IMAGINATIONS

Digital Resistance to Asian-American Hate during COVID-19: Study of Photography and Art on Instagram
Résistance numérique à la haine des Asiatiques-Américains pendant la Covid-19 : étude de la photographie et de l'art sur Instagram

Nanditha Narayanamoorthy

Article abstract

In this research, I study the digital resistance to Asian-American hate, isolation, alienation, and 'othering' visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 in the Global North. Specifically, I draw attention to the role of personal and artistic representations of Asian female bodies that perform both a resistance to hate, in the context of the pandemic, and an affirmation of ethnic and racial heritage and belonging of the self in North America. Through the engagement with #stopasianhate and #haterisavirus hashtags on Instagram, I uncover the rejection of historic and contemporary racial and gendered violence, harassment, xenophobia, and othering that emerges through visual activism and personal and artistic performativity online. I focus on the interplay between body politics and anti-racist feminist digital activism in order to understand how performativity of the self through photography and art can empower Asian-American female bodies.

IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

ALI AHMED
R. BENEDITO FERRÃO
ABU HAQUE
NANDITHA NARAYANAMOORTHY
JAQUELINE MCLEOD ROGERS
SADIA UDDIN

IMAGINATIONS

REVUE D'ETUDES INTERCULTURELLES DE L'IMAGE • JOURNAL OF CROSS-CULTURAL IMAGE STUDIES

CONTEMPORARY CRITICAL THEORY AND DECOLONIAL VISUAL PRAXIS: EXPLORING RESISTANCE NARRATIVES AND COLONIAL HEGEMONIES IN THE PANDEMIC

Guest Editor: Nanditha Narayanamoorthy   Issue 14-1, 2023

Contemporary Critical Theory and Decolonial Visual Praxis: Exploring resistance narratives and colonial hegemonies in the pandemic
Guest Editor: Nanditha Narayanamoorthy
2023-03-31

DIGITAL RESISTANCE TO ASIAN-AMERICAN HATE DURING COVID-19: STUDY OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND ART ON INSTAGRAM

NANDITHA NARAYANAMOORTHY

In this research, I study the digital resistance to Asian-American hate, isolation, alienation, and 'othering' visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21 in the Global North. Specifically, I draw attention to the role of personal and artistic representations of Asian female bodies that perform both a resistance to hate, in the context of the pandemic, and an affirmation of ethnic and racial heritage and belonging of the self in North America. Through the engagement with #stopasianhate and #haterisavirus hashtags on Instagram, I uncover the rejection of historic and contemporary racial and gendered violence, harassment, xenophobia, and othering that emerges through visual activism and personal and artistic performativity online. I focus on the interplay be-

Dans cette recherche, j'étudie la résistance numérique à la haine, à l'isolement, à l'aliénation et à « l'altérité » des Asiatiques-Américains, visible pendant la pandémie de Covid-19 en 2020.21 dans le l'hémisphère nord. Plus précisément, j'attire l'attention sur le rôle des représentations personnelles et artistiques des corps féminins asiatiques qui constituent à la fois une résistance à la haine, dans le contexte de la pandémie, et une affirmation de l'héritage ethnique et racial et de l'appartenance de soi en Amérique du Nord. À travers l'engagement des hashtags #stopasianhate et #haterisavirus sur Instagram, je découvre le rejet de la violence raciale et sexiste qui est historiques et contemporaines, le harcèlement, la xénophobie et l'altérité qui émergent à travers l'activisme visuel et la performativité personnelle et artistique en ligne. Je me concentre sur l'interaction entre la poli-

tween body politics and anti-racist feminist digital activism in order to understand how performativity of the self through photography and art can empower Asian-American female bodies.

tique du corps et l'activisme numérique féministe antiraciste afin de comprendre comment la performativité du soi à travers la photographie et l'art peut renforcer le corps des femmes asiatiques-américaines.

INTRODUCTION

In this research, I study the digital resistance to Asian-American hate, isolation, alienation, and "othering" visibilized during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-2021 in the Global North. Specifically, I draw attention to the role of personal and artistic representations of Asian female bodies that perform both a resistance to hate, in the context of the pandemic, and an affirmation of ethnic and racial heritage and belonging of the self in North America. Through the engagement with #stopasianhate and #haterisavirus hashtags on Instagram, I uncover the rejection of historic and contemporary racial and gendered violence, harassment, xenophobia, and othering that emerges through visual activism and personal and artistic performativity online. I focus on the interplay between body politics and anti-racist feminist digital activism in order to understand how performativity of the self through photography and art can empower Asian-American female bodies.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Anti-Asian Hate during the Pandemic

The global spread of COVID-19 has exacerbated hate crimes and discriminatory acts against Asian-Americans who have been "burdened with mounting anxieties and heightened racial tensions, microaggressions, verbal attacks, physical violence and harassment" (Gover et al. 648). According to the Stop AAPI Hate campaign, more than 1700 anti-Asian hate crimes have been documented since the beginning of the pandemic (Jeung). Asian-Ameri-

cans have been perceived as dangerous (Gover et al. 648) owing to the racialized origins of the coronavirus in Wuhan, China, and the "COVID-19 crisis has been misappropriated to reinforce racial discrimination and anti-immigrant rhetoric" (Devakumar et al.1). Therefore, the spread of the virus occurs in tandem with "the spread of racism, and the fear and 'othering' of Asian bodies in the United States" (649), and perpetuates the characterization of Asians as "foreigners, stigmatized groups, and other minorities" (Li and Nicholson Jr. 5). The increase in the production of polarized echo chambers has further inflamed violent crimes based on "perceived race, colour, religion, nationality, country of origin, disability, gender or sexual orientation" (649). According to Angela Gover et al., the practice of othering and hate in the North is deeply imbricated with histories and hierarchies of colonial racism, racial superiority, and privilege, thereby emerging as a xenophobic response to the global pandemic (750). Although Asians have recently become targets in Anti-Chinese sentiment owing to false stereotypes, they have always been considered foreigners, and "perceived as unassimilable" in the North (Li and Nicholson Jr. 2-3). Yao Li & Harvey L. Nicholson also note the linkages between otherization and the historic exoticization of Asian groups in the west (3). Furthermore, scholars have contextualized Asian-American identity in relation to the dominant and hegemonic structures of white supremacy, "non-white" settler colonialism, and systems of capitalism (Brock; Nakamura).

Several incidents from "boycotting of Asian restaurants, bullying of Asian American children at school, to verbal and physical assaults of Asian-Americans in public spaces" have been documented during the pandemic (Gover et al. 748-749). Women and the elderly are most affected by this pervasive violence and the interlinkages between micro aggressions and macro structures of power produced by colonialism and white supremacy. The recent mass shooting of six Asian women in Atlanta by Robert Aaron Long, a 21-year-old white man, brought to the fore the risk of physical assault and battery that female Asian bodies carry. In this context, therefore, women have found a safe space on digital platforms to engage in discussions of racism, hate crimes, and gendered violence, and participate in a

process of sharing in order to subsequently de-"otherize" their own bodies, and legitimize their belonging and cultural heritage through digital photography and art. The body politics of Asian-American women, here, also underscores the intersectional connections between their racialized and gendered identities, and intersectionality becomes a "space for coalitional possibilities" for the reassertion of the self through digital representation (Collins and Bilge 133-134).

Visual Activism and Representation - Instagram as a space for Resistance

Visual media and visual practices, according to Olu Jenzen et al., "have become a vital part of political and protest communication, and gained importance in the study of social movements and digital activism" (419). Danielle Kilgo & Rachel Mourão contend that visuals carry powerful messages that we process faster than verbal and/or textual cues (581). According to Aidan McGarry et al., images leave a "trace of social identities, processes, practices, experiences, institutions, and relations" (22). In this context, visual activism is "aimed at catalysing the social, political and economic change" (Demos 87) through the repurposing of images, politicizing of resistance, and creation of new meaning making online (Jenzen et al. 419). Furthermore, visual protest culture fosters mobilization, communication, and participation among users, and engenders the creation of an affective network of "feelings of engagement, belonging and solidarity" (Papacharissi 4). The visual platform has continued to redefine the "production of protest imaginaries," (Jenzen et al. 416) as artists, creators, and designers find an avenue for personal and collective empowerment (Lotfalian 1377) through the medium of digital ecology. Emiliano Treré's term "media imaginaries" (108) illustrates how social media is visually represented by artists and employed by protesters to both "mobilize and communicate their ideas, identities and emotions across diverse social spaces" (Jenzen et al. 415). Instagram, in recent years, has become a "central presence in the media landscape," (Caldeira et al. 1073) and in the production of visual activism and other "aestheticized forms of political expressions," (Lotfalian 1371) shaping "visual contemporary culture, aesthetic values and photographic conventions" (Manovich 73). McGarry et al. define the aesthetic of visual protest culture as encompass-

ing "slogans, art, symbols, slang, humour, graffiti, gestures, bodies, colour, clothes, and objects" (18) that can be shared across diverse platforms such as Instagram. In this context, Treré argues that visual cultures produce "counter-hegemonic imaginaries pushed forward by social movements" for marginalized communities (110). The platform, therefore, creates the space for mobilization and resistance against exclusion, inequality, and injustice, and enables the representation and visibilization of subaltern minoritized communities in the digital public sphere (Fraser 67). Furthermore, Instagram has also been studied in relation to digital self-representation, particularly in the context of fame, visibility, gender, and selfies in popular culture (Caldeira et al. 1073). A global and vibrant culture of image production, "curation, archiving, organizing, and dissemination" including photographs, selfies, and art has become an important practice in visual activism (Senft and Baym 1588; Caldeira et al. 1077-78) and guides visual strategies of representation. Sharing self-portraits and photographs on Instagram empowers individuals to connect, form affective communities, create narratives, and share their personal stories. Similarly, the emergence of "art works, relational aesthetics, cultural ecology," (Silva 177) and artistic installations demonstrates a "low barrier to artistic expression and civic engagement" (Kang et al. 2) online. As Jian Kang argues, Instagram is now a powerful medium to "discover, promote and critique art, and enables the emergence of a highly interactive process" (2) in citizen participation. Activist art brings a feminist and decolonial perspective, and enables the coming together of social and political spheres in order to establish equality and justice for racialized bodies. However, as the raging pandemic creates more othering and inequalities through polarization, new forms of visual protest are emerging on digital platforms. At this juncture, this study aims to fill the gaps in scholarship by putting Asian feminism in conversation with empowerment through the female body politic and visual aesthetics on Instagram. I consider it important to contextualize anti-Asian xenophobic othering during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the historically situated racism towards Asian bodies in the Global North, and to examine

their conscious act of empowerment, resistance, defiance, and self-assertion on Instagram.

Visual Feminist Activism—Body Performativity

Rachel Kuo states that Asian communities have been historically "excluded from dominant discourses thereby preventing cross-community solidarity" (8). Therefore, digital participation and engagement of Asian bodies through hashtags on Instagram both discursively and visually produces mobilization and affective solidarities among Asian women. Basia Sliwinska expands on Judith Butler's performative aspect of female bodies that ensures empowerment through a collective struggle on social media platforms (3; Butler 4), and functions as both a personal and a political gesture to express belonging in the country. Asian women, particularly in the pandemic, have collectively mobilized and located their own bodies online in order to effectively resist racial hate. Sliwinska adds that the "assembly, embodiment and mobility of bodies in space becomes a vehicle for activism," (4) and that the spatiality of feminism works to bring their narratives to the forefront of their cause (7). In this context, body politics and performativity create spaces for feminist and racist emancipation through an active process of decoloniality of both gender and race (Makhubu 214). Therefore, the digital photographic and artistic reflection of the self against the "other," occurs through self-representation and performativity of female bodies against the "materiality of the patriarchal, racist, ethnocentric" reality of the pandemic (3-4; Grosz 15).

METHOD

In order to determine the common themes that emerge in the personal and artistic performance of belonging and rejection of racism for Asian women, I conducted this research using a visual qualitative analysis of Instagram posts collected on the anti-Asian violence movement. I engaged specifically with #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus hashtags on Instagram using a critical feminist framework and decolonial visual praxis. Out of 535,924, 51,671 and 13,063 posts yielded by #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus respectively on In-

stagram, I manually selected 80 images that depict the self-representation of Asian women, as well as artistic designs for the movement made for/by Asian women in the Global North. Since Instagram is a private platform, I conducted data extraction using data scraping techniques. To collect Instagram content on the #stopasianhate movement, I downloaded posts using the specific hashtags on the Instagram webpage using the Selenium Project (2019) and Beautiful Soup (Richardson) libraries in Python. Following this procedure, I manually screenshot Instagram posts to include the image. I collected the text and the date separately. All original posts are in English, and were collected in the timeline of seven months between April 1 and October 8, 2021. As personal stories are more likely to be shared on private or highly visual platforms such as Instagram, I selected uniquely relevant and personal posts in comparison to posts made by organizations. Here, to understand the relationship between Asian-American body politics and digital resistance, I examine various images that showcase the multiplicity of voices in Asian-American bodies. With respect to artistic representations of Asian-ness during the pandemic, I primarily investigate the work of multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname) with her permission.

Decolonial Visual Framework

I study the Instagram posts using decoloniality/a decolonial framework that is produced by structures and matrices of power following colonization and settler colonialism. Therefore, a decolonial framework helps uncover racialized and gendered bodies and knowledge of belonging that has been erased by the forces of modernity and colonialism. Thus, I employ the decolonial visual praxis as a means to rediscover, acknowledge, and validate Asian-American lives and recenter their lived experiences in the hierarchies of racial privilege in the Global North. In this context, the process of decolonization occurs through the engagement with anti-racist hashtags; through the sharing of personal stories bearing witness to their resilience; through self-representation of female Asian bodies on social media platforms to communicate their belonging; and through the depiction of art to visibilize the Asian-American experience in the North.

BODY POLITICS AND REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN WOMEN ON INSTAGRAM

The gendered and racialized body of the Asian-American is defined as the "other" and the minoritized outsider, and the history of racialization in the Global North otherizes them either through a process of exoticization, or through discrimination, hypersurveillance, and violence enacted on their bodies. In this context, the female body functions as the "key site of feminist visual activism," (Baer 19) and performs a personal and political gesture of empowerment and resistance using a bodily form (Sliwinska 4). The process of appropriation, infiltration, and self-insertion of Asian-American women on Instagram "combats racial oppression," (Baer 19) produces dissent, and disrupts dominant infrastructures. Their bodies emerge as the site of resistance and are constantly being reshaped and repurposed to define their identities and assert their belonging in the North. The visuality of their bodies online creates a counter-hegemonic space against normative hierarchies and power structures where they can produce an agency over and alternate interpretations of their own stories and perform resistance. Their corporeal presence on Instagram and engagement with the #stopasianhate hashtags on digital spaces underpins a sort of precarity, vulnerability, and comfort for these women (Sliwinska 9). The material reconfiguration of public and digital spaces, in fact, allows them to re-center their personal stories through the practice of vulnerable sharing. In this case, photography becomes a powerful medium of creating and disseminating narratives of violent and xenophobic othering. Out of the 80 images collected, 34 are characterized as photographs, self-portraits, or photoshoots that depict the defiance of female Asian-American bodies and the desire to reclaim public and private spaces through their "Asian-ness." Here, I contend that digital resistance in photographic and personal representation emerges on Instagram in the following ways:

1) Resistance against Asian-American hate founded on historical otherness,

2) Opposition to forced stereotypes of "Chinese-ness" thrust on all Asian-Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic,

3) Navigation of personal identity and voice as an ethnic Asian, and

4) Intergenerational memories of racism and unbelonging

For instance, an Instagram user states:

> "Growing up, I've always told myself to be quiet when people make **racist** jokes to me. I've always told myself to ignore those who only see me as being able to say they've 'been with an **exotic** woman.' To this day I struggle to speak up for myself when people say **negative** comments. This photo is one part of my final project for my studio class this past spring. I wanted to provide a visual for how I've truly felt and how much I've grown even just through the pandemic. I've officially lost count of how many times I've been told to go back to my country, or how many times people have blamed me for the pandemic. The COVID virus is not the 'Chinese virus,' and no, I'm not Chinese. Although I always want to be quiet, because peoples ignorant comments reflect more on them than on me, I'm starting to slowly come out of that. I need to speak up for myself. They believed what they were saying, but it hurt. It still hurts. But I'm thriving, and I'm growing. **Silence** truly does kill."

Through visual representation of the self, the above user engages in decrying racism against Asian-Americans, the violent exoticization, and the negative remarks and assumptions of being "Chinese" directed at her during the pandemic. According to her, she carries the negativity and otherization in silence. However, she breaks through her silence, and, through the sharing of her personal stories of alienation, struggle, and isolation, she creates a space for personal as well as collective emancipation for Asian-Americans. Simultaneously, her body becomes the battlefield where Asian-American resistance is performed. In order to challenge hate against her community, she etches the letters "S" and "H" that denote "Stop Hate" throughout her body for a visual and performative display of the everyday struggles and violence her community faces. Therefore, digital feminine em-

Figure 1: Image posted by @megan.keun

bodiment constructs the ability to negotiate agency and visibility for both the personal and the collective, as well as performativity in opposition to online and offline oppressive structures (Gajjala; Bhatia). In addition to the resistance, she displays immense vulnerability and precarity in her post that emerges in her desire to speak for herself, and in her admission of shame and hurt caused by otherization in

Figure 2: Image by @joeyunlee

her country. Similarly, the post below also stands for the collective Asian-American resistance against the dominant structures of whiteness.

The user asserts,

> "Asian Americans throughout the nation have been facing hate, and harassment from many people. We stand with our Asian counterparts and want to #stopasianhate. Please look into how you can help stop Asian hate in your communities."

Again, the participant engages with the #stopasianhate hashtag to declare solidarity with the movement. Despite the positivity and

collectivity that is established in the posts, the performativity of their Asian-American identity in the image lays bare the fragmentation and disruption in the face of everyday assault and harassment against members of the community. The presence of various skin tones and colours on the user's face is a testament to their inability to exist simply as an Asian-American, and their desire and/or pressure to constantly fit in the mould of whiteness. This portrait of self-representation allows the user to navigate and wade through the various identities that Asian-Americans must construct for themselves in order to eventually validate and acknowledge their voice in society. Furthermore, through the visual imagery, the creator establishes the struggles behind otherization of Asian- American bodies: a feeling of never being "at home" in the Global North; of always being broken and fragmented; of being forced to carry multiple sides in their hyphenated Asian-American identity; and the constant disconnect that Asian bodies are being subjected to in the country. Similarly, another user (below) shares her personal story, and speaks to how she gravitated towards whiteness while constantly being exoticized by non-Asians. This fragmentation of identity along with the discomfort produced in a non-white body is an inherent and direct manifestation of hierarchies and privileges attached to whiteness. She says,

"I feel quite vulnerable posting this, but I'm more than willing to join the voices that demand equality 💪

I grew up in a diverse, but predominately white neighbourhood. I am Filipino and Japanese and thankfully never received blatant racism in my face as a child. But I always knew I was **different** and sadly often wished I was **white**. Going into my teenage years, I was seen as unique and sometimes even exotic… but I didn't feel that way. I felt **disconnected** on all fronts and wasn't '**enough**' Japanese, Filipino, or American. I never knew anyone who could directly relate to me and as an only child I was alone. I grew up completely aware of the fact that Asians have historically been **discriminated** against and stereotyped. Yes, I do still get spoken to in Chinese or Korean by non-Asians assuming we're all the same. It will continue to be a lifelong process of embracing my culture, but I'm 100%

Figure 3: Image posted by @alicynreikoart

committed to it! I love how rich my background is and the food is GREAT!"

In her narrative, despite an active lack of otherization, she states that she knew she was always different. The production of dislocation and non-belonging, therefore, are a result of whiteness around her.

Furthermore, much like the above post, she struggles with the navigation of multiple identities, and finds it difficult to embrace the Filipino and Japanese cultures she was born into as her own. This post, in its vulnerability, performs her eventual acceptance of her own culture and assertion of her belonging in the Global North through fashion. Another point to note is her contention that Asian-Americans are viewed as a single entity in the west. Otherization here exists in binaries of white versus non-white where the non-white is simply labelled "Chinese or Korean," as the post states. The user rejects an essentialist categorization of Asian identity that is detrimental to the process of personal identity building as part of a multicultural family. Her argument is that Asians come in many forms, and carry a multitude of diverse identities, particularly as part of the Asian diaspora in the west. Ironically, for the Asian-American community, collective solidarity is rooted in the binaries of essentialist categorization that is necessary in the building of a coalitional movement of resistance against hate. Here, the essentialist "Asian" identity created through the process of otherness is usurped by the community as a collective political identity and statement. Asian-Americans come into this identity through an act of subversion that occurs through, in this case, engagement with the hashtags and the visual aesthetics of protest.

Finally, self-representation through photography emerges also in intergenerational memory and identity for the Asian diaspora in the west. The user below expresses her nostalgia, and relates her intergenerational memory, invoking multiple generations of her family in Taiwan.

> "It's just really nostalgic, since it's picturing multiple generations of my family from when I was young. I saw it sitting in my aunt's house last month on the day of my grandmother's funeral, so it just seemed like … a fitting one. I read Joy Luck Club when I was very young—actually randomly picked up a second-hand copy in Taiwan when I was like 12. The stories of the mothers and the daughters aren't very similar to my family, but the idea of having to listen to your family while also staying true to yourself resonated with me."

Figure 4: Image posted by @henrikmeng

In this image, the production and the assertion of the self occurs through familial attachments and the memory of belonging in her native land that the user carries with her at all times. Her ties to her mother, grandmother, and other members of the family, as well as her memory of important events such as funerals and weddings create familiar threads of personal identity. The image above displays an al-

most ethereal diasporic and corporeal tether to her identity through an act of "remembering," and her memory helps her embrace herself completely.

ARTISTIC REPRESENTATION OF ASIAN WOMEN ON INSTAGRAM

The philosophy of both street and digital art encompasses a "strong sense of activism" (Alpaslan 53), and through its visual aesthetics performs an anti-authoritarian and anti-oppressive function (Taş and Taş 326). As Oğuzhan and Tuğba Taş argue, street art in its various hybrid forms is a form of political statement with the potential to reclaim public spaces, forge new spaces, and negotiate visibility through dissemination (328-329). The aesthetic imaginaries enable the production of "a counter-spatial intervention in the dominant public sphere" (328) that brings necessary self-affirmation, healing, reparations, and acknowledgement of the historic trauma for the members of the community. In the context of Asian-American hate and violence, digital artistic representations employ visual performance art and public installations that also find an avenue on digital platforms such as Instagram. Here, protest and resistance against hate occur through the public presence of Asian-American figures on the street, or as part of magazines and other popular media that subsequently ensure representation for the Asian-American community and instill a feeling of belonging in the dominant public sphere. In order to study artistic resistance in the #stopasianhate movement on Instagram, I examine the work of multidisciplinary artist Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname). Amanda, born to Thai and Indonesian immigrants, is a multidisciplinary artist based in Brooklyn, New York City. She primarily employs a feminist and decolonial framework in her art, and works to reclaim community spaces through her construction of art and art installations in museums, subways, highway tunnels, buildings as well as street graffiti around the city. Her art has also been featured on prominent magazines including the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine.
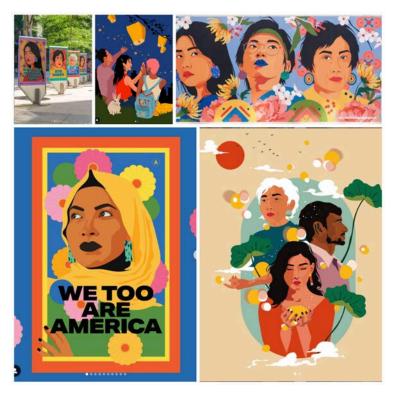
Figure 5: Instagram Images: Courtesy of Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya
(@alonglastname)

The above image showcases various installations across the city as well as a magazine cover that prominently features Asian-Americans as well as Pacific Highlanders through art. For one of the city's many installations, represented by the first image above, Amanda writes:

"These guardians are at Water x Maiden **proudly declaring our belonging in Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean and Japanese**, according to the stats we saw, the groups most impacted by anti-Asian bias incidents, though everything is underreported. Help me tell folks they are there ☺ Thanks @nycimmigrants for helping with the translations.

Amanda's art captures the resistance to physical violence, harassment, and assault directed towards the Asian-American community in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through the representations of multiple Asian women in her installations, she invokes the ancestors from "Tagalog, Chinese, Vietnamese, Korean, and Japanese" backgrounds to "proudly declare Asian belonging in the city," and bring awareness to the racial and gendered otherization of Asian women's bodies. As the NYC public transit saw a number of reported incidents of hate and harassment against members of the Asian community, Amanda's creation serves as both an homage to Asians in the city, and a platform to generate visibility for Asian bodies at the site of hate and harassment. She has also created several murals across the city, shown in the images on the right in the above post, that serve not merely as an active form of resistance but also as a "reminder of strength, resilience and hope," for the community. Therefore, her artistic creations are imaginaries of resistance, love, hope, healing, reparation, belonging, and courage that emerge through visual and textual activism online. As she poignantly states in another post: "It was a process **of collective healing, a ritual to hold space for our self-care and catharsis**, and a **celebration of our courage**. It was also a collaboration at a time when it was difficult to connect and be with our friends and loved ones in-person."

Amanda questions what it means to be Asian through an artistic performance of protest, and engages with #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus to bring attention to the struggles of otherization in her community. In this context, her art becomes a "ritualistic space for self-care and catharsis"; a space that implies ancestral protection; a place to heal as a community from personal grief and collective trauma derived from historical and violent oppression. She brings her artistic creations to life in order to connect with others who identify

as Asian-Americans while providing a space for community build-ing. Her art performs a reclamation of public space, and begins the arduous process of recentering the Asian-American narratives. Fur-thermore, she locates a deep personal vulnerability and trust in her artistic performance. Using her Instagram posts, she shares her per-sonal stories of growing up in the Global North, and being "burdened with childhood scars" caused by dislocation and a sense of unbelong-ing. She says:

> "I am the proud daughter of Thai and Indonesian immigrants, and a proud Asian-American. Every year when Moon Festival rolls around, or as I call it, mid-Autumn Festival, I experience the same giddy excitement as I did when I was 5. This is a time where we get to gather with loved ones, gaze contemplative-ly at the moon, give gifts, release our hopes and burdens with lanterns, eat all kinds of delicious food and stuff ourselves sil-ly with mooncakes. One year in elementary school. I brought moon cakes to school to share with my classmates. I was so excited for them to embrace the sweet and salty goodness of these treats! It didn't quite go as planned. Watching them try a bite and then spit it out in disgust was like a stab in my little heart. I remember thinking, it's fine if you don't like it. More for me. But I also stopped bringing any Asian food for lunch for a while and begged my mom to let me eat McDonald's so that I could be more like the other kids. It's a curious thing how these childhood scars run deep and how these experiences often grow up with us and turn into micro aggressions in the work-place or more explicitly anti-Asian bias incidents or outright hate. Despite this, I'm hopeful for change."https://www.insta-gram.com/nycimmigrants/

In the above post, Amanda employs her art as a tool for sharing her story that speaks to the production of guilt and shame in relation to her non-whiteness, and of the countless micro-aggressions she and others like her have faced. Therefore, her artistic imaginaries become an intentional form of visual, personal, and collective protest that brings awareness to anti-Asian bias, and everyday micro-aggressions against the community.

DECOLONIZING THROUGH VISUAL ACTIVISM

The Asian-American experience in the Global North has been historically shaped by the matrices of colonial power that have perpetually otherized, exoticized, and racialized predominantly non-white and feminine bodies. The history of Asian-Americans in North America abounds with exclusion, exploitation, and misrepresentation, and has set a precedent for distrust of Asians that the COVID-19 pandemic has both visibilized and exacerbated. The colonial narrative of whiteness that defines East, Southeast, and South Asians as "perpetual foreigners" who are inferior owing to the difference in their ethnic and cultural identity plays an important role in the production of guilt, shame, and identity confusion for Asian-Americans. Therefore, visual activism through #stopasianhate and #hateisavirus in the context of the pandemic, as well as the use of Asian-American women's personal and artistic imaginaries on Instagram, is a veritable act of decolonization that emerges in the digital resistance of hate. In this context, digital decolonization also occurs through the acknowledgement and visibilization of the histories of oppression for Asian-American people, through the creation of affective networks and community building, and through the construction of decentralized counterpublics of collective resistance, survival, care, healing, and resurgence through activism. Visual protest, in this sense, creates a space for rewriting colonial history with collective histories and genealogies of vulnerable and oppressed communities and forges the means to dismantle and recenter the foundations of colonial knowledge through the use of hashtags. A decolonial praxis in the form of anti-racist hashtags here illuminates the previously invisible narratives of the Asian-American community, and amplifies the voice of the racialized and gendered subject. As the visual and textual discourse above demonstrates, users employ the #stopasianhate hashtag on Instagram in an attempt to connect with their culture, their ancestors, their language and food. Through this process, they both reassert their belonging in the North as well as embrace their own identity as an "Asian." Thus, decolonial strategies on social media enable the forging of their new identities and resistance of hate through decolonization.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I contextualized digital hate of Asian-Americans during the COVID-19 pandemic in relation to the historic otherization of Asian communities in the Global North. I argued that the digital resistance to hate emerges through visual protest and the use of anti-racist hashtags on social media platforms such as Instagram. Through photographic representation of and artistic intervention by female Asian bodies, the embodiment of feminist visual activism on Instagram bears witness to the historic oppression of Asian-American communities, enables the insertion of Asian bodies, the assertion of belonging, and constructs networks of intergenerational memory and culture and affective communities that build resilience, hope, healing, and reparations for the Asian American community in the future.

WORKS CITED

Alpaslan, Zeynep. "Is Street Art a Crime? An Attempt at Examining Street Art Using Criminology," *Advances in Applied Sociology*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2012, pp. 53-58.

Brock, André. "Black Technoculture and/as Afrofuturism." *Extrapolation*, vol. 61, no. 1-2, 2020, pp. 7-28.

Butler, Judith. "Notes Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly." *Law and Literature*, vol. 30, no. 2, Harvard UP, 2018, p. 381.

Caldeira, Sofia P., et al. "'Everybody Needs to Post a Selfie Every Once in a While': Exploring the Politics of Instagram Curation in Young Women's Self-Representational Practices." *Information, Communication & Society*, vol. 24, no. 8, Routledge, 2021, pp. 1073-90, doi:10.1080/1369118X.2020.1776371.

Collins, Patricia Hill, and Sirma Bilge. *Intersectionality*. Polity Press, 2016.

Corrigall-Brown, Catherine, and Rima Wilkes. "Picturing Protest: The Visual Framing of Collective Action by First Nations in Canada." *American Behavioral Scientist*, vol. 56, no. 2, Feb. 2012, pp. 223-243, doi:10.1177/0002764211419357.

Demos, TJ. "Between Rebel Creativity and Reification: For and Against Visual Activism." Journal of visual culture 15.1 (2016): 85–102. Web.

Devakumar, Delan, et al. "COVID-19: The Great Unequaliser." *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, vol. 113, no. 6, June 2020, pp. 234–235, doi:10.1177/0141076820925434.

Fraser, Nancy. "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy." *Social Text*, no. 25/26, Duke University Press, 1990, pp. 56–80, https://doi.org/10.2307/466240.

Gover, Angela R., et al. "Anti-Asian Hate Crime During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Exploring the Reproduction of Inequality." *American Journal of Criminal Justice*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2020, pp. 647–67, doi:10.1007/s12103-020-09545-1.

Grosz, Elizabeth. "The Future of Feminist Theory: Dreams for New Knowledges." Becoming Undone. New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2020. 74–87. Web.

Jenzen, Olu, et al. "The Symbol of Social Media in Contemporary Protest: Twitter and the Gezi Park Movement." *Convergence* (London, England), vol. 27, no. 2, SAGE Publications, 2021, pp. 414–37, doi:10.1177/1354856520933747.

Jeung, R. "Incidents of coronavirus discrimination : A report for A3PCON and CAA." *Asian Pacific Policy and Planning Council.* 2020. DOI: http://www.asianpacificpolicyandplanningcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/Stop_AAPI_Hate_Weekly_Report_4_3_20.pdf.

Kang, Xin, Wenyin Chen, and Jian Kang. 2019. "Art in the Age of Social Media: Interaction Behavior Analysis of Instagram Art Accounts" *Informatics* 6. 4(2019): 52-. https://doi.org/10.3390/informatics6040052.

Kilgo, Danielle K. & Rachel R. Mourão. "Protest Coverage Matters: How Media Framing and Visual Communication Affects Support for Black Civil Rights Protests," *Mass Communication and Society*, 24:4, 576-596, 2021, DOI: 10.1080/15205436.2021.1884724.

Le, Thomas K., et al. "Anti-Asian Xenophobia and Asian American COVID-19 Disparities." *American Journal of Public Health* (1971), vol. 110, no. 9, 2020, pp. 1371–73, doi:10.2105/AJPH.2020.305846.

Lee, Jennifer. "Asian Americans, Affirmative Action & the Rise in Anti-Asian Hate." Daedalus (Cambridge, Mass.), vol. 150, no. 2, *American Academy of Arts and Sciences*, 2021, pp. 180–98, doi:10.1162/daed_a_01854.

Li, Yao, and Harvey L. Nicholson. "When 'model Minorities' Become 'yellow peril'—Othering and the Racialization of Asian Americans in the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Sociology Compass*, vol. 15, no. 2, Wiley Subscription Services, Inc, 2021, p. e12849–n/a, doi:10.1111/soc4.12849.

Lotfalian, Mazyar. "Aestheticized Politics, Visual Culture, and Emergent Forms of Digital Practice." *International Journal of Communication* (Online), University of Southern California, Annenberg School for Communication & Journalism, Annenberg Press, 2013, p. 1371–1390.

Manovich, L. *Instagram and contemporary image.* New York, 2017. DOI: http://manovich.net/index.php/projects/ Instagram-and-contemporary-image.

McGarry, A., I. Erhart, H. Eslen-Ziya, O.Jenzen, U. Korkut (eds), *The Aesthetics of Global Protest: Visual Culture and Communication.* Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020, DOI: 10.5117/9789463724913_pre.

Nakamura, Lisa. "Watching White Supremacy on Digital Video Platforms: 'Screw Your Optics, I'm Going In.'" *Film quarterly* 72.3 (2019): 19–22. Web.

Piancatelli, Chiara, Marta Massi, and Andrea Vocino. "Artoninstagram: Engaging with Art in the Era of the Selfie." *International journal of market research* 63.2 (2021): 134-160. Web.

Ren, Jingqiu, and Joe Feagin. "Face Mask Symbolism in Anti-Asian Hate Crimes." *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 44, no. 5, Routledge, 2021, pp. 746–58, doi:10.1080/01419870.2020.1826553.

Senft, T. M., & Baym, N. K. "What does the selfie say? Investigating a global phenomenon." *International Journal of Communication*, 9 (2015): 1588–1606,. https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/ view/4067/1387

Silva, Armando. "Imaginaries In Contemporary Aesthetics" *Imaginations* 7:2 (2017): 174-187. DOI: 10.17742/IMAGE.VOS.7-2.10.

Sliwinska, Basia. *Feminist Visual Activism and the Body.* Routledge, 2021.

Taş, Oğuzhan, and Tuğba Taş. "Resistance on the Walls, Reclaiming Public Space: Street Art in Times of Political Turmoil in Turkey." *Interactions*

(Bristol, England), vol. 5, no. 3, Intellect, 2014, pp. 327–49, doi:10.1386/iscc.5.3.327_1.

Emiliano Treré. Hybrid Media Activism: Ecologies, Imaginaries, Algorithms. Taylor and Francis, 2018. Web.

IMAGE NOTES

Figure 1: Instagram image posted by Megan Keun (@megan.keun).

Figure 2: Instagram image posted by Joseph Lee (@joeyunlee).

Figure 3: Instagram image posted by Alicyn Reiko (@alicynreikoart).

Figure 4: Instagram image posted by Henrik Meng (@henrikmeng).

Figure 5: Instagram image posted Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya (@alonglastname). Photo credit: @alonglastname.