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# SOUTH AFRICAN SILENCES, JAPANESE ERASURES, APARTHEID STUDIES: BLACKMAN NGORO AND THE PERSISTENCE OF APARTHEID

## ABSTRACT

*This article is a “forensic inductive” reflection on the silences and erasures, in South Africa and Japan, that mark the last years of Zimbabwean journalist Roderick Blackman Ngoro. Ngoro was ostracised in South Africa after he penned a controversial blog article about “Coloureds”. After the affair, Ngoro relocated to Japan, continuing his journalistic research on racism. He returned quietly to South Africa a few years later to pursue doctoral studies at Wits University in Johannesburg. In late January 2010, Ngoro was found dead in his room at the University. Police did not suspect any foul play. This article deploys a purposive set of snapshots as part of a reflection on how Ngoro’s last few years in South Africa and Japan illustrate the persistence of apartheid. The problem of undetectable crime scenes is considered by means of specific inductive forensics of snapshots that allow a demonstration of how, at the crime scenes of apartheid, no foul play is detectable. Forensic induction is a methodology drawn from the author’s emerging work in apartheid studies, seeking to explain how the worlds of the oppressed are crime scenes in which people live with harm and live in harm’s way. The article concludes that the complex ironies that attend Ngoro’s last few years cannot make sense if not looked at through the lens of apartheid as a paradigm and theoretical framework (by which to detect persistent crime scenes). Such a paradigm has utility in detecting the persistence of harm, from South Africa to Japan.*

**Keywords:** journalism, media studies, media representation, apartheid, apartheid studies, Roderick Blackman Ngoro

## INTRODUCTION

In January 2010 Zimbabwean journalist Roderick Blackman Ngoro was found dead in his room at the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, South Africa. Ngoro, who had recently returned from Japan, had registered for, and

begun doctoral research in media studies. Police did not suspect any foul play. At the time of his passing, Ngoro was alone, ostracised, and forgotten – in contrast to the time when he had been an award-winning journalist and a special advisor to the mayor of Cape Town, Nomaindia Mfeketo of the ruling African National Congress (ANC). Ngoro's body was already decomposing when it was found. This article uses the emerging paradigm of apartheid studies to unravel a set of subtexts superposed around Ngoro the journalist, media scholar, and anti-racist. These subtexts throw light on the condition of the oppressed in a world where apartheid has become undetectable, and no foul play is detected.

## THE NGORO 'AFFAIR'

In 2005, Ngoro posted a blog article on behalf of a group called the Concerned Persons against Racism in the Western Cape. The article, titled *Why Africans and Coloureds are on the throats of each other in the Western Cape and Cape Town* (sic), warned that "Coloureds must undergo ideological transformation if their race is to prosper and not die a drunken death". It stated that "Coloureds have not yet realised that the time to be the cheerleaders for the white race is long past and gone", that "Coloureds" were "beggars, homeless and drunk on cheap wine", and that Africans were "vastly superior" to "Coloureds" (thus implying that "Coloureds" were not Africans). A set of subtexts superpose themselves on Ngoro's statements. Firstly, discourses about the extinction of "Coloureds" draw from actual histories of colonisers who tried, and failed, to cause the genocide of the indigenous Khoe and San (cf. Adhikari 2011; 2015; 2021). Secondly, debates about "Coloured" "drinking" habits cannot be innocent, being of a piece with racist colonial discourses of power, control, and subjugation (cf. Martens 2001). Thirdly, debates about the so-called "Coloured character" are as old as colonialism, with colonisers arrogating themselves the prerogative to name, define, and characterise those that they subjugated (cf. Martens 2001; Adhikari 2011).

A white politician, Kent Morkel, belonging to the Democratic Alliance (DA), complained to the Equality Court, alleging that Ngoro's article was hate speech. Morkel's race is worth highlighting because of the dynamic of a white man being hurt on behalf of "Coloureds". This dynamic forms a continuum with the phenomenon, between 1910 and 1952, whereby "Coloureds" were represented in the Union parliament by means of white representation whom they voted to the white Lower House. Essentially, "Coloureds" were in parliament without being in parliament. To be in parliament, they sent a white man. Here this problem is framed as a quantum superposition: when a thing simultaneously inhabits contradictory states. Morkel, the son of Gerald Morkel, the previous mayor of Cape Town, did not see the irony or detect the hurt he was causing. Again, no foul play was detected. Ngoro was criticised in newspapers and by organisations such as the South Africa Institute for Race Relations. One Cape Town tabloid, the *Daily Voice*, organised a protest, ostensibly to give Ngoro a "taste of coloured culture". The protest included hiring a group of minstrels in colourful attire to picket outside the mayor's office. The minstrels handed over a gatsby (a bread roll filled with chips) to security guards at the mayor's office, asking that it be passed on to Ngoro.

The Equality Court – as well as the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) – did not find Ngoro’s words to be hate speech, reaching a settlement with Ngoro in which he was to apologise. Ngoro apologised, undertaking “to be more sensitive when commenting on racial issues in future and to take the diversity of the South African population into consideration” and not to “express himself in a way that can be construed as hurtful or malicious” (Prince 2005). Further, Ngoro asserted that his remarks were meant to refer only to “a certain group of coloured people and not to the community in general” (Prince 2005), but conceded that the statement “beggars, homeless and drunk on cheap wine” could be interpreted as a reference to the entire community of “Coloured” people. Ngoro stated that the words about the vast superiority of Africans were insulting and could encourage hatred. This was never his intention, he said. Ngoro also conceded that the sentence about “Coloureds” being cheerleaders for whites was an unjustified generalisation since “Coloured” people had the same rights as anyone under the Constitution and had also suffered under apartheid. Morkel accepted Ngoro’s apology. Here, too, no foul play is detectable.

The exoneration regarding hate speech, the settlement in the Equality Court, and the formal apology did not end Ngoro’s problems. The mayor fired him following an internal council inquiry that concluded that Ngoro had “created racial disharmony” in Cape Town (*Mail & Guardian* 2005). The situation seemed so serious that the mayor dismissed Ngoro without the usual four-week notice or the chance to defend himself. No foul play was detected in Mfeketo’s disposing of Ngoro in this way. The summary dismissal following the accusation of causing racial disharmony brings a sacrificial dimension into the saga. With Ngoro out, racial equilibrium in Cape Town could, presumably, be restored. Mfeketo stated that she hoped her decision would help the city to refocus “on the main challenges facing our people”, an assertion that suggests Ngoro’s value as a scapegoat. The issues that Ngoro’s blog brought to the surface were thus being framed as trivial and a distraction. Mfeketo, who expressed confidence that the affair would not turn voters away from the ruling party, was to be the first and last ANC mayor to lead Cape Town because the ANC lost the 2006 local elections. Helen Zille of the DA became mayor. Ngoro left for Japan (where his wife hails from). A downward spiral for him had begun, ending with his suicide in 2010.

Ngoro’s Master’s study, titled “Framing the other: representations of Africa in the *Japan Times* between January and December 2000” (Rhodes University 2003), suggested that he had already had extensive interest not only in Japan but in the topic of how Japan treated darker skinned peoples. Ngoro cites how, for instance, in 1984, Prime Minister Yasuhiro Nakasone, having referred to Africans as *dajin* (a term which Ngoro says is suggestive of “primitive, uncivilised people”), claimed that the economy of the USA was being parasitised by blacks, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans. Nakasone’s is an assertion which – we must note - finds echoes in Ngoro’s “beggars, homeless and drunk on cheap wine” remark. In September 1990, Justice Minister Kajiyama Seiroku, while touring a Tokyo red light district, stated “It is like a bad currency driving out a good currency... It is like in America, when neighbourhoods become mixed because Blacks move in and Whites move out”. In the early 2000s, when Moody’s downgraded Japanese government bonds by two notches, giving them a value lower than that of

Botswana, Takeo Hiranuma, the Minister of Economy, Trade, and Industry at the time, inexplicably attacked the African nation, stating that “Half of the people of Botswana are AIDS patients” (Brooke 2002). Ishihara Shintaro, the Governor of Tokyo from 1999 to 2012, citing a supposed theory by an unnamed Swedish thinker who argued that blacks have inferior genes to whites, is quoted as saying that “efficiency drops when Blacks are employed. Even if Blacks are given the vote, South Africa’s future will still be chaotic. Even if they are independent, they can’t survive.” For Ngoro, all these assertions by Japanese politicians constitute “a cowardly way of analysing reality”. More importantly, Ngoro observes that racism persists in Japan but has withdrawn “from obvious positions to become increasingly subtle”, marked by “new silences” seen, for instance, in mundane labels such as *gaijin* (foreigners) or *hāfu* (“impure” or half-Japanese). The *gaijin seat* phenomenon (whereby Japanese refuse to sit next to a *gaijin*), for example, is a complex element of these new silences (cf. McNeil 2018).

In a 2004 article in *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, titled “Representation in the ruling ideas of Japan about Africa/ns/Blacks between 1984 and 2002”, Ngoro expanded his focus from the narrow preoccupation with the media and media representations to a sociology and historiography of racism in Japan. Ngoro manages a deeper and sensitive analysis into how one could not talk about racism in Japan without understanding the “idea” of Japan and being Japanese itself and how that idea is coextensive with the ubiquity of shame and harm in Japanese society, linking Japanese racism to Anglo-American racism, the transatlantic slave trade, and apartheid in South Africa. Such an analysis reveals that racism against Africans in Japan is not an isolated problem but, rather, a deeper issue that is networked with other deeper, ubiquitous issues such as the problem of the *hikikomori* – a phenomenon originating in Japan that denotes acute social withdrawal and extreme isolation (Tamaki 2013; Berman & Rizzo 2019; Tajan 2021) – that is a prism and container for a proliferation of subtexts about power, oppression, and injustice. That is, inductive forensics into Japan – as with a magnifying glass – shows not just racism but apartheid. After all, apartheid is not reducible to racism and racism is but a mere subset of apartheid. *Hikikomori* suggests that Japan is an apartheid society whereby many of its citizens live with harm and live in harm’s way without (as far as one can tell) ever inducing a sense of crisis. Victims either integrate and act normal or stay out of sight as outsiders. The broadening of Ngoro’s focus liberates his politics from narrow anti-racism to emergent apartheid studies.

Ngoro contests the illogic of Othering in Japan, which he finds ubiquitous and normalised. These ideas, Ngoro says, “work through the media, educational institutions and way of life” (Ngoro 2004: 162). Interestingly, Ngoro himself was one such outsider, and, notably, both in Japan and South Africa. If darker skin marks Ngoro as an outsider in Japan, Ngoro is also an outsider in South Africa, a Zimbabwean *kwerekwere* marked by so-called “Afrophobia”. Hence, mayor Mfeketo, on firing Ngoro, was keen to emphasise the need to return to working on important issues “for our people”. In South Africa, Ngoro is African without necessarily being South African. In a sense, Ngoro is acutely aware of how he inhabits a liminal space that is neither South African nor Japanese but much more in-between, there but not there, a quantum superposition. This same liminality accosts the “Coloured” in South Africa

– with the Population Registration Act enacting into law that the “Coloured” is neither white nor black but a halfway point between both. Ngoro’s blog article grapples with the liminality of such a position but – due to limits in his theorising of the condition of the oppressed – fails to go beyond the racism of the Population Registration Act. The claim that “Coloureds” are “cheerleaders for the white race” shows what happens when anti-racist positions do not sufficiently grapple with tensions and different rates of oppression amongst the oppressed themselves. This is a question that, this author avers, the apartheid studies framework resolves by showing that if one wants to see “Coloureds” as having a different “rate” of oppression to Africans, then one already admits that some “Coloureds” have a different rate of oppression to other “Coloureds” in the same way that some Africans have a different rate of oppression to other Africans and therefore, in the end, the division between “Coloureds” and Africans is, in practical terms, spurious and specious. Essentially, the Rate of Oppression (ROp) as a theoretical construct allows for an analysis of how the arbitrating of oppression is a more useful measure of who is who and who gets what (and who lives where) than racial, gender, or even class differences.

Essentially, Ngoro’s studies had established that Japan was not only a racist society, but one whose remanent racism was marked by (new) silences. No foul play could be detected. Ngoro was leaving South Africa, the heartland of apartheid, for another racist country, while carrying his own new status being that of an antiracist who was being accused of racism. Ngoro was moving in silence, from silence to silence, until the final silence of his room at Wits. That is, it is Ngoro himself whose life – since at least July 2005 – was now marked and suffocated by new silences. That Ngoro withdrew to his room for his final demise is notable not only for the way it contrasts with the publicness of the persona and practice of a journalist (journalism turns over the private to the public) but also for the light it throws on the Japan from which he had just returned. *Hikikomori*, while largely existing in the private sphere, “are positioned as residing outside of the prevailing system of social relationships and as such are perceived as a threat to social order” (Berman & Rizzo 2019: 791). Though classifiable as a psychiatric disorder, a notable subset of *hikikomori* cases does not appear to meet criteria for any existing psychiatric disorder (Teo & Gaw 2010). Rather, the problem appears larger and complex, with no single explanation. Indeed, Teo and Gaw (2010: 444) call for “international research” into the condition. *Hikikomori*, like the “Coloureds” of Ngoro’s blog post and the *kwerekwere*, are there but not meant to be seen. So-called Japanese “shame culture”, for instance, means that the poor, heavily indebted and those struggling economically are too embarrassed to be seen in that condition and so they stay out of sight or, in extreme cases, commit suicide (cf. West 2003; Kageyama 2003). The “Japanese-ness” of Ngoro’s demise is striking, beginning with his studies into Othering and Otherness in Japanese media representations and social structure, and ending with his own social withdrawal and suicide. A 57-year-old recovering *hikikomori*, Vosot Ikeida, says that his mother “put a kind of bomb inside my body, which later made me become a *hikikomori*”. So, to understand Blackman Ngoro, one must perhaps think of all the kinds of bombs carried in the bodies of “outsiders” all over the world – the bombs put inside Ngoro’s own body, in the bodies of *hikikomori*, and in the bodies of “Coloureds” over centuries of slavery, colonialism, and apartheid.

That police found no foul play connected with Ngoro's demise is a phenomenon this article frames in terms of the "disappearance" of apartheid crime scenes and the undetectable persistence of harm among the oppressed (cf. Mboti 2023a; 2023b; 2023c). At the heart of the problem is the fact that we lack a framework and vocabulary to talk about apartheid as a constant presence when, officially, there is no more apartheid. Apartheid has become undetectable not because it is not there, but because it arbitrages the oppressed's capacity to live with harm and live in harm's way until and such that it seems there is no contradiction or crisis. Ngoro's words hurt because he spoke about those living with harm and living in harm's way as though they were not living with harm and living in harm's way (and as though he himself was not living with harm and living in harm's way). Without a framework and vocabulary for detecting apartheid foul play, we will not understand how the Ngoro affair is so salient in the ongoing struggle to end the persistence of harm.

## APARTHEID, APARTHEID STUDIES, AND THE NGORO 'AFFAIR'

The problem of the persistence of oppression, harm and injustice is one of the fundamental problems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Apartheid studies is the study of the persistence of harm in human society. It considers how oppression persists instead of ending. It studies how people live with harm and live in harm's way. The problem is that oppression persists even where there is a fundamental disproportion of oppressors and oppressed. Oppressors cannot be present at all times in every place where the oppressed are. Yet, even in places where there is no constant presence of the oppressed, oppression persists. This is an original problem that demands wider reflection than has hitherto been allowed for in existing frameworks. Scarcity and shortage are when there is not enough – when there is less of what is needed to achieve optimal outcomes. The solution to scarcity is to share or go without (until enough can be found). But how do oppressors, who are always in the minority (in the sense that one never sees the oppressor at all times in every place where the oppressed are), solve for scarcity? The answer is apartheid. Apartheid is the permanent solution to the disproportion and "enforceability problem" of oppression (Mboti 2023a; 2023c). How many oppressors are "enough" to sustain oppression? That is, how does one continue to rule if, when, and where there is a shortage and scarcity of enforcers, supervisors, monitors, commanders, hegemony, and controllers? In fact, it turns out that one does not need a one-to-one presence of oppressor to oppressed to sustain oppression. All that is needed are states of apartheid. That is, oppression can still be sustained even if the oppressor is on holiday. This would seem to be a contradiction, a violation of Schrödinger's cat – the cat that is both dead and alive, inhabiting two contradictory states simultaneously.

These are the questions that apartheid studies address by showing how oppression happens and works. This author shows that apartheid resolves the enforceability problem by invoicing the costs of oppression on the oppressed themselves. This is achieved via a mechanism called the Rate of Oppression (ROp), an original construct of the apartheid studies framework that shows that the oppressed never experience the same oppression at the same rate, thus allowing for regulation by inconsistency

and disuniformity. Essentially, the oppressed are able to live with harm and live in harm's way because the experience of the prevalence and virulence of oppression is subject to arbitrage. As some are dying in Gaza in October 2023, others are watching the Rugby World Cup or the Cricket World Cup. The sound of bombs falling on the heads of children can exist in the same duration with the sound of fans celebrating a try, a run, or a wicket. Thus, apartheid is a policy of "good neighbourliness" of things that ought not to go on simultaneously, whereby, now, life goes on in conditions of persistent harm without detectable contradiction.

Apartheid studies proposes a novel framework that shows how harm persists in the world, by showing the forms and conditions by which apartheid violates unenforceability and disproportion. Oppressors are now on holiday. One cannot place them on the scene of the crime. Had there been no apartheid in the world, the oppressor would need to be present at all times in every place where the oppressed are if oppression were to persist. We have established that the constant presence of the oppressor is impossible. If oppressors cannot be present at all times in every place where the oppressed are, it ought to mean that harm should therefore not persist in human society. Yet harm does persist in human society. The disproportion of oppressor and oppressed has not led to the end of harm and injustice. Instead, they persist. So, what is going on? The answer is: apartheid. We have established that the most important question for any command, rule, order, and hegemony would seem to be whether you can enforce it. Can you enforce it? How are you going to enforce it? A command, order, rule, or hegemony that you cannot enforce is, putatively, useless. This, in a word, is the problem of unenforceables. Apartheid, as a Verwoerdian "policy of good neighbourliness", precisely resolves this problem by bypassing unenforceability and rendering it compatible with life going on in conditions of persistent harm. What we have are contradictions-that-can-be-lived-with (liveable contradictions), or quantum superposition. Apartheid ensures that the oppressor can still oppress without the necessity of a constant or one-to-one presence. Until we have a vocabulary and a framework to understand this phenomenon, oppression, harm, poverty, and injustice will continue to confound us. Harm persists in human society when, and if and only if, there is apartheid. The condition of unenforceability, whereby harm cannot persist at scale simply because of the fundamental disproportion of oppressor and oppressed, is only true if persistent oppression needed to be consistent. It turns out that persistent oppression is inconsistent as a rule. This is an expression of the ROp: the rates at which people are oppressed are not only not uniform but are subject to constant arbitrage. The oppressed can only exist from day to day if they participate in the vast "marketplace" of rates of oppression that apartheid leverages. Through apartheid studies we establish what is going on. The purpose of the analysis is to arrive at an understanding and framework of what to do about it.

The question about whether apartheid ended (in 1994 or at some other point), and indeed, what apartheid itself really is, is important in South Africa and for those preoccupied with how oppression persists. These concerns lie at the heart of apartheid studies. This author pioneered apartheid studies on 17 August 2012, the day after the Lonmin Massacre in Marikana, when the author noticed that life appeared to

continue “normally” as if nothing had happened and as if there had not been a crisis (cf. Mboti 2023b; 2023c). How could life go on like that? Posing this question led to a progressive, and then sudden, revelation that the oppressed had never, in fact, experienced apartheid at the same rate (Mboti 2023a; 2023b; 2023c). The experience of the same sort of oppression at different rates explained why the Lonmin Massacre did not stop everyday life from going on elsewhere and for other people not directly touched by the bloodshed (Mboti 2023b). This meant that the oppressed live with harm and live in harm’s way not because they accept oppression or because they are mentally colonised but, rather, merely because apartheid operates, as noted, a peculiar mechanism by which the costs of oppression are invoiced on the oppressed themselves (cf. Mboti 2023a; 2023b; 2023c). This means that the oppressed typically deal first and only with the most urgent and immediate costs of oppression, a state that, continued frequently, makes apartheid disappear (cf. Mboti 2023c). Apartheid disappears not because it is not there but because it becomes undetectable due to the oppressed living in terms of their own rates of oppression. Rate of Oppression (ROp) allows us to see, for instance, how the household is the basic unit of the persistence of oppression since this is where rates go through daily arbitrage and revaluation; how, when harm persists, it turns into a “service” of sorts rather than an object to be avoided or extirpated; and how apartheid becomes undetectable and, indeed, how it goes on holiday.

Inductive forensics is the methodology of apartheid studies (Mboti 2023a; 2023b). It deals with the questions of the apparent undetectability of harm and the Crime Scene of apartheid (the crime scene itself is composed of Scene 1 - which is televisable – and Scene 2, which is undetectable). That is, while the untelevisable may still be detectable, the undetectable is televisable, but will still not be seen. In large part, undetectable events happen “because people move on to other things or have other things to do” (Mboti 2023c: 4).

Apartheid studies as an inductive practice allows the author to move effortlessly from Japan to South Africa, and back to Japan, from *hikikomori* to rugby to the Population Registration Act, and to see the crime scene of apartheid where the “police line – do not cross” tape has long been removed and sites long built over and put to other uses. The layers and subtexts of Ngoro’s “story” become available for a range of other uses beyond that contained in normative journalism, as information from observed cases leads the way to unobserved cases. Forensics, from the Latin *forensis* (“of a forum: place of assembly,” related to forum, “public place”), links naturally with induction because of the fact of *making public* and *making detectable*. The point is to bypass apartheid’s traditional obfuscations.

How, then, can one use inductive forensics to detect the foul play surrounding the “Coloured” without Kent Morkel thinking that it is hate speech? South Africa as an official entity with a national flag has colonial origins, in the Union of 1910. That Union was based on erasure. So, for instance, only whites – also called Europeans – could be South Africans. That is, only Boer and British were recognised as citizens of the Union (cf. Mboti 2013; Ramutsindela 1997). Africans were mere “natives of the Union”, belonging in locations, reserves, and Bantustans. By commission or omission, there



was no specific mention of “Coloureds” in Union doctrine, despite “Coloureds” being, obviously, Africans. “Coloureds” could stay in South Africa, even if they were not whites, such that no legal justification was given or needed for their staying in “White” South Africa. Yet this being-allowed-to-remain in South Africa did not hold out citizenship. “Coloureds” were not foreigners in “White” South Africa, a non-status status. Thus, “Coloureds” were there but not there. For instance, under Union doctrine, “Coloureds” needed a white member of parliament to represent them – thus being included without being included, there without being there, a presence that is constantly absence. These traumas of omission and by commission are part of the undetected foul play that began at the battle of Gorinhaiqua in 1510. “Coloureds” are talked about and treated as if they were not there, a contradiction and a quantum superposition. Hence, in the Ngoro “affair”, for instance, it is a white man who approaches the Equality Court on behalf of “Coloureds”.

Throughout this article the term “Coloured” is enclosed in quotation marks because it is an apartheid invention. The invention is codified, legalised and formalised through the Population Registration Act of 1950 which institutionalised divide and rule by formally separating the population into four race groups: whites, Indians, Africans and Coloureds (Breckenridge 2014; Mboti 2013). Under this racist law, “Coloureds” were defined, specifically, as “not a white person or a native”, further sub-divided into “Cape Malay”, “Other Coloureds”, Khoisan, and so on. This is a meaningless checklist serving to conceal the fact that “Coloured” is a dehumanising invention. Try to imagine, for instance, what “Other Coloureds” are. That is, the notion of “Coloured” is a racist canard invented and maintained by successive South African governments since colonial times. So-called “Coloureds” are in fact descendants of the indigenous Khoi and San, of slaves, and of East Asian immigrants. They are also mixed-race descendants firstly of marriages between white men and black women, as well as institutionalised rapes and sexual assault of black women by white men (cf. Gqola 2015). Basically, white men permitted themselves open access to black women’s bodies, while criminalising – for instance, through the Immorality Act (1927) and the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act (1949) – against black men sleeping with white women. From the beginning “Coloureds” were marked either for extermination, genocide, and erasure or to be perpetual slaves of whites in South Africa (Adhikari 2011). The “dop” (or tot) system provides the clearest proof (cf. Williams 2016; London 1999; 2000; Naude *et al.* 1998). White “masters” and employers deliberately set out to addict “Coloureds” to alcohol and drugs, both as a means of perpetual control and to prevent the emergence of a coherent sense of rootedness and identity (Williams 2016). “Dop” continues to this day in a variety of forms (Herrick 2014; May *et al.* 2019). The cheap wine that Ngoro referred to is *papsak* which, despite a ban in 2007 by the South African Wine Industry, is still widely manufactured and sold. Many workers paid in cash fritter significant portions of these wages on alcohol sold by farmers or illegally in shebeens (cf. Herrick 2014). Foetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS) in Western Cape communities has been traced to the dop system (McKinstry 2005). In fact, certain “Coloured” communities have the highest global incidence of FAS (cf. May *et al.* 2001; McKinstry 2005; Adebisi *et al.* 2019).

The attempted erasure of “Coloureds” is clearly demonstrated in the land question in the Western Cape: “Coloureds” were the only indigenous group *not* allocated their own “homeland” by the apartheid government. Oppressors have thus always played a double game with “Coloureds”, using and abusing them at the same time but – like Schrödinger’s cat – never allowing them a putative African or European identity (cf. Adhikari 2005; 2013). This crisis of liminality is expressed in the saying that “Coloureds” are “not white enough (and) not black enough”. Apartheid carefully preserved the precarious liminality (Adhikari (2005) calls it “marginality”) of “Coloureds” as a control mechanism, to be used as circumstances demanded. Modisane (1963: 16) says:

It is true that as racial groups, we were placed, socially and economically, on different levels of privilege; white was the ultimate standard and the races were situated in approximation to this standard: the Chinese were nearest to white, they were allowed into white cinemas and theatres and some restaurants; the Coloureds, nearer white, and the Indians, near white. Social mixing was difficult.

The invention of “Coloureds” was part of the colonial and apartheid principle of *divide et impera* (La Guma 1972). Basically, the “Coloured Question” was separated – and kept separate – from the “Native Question”. The clearest institutional examples are the so-called Eiselen Line (purporting to map a “Coloured Labour Preference Area” in the Western Cape where “Coloured” workers were preferred for work over “Bantus”), the Population Registration Act of 1950 (which placed “Coloureds” over “Bantus” but below Europeans), and the tricameral parliament of 1984 (whereby “Coloureds” – and Indians – were brought into the white parliament via the back door, to occupy their own silo or chamber, the *Raad van Verteenwoordigers*, representing “Coloured affairs”). Furthermore, “Coloureds” were exempt from carrying the dompas. Such divide and rule meant arbitrarily allocating different forms of humiliation.

Indeed, this arbitrary allocation of oppression was so successful that it led to the pernicious perception that some of the oppressed in South Africa (whether it is “Coloured” or “Indians”, for instance) were not oppressed enough or that “blacks” were oppressed more than others. Farred (2001: 178), for instance, identifies being “Coloured” as an ambivalent condition that defines “a group that was historically disenfranchised and partially enfranchised, precariously situated between the traditional oppressor and the oppressed majority”. This is completely illogical. Being “Coloured” is not an ambivalent condition. It is an oppressed condition. There is no ambivalence in being oppressed. Either one is oppressed, or one is not. More importantly, the concept of being “partially enfranchised” is nonsense. Either one is enfranchised, or one is not. Farred (2001), and many others who think that “Coloureds” had it better under apartheid, ultimately fail to understand how apartheid functions.

Thus, talk about the partial enfranchisement of “Coloureds” and being spared the worst deprivations is Verwoerdian speak. Deprivation is deprivation – it is harmful in every form. There is no “better” deprivation. It is important to understand that no two oppressed people ever experience oppression – neither slavery nor colonialism, poverty nor inequality – at the same rate. No two “Coloureds” experienced apartheid and colonialism at the same rate. After all, “Coloureds” themselves are incredibly

diverse, in terms of class, personality, temperament, aspirations, genealogy, and so on. The point is that there is no framework, other than the Population Registration Act, that justifies, permits, or excuses nonsense gradations among the oppressed.

After the National Party ended the “Coloured” franchise in 1952, the Population Registration Act codified “Colouredness” as a rigid, fixed and inflexible hierarchy, completely ignoring that so-called Coloureds are not and have never been homogenous. “Coloureds” are so diverse that there is no single characteristic (or two, or three) that defines being a “Coloured”. Fundamentally, the Population Registration Act sought to trap “Coloureds” in a non-negotiable dehumanising liminality. It is only from this dehumanising liminality that the phrase “not white enough, not black enough” becomes both material and materiel. Seemingly, the “Coloureds” are free-floating between whites at the apex and “Bantus” at the base, such that, merely by mentioning “Coloured”, one excludes. That is, one excludes “Coloureds” from the binary of white and black since “Coloured” is codified as that which is neither white nor black, that which is there by being nowhere. Such liminality rehearses for communal conflict in the sense that it codifies divide and rule. Divide and rule also provides convenient scapegoats and sacrificial lambs. Ngoro, himself a scapegoat and a sacrificial lamb, scapegoats and sacrifices “Coloureds” by failing to recognise that at issue is not “Colouredness” at all but, rather, different and differently arbitrated Rates of Oppression. Ngoro fails to acknowledge his own Rate of Oppression. Had he done so, he would perhaps have seen “Coloureds” with sensitivity and a deeper awareness. His apology would also have been reparative rather than defensive. Due to apartheid’s disappeared crime scenes, Ngoro saw “Coloureds” where he ought to have seen the persistence of harm. To undo the far-reaching dehumanisation codified in the concept of “Coloured”, it is important to have a deepened framework and vocabulary that unfixes the Population Registration Act while depriving the Kent Morkels of this world from the deontological oxygen that obliges them to be hurt vicariously on behalf of the oppressed.

Ngoro’s dissertation and journal article contend that a structure of difference and Othering, over-emphasised in Japan’s relationship with Africa and African people, exists to reproduce subtle and “common sense” racism in Japan. His blog article, however, treats “Coloureds” as the Japanese treat *gaijin* and *hafu*. How did Ngoro fail to connect his anti-racist projects in Japan with the historical racism facing “Coloureds” in the Western Cape? Ngoro, so perceptive when it comes to seeing racism in Japan, seems inordinately blind or insensitive to the same patterns in the Western Cape. Is Ngoro’s blog article about “Coloureds” an extension or a renunciation of his anti-racist thought? It is hard to say, except that the blog touches multiple painful histories. Ironically, Ngoro’s son with his Japanese wife would be “Coloured” in South Africa and Zimbabwe. In Zimbabwe, saying “hunhu hwechiKaradhi” (Coloured behaviour) is an epithet for alcoholism, sexual and drug abuse, violence, criminality, and identity crises – never mind that these are problems that bedevil all societies that live with harm and live in harm’s way. “Coloureds”, *makwerekwere*, and the *hikikomori* all live in harm’s way. They are all victims, and victims can and do frequently think and act in ways that coincide with those of their oppressors.

So, can a victim victimise other victims? The answer is a definite yes. The only problem is that we have no analytical framework to explain how this happens, and how to understand and deal with it. The limited solution is to sacrifice and scapegoat – as happened to Ngoro in July and August 2005. We fail to grasp that, as the oppressed, we are all Ngoro, with different rates of oppression. Ngoro’s Master’s dissertation, journal article and blog, taken together, reflect the complexities of the Rate of Oppression – the differentiated, arbitrated experience of oppression. The outcomes of that process are materially haunting. Yet, while the outcomes of apartheid are frequently lived with, they need not be final.

## BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

This article maps the silences and erasures that attend the memory, last years, and demise of journalist Roderick Blackman Ngoro. Its success depends on how much we think Ngoro’s story means – if it means anything at all. The author sought to open a path into the meanings that the material in the public domain invite. Thus, this article is perhaps merely that: an opening. In South Africa, unrehabilitated racists force black people into coffins and murder black boys for “stealing” sunflowers. Apartheid torturers walk free on the streets. Companies that profited from apartheid continue to make billions. If FW De Klerk, the putative last apartheid president, received a Nobel Peace Prize, why can Ngoro not rest in peace? What is it about Ngoro that made him lose his life in the way he did? If the lack of “human relationships” produces *hikikomori*, how much of human relationships can we handle? Was Ngoro human? Are “Coloureds” human? Are *makwerekwere* human? How are we human during and under a state of apartheid? Blackman Ngoro was not a criminal – yet died like one. Yet, life went on. Yet, life goes on. Only his life ended when it did. But was it his life only that ended? Thousands of babies and children have died in shack fires since 2010, since Ngoro died, since the 2010 FIFA World Cup, since the 2023 Rugby World Cup, and so on. Mandela said never, never, and never again. What exactly did he say never again to? We still need a vocabulary and a framework to properly talk about the dark matter of apartheid.

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