

Introduction

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The COVID-19 pandemic that swept through the world laid bare the deeply rooted anti-Asian racism in North America and made it particularly visible in hate attacks and the inequalities in the provision of health care, public services, and vaccine access. Importantly, though less noted, even before the pandemic the worsening geopolitical tensions centred around the China-US rivalry have already fueled the Sinophobia mentality since the 2008 financial crisis. These served as a reminder that W.E.B. Du Bois's famous line, "the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line," still stands today in the twenty first century, thereby debunking the myth of 'post-raciality' that was widely spread especially after the election of the former American president Barack Obama.

While the COVID-19 pandemic imposed an unprecedented global restriction on people's movement, global connections and a collective desire for racial justice have unprecedentedly emerged at a larger scale. During the pandemic and particularly after the tragic incident of the Atlanta Shootings in 2021 that specifically targeted Asian women in the spa business, #StopAsianHate protests took place across North America. Significantly, in the year before, the death of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin brought the problems of systemic anti-Black racism to the fore and re-ignited the global Black Lives Matter movement which resists the colonial legacy of anti-Black racism stemming from the history of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and tackles the racist association between Blackness and criminality.

The historical intersection of these two global anti-racist movements calls for local and global level discussions and interventions to dismantle systemic racism and build inter-racial solidarity. The local and global desire for racial justice is the foundation of this special issue, which aims to demonstrate a bounded effort of academic and grass-roots movements to critically examine anti-Asian racism which had culminated during the pandemic, and to keep a record of Asians/Asian Canadians resistance in their fight against anti-Asian racism.

Drawing on critical race scholarship, we situate anti-Asian racism in the context of white settler-colonial and racial politics in Canada: from the history of racial exclusion during the white settler nation building process (e.g. Chinese Head Tax, Komagata Maru incident, the internment of Japanese people during the WWII, etc.) to contemporary forms of exploitation of Asian temporary migrants in the low-wage service industry (e.g. care work, meat-packing factories) and oppression of Asian women working in massage parlours and sex industry. Furthermore, we analyze anti-Asian racism in Canada through the history of European colonization of Asian regions and Orientalism as a major colonial discourse combined with the continuing American imperialism and militarism in Asian regions (e.g. American military bases in the Philippines, Japan and South Korea to today) as well as recent geopolitical changes such as China's rise in economic, political and technological areas.

Postcolonial feminist scholarship also inspires us to examine the intersection of gender and anti-Asian racism such as the feminized construction of an Orient and fetishization of Asian women as objects of white men's sexual fantasy. As McClintock (1995) astutely points out, sexuality works as a trope for imperial power relations. Asian women have been variously portrayed as objects to be saved from their culture by white men, as being exotic and easily available for pleasure and fun, or as targets of sexual violence. One example of such sexualized discourses of Asian women is the travelogues that were popularized among American soldiers occupying Japan and Korea, where military duty in East Asia was treated as "first and foremost a sexual adventure (Kindig 2016, p.151)".

Drawing on critical race and postcolonial feminist scholarship, in this special issue, we introduce academic journal articles and grassroots activism reports from Asian community that provide a multi-faceted analysis of anti-Asian racism in a variety of contexts.

Xiaobei Chen's article takes a historicizing and structural approach to anti-Chinese racism. Chen is critical of current discussions about anti-Asian racism that are often narrowly focused on individual acts of hateful attacks, overlooking the anti-Chinese scapegoating discourse that is at the root of discriminatory and hostile treatment of the Chinese, particularly those with Mainland Chinese background. Using textual data, observations, and interviews and drawing on literature on scapegoat racism and the sacrificial politics of threat and security (Girard 2021[1977]), the article argues that the anti-Chinese scapegoating discourse has revived the anti-Communist Sinophobia during the Cold War with exaggerated claims about the threat of China and perceives the "Bad Chinese" in the Chinese diaspora as threats to Canada. The anti-Chinese scapegoating

discourse not only fuels racist and discriminatory treatment of the Chinese, but also diverts our attention away from serious issues in Canada that do not have much to do with China or the Chinese diaspora.

Wu et al.'s article reminds readers that Asians are diverse and have different geopolitical and historical backgrounds, immigration histories, and generational differences. In their article, they call for a nuanced analysis of differences among Asians living in Canada using two surveys conducted in 2020 about their experiences of racism after the COVID-19 outbreak. Their findings demonstrate that native-born Asians reported encountering more instances of discrimination than their counterparts born abroad.

The experience of racism is not limited to offline spaces. Kao et al.'s article asks for the expansion of our awareness about anti-Asian racism to virtual social media platforms. Whereas the online social media space has been an active terrain of social interactions, sufficient academic attention has not been paid to online spaces. To contribute to this area of study, these authors present a conceptual framework to analyze the potential impact of racial discrimination in the social media space and the impacts on the health and mental well-being of Canadians. They draw our attention to a variety of online actors (victims [both direct and indirect victims], perpetrators and bystanders) and focus on the roles of cyber bystanders as a potential actor that can both positively and negatively affect the victims.

Hijin Park's article is a timely intervention to capture the global moments for racial justice and discuss the directions of inter-racial solidarity. In her analysis of public and media discourses of Asianness surrounding the death of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin, she questions and challenges the ways in which the Asianness of Tou Thao and Kellie Chauvin is constructed as one intrinsically contradictory to Blackness. In order to present the direction of inter-racial solidarity, she situates anti-Asian racism and anti-Black racism within the context of white settler colonialism and racial capitalism that have been fundamental structures for racial oppression and structural violence. She argues that the attention towards anti-Asian racism can be a catalyst to build collective momentum towards re-envisioning political advocacy and community actions for prison abolition and defunding police to rectify structural violence and systemic racism.

Elene Lam examines how Asian migrant sex workers are targeted by Canadian laws and policies and how they continue to be targeted by the "carceral web" of policies at the federal, provincial, and municipal levels today. A case study of Newmarket, Ontario's municipal council's recent "crackdown" on personal wellness establishments illustrates how systematic racism and "whorephobia" are embedded in the regulations targeting low-income Asian migrant women, particularly those who work in massage parlours and the sex industry. The article ends with a discussion of how, rather than passive trafficked victims, Asian workers in massage parlours and the sex industry are actively working to resist, fight for their rights, and build solidarity to push back against racist ideas about them.

One strength of this special issue is the pairing of academic articles with reports from activist groups fighting anti-Asian racism on the ground. Justin Kong shared his experiences with organizing Chinese communities around anti-racism, workers' rights and social justice during the COVID-19 pandemic during his term as the Executive Director of the Chinese National Council Toronto Chapter (CCNCTO). Kong revealed the challenges of working with different views within the community and balancing between community needs and public health directives in a time of crisis. Teresa Woo-Paw reported on how the ACT2Endracism National Network was organized to respond to anti-Asian racism in year 2020. Ines Huang, Xiaobei Chen, and Jiyoung Lee-An shared their experiences involved in organizing a vigil for the Atlanta shooting victims in Ottawa in March 2021. Elene Lam focused on the advocacy work undertaken by Butterfly, Asian and Migrant Sex Workers Support Network to speak out about the oppression and violence faced by sex workers and the heavy economic, social, and mental impacts of COVID-19. In the last community report, Yafang Shi reflected on the online, non-for-profit news and commentary website Loving Sister's coverage of intersectional and transnational experiences of anti-Asian racism and other oppressions.

Together, the academic papers and the reports about community organizing highlighted a number of important insights for academic analysis and concrete activist practice: first, they demand an intersectional analysis of historically and contemporarily nuanced impacts of systemic racism on Asian groups. Second, Asians'/Asian Canadians' experience of oppression requires attention to both the local and the global perspectives and practice: in times of crises, the anti-Asian racist logic sees their transnational connections as danger and threats to hate and to curtail; globalized racial capitalism positions racialized masses against each other, as well, they can be targets of exclusion and suppression of more than one state and society. Third, struggles against anti-Asian racism must not leave out groups experiencing multiple exclusions, most notably, working class migrant workers such as migrant massage and sex workers and must include their concerns and needs as part of the struggles. Last but not the least, histories of joint struggles against racism and present social justice movements #blacklivesmatters and #idlenomore have made possible the scope and reach of our struggles against anti-Asian racism, including #StopAsianHate, and demonstrated the importance of interracial solidarity.

References

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