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Race and Neoliberalism in the Labour Market Integration of International Student Graduates in Canada

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ABSTRACT

This paper illustrates the mutually constitutive processes of race and neoliberalism in the labour market navigation and integration for Black Caribbean and South/Southeast Asian international student graduates in Canada. The data was gathered from recent international students and key informants in Canada's immigration policy circle using semi-structured interviews. The paper reveals that international student graduates (ISGs) are constrained to seek out precarious and low-skilled forms of employment and participate in a labour market that profits from cheap, exploitable flexible labour. Participants in areas outside the populous Greater Toronto Area (GTA) are perceived as contingent workers. The paper concludes with an argument for centering both race and neoliberalism in future empirical studies of ISG labour market integration.

Keywords: International student graduates, labour market, racing neoliberalism, Canada

INTRODUCTION

The 2010s witnessed a dramatic uptick in the number of international student graduates (ISGs) seeking entrance into the Canadian labour market post-graduation (Lu & Hou, 2019; Government of Canada, 2020). Canada's federal and provincial governments have introduced piecemeal labour and immigration regulations to attract and retain these skilled individuals (Williams et al., 2015). Coupled with the 2015 International Education Strategy (a federal policy aimed at targeting international students), this policy assumes Canada competes globally to attract skilled (and youthful) labourers (Frenette, Lu & Chan, 2019;

Government of Canada, 2014). Canada, through Employment and Social Development Canada, makes available postgraduate work permits (PGWPs) to support transition and participation of ISGs in the labour market 90 days after completion of postsecondary studies (Government of Canada, 2018). Having obtained credentials in Canadian postsecondary education (PSE), the government assumes that these skilled graduates, unlike previous immigrant cohorts, will experience a 'seamless' integration into the labour market (Bauder, 2006; Government of Canada, 2014). Although the PGWP has made it possible for ISGs to legally participate in Canada's labour market, very little has been documented about their outcomes in a neoliberal economy. However, we know that Canada's national development is historically structured by the demands of political economy via the incorporation of unskilled, racialized and dispensable labourers from the global south as contingent and contractual labour (Aguiar & Marten, 2011; Bolaria & Li, 1988; Choudry & Smith, 2016).

This article draws on interviews with Black Caribbean and South/Southeast Asian ISGs from a larger project on their postgraduate trajectories to illustrate the mutually constitutive processes of race and neoliberalism in their labour market navigation and integration in Canada. The paper deals with how ISGs fare in the Canadian labour market during the initial phase of their postgraduate transition; and how seeking employment in less culturally diverse and smaller cities outside the GTA both shapes and helps to make sense of their labour market integration. As I have addressed elsewhere, there are other processes (for example, immigrant networks, social capital, habitus, social fields, etc.) to be considered when examining PSE to labour market trajectory of ISGs in Canada (Ellis, 2019). The focus here is on the mutually constitutive process of racialization and neoliberalism.

The paper begins with a brief reference to the literature on neoliberalism followed by a more detailed discussion of racing neoliberalism, the conceptual frame that grounds the paper. The method used in the study is described, and data is then presented illustrating how race and neoliberalism shape ISG early job experiences both inside and outside Canada's GTA.

LITERATURE RELEVANT FOR CONCEPTUALIZING RACE AND NEOLIBERALISM IN ISG/ISM RESEARCH

There is a vast literature on the topic of neoliberalism, also known as advanced capitalism. The specific topic of ISGs and ISM (international student mobility) and neoliberalism has also been critically reviewed by several authors, most recently by Yang (2020). Springer (2010:1031) sees neoliberalism as a "hybridized mobile technology" which is adopted differently in different contexts, necessitating a close look at how it unfurls in specific geographical locations. Britain and America implemented neoliberal reforms in the 1980s and Canada followed in 1984 (Swarts, 2014:107) with a federal government report that "clearly articulated the basic neoliberal philosophy shared by many at that point among business Liberals, by Bay Street and ultimately by Prime Minister Mulroney himself." Briefly, neoliberalism advocates a return to neoclassical

economics to replace what is constructed as a failed Keynesian economic project. Neoliberalism promises to restore individual freedom through the penetration of market ideals or principles and "competitiveness" in all spheres of human life (Peck & Tickell, 2002:380). Since financing welfare programs is constructed as disincentivizing the self-interested individual from maximizing the potential for generating wealth (Springer, 2010), it is argued that "there is no alternative" (Swarts, 2014). Global spread, supported by the World Trade Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, enforces a regulatory framework that guarantees the protection of individual freedoms, property rights and economic conditions for free market ideals (e.g. competition, meritocracy, efficiency, etc.) that are conducive to investments (Harvey, 2005; Peck & Tickell. 2002; Springer, 2010). Critics on the political left have pointed to the devastating consequences of IMF structural adjustment policies for poorer nations (Mullings, 1999). Richer nations like Canada have not been subjected to the IMF, with neoliberalism instead operating as a "hegemonic mode of discourse" (Harvey, 2005:2-3) promoted by both levels of government.

Scholars have drawn on various theoretical frames to interpret international student mobility issues. Researchers deal with ISM as part of a migratory regime, since ISGs are defined as those who pursue PSE outside their countries of citizenship. According to a recent review of the critical literature, ethics and human rights are associated with neoliberalism and/or postcolonialism (Yang, 2020). Issues that are covered include the role of educational intermediaries, social networks, the discourses of ethics and politics, and student mobility as a trans-border mechanism for "capital accumulation and the reproduction of either privilege or inequities along the lines of social class" (Yang, 2020: 521; Akkaymak, 2016). However, this literature fails to consider the issues in explicitly racial terms and much of it focusses on PSE. Scholars critique the neoliberal logic of the bourgeoning practice among richer countries to commodify PSE access and marketize the movement of educational talent (Yang 2020:552). As a corollary, these scholars emphasize that PSE institutions and by extension, Anglophone states, consider international students as a "source of tuition fees, or cash cow" (Baas, 2006; Robertson, 2011).

There has been recent empirical study of ISGs post-graduation in Canada (e.g. Akkaymak, 2016; Frenette et al., 2019; Kim & Kwak, 2019; Scott et al., 2015) but it remains largely silent on the postgraduate experience and race with a few notable exceptions (e.g. Liu, 2019, Ku et al., 2018). Overall, the ISM literature treats race and neoliberalism as two separate categories with the former relatively underexplored (Baas, 2014). Postcolonial analyses on international student mobility have largely been used to interpret the inequities and dominance of Western knowledge in higher education rather than integration of ISGs post-graduation (Yang, 2020). Some ISM literature may even go so far as to construct ISGs as incapable bodies that must demonstrate their capacity to acclimatize to life in immigrant-receiving states, without questioning existing asymmetrical power relations and resources between international students and the immigrant receiving country. Internationally, scholars of ISM have documented the vulnerability characterizing the post-

graduation experience for ISGs in immigrant-receiving states. For example, Marginson et al. (2010:148), in a study of 200 students, found that mobile international students experience an "uncertain, vulnerable" and disempowering existence (p.148). International student security scholarship in this vein emphasizes the "maintenance of a stable capacity for self-determining human agency" (Marginson et al., 2010) and as a consequence contemplates and invokes discourses of "well-being," "security" and human rights (Marginson et al., 2010:60).

But matters connected to the security of international students cannot be disentangled from issues of "politics and ethics" (Yang, 2020:520). Where it is not centred, as in a large Canadian study that concludes that the problems of ISGs are "difficulties pertaining to language abilities, poor connectedness to host communities, and perceived employer discrimination against IS" (Scott et al., 2015), the impression is left that ISGs are to blame for their problems. Not mentioning race at all may leave the impression that ISGs are 'raceless.' Challenging this approach, I applied a co-constitutive analysis of race and neoliberalism to interpret the incorporation of students from two racial backgrounds, also exploring their experiences in culturally less diverse spaces in Canada.

There is a large critical literature on race and racialization relevant for studying ISM, though a review shows that while neoliberalism is present in critical analysis of ISM, race is rarely central in the analysis. Where there is reference to racialization, as Roberts and Mahtani (2010: 248-50) argue, race is treated as "an inevitable" consequence of neoliberal orthodoxy—where race is constructed as a fixed category that is only capable of illuminating the implications of neoliberal regulations which it maps unto racialized bodies. An example is Wilson's (2006) conclusion that the economic peripheralization of Blacks in urban ghettos in American Rust Belt cities stems from the implementation of neoliberal policies. Rare exceptions include Theodore's (2007) argument that neoliberal reforms have trampled on labour and safety protection; and facilitated participation in "informal"/non-regulated work environments dependent on the labour power of non-White and undocumented immigrant bodies. In Canada, Ku et al. (2018) point to the use of "Canadian experience" rationalizations for delaying ISG entry into the labour market. And Liu (2019) argues that "racialization remains central to the operation of a hierarchical skill regime." Following this line of reasoning suggests that by analyzing race and neoliberalism together, we could theorize that the organization of work and "protections" which is slowly being substituted with flexible, "precarious work" will likely affect ISGs. As workers, these individuals would be differentially susceptible to non-standard labour schemes that are low-paying, contractual, casual or "part-time and short term," lacking in safety protections, job security and benefits – features of the neoliberal labour force (Herod, 2018:56-88). Deploying a non-racial materialist or a racial lens as a separate or secondary analysis will not adequately interpret the labour market navigation for international students in Canada. Therefore, this paper uses a

"racing neoliberalism" framework that treats neoliberalism and racialization as a mutually-occurring processes.

A co-constitutive analysis of race and neoliberalism is promising for interpreting the hierarchical distribution of professional and technical jobs in the economy; the participation of racialized student migrants in flexibilized, unpaid internships; and precarious labour arrangements in Canada. For example, Pulido (2016) engages Robinson's (2000:66-68) notion of "racial capitalism" to illustrate how the racial ideologies which predate colonialism drive modern capital accumulation processes and operate as a fundamental rationale for the contemporary free market paradigm. Early on, scholars contended that global capitalist expansion and capitalist orthodoxy across variegated contexts are established and sustained within a racial pecking order of White dominance (Omi & Winant, 1994/1986). Within this arrangement, workers are differentially exploited in a "hierarchically organized, racialized and gendered labour system" (Bonacich et al., 2008:342; Dawson, 2019). Racial inequality also produces "variegated landscapes that cultures and capital can penetrate or exploit" to augment their profit-making capacity and dominance (Pulido, 2016:7). As labour migration scholars aver, "the marginalization of migrant workers" along the "axes of race, gender, skill level" and (im)migrant status are linked to the complexity of global capitalism and its practice of incorporating racialized groups in exploitative labour schemes (Sharma, 2012; Thomas, 2020). Canada's national development and political economy from this perspective revolves around the availability of relatively cheap, low-skilled, and more recently around 'essential' workers, who are largely racially marginalized migrants (Bakan & Stasuilis, 2003, Choudry & Smith, 2016; Government of Canada, 2021). A racing neoliberal approach also argues a kind of expendability associated with humans proportionate to their skin pigmentation or physical difference under capitalism (Aguiar & Marten, 2011; Thomas, 2020). As Bonilla-Silva (2004), Melamed (2011:77), and Pulido (2016) contend, understandings of racism and white dominance change with time and evade a "black/white" binary during neoliberal times.

Racing neoliberalism also helps to interpret the racist ideologies and outcomes that are embedded in neoliberal ascendency and discourse. Roberts and Mahtani (2010) engage Harvey's (2005) notion of "common sense" to illustrate how political elites and the capitalist class tap into neoliberal discourses to implement policies that replicate racism. This is important for understanding how ISGs are perceived by employers in areas outside Canada's populous GTA. In Canada, seemingly benign discourses of 'colour-blindness' and free market rationales in the contemporary economy make it difficult for individuals to comprehend racism, thus safeguarding notions of white privilege as a part of Canada's racial formation (Mascarenhas, 2016). Inwood (2015:415) and Leah (2015:439) maintain that a neoliberal 'racial fix' employs a "coded," "abstract" and ambiguous turn of phrase which has "the same effect as an overt expression of the historical past." This rearticulation of racial differences interprets "race as culture." Here subtleties are manifested via covert cultural or linguistic expressions of racism (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Goldberg, 1993:73; Leach

2015). Davis (2007:349) picks up on Giroux (2005) to illustrate how this kind of discourse mutes race and racism to the point where it is perceived as an "unimportant" issue that nevertheless structures society. Davis (2007:349) further suggests that economic paradigms are "saturated with race" by employing "capitalism to hide racial (and other) inequalities by relocating racially economic disadvantages and reassigning identity-based biases to the private and personal spheres." Making discourse non-racial and colour-blind also depoliticizes neoliberal doctrine and policy discourses (Bonilla-Silva 2014; Goldberg, 1993), thus making difficult the identification of covert manifestations of racism in policy (and outcomes) that underpin the advancement of White supremacy (Davis, 2007; Inwood, 2015).

RESEARCH DESIGN, METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The data for this study was gathered in Canada between September 2017 and December 2018. Semi-structured interviews recorded key details about the career transitions of ISGs. Interviews offer participants latitude to share their experiences process (Luttrell, 2010:261). This method of data collection, rare in the literature, seeks to identify the power dynamics in the ISG career. The in-depth and conversational nature of semi-structured interviews permit the researcher to explore nuances and tangential details arising from exchanges with participants that might have been excluded in a more controlled context (Luttrell 2010:260).

Data was obtained from two categories of participants: ISGs and key informants. Inclusion criteria for ISGs included self-identification as Black or Asian and completing a postsecondary program lasting, at minimum, two years at a publicly funded college or university in Ontario between 2013 and 2017. These groups were chosen because there is an indication in the literature that Black Canadians are disadvantaged in accessing the Canadian labour market (Mensah, 2012) while Asian Canadians are relatively privileged. Nine Black Caribbean and nine South/Southeast Asians were recruited; they are now dispersed across cities of southern Ontario (Toronto, Mississauga, Brampton, London and Cambridge) and northern Ontario (Sudbury), and in distant locations as far away as Saskatchewan (Saskatoon) and Nova Scotia (Dartmouth).

Key informants operate as natural observers of hidden social processes within institutions or a community of practice (Marshall, 1996). In my study, key informants (two immigration lawyers, an immigration consultant, a human resource recruiter in Toronto and a federal politician in Ottawa) informed my research on the details of immigration and postgraduate transition processes for ISGs in Canada. For the ISGs, convenience sampling allowed for relatively quick access to participants who would be otherwise difficult to reach after graduating. Etikan et al. (2016:2) suggest recruiting prospective respondents in proximate settings to the sites of data collection, and so I posted calls for participants in religious and community organizations throughout Canada's GTHA. ISGs who satisfied the criteria of the study were selected for an

interview whereas informants were invited to participate because of their expertise and activism in the areas of immigration and settlement services for immigrants.

Semi-structured taped interviews between 30 and 90 minutes long were conducted in the ISG's home or out of earshot in a public space. To address time and scheduling conflicts and geographic distance between the researcher and participants, only six of 18 ISG and the five informant interviews were in person, with the rest over Skype. The participants' identities are concealed via pseudonyms and, wherever possible, anonymizing their institutions. Themes were generated based on the analysis of the data. I also consulted secondary data sources for analysis of wording and gauging the context within Canada's immigration history and how immigrants are described within Canada. The sources included government documents, media reports and online publications.

FINDINGS: ISGS AND PROFESSIONAL AND TECHNICAL JOBS IN CANADA'S LABOUR MARKET

Table 1 reveals that, at first, it was difficult for several of the ISGs to find professional and technical jobs in the GTA and that a few had to travel to smaller cities to obtain any employment. Significant time and effort were required to even obtain first employment, which averaged 5 (with a median of 4) months for the Black ISGs and 3.5 (with a median of 3.5) months for the Asians. There is support for the theory that race and neoliberalism are mutually constructed in that, as Table 1 indicates, nine of the 18 participants were first employed in "customer service" or low-skilled and precarious jobs upon entering the labour market.

Table 1: Participant Credentials, Initial Job Titles, Time to Obtain, Type, and Location*

Name	Credential	Initial Job(s) Obtained	No. of Months to Obtain Job	Type	City of Employment
Black Caribbean Participants					
Lydia	Adv. Dip. Fashion Merchandising	Customer Service	0	FT	London & Brampton, ON
Chevon-Marie	MSc Civil Eng.	Customer Service	6	FT	London, ON
Dimple	MSc Chem. Eng.	Customer Service	0	PT	Mississauga, ON
Zacchaeus	B.Eng Civil Eng.	Engineering	0	FT	Cambridge, ON
Nyesha	Nursing Certificate	Health Care Worker	0	FT	Dartmouth, NS
Kirk	Adv. Dip. Business Admin. Accounting	Customer Service	5	FT	Dartmouth, NS
Jerome	Adv. Dip. Programs Systems Analyst	Factories, cash jobs	24	PT	Mississauga, ON
Bernadette	MA Development Studies	Internship – Unpaid (Communications)	3	FT	Toronto, ON
Hortense	B. Comm Business Mgmt. & Org. Studies	Customer Service	7	FT	Toronto, ON
South/Southeast Asian Participants					

Navdeep	Dip. Electronic Eng. Technology	Customer Service	2	PT	Markham, ON
Sacchin	MBA	Customer Service	3	PT	Brampton & Toronto, ON
Bhushan	Adv. Dip, Business Admin/Accounting	Investment Associate	0	FT	Brampton, ON
Hilene	MBA	Fraud Prevention Specialist	3	FT	Toronto, ON
Daisy	MEd	Volunteering/ Admin. Coordinator	24	PT	Toronto, ON
Imelda	MBA	Student Services	0	PT	Toronto, ON
Khosing	MA in Education; BA Theatre Studies	Customer Service (Sales)	0	PT	Toronto, ON
Pranavi	MA Development	Customer Service; Grad. Student Assn.	0	PT	Toronto, ON
Singh	MBA	IT Sector (Contract)	0	FT	Toronto, ON

*FT= Full time. PT = Part-time; Adv. Dip. = Advanced Diploma (obtained from community college; B); B. Comm = Bachelor of Commerce degree; MBA = Master of Business Administration; MEd = Master of Education; MA = Master of Arts).

Table 1 also indicates that six of the nine Caribbean ISGs initially obtained jobs doing customer service work in call centres, warehouses and factories whether they had advanced college diplomas, bachelor's or masters degrees, while four of nine Asians with similar credentials participated in customer service work. By comparison, participants originating from Asia reported slightly better outcomes. Table 1 shows that four out of nine Asian participants with relevant degrees found initial employment in professional and technical jobs, and one in an administrative role, with the remaining four in customer service. The observation that professional and technical jobs eluded half of the ISGs at their entry into the labour market raises questions about the operation of a racial hierarchy. I did not interview a comparable sample of White ISGs to confirm whether half of them also face this difficulty. However, I examined the transcripts to see what processes accounted for the labour market disparities between those who did and did not secure professional jobs. As Table 1 indicates, two of the Black Caribbean participants--Zacchaeus, and Nyesha with college certificates and diplomas-- initially found paid full time professional employment by moving away from the populous GTA while three Asian participants – Bhushan, Hilene and Singh – were able to secure full time professional employment within GTA. What is it about the nature of the economy that these ISGs were successful while others with Canadian credentials started in precarious and low-paying work in GTA and London, Ontario?

It appears that the competitiveness that is part of neoliberalism is present in the search for beginning positions relevant to one's studies because it is not very successful in Toronto, at least for the Blacks. But traces of a racial pecking order were also present in the interview data. For example, Black participant Chevon-Marie, with a Canadian civil engineering graduate degree and prior expertise, could only obtain customer service jobs. As she explained, aiming for work in her field of expertise, on the advice of her friends:

> I tailored my resumé to reflect the keywords and phrases [advertised] in the job posting and highlighted my prior skills…but I wouldn't get a call back. … Other Black Caribbean international students and friends from Trinidad were like, …"if you want to improve your chances of being called in for an interview, you need to take off all your previous experience, employers and locations which indicated you worked in Trinidad". And I went ahead and removed my experience from back home. …I also used an online application to improve my chances of passing the initial screening… I made approximately 300 applications…but I was often told I was not the right fit.

Vietnamese participant Hilene, with an MBA, also applying in Toronto, also modified her resume to hide racial details for a position in her field:

> My mentor [a Vietnamese-Canadian college professor] changed my first name to an English name…on my resumé…[for] the interview… . It [limits] the awkward situation of … trying to pronounce my name correctly. …She…introduced me to a white

> male [bank] branch manager who had an opening [and]…made it easy for [me] to connect with the bank [manager] with whom I am now working…. [He] invited me for an interview…[that] helped to get me into the banking job. … [She] was [also] talking to other Vietnamese contacts and Canadian friends at other banks…because lots of Vietnamese work in the banks in [the GTA]. … [At other times], she helped connect me to contacts.

At first glance, a comparison of the network support in these two cases confirms the general observation that Blacks are disadvantaged in accessing the labour market (Mensah, 2012). Unlike the South Asian participant, the Black participant asked friends for advice—she had a network but it was not embedded in the labour market. The hidden component here is that although there is race at play in both cases, neoliberalism sets the stage for the contrasting outcome since it is already known that there is an oversupply of cheap, low paying jobs which Blacks are expected to fill in the GTA.

Mutually constructed race and neoliberalism are also implicated in the unfair treatment and preferential work arrangements for White workers in a call centre in Nova Scotia noted by Black ISG Kirk. With a three-year diploma in business, he commented that Blacks are frequently scheduled to work "the graveyard shift", which typically are the undesirable hours "starting in the afternoon and finishing at 12 a.m." In contrast to his own shifts, Kirk pointed out that younger White workers, including those with lesser months of seniority on his team, enjoyed "the [better] shifts" that see them reporting early for work and returning to their homes in the evenings. Kirk added that his attempts to obtain better shifts were futile: "whenever I tried to get [my shifts] changed, my supervisor would say [I am scheduled] based on business needs. It just did not make any sense." His account suggests that there is a racial pecking order at play just as outlined in the literature cited earlier in this paper; but a hidden neoliberal component is that this Black participant had to move to a province with labour shortages in order to find his first position which was not in his area of expertise.

A fourth case chosen from among others describing the situation of being stuck in low-skilled jobs illustrates that the type of work Caribbean ISG Lydia first obtained was not just a simple and innocent mismatch with her educational qualifications. While in London, she had multiple low waged manufacturing jobs lasting a year. She then relocated to Brampton, Ontario, where members of her diaspora had suggested she would have an easier time finding a more suitable job. But even after three months of distributing her resumes and making job applications across the GTA, Lydia's labour market prospects did not improve. Despite possessing a college diploma in Fashion Merchandising, Lydia found that she was only employable in customer service work on different factory floors in Mississauga and Brampton. Unwilling or unable to leave the GTA, she initially found five months' employment with a company that warehouses, packs and distributes merchandise to North American big-box retailers across southern Ontario. Subsequently, a third-party job agency contracted out her labour to a factory outlet where she performs customer service duties for an online distribution company operating in Brampton, Ontario. Lydia contended that her

area of expertise is currently "not in demand," though GTA employers are eager to hire precarious workers. Instead of benefiting from her college diploma, then, she became a part of the "reserve" supply of labour that helps employers drive down wage rates and keep them at or above the (then) Ontario minimum wage of $11.60 per hour (2017). As Lydia summed it up:

> Factory jobs are the only work that Black people including international student graduates can pick up quickly in London and Brampton. Employers want people so that they can work in factories and warehouses. They really do not need a lot of people for corporate jobs.

Chevon-Marie, the first Black ISG quoted above, described a similar experience navigating the labour market in the cities of southern Ontario. In her words,

> I took extra shifts as the company is always in need of workers. … I answered calls and resolved customer service-related inquiries … across different time zones.

Unable to cope with the precarious nature of her work, Chevon-Marie eventually expanded her job search across the GTA seeking employment commensurate with her graduate engineering credential and prior expertise in project management. With tears welling up in her eyes, she painfully recounted:

> I was networking with people in the [engineering] field and applying for jobs. But I had no luck finding jobs that would allow me to use my skills… . It is just low-paying jobs like my customer service-oriented work [that seem to be] available. … I told myself I couldn't do this anymore. I also refused [to accept more] money from my mom; she had already been helping to buy food and [pay] for rent and other things while I was living in London. … Like other international student graduates … I work a lot of overtime hours [at the call centre] to cover my bills. …but I had difficulties financing my basic needs.

Taken together, the participation of s many of these ISGs of colour in low-skilled and customer service jobs support Roberts and Mahtani's (2010:250) argument that employer stereotypes combine with neoliberalism as an integral force that "reinforces the racial structure" in Canadian society. The contradiction between the acquisition of low-waged and low-skilled work in factories and customer service jobs by 'skilled' ISGs with college diploma and university degrees and the success of Nyesha and Kirk in finding work in eastern Canada hints that neoliberalism is involved, since there is an oversaturated job market in the GTA where so many racialized communities reside. There exists an availability of cheap waged jobs in the economy of the region that are waiting to be filled by workers/immigrants (Thomas, 2020).

The role of race is revealed in the initial forms of employment obtained by the ISGs; many become caught by the demand for cheap, exploitable, and flexible labour which defines racialized workers in Canada's neoliberal economy where they live. After two months navigating the labour market, South/Southeast Asian participant Navdeep, with his diploma in Electronic Engineering

Technology, obtained employment doing customer service work in a local eatery and bakery. As he observed: "I did the midnight shifts waiting tables in a restaurant and…worked somewhere else baking cookies for minimum wage to cover my monthly expenses." Sacchin, another South Asian participant, remarked: "I held down two part-time jobs in Brampton… I waited tables at a banquet hall on the weekends and I also did part-time shifts placing cold calls in a Toronto-based call centre." Dimple, a Black Caribbean graduate from a prominent university in Ontario had a similar story:

> I did mediocre jobs working in restaurants. I had to move out on my own and I had bills to pay. So, I also took up another part-time [job] at a Tim Horton's franchise in Mississauga, where I worked the night shifts.

The critical literature on race reviewed above suggests that this situation is not unique to Canada, and that these cases shine a light on the pressures on ISGs to adapt to the organization of work in the neoliberal economy (Herod, 2018). The availability of a cheap supply of labour is fundamental to global transnational capital expansion (Bonacich *et al.*, 2008). The cases I investigated were tragic: skilled, Canadian-educated ISGs were expected to do irregular/flexible working hours and/or take on multiple jobs just to survive. This reveals an irony in Canadian immigration policies which categorize ISGs as 'skilled' talent that Canada seeks

The Significance of the "Canadian Experience" Requirement for ISGs

A unique aspect of my research was an exploration of what happened when ISGs moved out of the GTA. This has not been explored in most prior research since ISGs who leave are often difficult to find. In one Canadian study following ISGs who became pharmacists, Mickleborough (2020) found that racialization occurred for those who moved to predominantly white and/or rural areas to obtain the Canadian experience required by their professional body. In my study, this took the form of the seemingly innocent perception that ISGs were individuals who seek initial opportunities for the sole purpose of gaining Canadian experience, and who later will leave the area seeking to advance their professional careers and outcomes elsewhere. For example, Zacchaeus, 26, an ISG from Barbados, explained that "based on his years working as an engineer" his previous supervisor urged him not to expect a job from a company offering him a job where "the recruiters mostly take on immigrants when they need help with contract jobs or internships.' In the mentor's view, "recruiters don't think that immigrants will stay for long as they think that [immigrants] just want the experience to improve their chances of getting a better job elsewhere." Indeed, the practicum did not translate into immediate post-graduation employment. Instead, the ISG spent his first five months unsuccessfully navigating the labour market, eventually getting a job offer in a smaller city near London. Arguably, it was astute of the internship supervisor to advise Zacchaeus that he would have a better chance of obtaining employment opportunities in a smaller centre. But what does this say about race

and ISM in Canada? The excerpt is an indication of how racialized immigrants are perceived in culturally white spaces.

To sort out if ISGs are mistaken for contingent foreign workers, I questioned what participants knew about how recruiters select applicants for interviews and what are criteria they use to determine who are the most suitable candidates for the advertised positions. In response, ISGs in London and Dartmouth spoke of the uncomfortable exchanges they had with recruiters who interrogated and expressed doubt about their legality to work in Canada. Black Caribbean participant Nyesha, who interviewed with nursing homes in Halifax, commented:

> [During] the interviews, the human resource people kept asking me for the postgraduate work permit. They thought that I was gaming' the system. I had to explain the postgraduate work permit to the employers [during] the interviews. I told them, it is a legitimate document from the ESDC made available to international student [graduates and] that, between the periods of leaving school and the processing of the actual work permit, ESDC gives us a temporary document to show the prospective employee …that we have applied for a work permit. So, sometimes the employers are turned off …because they really do not understand it.

It is evident that her recruiter in Nova Scotia was not abreast of the regulatory changes regarding the participation of (im)migrants in the Canadian labour market. This might also partly explain why the recruiters could misconstrue Zacchaeus as an individual belonging to the contingent and temporary labour force in Canada. In this case, it might also be that the company is one that only employs contingent workers.

In my interviewer with a Canadian legislator key informant, about how ISGs were perceived in state policies, as contingent workers in Canada, she remarked:

> If you look at previous policies, …a lot of migrants were brought into the country for no other reason than cheap labour. And they were dispensable! … Like [those] previous groups in Canada's early racist history, this new class of temporary migrants who come here for school, end up doing cheap labour and low-end jobs. I say temporary and dispensable because I am familiar with lots of stories of those who have difficulty with the process… and most who cannot find skilled jobs… sometimes return to their home country.… Becoming a permanent resident is a tall order. … The government expects them to demonstrate admission requirements… a skilled job which, for many, is hard to get.

Race is explicit as a historical artefact here but I would argue, based on participant experiences that the "Canadian experience" clause continues to play a central role in structuring Canada's economic development in a contemporary neoliberal context; it appears that the immigration policies are so misunderstood that ISGs can "accidentally" become labourers to fill precarious jobs in the economy.

Returning to Zaccheus' mentor's warning, I found that five Caribbean and two Asian participants interviewed in London, Ontario all contended that as ISGs, they experienced challenges in securing an interview for skilled employment. For example, Nyesha said:

> Something just seems to be wrong in London [Ontario]. Something is really going on! Most of the Black international students who graduated with me or just a year ahead of me could not find a job… that has benefits and standard working hours. We have a hard time getting an interview there or in an adjoining area. … We are more likely to find jobs in factories, manufacturing, and customer service… through [employment] agencies… which often last a few weeks.

Similarly, Black Caribbean participant Kirk, who received resume preparation and interview coaching from his professor and a career counsellor at his local college, shared a similar experience. He cited a particular experience:

> It's really hard to get job in London. I am not sure if it's just an international student thing…. I prepared a lot for it. … I interviewed for a minimum-waged, part-time customer service job with a coffee franchise…as did other young applicants and international students. [Based on my responses] in the interview, and my educational qualifications, I really thought I had the job. … But when I called back, they told me that another person got the job.

Obvious in the second excerpt is the dynamic of neoliberal competition for employment in the local labour market which Kirk and the supposedly young applicants and ISGs face. The participation of ISGs in these cheap jobs also speaks to the way in which capitalism has altered the economic environment to facilitate the production of low-wage employment often filled by young and racialized workers as argued by Davis (2007) and Pulido (2016:8).

CONCLUSION

One unique contribution of this study is that it follows ISGs beyond their graduation into the labour market. By focusing empirically on this process, I have pointed to the mutually constitutive nature of race and neoliberalism. Half of my participants obtained low-skilled, customer service and part-time jobs in the initial phase of their postgraduate labour market search, although they earned their credentials in Canadian PSE. Another innovation is the use of a lens that races neoliberalism to interpret the outcomes of the competition between differently racialized ISGs as well as ISGs and the domestic population for jobs in the neoliberal economy. The participation of skilled and racialized participants in low-skilled customer service labour validate Roberts and Mahtani's (2010) call for theorizations of race and neoliberalism as mutually constituting. The findings help make visible racial components embedded in the neoliberal project. Black Caribbean participants who sought work attributed their inability to secure interviews or jobs to the general difficulty encountered by Afro-Caribbean diaspora in Canada. However, Kirk's experience seeking low-waged employment

at a coffee franchise signals both the neoliberalism and racialization that supports the production of labour which is often filled by young and racialized workers.

Data was also presented on how the "Canadian experience" requirement for ISGs, which has been identified as a barrier in the literature (Ku et al., 2018), works as part of the co-constitutive processes of race and neoliberalism through perceptions of racialized bodies in culturally white Canadian spaces. Zacchaeus' supervisor informs us of at least one employer constructs racialized (im)migrants as temporary hires, presuming that the racialized immigrant has no intention to settle permanently but will rather leave for a more culturally diverse city once he/she obtains Canadian experience in their respective occupational fields. (Im)migrants are perceived as contingent workers, especially in instances where employers become unaware of labour regulatory changes concerning the immigrant-labour market integration process for student migrants.

The outcomes of ISGs discussed here also reveal the limitations of a non-racial theorization of neoliberalism in the Canadian context. Theoretically, if neoliberalism promotes free market ideals of efficiency and competition amongst individuals (and states), then social identities should be inconsequential to the labour market outcomes in Canada. Neoliberalism is an economic paradigm that is constructed as rewarding the rational and meritocratic individual. However, the racial inequities found in this study show the importance of combining race and neoliberalism as a single lens through which to understand the integration of ISGs into the labour force.

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