence, such as street harassment, intimate partner violence, sexual assault, and homicide, as well as the more national and global, structural forms of violence such as white settler colonialism, global migration, and neoliberal processes of criminalization, privatization and medicalization. These forms of violence are largely seen as distinct, separate, and not tied to each other. Racialized sexual harassment is generally not viewed as connected to white settler colonial practices of occupying indigenous land and legitimating white settler entitlement. The police killing of racialized people, particularly Black and indigenous people, is primarily not conceptualized as reinforcing white settler genocide on indigenous land that has been rearticulated as white settler national space. Similarly, the sexual assault of Asian women in North America by non-Asian men is largely viewed as disconnected from global economic hierarchies that position Asian women as tied to Asian men and economies.

In most anti-sexual violence work there is inadequate examination of how local and everyday violence operates on the level of the national and global, and this violence

is systemic and structural. My overall work is to explore how legal and public definitions of the violence of sexual assault, partner violence, mothers who kill their children, and women who kill their partners, may conceal the structural violence endemic to white settler nationalism and neoliberalism. In other words, my work contributes to scholarship that argues that the law and legal processes often conceptualize violence and crime in ways that largely erase the conditions of its production (see Razack; Noonan). How may the law's individualization and pathologization of crime mask the multiple forms of violence that racialized women in Canada are disproportionately susceptible to, often experience, and may perpetrate on others (see Wortley)? In short, I contend that in order to end violence, in its multiple and interconnected forms, we need to reconceptualize violence.

Violence Against Female Asian International Students

In terms of conceptualizing violence in relation to gender-based violence on university campuses, the recent report, *From The Margins to the Centre: Re-Thinking Sexual Violence Education and Support at Brock University* (Francis et al.), does an exemplary job of outlining decolonial and intersectional approaches to sexual violence education, and of offering solutions and recommendations. An important point in the report is that:

The struggle to name sexual violence is not simply personal. Sexual violence happens in the context of structural violence—which is colonial, racial, intergenerational, economic, embodied, ableist, and gendered. Institutional transformation, including leadership for educational campaigns and support services, must articulate and navigate the intersection of personal and structural violence. (31)

In terms of the “intersection of personal and structural violence” in relation to international students, the report states that:

...several participants and expert interviewees highlighted the unique challenges facing international students. For example, Sarah ... remarked that “students who don't speak English as a first language get treated very poorly... in addition to that; they may be misunderstood when they try to raise a complaint.” In addition, she highlighted that international students may be unfamiliar with the legal context and/or uncomfortable consulting with police. And given international students relative isolation on campus,

they may not know about a whole range of services on campus and in the community, and those services may not have the linguistic and cultural capacity to offer international students meaningful supports. (22)

In recognizing some of the specificities of female international student experiences, the Brock University report attends to an arguably vulnerable and underserved group on university and college campuses. Helen Forbes-Mewett and Jude McCulloch (345) argue that there is minimal research on international students and crime, and even less research on gender-based violence against female international students. Elsewhere I have documented and analyzed cases of racialized sexual violence in Canada and the United States between 2000 and 2010 in which the perpetrators specifically targeted or mostly targeted Asian women and girls (Park, “Interracial Violence”). A number of these cases¹ occurred on university and college campuses. They include:

In 2000, in Spokane, Washington two men and one woman plead guilty to the abduction of five Japanese English-as-a-foreign-language students on a college campus in two separate incidents. They admitted that they chose Japanese English-as-a-foreign-language students because they believed they would not report the crimes. In the first incident, the women escaped, reported the abduction but the responding police officer did not file a report. In the subsequent incident, the Japanese women were raped and released (Geranios).

In 2001, David Gould was charged with the rapes of five Japanese women attending Mount Royal College and the University of Calgary in Calgary, Alberta. Gould identified his victims by speaking to Asian women in his limited Japanese (Manuel).

In 2005, Michael Lohman, a white male Princeton University doctoral student, was arrested for sex-related crimes against over 80 Asian women on the Princeton University campus. He cut locks of hair, poured his semen and urine into their beverages, and onto their bodies. Princeton University received complaints over a three-year period but largely ignored the women (Woan 294-295).

In 2010, Toronto police arrested Jeffrey Fraser for breaking into 17 student residences on or near the University of Toronto. Most of the women were young and Asian (Humes).

In that study, I argued that these cases serve as a departure point to problematize liberal separations between public and private, group and individual, east and west, local and global, and gendered violence and racial violence, since the violence is clearly racialized as well as gendered and is shaped by national and global education and migration policies.

Research suggests that Asian women in general are highly vulnerable to various forms of sexual violence in part due to their hyperfeminization and sexualization (Chou; Woan; Cho). Asian female international students may be even more vulnerable due to their cultural and linguistic dislocation and isolation, separation from family and friends, and financial insecurity. At Brock University, where I teach, most of the Asian women on campus appear to be international students. Many of the Asian students at Brock are enrolled in English-as-a-foreign-language programs.

from China and the remainder from India, South Korea, and Japan (Ostaszewski). According to the Asia Pacific Foundation of Canada, the current Trudeau government hopes to double the number of Chinese international students studying in Canada. Much of this is motivated by international students' contribution to the Canadian economy in terms of tuition, tourism, accommodation, and discretionary spending.

The susceptibility and the sexualized violence that Asian female international students experience may also largely

The fact that the women are from patriarchal societies in which rape myths are prevalent, and are living in a foreign, white settler country that equally silences violence against women, hypersexualizes Asian females, and dehumanizes Asians in general, all contribute to the vulnerability and erasure of the experience of Asian international students.

Canadian universities often recruit and cater to Asia Pacific markets in their efforts to internationalize (Houshmand et al.). A review of Brock University's promotional material directed towards international students reveals that safety on and off campus is an important selling feature (Brock University; see also Fincher and Costello 169,174-175 and Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch).

University administrators may be particularly invested in keeping quiet any violence that happens to international students, due to the potential for significant losses in tuition and accommodation dollars. In the province of British Columbia, Daniel Hiebert and Min-Jung Kwak argue that local and provincial government, and the Canadian export education and English-as-a-foreign-language industries, promote the city of Vancouver as a Pacific Rim city in which Asian students can cultivate a United States accent without being confronted with United States crime rates (15-18, 23-24). An analysis of the national concern over the 2002 attacks and sexual assaults of six Asian women and girls temporarily living in Victoria and the Greater Vancouver Area to study the English language revealed that the concern was less about the violence against the women and girls and more about the vulnerability of the tourist, export education, and English-as-a-foreign-language industries that are heavily dependent on Asian consumers (Park, "The Stranger").

In 2010 it was estimated that international students contributed \$8 billion dollars to the Canadian economy and that 37 percent of this revenue came from students from China and South Korea exclusively (Ostaszewski). In 2014, 60 percent of all international students in Canada were from the Asia Pacific. Of this number, half were

go unaddressed because of the in-between status of Asian female international students. Asians are not white and yet the violence they experience may not be adequately addressed by mainstream gender-based efforts; and they are not quite of colour enough to warrant attention by those who see themselves as serving the needs of the marginalized. International student migration is largely viewed as a privileged form of migration. China, Japan, and Korea, for example, are economic power-houses. Asians as a racialized group in North America are frequently viewed as experiencing minimal, insignificant, and/or less significant racism than other racialized groups (often referred to as the model minority mythology) (see Day; Ty). Therefore the racialized sexual violence that Asian female international students experience may be minimized and left unaddressed by the university, mainstream service providers, and the more critical, activist people and groups. The fact that the women are from patriarchal societies in which rape myths are prevalent, and are living temporarily in a foreign, white settler country that equally silences violence against women, hypersexualizes Asian females and dehumanizes and commodifies Asians in general, all contribute to the vulnerability and erasure of the experience of Asian female international students on North American university and college campuses (see Forbes-Mewett and McCulloch).

Reconceptualizing Violence in White Settler Neoliberal Contexts

In thinking about these cases in relation to understanding, addressing and eliminating gender-based violence,

I end by drawing on the work of activist scholar Angela Davis. In a recently published interview she says many things that are relevant to the issue of violence against university and college women, such as the need for the intersectionality of movements and the need to understand the structural character of racism. In speaking about the possibility of abolishing the death penalty in the United States, Davis states, “Sometimes we have to do the work even though we don’t yet see a glimmer on the horizon that it’s actually going to be possible

everyday violence needs to be understood as always also structural, national, and global violence. The vulnerability of Asian female international students involves national and global processes. The neoliberal privatization and individualization of violence against women in the form of victims’ rights and service provision issues conceals how, in white supremacist heteropatriarchal nations, gendered and racial violence is institutionalized and is vital to the (re)production of the nation state. The case of Rie Fujii is telling.

All forms of prosecution of gender-based violence, for example through the criminal justice system, serve to legitimate white settler genocide in that they support Canadian sovereignty and settler entitlement to manage the lives of Indigenous and non-indigenous people. Indigenous disentanglement undergirds Canadian legal structures.

(29-30).” She opines that whether something seems possible or not, one must still do the groundwork, and this groundwork must be done on a daily basis. The question then is, what needs to be done, or what needs to be recognized, to eliminate gender-based violence? None of the following constitute concrete solutions, however, I argue that they still need to be articulated despite their impracticality or impossibility.

All forms of prosecution of gender-based violence, for example through the criminal justice system, serve to legitimate white settler genocide and disavow indigeneity in that they support Canadian sovereignty and settler entitlement to manage the lives of Indigenous and non-indigenous people. Indigenous disentanglement undergirds Canadian legal structures. This recognition is important to understanding and eliminating not only violence against Indigenous women and girls, but also violence against racialized non-indigenous women, because the violence done to both groups of women and girls supports white heteropatriarchal supremacy. Various forms of everyday and structural violence are central to (re)producing the normative national hierarchies of entitlement (Brandzel; Thobani). This statement may appear obscure or overstated, but only if one views violence as solely the individual acts of a perpetrator against a victim/survivor.

In consent education, when one draws attention away from the actions of the victim/survivor to the actions of the perpetrator, one is still operating on the level of individuals. Instead, as Angela Davis states, in order for change to occur we need to centre the conditions that make the violence possible in the first place (30). Local and

Rie Fujii, a Japanese national who came to Canada to study English on a student visa, overstayed her visa, and became non-status. In Canada she experienced intimate partner violence and sexual assault, which formed an important part of the backdrop to her eventual imprisonment for manslaughter in the deaths of her two infant children (Court of Queen’s Bench of Alberta). Fear and isolation combined with the inability to access social services makes non-status women particularly vulnerable to domestic violence (Bernhard et al. 102). Living alone and non-status with two Canadian-born children, Fujii was not entitled to or had difficulty accessing legal employment, health care, education, settlement services, social housing, rent supplement programs, emergency and short term shelters, violence against women services, subsidized childcare, child tax benefits, and alimony. The violence that Fujii experienced was institutionalized in the gendered and racialized structural violence of immigration law and policy, and was facilitated by government. Importantly, this government by its very nature is a product of white settler colonialism and land theft (key to understanding violence against indigenous women). Thus, the structural violence that contributed to the physical and sexual violence experienced by Fujii is also a part of colonial violence in that the settler state dictates who has status and under what conditions. The Rie Fujii case complicates boundaries of privilege and marginalization in that she is part of a relatively privileged group of migrants who desire westernization and legitimization in white settler colonialism, and yet the intersection of race, gender, and immigration status rendered her a less valuable migrant, citizen, and human.

Conclusion

According to Farrah Khan, the Sexual Violence Response Coordinator at Ryerson University, racialized students who seek support after experiencing sexual violence (unlike more privileged white young women) often “see the act of violence they have experienced as part of a continuum of oppression” (qtd. in Francis et al. 23). Central to dismantling racialized sexual violence is an articulation that individual acts of sexual violence exist along a continuum of various forms of everyday and structural violence on local, national, and global levels that are interconnected and not distinct.

To understand and attempt to eliminate gender-based violence, more attempts must be made to provide an intersectional, relational, historically specific, and structural analysis of violence. How are racialized groups in fact racialized differently in relation to, and often in opposition to, each other in ways that obscure and affirm white heteropatriarchal supremacy? How do the intersections of race, colonialism, gender, class, citizenship, disability, sexuality, and other aspects of identity produce diverse forms of violence against differently situated women? In this regard, this paper has attempted to contribute to recent government, public, and media analysis of the problem of gendered sexual violence on university and college campuses by examining some of the specificities of the experience of Asian female international students. In response to these particularities, the authors of the recent report, *From the Margins to the Centre* (Francis et al.) advocate that

International students have access to proactive information regarding sexual violence policies and services; culturally appropriate educational initiatives and information about relevant academic accommodations that could better enable their academic success. (22)

In addition to these more service-oriented recommendations, this paper has argued for a reconceptualization of violence that can better address the structural conditions that make gender-based violence possible. It is only by examining these conditions that one can lay the groundwork for eliminating violence against all marginalized groups who are differently affected by the multiple and interconnected forms of violence that are required to sustain white settler colonialism.

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Endnote

¹The limited research on gender-based violence and female international students indicates that the violence is primarily at the hands of someone the victim/survivor knows and occurs in private spaces. Most of these cases are unreported (Forbes-Mewett and McCullough 345-346). Since sexual violence is often sensationalized in dominant elite discourse as stranger violence in public spaces, and these are the cases that draw media attention, the cases highlighted in this paper reflect this bias.

Hijin Park is Associate Professor of Sociology at Brock University. Her most recent work is on racialized sexual violence and the violence of white settler colonialism published in Feminist Legal Studies and the edited collection Criminalized Mothers, Criminalizing Mothering. Currently she is working on two projects on racialized female murderers, and on the everyday and structural violence experienced by racialized international students in Canada.

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TANYA GRAE

Third Wave, Shift

When my mother sat at our table
for late hours of statistics homework,

biting the corners of her lips, I saw
prophecy swell, but took comfort

in the closeness, instead of seeing
my mother brawling for me:

head down, grinding each equation,
my whole life set in her jaw.

Tanya Grae won the 2016 Tennessee Williams/New Orleans Literary Festival Poetry Prize, selected by Yusef Komunyakaa. She is the author of the forthcoming chapbook Little Wekiva River (Five Oaks Press), and her poems have appeared in AGNI, New Ohio Review, The Florida Review, New South, Fjords, The Los Angeles Review, Barrow Street, and elsewhere. She lives in Tallahassee and teaches at Florida State University while completing her doctorate. Find out more at: tanyagrae.com.