Student Spotlight

Student Concerns Subcommittee
Canadian Sociological Association

Gabrielle Mundaka



PhD Candidate, University of Windsor, Sociology Dept.

Gabrielle's research brings together decolonial sociology, ethnography, relationality, Indigenous-non-Indigenous relations, diaspora, and community-engaged scholarship. Her doctoral research examines Mapuche-Chilean relations in Wallmapu/Chile and develops Ontological Relational Solidarity (ORS) as an approach to understanding solidarity beyond symbolic allyship. Her work is informed by ethnographic fieldwork, community engagement, and a commitment to connecting sociological research with struggles against colonialism and other forms of structural inequality.

Manzah-Kyentoh Yankey



PhD Candidate, University of Alberta, Sociology Dept.

Manzah-Kyentoh Yankey (she/her) is a PhD candidate in the Department of Sociology at the University of Alberta. Her research interests include race, sociology of law, and the criminal legal system. Her dissertation is an ethnographic study on racial inequality in the Canadian criminal courts. She has publications in Race and Justice, Feminist Criminology, and the Canadian Journal of Sociology.

For more information and nomination forms:
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She/Her

PhD Candidate

Department of Sociology

University of Windsor

Ontological Relational Solidarity: Mapuche-Chilean Relations, Diaspora, and Decolonial Solidarity

My doctoral research examines relationships among Mapuche peoples, Chilean society, colonialism, mestizaje, diaspora, and possibilities for decolonial solidarity. Based in sociology and anthropology and informed by ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Chile/Wallmapu, the project draws on participant observation, open-ended interviews, community events, and engagement with Mapuche and Chilean educators, artists, students, organizers, and community members.

A central contribution of the dissertation is the development of Ontological Relational Solidarity (ORS). ORS conceptualizes solidarity not simply as political identification or symbolic allyship, but as a situated practice of rebuilding and transforming relations disrupted by colonialism, displacement, and exile. It asks what solidarity can look like when people take seriously different relationships to land, territory, ancestry, community, spirituality, and more-than-human worlds.

The research also critically examines Chilean mestizaje and the ways Indigenous ancestry can simultaneously be invoked as part of national identity while living Indigenous peoples, territories, political claims, and ontologies remain marginalized. My positionality as a Chilean diasporic researcher and daughter of exiles is part of the analysis rather than treated as external to the research encounter. Ultimately, the project considers sociology itself as a relational practice: how researchers listen, witness, build relationships, remain accountable to communities, and translate scholarship into forms of solidarity and community engagement.

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Additional project insights...

My motivation for this project emerged from questions about colonialism, diaspora, belonging, and the limits of conventional models of solidarity. During ethnographic fieldwork, these questions became increasingly relational. Rather than approaching Mapuche communities simply as objects of sociological inquiry, I became interested in what happens when research is understood as an encounter carrying responsibilities to people, land, histories, and relationships.

One of the most important lessons of the project has been that solidarity cannot be reduced to claiming proximity to another people's struggle. It requires accountability, and recognition of difference. This became particularly significant in examining mestizaje, because claims to Indigenous ancestry do not necessarily constitute Indigenous belonging or political relationship to an Indigenous nation.

The project has also shaped how I understand sociological impact. Academic research matters to me when it can move beyond universities-supporting public education, community organizing, knowledge mobilization, and relationships of solidarity. ORS therefore remains both an analytic concept and a question of praxis: how can sociology participate in repairing relations rather than reproducing extractive ones?

More About Me...

I organized Justice for Julia Chuñil - Chew Müley at the University of Windsor, bringing attention to the disappearance of Mapuche environmental defender Julia Chuñil and creating a space connecting academic, Indigenous, diasporic, and community perspectives. The event included Mapuche speakers and participation from Indigenous students.

I have worked as an RA on a SSHRC-funded harm-reduction project examining supervised consumption services in Ontario, including media discourse surrounding the opening and closure of SafePoint in Windsor. In another research role for Mind the Gaps: A Survival Guide for Graduate Students, I helped connect research on grad student mental health with students and campus organizations.

One lesson I have learned is that sociology does not have to end at analysis. Research can involve listening, relationship-building, witnessing, accountability, and action. For me, committing sociology means asking not only what we know about inequality and colonialism, but what responsibilities emerge from knowing.

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She/Her

PhD Candidate

Department of Sociology

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The Myth of a Race-Neutral Trial: Racial Inequality in the Canadian Criminal Courts

My dissertation is an ethnographic study on racial inequality in the Canadian criminal courts. I conducted six months of ethnographic court observations in the Edmonton law courts to examine how court actors treat White and racialized people in the courtroom. This dissertation is organized into three journal style papers that focus on a distinct topic related to racial inequality in criminal courts.

The first paper, *White Innocence, Racialized Harm*: *Race, Criminality, and Deviance in Criminal Court*, focuses on court actors, police officers, and social workers constructions of race, criminality and deviance on defendants, victims, and witnesses in criminal court. The findings show that police officers, social workers, prosecutors, defence attorneys, and judges associate Blackness and Indigeneity with criminality and Whiteness with innocence.

In the second paper, *Race and Space*: *Constructions of Crime, Violence, and Victimization in Criminal Court*, I focus on how the courts use race and space to describe crime, violence, and victimization in racialized spaces and white spaces. Drawing on the racialization of space literature, the findings demonstrate that court actors view inner-city, downtown, low-income, Indigenous and racialized communities as violent spaces where crime, poverty and violence is the norm. In contrast, court actors portray predominantly white middle-class neighbourhoods & communities as safe spaces where crime is nonexistent.

In the third paper, *Racism and Racial Degradation among Legal Actors in Criminal Court*, I examine racism and racial degradation among legal actors in criminal court. My findings show that racism and racial degradation in the criminal courts occur within the institutional legal practices and behaviours of legal professionals in the courtroom.

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Additional project insights...

My motivation to pursue this project was that I noticed a lack of ethnographic research on racial inequality in the Canadian criminal courts. I saw the importance of doing court ethnography because it allows me to observe and analyze the racialized power dynamics of the courtroom. One of the most surprising findings is that when racialized people are victim/survivors or witnesses of crime, legal actors label them as criminals or deviant individuals to challenge their credibility in criminal trials or preliminary hearings.

The most challenging part of doing fieldwork was being misidentified as a criminal defendant multiple times in the courthouse by mostly white lawyers. As a Black woman researcher carrying my purse and notebook to the courthouse, my Blackness was viewed suspiciously by white lawyers. Sometimes white lawyers thought I was writing fieldnotes because they perceived me as a defendant preparing to appear in court for a trial or docket court session.

Engaging academic research that intersects with applied sociology, activism, and/or community work is important to me because it helps researchers understand the lived experiences of Black, Indigenous, and racialized communities negatively impacted by state violence and help advocate for racial justice and liberation.

More About Me...

Beyond my research experience, I regularly participate in departmental, institutional, and professional service. As the former President for the University of Alberta (UofA) Sociology Graduate Students Association, the Vice-President of Student Welfare and Membership Engagement for the UofA Black Graduate Students Association, and member of the Administration and Communications Committee for the Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) Black Caucus reflects my commitment to social change, racial justice, and community engagement for students from diverse backgrounds within academic institutions.

I collaborated with faculty and graduate students to organize, chair, and co-chair two race and ethnicity cluster sessions for the 2024 CSA conference. The first session was on race, ethnicity, and identity construction in Canada. The second session was on race, ethnicity, and migration experiences in Canada. In 2024 and 2026, the CSA Black Caucus invited me and Dr. Carlo Charles to present a talk on graduate student awards and scholarships. Last year, I was an invited panelist for the American Sociological Association Student Forum Advisory Board workshop titled “From Thriving to Surviving: Your Graduate School Roadmap.” These are part of my strong mentorship and service record.

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Interested in being featured?

The Student Spotlight Program allows students to share academic research, applied sociological work, activism, and community engagement projects.

Eligibility

- Students may self-nominate or can be nominated by a faculty member or colleague
- Nominated students must be a member in good standing of the Canadian Sociological Association
- Nominees may be a university or college student at any level of study (Undergraduate, MA, Professional Degree, PhD)

Once Selected

- The nominee will be notified via email. They will be asked to confirm their profile information and given the opportunity to submit a photo (if desired) before the profile is made public.
- Profiles will be posted on the CSA website for one (1) year before being archived. Profiles will also be posted on SCS social media accounts.

Equity Statement

The Canadian Sociological Association (CSA) is committed to the values and principles of equity, diversity, inclusion, and decolonization. We recognize and honour the intersectionality of equity-based identities. The CSA therefore invites and encourages the nomination (including self-nomination) of members from marginalized groups, including Indigenous peoples, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, persons who identify as women, and/or 2SLGBTQIA+.

For more information and nomination forms, visit:
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