



STATEMENT

ON THE MURDERS IN ATLANTA AS AN ACT OF FEMICIDE

CENTER FOR WOMEN'S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP (CWGL)

“Femicide is a human rights violation and the worst form of gender-based violence in the world. It’s a human rights violation that eradicates life, liberty and pursuit of happiness and must be treated as such. The women in Atlanta were victims of femicide – a deliberate act of gender-based misogyny, intersecting with racial hatred that killed them. CWGL condemns this heinous crime and extends our profoundest sympathies to the victims’ families and communities in this terrible time.”

Krishanti Dharmaraj, CWGL Executive Director

The Center for Women’s Global Leadership (CWGL) at Rutgers University led the shift in the global narrative on violence against women three decades ago to affirm that “women’s rights are human rights” and advocated for recognition that violence against women is a human rights violation. Rooted in our deep experience around how violence manifests around the world, we believe that femicide, the intentional murder of women or girls because of their gender, deserves to be named.

Femicide holds a terrible place in this national reckoning with the violence that killed seven women – six of them Asian American, one a White woman – and one man in Atlanta. At the international level, femicide is a recognized human rights violation and the most extreme form of gender-based violence, denying women their right to live. However, recognition of it as systemic violence, which goes beyond even multiple murders on one day, is generally lacking in the U.S., as violence against women is framed as acts by individuals that fail to merit standing as human rights violations.

Here’s what we know: A White man has been charged with murder for a mass shooting in which he intentionally killed women at three massage parlors on Tuesday, March 16. Six of the victims were of Asian descent - Soon Chung Park, 74; Hyun Jung Grant, 51; Suncha Kim, 69; Yong Ae Yue, 63; Xiaojie Tan, 49, and Daoyou Feng, 44. Their murders occurred amid a national surge in violence against Asian Americans during the pandemic that has often been linked to racist characterizations of the virus. There is little wonder that this has been initially investigated as a possible racial hate-crime. And rooted in hatred it doubtless is.





But how to make sense of the fact that seven of the eight people killed were women? Or that the gunman targeted establishments he well knew were primarily staffed by women of color, as he himself had allegedly frequented massage parlors in the past? Or that he denies that he murdered the victims

because of their race, but rather out of “vengeance” for his sexual addiction, a rationale that places the blame for his crime squarely on the victims – one that law enforcement authorities seemed initially willing to accept? In the U.S., where the gravity of femicide is continually downplayed, the systemic nature of the murder of women is overlooked and each incident seen as an individual aberration, rather than the result of cultural hatreds.

We believe that a toxic intersection of misogyny, racism and societal normalization of violence against women added up to femicide in Atlanta. Many of the statements by Asian American advocates, activists and scholars point in this direction. Sung Yeon Choimorrow, Executive Director of the National Asian Pacific American Women’s Forum, said in a statement: “We know firsthand that sexual violence, sexism, and racism are intertwined for Asian American and Pacific Islander women.” Indeed, the Stop AAPI Hate center reports that between March 2020 and February 2021, about 68% of anti-Asian hate incidents reported were against women.

“Killing Asian American women to eliminate a man's temptation speaks to the history of the objectification of Asian and Asian American women as variations of the Asian temptress, the dragon ladies and the lotus blossoms, whose value is only in relation to men's fantasies and desires,” Sung Yeon Choimorrow said in an NBC news report. Indeed, much of the initial reporting on Tuesday’s massacre covered the shooter’s alleged motivations in some detail, while the dead women were largely grouped as a faceless statistic – classic framing in reporting on femicide.

We at CWGL believe that what took place in Georgia was femicide. We ask that, in trying to prevent such horrific incidents of mass murder, we move away from debate on whether violence against women of color may be more rooted in racism than misogyny. We should reject assumptions that participation in anything even indirectly related to sex work would make women unworthy of protection. We ask that accountability be demanded not only of the perpetrator, but of ourselves in our failure to recognize the murder of six Asian American women for what it is.

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