



Racial Tropes and Colonial Scopes: The Eye of the Empire

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Abstract

This paper offers an account of two events – one from the United States and one from South Africa, aimed at national and international viewership – that focused on the portrayal of people of colour, previously enslaved, and ethnic women and girls, in an attempt to entrench, and perpetuate racial tropes and gain ownership of their image. The paper examines the processes by which these racial tropes are reproduced, and the mechanisms employed by White women and White-identified women, as part and parcel of the continued colonial scope: the perpetual gaze of servitude and enslavement that master narratives reproduce, visually and in writing, in order to maintain mastery over the oppressed and the downtrodden.

Keywords: *Racial Tropes, Colonial Scopes, United States, South Africa.*

In January of 2019, I wrote “An Open Letter to the organisers of the second International Girls Studies Association [IGSA] conference at Notre Dame” (<https://medium.com/@peminist/an-open-letter-to-the-organisers-of-the-second-international-girls-studies-association-igsa-5d25fd470399>), whereby I expressed my dismay at the manner in which the organisers had, among other things, advertised the second IGSA conference. My dismay was embedded in the knowledge of the organiser’s inability to address the kind of racism that had already been brought to their attention two years prior which, at the time they showed no indication that they understood nor that racism was even prevalent in the organising, conduct and content of their 2016 conference, at their hands. As such, the first part of my engagement in this paper, is focused on how Black women, African women, Asian women, Arabic women, South and central American women, women of colour, women from the subaltern and women from the global south¹ are represented by the beneficiaries of racism and imperialism – the very women who call themselves feminists but remain ignorant and oblivious to their role as empire builders, and are in fact agents of racism: perpetuating, maintaining, and reproducing the very racism they claim to be against.

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The second part of this paper, examines the manner in which a White-identified ‘social influencer’, Lalla Hirayama, debased Coloured women in South Africa. For scholars who identify as Black, African, Asian, Arabic, from South and/or central America, people of colour, people from the subaltern and people from the global south, as well as scholars who identify as White from the United States, Canada, Europe and the rest of the globe, it is important to note: the term Coloured is used in very particular ways in South Africa, and speaks to apartheid classification, which was forced on a particular group of people, by law, and treated as legal, as well as a continued racialised identity that draws on histories of enslavement at the Cape. The continued material conditions under which the previously enslaved at the Cape (and in other parts of South Africa) live and were racialised with particular ethnic and cultural histories, with contemporary continuities, stand as a testimony to South Africa’s colonial history, its apartheid era of forced removal from ancestral land and declaring the land for “Whites only” speak to the four-hundred year history of Coloured oppression. I return to this history later in the textⁱⁱ.

For the purpose of this paper, and for reasons which speak to histories of enslavement that started in India, Java, Malaysia, therefore Asia, to the African continent, it is important to understand South Africa’s population and the direct relationship with Asia. As such, it is also important for readers to be knowledgeable of the history of enslavement at the larger Cape region (not just Cape Town), some of which explains the history of Coloured people. I speak here of the enslavement of Bengalis by the Dutch in the 1600s who were forcibly transported as chattel to the Cape, forcibly Christianised, forcibly enslaved, selected from the middle and upper hierarchies of Bengali society so that the colonisers of the Cape would be able to rely on an enslaved group whose customs they became acquainted with, whose food they craved, and who would facilitate their livelihood while they continued to usurp, plunder and colonise the remaining regions of the Cape. The Coloured population, is as such, a population whose enslavement bears the history of various regions of the African continent (Mozambique, Angola, Madagascar, among others), as well as Indonesia (Java in particular) the indigenous KhoiSan people, the Amakhosa, Griqua and segments of the early Dutch colonisers and later British colonisers, all of whom through sexual and marital relations gave rise to, what was classified as Coloured by the Population and Registration Act of South Africa of 1950 – a term employed by the colonisers as early as the late 1600s. It is also important to note that many Afrikaners in South Africa, the last apartheid prime minister included, trace their ancestral mother to be Catherina of Bengal (with varied spelling, also called Groot Kathryn, to suggest her tallness and her statue as a woman to whom many trace their ancestry) and Angela (Ansel) of Bengal, with reference made in the documents of how beautiful both women wereⁱⁱⁱ (words such as *mooi*, *maaij*, as old Dutch words, suggesting beauty, and virginal in appearance); a process of claiming enslavement as part of their newly discovered history, which began shortly after 1994 that bears truth and yet has selectively been retrieved only recently as a means to situate many among the Afrikaner population as oppressed either by the British colonisers or by their own history, of which they believe they cannot be held responsible. The latter of course is indicative of the oppressor and coloniser who since the end of apartheid and legal racism wishes to attach himself/herself/themselves to the colonised and oppressed, as a means to avoid accountability for atrocities committed against the

colonised and oppressed. The South African term Coloured, cannot be compared to the term Colored in the United States or Canada, which has a very particular history.

In bringing these two critiques together, I wish to draw attention to the following concerns:

- i. that as long as White women remain in positions of authority, claiming vulnerability to any critiques of their racism with the use of the now in-vogue reference to White fragility whilst wilfully drawing on their White privilege, feminism remains in danger of being nothing more than a strong arm for White Supremacy;
- ii. that images depicting the debasement of Black people, African people, Asian people, Arabic people, people of colour, subaltern people and people from the global south continue to find their way into social media unchallenged because we are led to believe that they are funny, not so serious, or not as important as the regular printed media, which we regard as scholarly and therefore worthy of consideration.

It is my purpose in this paper to debunk these myths and to assert that feminism is not all-embracing and that as Black, African, Asian, Arabic, subaltern, people of colour and people from the global south, we remain in the perverse gaze of White women beholders, who reproduce these fantasies of oppression in order to allow themselves the fake orgasm of saviourship, much like their colonial forefathers who believed that their missionary measures would save 'the natives' from themselves – ourselves.

On January 10th, 2019, I wrote a letter to the International Girls Studies Association conference organisers wherein I expressed my dismay at the manner in which, yet again, the young and very new, International Girls Studies Association [IGSA]^{iv}, had gone about advertising its second conference using images that are enormously offensive and which, in their depiction of Black women and Muslim girls and boys, seem to be consistent with past behaviour of overlooking inquiries into the manner in which in the organising of the conference – as such the key players who determine the direction of the conference and the agents of scholarship who entrench an already established White mythology^v – seem to continue with their colonial and imperial mastery and remain oblivious to the fact that their racism is unwanted, old and outdated and highly problematic even if disguised as feeble feminist fumbling of freedom of expression. The latter was in fact the opening sentence of my letter. I turned my attention to the posters that the IGSA used for their display as I believed it gave out a very particular message. In referencing Derrida's term White Mythology:

A white mythology which assembles and reflects Western culture: the white man takes own mythology (that is, Indo-European mythology), his logos – that is, the mythos of his idiom, for the universal form of that which it is still his inescapable desire to call Reason (Derrida 1974: 11)

I am here pointing to the manufacturing of subservience, an image of undeniable servitude, which is created from a false myth that oppressed people need the gaze of the empire,

supplied by reason that suggests a care and concern for the very people they either bomb or massacre at empire pace.

The two images which opened the IGSA website, reproduced above, act as an advertisement of the second International Girls Studies Association conference and advertises the power and authority of White women along with how that power is exerted over Black, African, Asian, Arabic, subaltern, people of colour and people from the global south. More precisely, the first image above was used for the promotion of the 2019 conference, and exhibited on the IGSA website and several sites accessible to social media. The Black woman's face forms the central and main image, which looks almost tattooed in some parts (reminiscent of South Pacific cultures), as the ethnic ensemble of images of women are spread across and around the squared canvas – all set at the backdrop of variations of purple within which the Black woman is cast. The poster, with images and text advertising the conference, is encased in the colour purple and draws on a presumptuousness of a book title – from 1982 by that name (*The Color Purple*, a novel by Alice Walker)^{vi} which depicts Black women who challenge authority, particularly Black male authority in various forms including physical and sexual violence, which since its release as a film became a stepping stone for White feminists to declare their newly depicted, fully licensed, now well justified rage against Black men that now allows them to utilise the colour to convey a suggestiveness of a feminist solidarity that did not exist then and certainly does not exist now! At the first International Girls Studies Association conference, held at the university of East Anglia in the UK, there were three White women keynote speakers; as for Black women and women of colour^{vii} . . . we could count one another almost on one hand amid a crowd of close to one hundred White women, if not more, who remained oblivious to this very glaring sight for sore eyes in 2016 – the year that Trump triumphed.

A week prior to the first International Girls Studies Association conference in 2016 I checked through the draft programme that included the names of presenters and discussed the matter with a friend and colleague, who like me had severe concerns about the content that the titles (and abstracts) suggested especially after we googled the presenters' names and checked their biographical information as well as their scholarly work. We each thought since both of us had similar concerns we should request a meeting with the organisers and keynote speakers to address these concerns. Our joint concerns were with the manner in which the conference drew White women, primarily, the panel and presentation titles which suggested that Black women and women of colour did not exist, the clear and obvious lists of White women scholars whose biographical information we googled, the absence of titles of papers that even suggested that race and/or racism would be discussed. At the time of the email exchanges, I asked the organisers and keynote speakers to get together to address the issue of representation and what it meant to have an international event with so few women of colour invited and/or who were presenting, which was then half-heartedly agreed upon. In the meeting, my colleague and I had to listen to comments about how all the White women present were either "anti-racist" or very aware of the work on racism that was going on in their respective cities and countries . . . the US, the UK, Australia and Canada, primarily. We were treated as though we tried to chasten them – the punishment that we had apparently

inflicted upon them, was the meeting itself, for which we were rebuked, as gently and sweetly as possible. They had for the most part refused to take responsibility for their entitled White presence, exerted as White dominance, especially all of the ways in which they proceeded with the organising of the conference, which excluded Black women and women of colour as speakers, scholars and learned people in the academy.

In my 2019 letter to the IGSA organisers, I addressed their upcoming conference by noting that their steering committee was composed of White women who work in English literature, gender and women's studies, primarily. I noted the latter, to assert yet again, that the manner in which they were asserting the newly emerging girl studies, as part of gender and women's studies, was highly problematic for it engraved similar practices of erasure of Black women and women of colour much like women studies and gender studies programmes have historically enacted. I offer an excerpt here:

You cannot just claim images which do not resemble you or your existential experience of the world because you feel like it even though you have asked a Black woman to be a keynote speaker this year, just one, much like you asked me in 2016, and much to your disapproval I acted like an ungrateful Black, not satisfied with the invitation. At the 2016 IGSA there were three White women keynote speakers, which then ended up being two White women keynote speakers and a White women keynote panel. Now, as expected, there will be a White woman keynote speaker again because scholarship cannot be furthered without the presence of a White woman keynote speaker^{viii}.

The sarcastic nature with which I addressed them, was to evoke a sense of disbelief in their actions, which bears evidence of their continued organising for this international conference, and throughout, as per the repeated measures they sought to undertake, shows a clear and decided preference for White women scholars, who dominated the scholarship arena, and Black women and women of colour, whose images were used as a means of adornment. What is often offered as an explanation for this flagrant racism is that the White organisers could not find a Black woman or woman of colour suited for the keynote. It is not a question of reaching out to Black women and women of colour – it should be a matter of reaching within. Black women and women of colour are not hiding within universities – we are everywhere. If White women have to “reach us” it means that they are still holding the fort of White Supremacy, being gatekeepers of departments and academic schools without the realisation that their so-called anti-racist practices are just as racist as they were before they decided that feminism was for everyone.

With regards to the second image above: this image was on the website of IGSA and has, since my letter, been gracefully removed and replaced by an image of a field of daisies. The image that I took issue with, noted above, shows young Muslim girls, staring up at someone . . . presumably someone who is not from their community, taking liberties, photographing children without the permission of their parents. One immediately gets the impression that the image is suggestive of an Oxfam handout, or an American care package that had just been delivered: the scene of the crime now erased with a picture perfect poster to restore inhuman

humanitarianism. This is the perverse pleasure of killing people, the massacre of the parents but the reverence of the innocence of children, happy at the White camerawoman and White cameraman – the capturer of the image – who has come to take photos of them and make them famous: as United States soldiers have repeatedly told children whose photos they want to capture as a reminder that they are human whilst leaving the very children homeless after the bombs have fallen. To show Muslim children – any children from subaltern and disadvantaged communities, in this case predominantly girls – to exhibit them – as an interest, a care, a consideration of vulnerability, and to perform this exhibition of an image, captured, at the very process where the tilting of their young heads are so spectacularly poised that the capturer is guaranteed the appropriate gleeful consideration of the grateful oppressed child. This is nothing more than a genuflection to the White saviour, a gut-wrenchingly disturbing and highly problematic practice, which by all accounts was the objective. “Was the image captured after their homes were bombed or just before?” I asked the conference organisers, to which I have not once received a reply.

Exhibiting scarved Muslim girls, and/or women whose attire offer an indication of their ethnicity, dutifully wrapped in their oppression (an indicator by the White West who regard any form of head garment worn by a woman or girl as oppressive and from which they as White saviours have to step in) – is exactly how images are read when paraded at the backdrop of a vision of the world – gender studies now girl studies – which is not part of their identity but the identity that they choose to exhibit, to draw into a colour scheme, an aesthetic, a palette of colour of the oppressed, which they get to gaze at, display, as part of their ownership but which does not reflect membership of their organisation nor the framework of analysis they depart from where they draw themselves into the very realm they depict – that is, as the coloniser who constantly colonises with the intent of showcasing her catch. The colonial scope that I speak of, is suggestive here of the multiple ways in which the empire extends their lens, and inflicts their ideology by continually reproducing images of women and children as desperately in need of being saved from “oppressive men” as a means to prioritise patriarchy as the enemy and not a system of White domination or imperialism.

As a Black South African woman with Hindu and Xhosa heritage (my maternal grandmother’s Bengali heritage has always been known to all of us), who has Muslim family members due to a process of conversion, and who went to Madrasa with my cousin Amina – as she was older and had to watch over me – I find both the images out of context and suggestive of a continued colonial scope, which White feminists regard as important within the imagined girls studies agenda. Let me state for the record: one does not have to be Black, a woman, a woman of colour or Muslim, person from the subaltern, or any of the above combined identities to find these images offensive, damaging and/or part of a colonial scope of reproducing dependency and servitude. In addressing the White women organisers, I noted: “Just because as White women of the United States, you have usurped, bombed, colonised and captured, while calling yourselves feminists does not give you the right to take images of Black women and women of colour into your realm of ownership and exhibit us like playthings in your glorious noble imagination^{ix}”.

Each and every time I use my phrase, coined in Canada in 1999, "pornography of the poor", White women rush to claim it because they think it is "cool" and must be about other White women – not them – and now, yet again, I found myself at that place again, that place of incomprehensible anger and frustration of trying to understand why White women who call themselves feminists, apparently committed to addressing inequality, as per the definition and the mandate of their organisation, just don't get it and continue to perpetuate racial tropes and colonial scopes. What is this incessant need to put Black women, women of colour and subaltern women on posters, to gaze at, who do not speak back at the creator of the image . . . the pathologically perverse need to keep the image beautiful yet static, regal as racialised, queen of the jungle or the rice-field, part of the White imagination, as such postcard perfect, happy, and devoid of the trauma of racism or imperialism, gleefully waiting to be captured, as an image, to be adorned on the walls of White Women Studies? This is where my position of pornography of the poor makes its most salient point: how one always sees images of poor women, Black women, Native women, Asian women, subaltern women, bare breasted and feeding babies, in the rice fields, carrying water and wood on our heads in the dessert, adorning the walls of Women's Studies for the sole purpose of pleasing the White women professors who clearly need the titillation, the seduction of these images in order to fulfil their bland, uninteresting, teaching lives – a reward of sorts – as they walk the corridors of their lily-white academia. Who gives conference organisers the license to have loss of memory, so quickly, and not reflect on how they conducted the last meeting wherein racism was addressed back in 2016? Does any conference, feminist or not, in the twenty-first century really need another White woman keynote speaker?

I received two emails from the organisers, both of which asked me to attend the 2019 conference. I declined. The thought of being in the same room with the same people who "graced" the halls of the last conference, oblivious, ignorant, arrogant, and full of themselves, so smug, and so petty in their attempts at paying lip service to the dismantling of White domination, made me determined not to enter a space like that again. Which scholar or academic from the global south wants to be with empire beneficiaries telling the same lies, from same smug faces, the same people pimping out their paper-thin principles for the sake of having a conference listed on their curriculum vitae, the same people who have little ethical basis to be with women from the global south to begin with and who confuse historical racism with the liberty of showing Black women and Muslim children on posters as a means of reminding themselves of their prowess – their unclaimed empire status – and pat themselves on the back for having the guts to display their White privilege so openly and so freely that surely Black people and people of the global south would read their actions as noble, generous and anti-racist, allowing a poster to advertise their good intentions. I'm not interested in anyone's intentions! I'm interested in a programme of political action that addresses racism and colonialism head-on, and speaks to the agency of the actor!

One does not have to be a Black person, a person from the global south, a person of colour, a woman, a Muslim or any of the above identities to find these images offensive nor to oppose the constant construction of a scholarly agenda that constructs itself from the veins of White Supremacy whilst displaying its capturing of Black people, Muslim people and people from

the global south though images which falsely show solidarity . . . even after the bombs have dropped.

After I sent my letter, most of which has been noted in this paper, I added a postscript as a means to situate the spelling of certain words and phrases. I am including it here as a way of closing this segment of this paper:

Postscript: As a South African, I use spelling that is consistent with my education and have not converted to United States spelling to ease readers from that region into the reading of my letter. The length of my letter has been cut short in an attempt to contain my contempt. Whilst I am accustomed to writing long letters when expressing my discontent – usually due to the vastness of racism and its growing intersecting forms – I have refrained from offering further details that suggest my utter dismay at the ways in which White women scholarship of the kind I have witnessed among the attendees of the first International Girls Studies Association and the foreplay to the second, have disgusted me. I am uncertain as to whether it will encourage further papers on an area I work on, such as Philosophy of Disgust. I am however certain that the dwindling levels of consciousness of educated White women on matters pertaining to their White privilege is part and parcel of a larger process of a kind of perverted liberalism that has offered White women victim status from which they will never remerge as agents of racism responsible for the continued construction of White Supremacy as their White fathers, brothers, sons and lovers. In South Africa, White women were active agents of usurpation, settler colonialism and apartheid; after the first democratic elections in 1994, the constitution offered White women double jeopardy: the recognition of their past as beneficiaries of apartheid, only briefly, in passing, whilst declaring their gendered identities as central to the process of transformation of that role as one which suffered under White male patriarchy and therefore oppressed, alongside the rest of the oppressed women under a system of White male domination they participated in and benefitted from, and from which they are now able to seek refuge. It is no wonder that the fight against racism and White Supremacy is so twisted. If we cannot call out White women as beneficiaries of racism and hold them accountable for their continued perpetuation, maintenance and reproduction of the system of White domination because we are afraid that we will go against a perverse and pathologically flawed South African constitution, much the same way we applaud anything in the world –the United States and Hollywood in particular – that has the word “woman” attached to it as a sign of progress, we are failing hopelessly at fighting the very system of racism and White Supremacy we claim to be against.

In the second part of this paper, I focus on social influencer Lalla Hirayama’s racist depictions of Coloured women in South Africa. In the middle of April, 2020, I received email messages from students, friends and colleagues about a posting on Tik-Tok, a video-sharing networking service used across the globe these days, which originated in China, that was made by Lalla Hirayama. Tik-Tok, I was told, was meant to be used as parody, and upon reading about the app, I got the gist of the way that it functioned and what it was meant to elicit. Born in Japan, of a Japanese mother and a European descendant Jewish father, born in South Africa, Lalla Hirayama is a self-described television host, dancer and model, a self-

proclaimed South African, as per her biographical information. Over the years I have come to learn from my students what a social influencer is, what such a person does, and how their messages are distributed around the country and around the world.

My immediate community of colleagues and students who I teach were outraged by the video; as such, I thought it best to acquaint myself with it. I was absolutely gobsmacked by what I saw: Lalla Hirayama, in what was meant to be a parody, depicted Coloured women as drunks and drug addicts, preoccupied with our hair and appearance, embroiled in conversation about partaking in alcohol and drugs as part of the day to day activities of our lives, played against the backdrop of the song, “too legit to quit,” by MC Hammer. Hammer’s song, as revealed by its title, in the video version, depicts a person claimed as legitimate by James Brown, the father of soul, who tells MC Hammer that he is too legitimate to quit his career. Hirayama’s depiction, played against the same song yet with images of two drunk Coloured women embroiled in foul conversation, the kind that feeds the very stereotype Hirayama has learnt from White South African folks, with her voice-over, suggests that Coloured women are too legitimate as drunks, to quit drinking. In other words: “too legit to quit drinking . . . too legit to quit being Coloured.” I had to view it a second time to ensure that I had indeed witnessed the full extent of Hirayama’s vicious act of racism. The day after my article was published, the said students, friends and colleagues sent me a copy of the apology Hirayama posted. It is difficult to fathom why Hirayama holds a job in the South African media when she is so ignorant of the history of South Africa.

Many from my generation who were born in the 1960s at the Cape, and around South Africa, identify as Black and Coloured simultaneously; it is not an either/or identity but one that recognises, respectfully, our Indigenous heritage, and the histories of how we came to embrace the term ‘Black’ in South Africa. Most of us have parents, grandparents, and/or great grandparents whose ancestry are Xhosa, KhoiSan, Cape Malay, Bengali, Javanese, and/or of Indigenous South African heritage, and part of the previously enslaved of the Cape, as is indicative of surnames like mine – Maart, in Dutch, named after the month of enslavement by the Dutch, the third month, March. Once racialised as Coloured due to classification, the advent of the Black Consciousness Movement of Azania conscientized us to be knowledgeable of the divide-and-conquer strategies of the apartheid regime, and we began to claim our Black heritage, as teenagers, as an important part of an identity we were robbed of. Most of my colleagues and friends who have shared their shock at Hirayama’s posting have expressed a sense of frustration; some noted that they feel that in responding they are defending a depiction that they don’t identify with personally but which still troubles them deeply.

The problem with stereotypes is that if one fits the physical or racialised description of the person depicted then one is automatically viewed at the backdrop of that depiction, and in addition, that depiction then places one in a position to defend oneself as though one needs to offer an argument against the people who have been stereotyped and who are part of your racialised group. In other words, one has to make an argument for difference and/or exceptionalism, which is inevitably part of a continued process of demeaning the very people

and cultural group that one forms part of. The minute one says, "but I am not like that," or "I am different," you are participating in further accepting the conditions of self-hatred and removing yourself from any form of association because you believe that you are better! In so doing, you are forgetting that it is a stereotype and in your attempt at creating the distance between yourself and the person/s depicted within the stereotype you yourself fall for the trap, and participate in divide and conquer strategies yourself.

After my letter was published, Hirayama's apology made the social media circulation; within it, she claimed the following:

1. "I made a video which was offensive to some of my fellow South Africans," she wrote when in fact it is offensive to all South Africans, and anyone across the globe who understands the damage and cruelty of racism.
2. She suggests that her video is a question of bad timing. Well, this may come as a surprise to Hirayama – there is never a good time to inflict racism;
3. That Tik-Tok is satirical, she asserts, as though none of us as viewers are aware of this^x.

The video depiction is a cheap shot, from a person who has little understanding of the operation and functioning of historical and/or contemporary racism, who feels entitled, without question, to proceed with this lashing of Coloured people. In addition, there is no social contract between Hirayama and Coloured people; no one has put her forward to represent us in any way, unlike what the Coloured community has with Cape Town comedian Marc Lottering^{xi}, who is part of the community that he depicts;

4. Hirayama continues by noting that "we must always respect cultural nuances of our countrymen," when in fact her racialized depictions have nothing to do with cultural nuances yet everything to do with her position as a White-identified influencer, ignorant as she is, using the continued racial tropes of dagga (marijuana) smoking, liquor happy, superficial people with no command of the English language (albeit the coloniser's language that was forced on us). This stereotype is enormously convenient as it treats Coloured people with suspicion when we don't fit this stereotype;
5. She claims her "efforts were intended only to be entertaining, to share some uniquely South Africans "thing" to celebrate."

One would have thought, given South Africa's claim to "postapartheid" after the one-person one vote of April 27th, 1994, that foreigners who claim South African rights, and South African privileges as White, would also accept that it comes with a new constitution, which explicitly makes racism punishable by law. The days of using racism as entertainment has expired! Clearly, Hirayama did not get the memo!

What is highly problematic in the current South Africa, where social media has become the new real – an imaginary state of being in the world, compounded by a desire to satisfy oneself through the creation of sites of *jouissance* (a Lacanian term)^{xii}, which expresses both joy and pleasure, as well as sexual desire – is the incessant need to establish fantasy as real, as part of one's life. The latter is referenced here as a means of understanding the reaction of

cis gendered men students who noted in various emails to me that they did not find Hirayama's text offensive, and brushed it aside as "silliness." In discussion with various cis gendered women students, and in trying to ascertain why the said cis gendered men students did not see Hirayama's comments as offensive, I was met with a new reality that I, because of my refusal to have a television set in my house, was not privy to. There appears to be a need among various communities of young people to live vicariously, including within their lives a possibility to live out a Hollywoodized construction of identity and sexuality, which allows them to participate in social media discussions that emerge from the United States. In trying to understand this, it appears by all accounts, that Hirayama, who by watching various videos of her "work" has decided to model herself against the infamous Kardashian women. One can understand the need for fantasy among oppressed groups of people, whether as escapism from oppression or not, but what happens when the reality of racism is dismissed because the construction of the perpetrator as an object of sexual desire, a Hollywoodized one at that, is more pleasing than the cruelty of her racism? The Kardashian women have been famously noted for their desire for Black men – whether in the form of sexual relations, social relationships or marriage; that this has become a measure of their agency in actively dismantling racism, I fail to see. In the same vein, the said cis gender men students were quick to point out that Hirayama has also been known for her sexual relationships with Black South African men, which does not interest me in the least, for sexual relations with the very people the perpetrator dehumanises and belittles, will not contribute to the dismantling of racism. I have to also add here that upon my research visit to Aizawl, the capital of Mizoram, in 2016, I was particularly taken aback by discussions among students about the lives of the Kardashian women, their clothes and owner-status within the make-up industry, which more recently made the youngest Kardashian woman a billionaire, as though they were discussing members of their extended family. What is interesting to note in a city with three thousand people (300 000 00), is that young people treat the desire of the rich and famous as their desire – as desire for them, for their identities as people from Asia – overlooking all else. Robert Kardashian, the father of the first three Kardashian girls, now women, was born in the United States but both his parents are Armenian. The latter has offered the three out of five of the Kardashian girls (now women) to be treated as "exotic" by the United States media, with a geographical identity that includes the middle East, the Arab world and Asia, most of which are untrue as Armenia is considered Indo-European and the language, Armenian, is not close to Farsi or Arabic. Whilst I can examine the social construction of identities based on physical appearance and the sale of desire – which the Kardashian women seem to have a particular talent for – it is important to note that Hirayama's concerted effort to ensure that her Japanese identity is front and central to the way she constructs her South Africanness, is noted in every interview, and every performance she conducts in public; it allows her the Kardashian mirroring in a country where young people have been so influenced by the United States, through cultural imperialism that extends way beyond television, that they have adopted the language, the accent, the fantasy of fame, and the false allure of post-racism, along with the overarching need to dismiss racism when it comes from Kardashian wannabe's like Hirayama. The bottom line from young cis gender men in this regard can be summed up as follows: if she desires Black men, it means that she desires me, and therefore cannot be racist.

Lalla Hirayama was not alone in her perpetuation of racial tropes in South Africa. Earlier this year, we saw a group of White postgraduate students, guided and supported by their lecturers and professors from Stellenbosch University, undertake a similar outpour of racism, in the name of academic research, aimed at the Coloured population as though our position in society is so menial that no one would care to object. The study undertaken by the entitled White postgraduate students, with the support of the White professors, studied the cognitive development of 60 Coloured women, and found, as expected, that Coloured women had low cognitive development, lacked basic education and had no ambition to improve their low-level lived experience. All research projects have to undergo application to an ethics committee who then decides whether the research is ethically sound or not. This particular research project was not flagged as problematic, at all. Imagine the audacity of usurping the land of the people you then study for low cognition, and much to everyone's surprise, taking into consideration that as colonisers then colonials, you strip the Indigenous peoples of their livelihood, and create the material conditions for their racialised lived experience, massacre their people, jail their sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles, fire teargas at them when they protest, only associate them if they are able to clean your house then ask them why they live the way they do? This is colonial logic at its best! A petition was started shortly after the research "results" were made known, and was met with 3000 signatures within a short period of time, demanding a retraction^{xiii}.

The racial trope of Coloured people as drunks has a very unfortunate history: Dutch colonisers forced alcohol onto Indigenous peoples, got them addicted, then usurped the land, built wine farms and had the Indigenous people work on farms as labourers, for which the salary was in alcohol, brewed and cultivated on their land, at their hands, and for which the 'Tot-system' was made legal (tot, as suggestive of a small glass of wine). Through the 'Tot-system' alcoholism became synonymous with the identity of Coloured people. The practice dates back to the 1600s and was outlawed in 1960 but never enforced under apartheid, and remained in operation for almost 400 years, until the Mandela government put a final stop to it^{xiv}.

Racial tropes are created by the agents of racism in order to secure their place within the racist society they create, and where they continue to maintain these very tropes, ensuring that those tropes in circulation are reproduced, so that there is a dearth, a continuum to draw from, and from which a single trope remains justified among the slew that are reproduced as multiplication of the racism the agent of racism continues to benefit from. Anyone who researchers the contributions made by people from District Six, the old slave quarter at the Cape, and other suburbs within the country where the Coloured population lives, knows of the enormous contributions Coloured people have made to the arts, culture, literature, sport, food and gourmet culture, the film industry, medicine and education, nationally and internationally, and yet the approach of an "open season" on Coloured stereotypes never seem to end. In addition, I feel compelled to add that very few people in South Africa, scholars included, whilst aware of the history of slavery in the United States know little to nothing about the enslavement at the Cape: of Bengali people by the Dutch, as one of the first group

of enslaved people to the Cape, accompanied by enslavement of people from Indonesia, Malaysia, Madagascar and other parts of the African continent, along with Indigenous people and early Europeans, all of whom in turn formed what was then, and still today called the Coloured population. Instead, light skin and dark skin hierarchies of oppression have been set up as part of a divide and conquer strategy by the British in particular, where the end result manufactures discrepancies of oppression that places Coloured people as “privileged”, as if to suggest that enslavement was a privilege.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have put forward two particular forms of arguments pertaining to, what I call, racial tropes and colonial scopes. The latter refers to the manner in which racism operates through the construction of, and perpetuation of, images that foster notions of subservience, all constructed by agents of White supremacy and domination, and how the manufacturing of a gaze – the scope, as within the area of the subject matter that one looks at – that entrenches racial tropes and reinforces stereotypes. I would like to point out that one of my colleagues who is part of the group I mentioned earlier who sent me Lalla Hirayama's posting wrote to tell me that she did not see why I was "bothered" because I should be "above all of that," which I find rather disturbing. The problem with this position is that it is very easy to continue the depiction of Coloured people in these hugely offensive and limiting ways when one remains silent, therefore reinforcing it, as though we are not part of the said racialised group because we cannot be identified through physical appearance, speech or educational levels, shielded by self-inflicted historical amnesia, aided by the barriers certain forms of education help us to erect, and allow us to identify with our colonisers, as though we have to be ashamed for who we are, where we come from, and how we have been brutalised . . . therefore deserving of the stereotype. No form of education should allow us to harbour the false assumption that we can distance ourselves from our people, hate the people we believe fit the stereotype or are responsible for it, hold our heads and noses above the stench of other people's racism because we are ashamed of the cruelties that have been inflicted against us. Racial tropes and colonial scopes are a constant reminder of how racialised bodies are used as tools to advertise the power and authority that oppressors continue to have over those they have dehumanised and belittled in the name of an everlasting coloniality.

Endnotes

ⁱ People of color and women of color (US spelling), are generally terms used in the United States and Canada to refer to people who do not identify as White and/or are not identified as White. Martin Luther King used the term “citizens of color” (US spelling) as early as 1963 to refer to people in the United States who suffered racism and unjust treatment. Over the years, especially in the 1970s, the term people of colour (color, US spelling) was used at academic conferences, to indicate that the speaker or the community to which reference was made identified as such and/or could be identified as such, often terms using the reference as “not-White” or “non-White”; the latter was also used in South Africa. At the 1977 National Women’s Studies Conference in the United States, the term was used as a means of communicating solidarity among people, and women in particular, who identified their racialized identities as crucial to their lived experience of the world. I have noted multiple identities in this paper as a means of addressing people from the varied regions of the globe who are often grouped together under one category either as a means to suggest a quick and easy approach or as a means

to simplify identities and regions who experience the onslaught of White domination, imperialism and/or coloniality in different forms.

ⁱⁱ I refer here to several legal acts, starting with Act no. 41 of 1950, *The Group Areas Act*, passed in the South African parliament on July 7th, 1950 whereby, after 300 years of usurpation, land where Black and Coloured peoples had lived were still being taken away and declared “Whites-only” areas. As such, the South African government moved people out of areas where White people wanted to live. When various communities refused to move, forced removal was legalised.

ⁱⁱⁱ I refer here to Krotoa of Bengal, Catherina of Bengal, Mary of Bengal, and Domingo of Bengal, who were among the women who are considered the progenitors of the ancestral line of Coloured and Afrikaner communities, before intermarriage was outlawed. For further reference see:

<https://www.brandsouthafrica.com/people-culture/people/whats-in-a-south-african-name-from-krotoa-to-van-der-stel>

See also https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/Van_Palicatte-2 and for a more detailed history of the enslavement of Indians from Bengal and Kerala, see also:

<https://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/indian-slaves-south-africa-little-known-aspect-indian-south-african-relations-e-s-reddy>

^{iv} My letter was removed by the IGSA conference organisers but retained by a colleague and friend. See for example: <https://medium.com/@peminist/an-open-letter-to-the-organisers-of-the-second-international-girls-studies-association-igsa-5d25fd470399>

^v I am referring to the term used by Jacques Derrida, in “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” in *New Literary History, Vol. 6, No. 1, On Metaphor* (Autumn, 1974), pp. 5-74. In my use of the term I am referring to the manufacturing of myth as truth.

^{vi} *The Colour Purple* (1982), Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, United States.

^{vii} I use the term here as I had used it within the context of our discussion with women from the US, Canada, the UK and Australia at the IGSA conference in 2016, and the subsequent correspondence that transpired from it. I use the terms ‘people of colour’ and ‘women of colour’ hereafter in various places in the text as per the initial context of this discussion.

^{viii} For further details, see <https://medium.com/@peminist/an-open-letter-to-the-organisers-of-the-second-international-girls-studies-association-igsa-5d25fd470399>

^{ix} The quote here can also be found in <https://medium.com/@peminist/an-open-letter-to-the-organisers-of-the-second-international-girls-studies-association-igsa-5d25fd470399>

^x For further reading of Lalla Hirayama’s apology see <https://www.iol.co.za/entertainment/celebrity-news/local/lalla-hirayama-apologises-for-insensitive-tiktok-video-46768729>

^{xi} Marc Lottering identifies as Coloured and for the most part gears his comedy towards the Coloured community, depicting situations as an “insider” of the community. For further information, see <http://www.marclottering.com>

^{xii} See for example: Jacques Lacan (1978 [1973]), *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book II: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. W. W. Norton: New York

^{xiii} For further information on the content of this research and the response from researchers demanding its retraction, see <https://www.timeslive.co.za/news/south-africa/2019-04-25-study-on-coloured-womens-intelligence-scientifically-flawed-says-professor/>

^{xiv} For further information on the tot-system in South Africa, see https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tot_System