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ANTI-BLACK RACISM AND THE SLOW, STRUCTURED VIOLENCE OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION

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Police murders of unarmed black people deserve outrage and public protests. So too do the everyday and ordinary realities of life that the pandemic has laid bare. We have been confronted with the truth of ourselves – our communities, institutions, nation, and world. I'm not referring to the individual acts of brutality that provoke protests all over the world, and compel some to "race to innocence", to set "us" in Canada apart from "them" in the US (e.g. [Doug Ford](#), [Gwynne Dyer](#)). Equally worthy of our horror and outrage is the slow, systematic and structured violence that breeds such heinous crimes, over and over.

It's not easy to find words to adequately describe that which we take for granted – the precise processes and outcomes of violence and "soft domination" that are so familiar and commonplace that they seem self-evident. With some risk of banality, I have adopted the term *social exclusion* in my empirical and theoretical research. The point of this work has been to trace, with some specificity, the official procedures and everyday practices that make and organize groups, and perpetuate and even justify deep fractures between groups. In a few short/long months, COVID-19 has uncovered the economic, spatial, social and political, and subjective divides that I've been striving to show for two decades. For example, we have seen clearly the racialized and gendered dynamics of economic exclusion upon which the Canadian labour market and economy rely.

- ⇒ Graham Slaughter & Mahima Singh, *CTV News*: [Five charts that show what systemic racism looks like in Canada](#). (June 4, 2020).
- ⇒ Patty Winsa, *Toronto Star*: [Which workers are being hit hardest by the COVID-19 lockdown? These 6 graphics paint a stark picture of Canadian inequality](#). (May 28, 2020).
- ⇒ Ethel Tungohan, Broadbent Institute: [Filipino Healthcare Workers During COVID-19 and the Importance of Race-Based Analysis](#). (May 1, 2020).
- ⇒ Miles Corak, *Toronto Star*: [COVID-19 is not the great leveller. It's the great revealer](#). (April 15, 2020).
- ⇒ Jason Miller, *Toronto Star*: [The faces of the COVID-19 fight across Canada are female. Here's why that matters](#). (April 2, 2020).

We know that the Canadian labour market limits upward mobility for certain racialized individuals, thereby reproducing and reinforcing its structure according to socially contrived racial/ethnic classifications ([Lightman & Good Gingrich, 2018, 2012](#); [Good Gingrich & Lightman, 2015](#)). Such disparities cannot be explained away as interpersonal discrimination, or a few “bad apples.” These uneven outcomes persist even when we control for level of education, immigration status, age and gender, pointing toward a social economy that functions to disadvantage certain individuals and make groups. None of this is new, or brought about by the global pandemic. Rather, these are longstanding and deep-rooted dynamics of social exclusion that have come into view in ways that stir some discomfort, at least temporarily.

COVID-19 has also exposed spatial divides that keep people stuck in place. Dynamics of spatial exclusion function to deny and devalue economic and social capital (or resources available in a social system) to concentrate disadvantage in increasingly racialized and shrinking physical spaces in Canadian cities. In the city of Toronto, nearly half of individuals from racialized groups live in rented dwellings compared to just over one-third of non-racialized individuals. For 39% of racialized individuals (compared to 27% of non-racialized), their rental housing is unaffordable, unsuitable, and/or inadequate. (See Appendix 1.)

Socio-political exclusion is *erasure* (or “unmaking”) of individuals and groups, denying recognition and legitimacy under the law and social welfare systems that claim equal protection and benefits for all. We see this in labour regulations and an employment insurance program that all but overlook sectors of the labour market that are disproportionately filled by women and racialized workers. Socio-political exclusion produces a “common sense” that instantly sorts out who President Trump was addressing – and who he was not – in his declaration: “I will fight to protect you — I am your president of law and order.”

Subjective exclusion is the culmination of all dimensions of social exclusion, and it functions to justify and perpetuate all other forms of violence. Now I want to point out that the processes and outcomes of subjective exclusion – a term that may invoke ideas easily dismissed as “soft” – go much deeper than individual experiences of discrimination. The mechanism of subjective exclusion is symbolic violence – the classification, dispossession, and devaluing of the *person*, the subject, in everyday interactions ([Good Gingrich, 2010, 2016](#); [Good Gingrich & Young, 2019](#)). These everyday practices and official procedures naturally follow the “unmaking” of socio-political exclusion to “remake” whole groups of people. Subjective exclusion is violence because it is *dehumanizing*, making the agonizingly slow murder of George Floyd, witnessed without effective intervention, possible.

My team and I have more initiatives planned for the weeks to come, including a panel discussion—‘The Equity Myth Through a COVID-19 Lens’—with co-authors of *The Equity Myth: Racialization and Indigeneity at Canadian Universities*, Frances Henry, Enakshi Dua, and Carl James, and featuring opening remarks by Vice President Equity, People and Culture Sheila Cote-Meek and Shirin Shahrokni as the discussant.

For more on the roots of systemic racism, see:

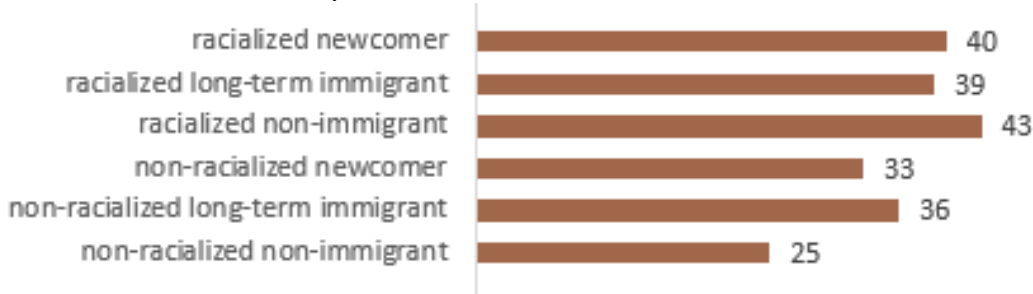
- ⇒ Dorota Blumczynska, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba: [Even if you start feeling uncomfortable, please don't stop reading. We are long overdue for this conversation.](#) (June 1, 2020).
- ⇒ Bill Lee, Critical Perspectives Blog: [White Privilege, White Supremacy and Racism.](#) (June 1, 2020).
- ⇒ Carl James' comments on talking to kids about anti-Black racism:
 - Jennifer Ferreria, *CTV News*: [How parents should talk to their children about anti-black racism.](#) (June 1, 2020).
 - Meghan Collie, *Global News*: [Raising an ally: How to talk to your child about the death of George Floyd, anti-Black racism.](#) (June 2, 2020).
 - Morgann Campbell, *Global News*: [Experts encourage parents to speak to children about anti-Black racism, police brutality.](#) (June 1, 2020).

For more on the uneven health implications of COVID-19, see:

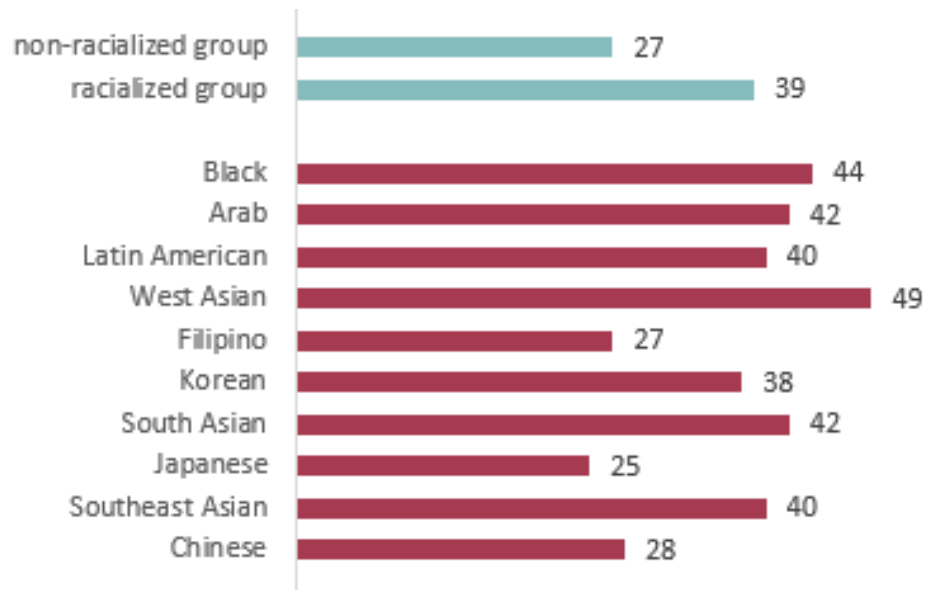
- ⇒ Public Health England: [Disparities in the risk and outcomes of COVID-19.](#) (June 2020).
- ⇒ Ed Pilkington, *The Guardian*: [Black Americans dying of Covid-19 at three times the rate of white people.](#) (May 20, 2020).
- ⇒ Aimée-Angélique Bouka and Yolande Bouka, Policy Options: [Canada's COVID-19 blind spots on race, immigration, and labour.](#) (May 19, 2020).
- ⇒ Muriel Draaisma, *CBC*: [COVID-19 affecting certain groups in Toronto more than others, preliminary data suggests.](#) (May 5, 2020).
- ⇒ Charles M. Blow, *The New York Times*: [The Racial Time Bomb in the Covid-19 Crisis.](#) (April 1, 2020).

Appendix 1

Percentage of Population Living in Rented Dwellings in Core Housing Need by Immigrant and Racialized Status in the City of Toronto, 2016



Percentage of Population Living in Rented Dwellings in Core Housing Need by Racialized Status in the City of Toronto, 2016¹



¹ From Social Planning Report on Spatial Exclusion (forthcoming) by Beth Wilson, Naomi Lightman, & Luann Good Gingrich.



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The [Global Labour Research Centre \(GLRC\)](#) at York University engages in the study of work, employment and labour in the context of a constantly changing global economy.