

THE RACIAL POLITICS OF GRAPHIC DESIGN:
A TRANSVERSALIST APPROACH TO ANTI-RACIST LITERACY

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Abstract

Historically, racism has been conceptualized primarily as overt discrimination, with recognition of more implicit forms—such as unconscious bias and microaggressions—emerging in recent decades. However, present within the social fabric is a more invisible, or rather “un-visible,” variety: a banal form marked by gross abundance, occupying both commercial and public spaces, subsequently entering our homes, stocking our refrigerators, and lining our shelves. Taking a cue from Ruben Pater’s *The Politics of Design*, this paper examines how racism is produced and reproduced through packaging and labelling design in food products. The study employs a qualitative, mixed-methods approach that combines autoethnography and purposive sampling, followed by a comprehensive visual analysis informed by racial and ethnic studies. Samples include Pride of Arabia 100% Arabica Whole Bean Coffee, Wong Wing Fried Rice, and Golden Temple Atta No. 1 Fine Durum Atta Flour. Developing an analytical and theoretical approach that supports the identification of racialization, racist typologies are situated within graphic design. Themes derived from the analysis include orientalism, self-orientalism, and cultural appropriation, among others. Adopting an anti-racist framework, this thesis positions transversalism as a more robust modality for decolonial praxis in graphic design.

Keywords: Commodity racism, packaging and labelling design, anti-racism, transversalism

Dedication

As Angel Jibreel (Gabriel) said unto Prophet Muhammad ﷺ,
And Muhammad said unto me:

Iqra! [Read!] — Iqra! [Read!] — Iqra! [Read!]

To my grandfather,
Muhammad Naim Baraki,
Governor of Ghor (1971) and Takhar (1972–1973);

to the women and children of Afghanistan;

and to my husband,
Steven Donald Killin,
and our little one on the way.

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This journey has been anything but ordinary, extending well beyond the usual two-year timeline for a master's degree. Along the way, I have navigated challenges familiar to many students, including a global pandemic, political and social instability in my homeland, the loss of loved ones, bureaucratic hurdles, moments of self-doubt, and ongoing health challenges. Yet this journey cannot be defined solely by its length or obstacles, but also by its richness: by the depth with which I engaged in my studies and the many opportunities I embraced. During my time at York University, I volunteered within my program, presented my research at both the national and international levels, engaged with causes I care deeply about, and made lasting connections. Collectively, these experiences have transformed my life, and for this, I am indebted to many.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Racism is ordinary, not aberrational—“normal science,” the usual way society does business, the common, everyday experience of most people of color in this country.¹ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001, p. 7)

Racism is generally acknowledged, *if at all*, when it is easily perceived or understood (Dei et al., 2005). It is often assumed to be explicit, intentional, and visible. However, “to suggest that racialized discourse exists only in overt, literal references to race” constitutes “a profound disservice to the inarguably multi-layered significations of political language” (Strub, 2008, p. 188). Racism, therefore, manifests not only in blatant acts of discrimination, oppression, or violence, but is also deeply embedded in the fabric of everyday life, including the supermarket—a space that racializes bodies and commodifies race (Elliott, 2008; Kamaloni, 2019; Sartori, 2018).

While this phenomenon has, in the past, often gone unnoticed by consumers, it garnered widespread attention during the global protests following the murder of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin in 2020 (Elliott, 2008; Edelman, 2020; Reuters, 2020). During this time, socially conscious consumers began to interrogate the racialized semiotics and perceived racist origins of consumer goods, demanding that brands acknowledge their complicity in perpetuating racial and ethnic stereotypes, rebrand racist trademarks, and take actionable steps towards racial equity (Edelman, 2020; Nittle, 2020). In the subsequent months, several brands announced plans to rebrand, including Aunt Jemima (now Pearl Milling Company), Uncle Ben’s (now Ben’s Original), “E-----” Pie (now Edy’s Pie), and Cream of Wheat—all of which were, or still are, available on Canadian grocery store shelves (B&G Foods, Inc., 2020; D’Innocenzio, 2020; Mars, Incorporated, 2020; Pearl Milling Company, n.d.).

¹ While this quote refers specifically to the U.S. social context, its insight resonates with how racism operates in other settler-colonial states, including Canada.

However, many of these changes proved largely performative, with brands strategically adapting to shifting consumer behaviour to continue benefiting from racial capitalism (Edelman, 2020; Hanlon, 2021; Nittle, 2021). For example, when the Quaker Oats Company decided to discontinue and replace Aunt Jemima, a brand modelled on the racist “mammy” stereotype, they failed to consult with or compensate the families of Nancy Green, Lillian Richard, Anna Robinson, and Anna Short Harrington, women who portrayed the controversial figure (Savage, 2021). In a conversation with co-host Robin Young on WBUR-FM, Vera Harris, the niece of Lillian Richard, proposed redesigning the package as a thoughtful commemoration of her aunt (Young, 2020). But instead, Quaker removed Aunt Jemima’s image entirely—erasing her from public memory, avoiding reparative work, and obscuring a complex history of Black women who navigated the Jim Crow era through strategic self-othering (Du Bois, 2018; hooks, 2014; Kern-Foxworth, 1994). Moreover, by assuming that calls to rebrand necessitated the complete removal of Aunt Jemima, Quaker homogenized diverse perspectives on racism and anti-racism within the Black community.

Other companies that announced plans to review their brands accused of racism abandoned them once the protests subsided. For instance, Conagra Brands, the parent company of Mrs. Butterworth’s—which was also criticized for evoking the “mammy” stereotype (through its bottle shape and product colour)—issued the following statement in June 2020:

The Mrs. Butterworth's brand, including its syrup packaging, is intended to evoke the images of a loving grandmother. We stand in solidarity with our Black and Brown communities and we can see that our packaging may be interpreted in a way that is wholly inconsistent with our values.

We understand that our actions help play an important role in eliminating racial

bias and as a result, we have begun a complete brand and packaging review on Mrs. Butterworth's. (Conagra Brands, Inc., 2020)

However, despite this pledge, the product is still sold in its original form.

Evidence suggests that such backtracking could have been influenced by concerns about brand identity and name recognition, as well as fears of alienating the (conservative) white consumer segment, many of whom threatened boycotts against brands that departed from “traditional” (read: racist) consumer packaging (Alcorn, 2020; Bruce, 2020; Burns et al., 2023; Fryberg, 2004; Kalaitzandonakes et al., 2023; Lee, 2023; Manseau, 2020; Stopera, 2020; Vogels et al., 2021). For instance, when Land O’Lakes removed its Native-themed “butter maiden” logo, Mia, in 2020, consumers flocked to social media to express their outrage (Manseau, 2020; Stopera, 2020). One user wrote:

Land O Lakes can kiss this butter buyer’s ass. My family has been a Land O Lakes family since I can remember. No more. I’m fine with store brand from here on out.

Your virtue signaling lost you some good customers who were always willing to pay more for your product. #BuhByeLOL (Stopera, 2020)

Another lamented:

Dumping the icon lady on your products???? Really?? Makes me want to throw up. IT IS NOT RACIST. IT IS HERITAGE. IT IS A COMPLIMENT TO NATIVE AMERICANS WHO DID THINGS THE HARD, FRESH WAY. GUESS I WILL BE SWITCHING BUTTERS. CAN'T SUPPORT SUCH AN IDIOTIC STUPID DECISION. (Stopera, 2020)

However, research shows that Mia was based on Muriel Barbaree, a Minnesota farm girl of French and English descent, with no known Indigenous ancestry (Manseau, 2020). Ironically, then, the “butter maiden” functions as a symbol of the very (white) consumers who, through

racialized capitalism, engage in Othering, including ethnographic nostalgia and imagined geographies (Elliott, 2008). Perhaps for this very reason, only the most visible brands, which faced significant media scrutiny and public pressure, have more fully rebranded, while many others, including international brands such as Banania, “N-----” Rhum, and Sarotti, continue to rely on their racist trademarks (Girardot, 2025; Hackenesch, 2014; Imani, 2019; La Martiniquaise-Bardinet, n.d.; Stollwerck GmbH, 2025; Todd, 2025).

In recent years, the global political climate has grown increasingly volatile. The rise of right-wing populism in European metropolises and settler-colonial states has, as is often the case, been accompanied by a racial nostalgia for a so-called “simpler time” (Danbolt, 2017; Hinrichsen, 2015; Reyna et al., 2022). As a result, some brands are reverting to racist and ethnocentric imagery, suppressing social progressive movements (BDS National Committee, 2025; Furlano, 2025).

This logic can be traced back to the *Paris Manuscripts*, where Marx, with his characteristic acuity, observed how “the [producer] puts [themselves] at the service of the [consumer’s] most depraved fantasies,” exciting in them “inhuman, sophisticated, unnatural and *imaginary*”—even morbid—appetites in order to spur consumption and fuel capitalist accumulation (Marx, 1977, p. 109; see also Burkett, 1999; Mazzarella, 2003). But it wasn’t until the 90s that cultural theorists began to explore the concept of *commodity racism*—that is, the ways in which ethnocentric and racist ideologies are encoded into (or onto) commodities (McClintock, 1995; see also hooks, 1992; Kern-Foxworth, 1994; Hall, 1997; Redden, 1999). Since then, there has been a growing scholarship on the persistence of racism in consumer culture, including but not limited to racist brand names, trademarks, mascots and characters, and slogans (Hinrichsen, 2015; Souza, 2020).

And while these studies are highly informative, they are not without limitations. Primarily,

much of the existing literature on commodity racism remains exploratory or explanatory, offering few concrete solutions for addressing racism in the marketplace (Davis, 2018). One example is Elliott (2008), who explores packaged representations of “foreignness” in President’s Choice (PC), a Canadian line of grocery products by Loblaw’s Companies Ltd (p. 179). Using visual discourse analysis, she dissects more than 20 consumer packages, including those from PC’s *Memories of ...* line, to show how exoticized commodities function as a form of “image colonialism” (Elliott, 2008, p. 187). Throughout the text, Elliott engages with foundational works, including Appadurai (1981), Deleuze and Guattari (1977), hooks (2014), and Said (1979). However, the study ultimately fails to move beyond analysis. Another example is Redden (1999), who examines how food packaging in Australian supermarkets uses pastoral and nationalistic imagery to naturalize a Eurocentric relationship to the land, thereby undermining Indigenous sovereignty. Although his work offers a rich analysis of the supermarket, white nationalism, and the semiotic ontology of commodities, it falls short of proposing tangible strategies to challenge commodity racism and imperial advertising. Moreover, while he critiques the erasure of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ relationships to the land, he does not sufficiently foreground First Nations voices or perspectives. Building on Agozino (2007), scholarship that simply deconstructs racism risks privileging racism and does little to help individuals who yearn for an end to it. Although it is certainly useful to analyze commodity racism to explain and (re)interpret it, commodity racism manifests materially and thus demands not just critique, but a concerted effort to challenge and disrupt its continued circulation.

The few studies that do provide anti-racist strategies typically operate within the very colonial frameworks they seek to challenge (Davis, 2018). For example, Hinrichsen (2015), who examines the origins of racist trademarks and the persistence of commodity racism in Europe and

the United States, presents trademark law as a potential mechanism for contesting racist imagery, even though it has historically served to protect those who maintain proprietary rights over ethnic or racial stereotypes (see also Bhandar, 2018; Coombe, 1998; Lee, 2023; Lipsitz, 2006; Moreton-Robinson, 2015).² Such an approach also places (racialized) groups seeking redress for racist trademarks at a structural disadvantage, forcing them to navigate Western European legal frameworks. Arya (2021), who studies cultural appropriation in media and consumer goods, observes that although postcolonial thinking culls from a wide variety of sources, most studies are “initiated and implemented by the academy, itself fraught with Eurocentrism and ideological knowledge structures” (pp. 8–9; see also Davis, 2018). In the event that scholars engage with diverse, anti-racist epistemologies or methodologies, analysis often remains framed by the logics of identity politics, which, while indispensable, tends to focus on localized or siloed struggles and risks factionalism and the privileging of identity categories (Yuval-Davis, 2012a; Yuval-Davis, 2012b). Instead, Arya (2021) advocates for a more decentered approach that incorporates more diverse cultural contexts, including perspectives from the Global Majority, to broaden the field and create more meaningful anti-racist interventions.

Another drawback in existing literature about commodity racism is the relative lack of attention to the participants and processes behind ethnocentric and racist imagery. Despite Marx’s prescience, contemporary scholarship has largely overlooked the role of advertisers, marketers, and, in particular, graphic designers who ideate, design, and produce the racial and ethnic stereotypes found in consumer packaging, instead focusing on the imagery itself.³ One

² For an example of how Western legal scholarship uses trademark law to downplay the harm caused by commodity racism, including racist trademarks, imposing evidentiary thresholds that minimize racialized perspectives, see Udvanc’s (2024) legal analysis of *Blackhorse v. Pro-Football, Inc.*

³ A few notable exceptions include McClintock (1995), who examines the role of advertisers and photographers in imperial advertising and commodity racism during the Victorian and early 20th-century period, and Hund et al. (2013), who examine the role of producers, designers, photographers, marketers, and advertisers in colonial advertising and commodity racism from the late 19th to the 21st century.

example is Danbolt (2017), who examines the heated public debate surrounding commodity racism in contemporary Denmark, specifically Haribo's *Skipper Mix* licorice, and epistemologies of ignorance as they pertain to race and colonialism. While he discusses racist product and package design, noting how design practices have normalized racist imagery and rendered it “un-visible,” his analysis gives little attention to the positionality, labour, creative decisions, complicity, and moral obligations of the graphic designers responsible for producing such imagery (Danbolt, 2017, p. 106).

Thus, in an effort to address these lacunae, this thesis explores how graphic designers perpetuate commodity racism. It asks:

1. How is racism produced and reproduced in packaging and labelling design?
2. How might anti-racism be operationalized in packaging and labelling design, and, more broadly, graphic design?

This study is organized into six chapters: Chapter One: Introduction; Chapter Two: Literature Review; Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Methodology; Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings; Chapter Five: Apropos Anti-Racist Graphic Design?; and Chapter Six: Conclusion.

Chapter Two provides a concise overview of racism from classical antiquity to the present, alongside anti-racist expressions of the 20th century. Sections 2.3 to 2.5 review racist typologies relevant to this study, including Orientalism, self-Orientalism, and cultural appropriation, while Section 2.6 traces the history of racism in packaging and labelling design from the 15th to the 21st century.

Chapter Three outlines the theoretical and methodological framework. Section 3.1 introduces transversalism—a feminist, dialogic model of coalition politics—as the study's

guiding theory, and Section 3.2 details the methodological approach, which integrates autoethnography, field observation, purposive sampling, and visual analysis. The consumer packages selected for analysis include the packages for Pride of Arabia Whole Bean Arabica Coffee, Wong Wing Fried Rice, and Golden Temple Atta No. 1 Fine Durum Atta Flour.

Chapter Four presents an in-depth visual analysis of each package, examining Orientalism in Pride of Arabia Whole Bean Arabica Coffee, self-Orientalism in Wong Wing Fried Rice, and cultural appropriation in Golden Temple Atta No. 1 Fine Durum Atta Flour.

Chapter Five surveys existing anti-racist and decolonial efforts within the field of design, including card decks, manifestos, guidebooks, field guides, and toolkits, before introducing transversalism—the theoretical framework guiding this study—as a more robust modality for decolonial praxis.

Finally, Chapter Six concludes by summarizing how graphic designers perpetuate and normalize racism in the material-discursive space of the marketplace through Orientalist, self-Orientalist, and culturally appropriative consumer packaging. It revisits existing anti-racist and decolonial interventions in the field of design, outlines transversalist policy, and restates the anti-racist prompts developed in Chapter Five, emphasizing the ongoing, reflexive, and relational nature of anti-racist work. The chapter closes with suggestions for future research and a personal reflection.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Addressing racism in package and label design first requires a comprehensive understanding of racism as both a social construct and an ideological framework. As a result, this section offers a broad overview of racist thought and practice, tracing its development from classical antiquity to the present, with a brief detour into 20th-century anti-racist movements. While the scope of this review does not allow for an exhaustive account of every historical manifestation of racism, it aims to highlight the key themes throughout. The subsequent sections will explore racist typologies relevant to this study, including Orientalism, self-Orientalism, and cultural appropriation. Section 2.6 provides a brief history of racism in package and label design, divided into three periods: the 15th–18th centuries, the 19th–20th centuries, and the 21st century.

2.2 Racism

Defining Racism

Rooted in essentialist⁴ and supremacist⁵ beliefs, racism can be defined as “prejudice, antagonism, or discrimination by an individual, institution, or society, against a person or people on the basis of their nationality or (now usually) their membership of a particular racial or ethnic group, typically one that is a minority or marginalized” (OED, 2023e).

Proto-Racism

Some historians trace racism back to ancient civilizations, particularly the Herodotean and Aristotelian ontologies of Classical Greece (Cartledge, 2002; Hall, 1997; Hall, 2014; Isaac, 2004; Kendi, 2019; Leach, 2017; McCoskey, 2012; Snowden, 1983). Puzzo (1964), on the other

⁴ Cultural and racial essentialism posits “that members of a particular racial or ethnic group possess innate characteristics or qualities” (OED, 2023e).

⁵ Racial supremacism is the belief “that some racial or ethnic groups are superior to others” (OED, 2023e).

hand, contends that racism should be understood as a modern concept since the influence of physiognomy and racial hierarchies in Hellenic inquiries cannot be fully determined. In other words, the proto-racisms of antiquity lacked racial animus and were instead spurred by ethnocentrism,⁶ environmental determinism,⁷ and, more to the point, territorial expansionism and depredation (Berry, 2023; Puzzo, 1964; Reiss, 2005). The subsequent medieval period, which saw the Christianization of Europe, came to define loyalty by religious faith, not racial identity, *per se* (Monteiro-Ferreira, 2018; Topolski, 2024). Ecclesiastical differences aside, Christianity offered a common locus of allegiance, particularly for Western Europeans (Puzzo, 1964).

However, the consolidation of religion, in conjunction with the decentralization of political authority, various regional disputes, and economic hardship, precipitated a period of cultural, economic, and technological stagnation (Puzzo, 1964). It was not until the Crusades, the Commercial Revolution, Scholasticism, and the Renaissance—or, in simpler terms, war, trade, and learning—that Europe re-emerged from isolation (Puzzo, 1964).

The First Wave of European Colonization

European expansionism “thrust white men out toward nearly every point of the compass,” saw them traversing land and sea, being confronted with the forces of nature, struggling with one another and compromising what, to them, were “strange breeds of men, red, yellow, brown, and black”—for the mastery of a newly encountered world (Puzzo, 1964, p. 581; see also Pyne, 2021). The so-called Age of Discovery, alongside the Reformation, the rise of dynastic-state and nationalism, and imperial rivalries, were not only to transform Europe but “to

⁶ Bizumic and Duckitt (2012) define Ethnocentrism as “a strong sense of ethnic group self-importance and self-centeredness,” that “seems to consist of intergroup expressions (preference, superiority, purity, and exploitativeness), which assume that the ingroup is more important than other groups, and intragroup expressions (devotion and group cohesion), which assume that the ingroup is more important than individual ingroup members” (p. 17).

⁷ Environmental determinism is the belief that “the collective characteristics of groups of people are permanently determined by climate and geography,” and not “genetic evolution or conscious choice” (Isaac, 2004, p. 163).

furnish the elements of a calculus—not really understood by the Ancients and quite unknown to the Middle Ages—by means of which the worth of color was measured and determined” (Puzzo, 1964, p. 582; see also Carey et al., 2023; Cropley, 2019; Marshall, 2009). The onset of modern European colonialism, that is to say, “the quick, violent, overwhelming intrusion of the white man into the colored man’s world was an act of epic drama beside which the conquest of the Aegean world by the ancient Hellenes was a paltry affair” (Puzzo, 1964, p. 582; see also Eltis & Richardson, 2008; Hesse, 1993; Rawley & Behrendt, 2005).

Scientific Racism

But it was not until the late 18th and 19th centuries, amongst Western thinkers, that racism became a formalized area of study (Said, 1979). The Age of Enlightenment, as it is so carelessly called, witnessed a growing emphasis on scientific inquiry and taxonomic classification, marked by the debate between monogenism⁸ and polygenism⁹ (Caspari, 2018; Jarzombek, 2018; Smith, 2014). Anatomists in European metropolises, for instance, “began to systematically amass skulls of racialized, colonized, and enslaved people from across the globe for comparative description and measurement” (Mitchell, 2024, p. 21). Linnaean taxonomy, Blumenbach’s typology, and Buffon’s environmental determinism effectively laid the groundwork for what came to be known as scientific racism (Cambridge University, 2014; Fan, 2025; Isaac, 2004; Kowner & Skott, 2015; MacCord, 2014).¹⁰ The subsequent phrenological works of Gall, Spurzheim, and Combe, followed by the ethnographies of Morton and Knox, Gobineau’s treatise, and Darwin’s evolutionary theories, further contributed to racialized hierarchies by drawing a correlation

⁸ Monogenism, or monogenesis, is the “hypothesis or doctrine of the common origin of the human species, esp. from a single pair of ancestors” (OED, 2023c).

⁹ Polygenism is the “belief in or advocacy of a polygenetic origin of humankind”—that is, the idea that different races emerged independently from one another (OED, 2023d).

¹⁰ Scientific racism is “the pseudoscientific belief that the human species can be divided into biologically distinct taxa known as races and that empirical evidence exists to support the inherent inferiority or superiority of any particular race” (Razack et al., 2025, p. 116).

between physical traits and moral qualities, dividing humankind into “superior and inferior stocks” (Puzzo, 1964, p. 579; see also Said, 1979; Tucker, 2013).

Despite the coinciding abolitionist movement, which generated the widespread assumption that all forms of racial oppression would phase out with it, scientific racism underpinned New Imperialism, colonial exhibitions and “human zoos,” eugenics, Jim Crow laws,¹¹ and restrictive immigration policies (Bowden, 2023; Cohen, 2016; Corbey, 1995; Coté, 2006; Delbanco, 2012; Foxworth, 1994; Rydell, 1984; Sánchez-Gómez, 2013; West, 2018).

Non-Racialist and Anti-Racist Expressions of the 20th Century

By the late 20th century, scientific racism had largely been discredited (Lea, 2020). Scientific advancements, particularly in the fields of genetics, anthropology, and sociology, undermined biological determinism (Das Gupta et al., 2018).¹² German-American anthropologist Franz Boas, for example, developed cultural relativism,¹³ a concept that confronted ethnocentrism, challenging prevailing notions of race and necessitating a critical reassessment of Western modes of scientific inquiry (Boas, 2018). The human rights violations of World War II, particularly the Holocaust, prompted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, followed by UNESCO’s 1950 Statement on Race—the first of a series of international anti-racist statements “which declared that there was no scientific basis or justification for racial bias” (UNESCO, n.d.; see also Maio & Santos, 2015; United Nations General Assembly, 1948).

By 1960, an increasing number of countries and territories across Africa and Asia secured independence from colonial powers, leading to the adoption of United Nations General

¹¹ Enacted in the late 19th century, Jim Crow laws were the system of discriminatory laws and practices which enforced the segregation of Black people in the Southern United States (OED, 2024).

¹² Biological determinism is “an articulated theory of human social existence that provides a complete explanation of the hierarchical structure of present human society as both natural and unavoidable”—that behavioural patterns are anchored to immutable biological factors (Lewontin, 1983, p. 158; Miller & Costello, 2001).

¹³ Cultural relativism is the theory that “there are no objective standards by which to evaluate a culture and that a culture can only be understood in terms of its own values and customs” (OED, 2025).

Assembly Resolution 1514 (Getachew, 2019; Muschik, 2018). The declaration described foreign rule as a “violation of human rights, reiterated the right to self-determination, and called for the immediate end of all forms of colonial rule” (Getachew, 2019, p. 14). The coinciding civil rights movement, which was in part internationalized by the Cold War imperative, was yet another crucial step toward the advancement of human rights and social justice (Briker & Driver, 2022; Cheng, 2013; Cunningham et al., 2018; James & Leake, 2015; Kennedy, 1989; Luders, 2010).

In the subsequent decades, Indigenous rights movements gained significant momentum, particularly in settler-invader¹⁴ colonies (Berger, 2010). The Red Power movement in the United States, the modern land rights movement in Australia, the National Indian Brotherhood and the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs in Canada, the modern Māori protest movement in New Zealand, and the Coordination of the Indigenous Peoples of the Brazilian Amazon in Brazil all sought to address land rights, cultural preservation, and self-determination (Berger, 2010; Ferreira, 2020; Nickel, 2025; Pol, 2022). These regional movements also catalyzed broader mobilizations, such as the International Indian Treaty Council, the World Council of Indigenous Peoples, and the UN Working Group on Indigenous Populations (Berger, 2010).

The 1990s were equally transformative, marked by the end of apartheid in South Africa, its ensuing democratization, and the presidency of renowned anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela (U.S. Department of State, n.d.). These events, underpinned by the transnational anti-apartheid movement of the preceding three decades, revitalized the global campaign against racism (Graham & Fevre, 2024; Klotz, 2002; Satgar, 2019a; Thörn, 2006). This renewed emphasis on racial justice was also shaped by the growing prominence of intersectional theory (Crass, 2013).¹⁵ Consequently, the subsequent years witnessed the implementation of various political

¹⁴ For a discussion of the term “settler-invader,” see Johnston and Lawson (2005).

¹⁵ Developed by civil rights advocate and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, intersectionality emerged as a critical

and legal reforms, peacebuilding efforts, and international human rights initiatives (Dixon, 2013).

The Limits of Institutionalized Anti-Racism

However, the anti-racist achievements of the 20th century were not isolated. Alongside the political formations designed to bring about racial progress were the very systems and mechanisms of oppression that necessitated and challenged their existence (Dixon, 2013). Moreover, the progressive institutionalization of anti-racism, although aimed at addressing racial inequalities within societal structures, simultaneously reinforced colonial systems by operating within them (Gabriel, 1998; Sharp, 1998). Institutionalized anti-racism (1) hegemonized community-based organizations and movements, (2) made it incumbent upon marginalized racial groups to shoulder the responsibility of racial progress, (3) “served to disempower ethnic minorities who came to be seen and defined exclusively in terms of the effects of racism,” and (4) “immobilized and homogenized people,” overlooking “new and distinct forms of racism” (Gabriel, 1998, p. 36; see also Muschik, 2018; Zakharov et al., 2022). For instance, despite the legislative end of apartheid in South Africa, “the promise of non-racial politics in advancing fundamental transformation and deepening democracy has stalled. Obscene levels of inequality, high unemployment, deepening public debt, rampant corruption, creeping authoritarianism, weakening of democratic institutions, and growing signs of state failure” demonstrate the profound deterioration of African National Congress (ANC)-led politics (Satgar, 2019a, p. 2; see also Baron, 2022). Even the notion of a radical pan-African unity has been abandoned (Satgar, 2019a). In its place, “there is a resurgent Black Consciousness, narrow populist Africanist nativism, white nationalism, xenophobic state practices

framework for understanding how overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination and disadvantage affect Black women in ways that differ from the experiences of White women and Black men, thus exposing “the limitations of single-axis frameworks that presumed a kind of paradigmatic mastery over experience” (Cooper, 2016, pp. 398–399). Over time, intersectionality has expanded to include the interconnected nature of various social categorizations, including race, class, and gender (OED, 2023b). It is also understood as “a theoretical approach grounded in this premise” (OED, 2023b).

and growing race-based polarisation” (Satgar, 2019a, p. 2). In short, South Africa has “moved from apartheid racial classification to post-apartheid racial classification” (Satgar, 2019b, p. 201).

Racism in the Global Era: Migration, Xenophobia, and the World Conference Against Racism

By the 21st century, global developments—such as increased (south-to-north) migration, shifting demographics, and (the perceived threat of) economic competition—exacerbated anti-immigration attitudes (Reddy, 2007; United Nations, 2002). Despite the positive contributions of (racialized) migrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers to the social, cultural, and economic fabric of their host countries, prejudice towards non-nationals “constitutes one of the main sources of contemporary racism” (United Nations, 2002, p. 17; see also Howard, 2001).

And while these dualities demonstrate the sheer complexity of racial progress, why is it that, despite all efforts and achievements, the international community “has been as yet unsuccessful in eliminating racial discrimination from Earth” (Reddy, 2007, para. 5; see also Ray, 2023; United Nations, 2002)? Why is it that, despite the standard of non-discrimination—a bedrock of international law—xenophobia, violent conflict, and genocide persist (United Nations, 2002; see also Hughes, 1997)? The 2001 World Conference against Racism underscored these concerns, calling for “new ways to address this problem with more resolve, with more humanity and with greater efficiency” (United Nations, 2002, p. 1). There was also a Declaration and Program of Action which introduced preventative measures to eradicate racism and xenophobia, emphasized reparations, and offered cooperative strategies to achieve equality (United Nations, 2002). But unfortunately, these efforts were overshadowed by the September 11 attacks, which occurred just three days after the conference.

9/11 and Its Aftermath: The So-Called War on Terror and the Rise of Islamophobia

9/11 catalyzed a profound shift. Whereas in the past, the Middle East had been “identified

with a bad sort of eternity”—portrayed as “a living tableau of queerness,” mythologized, exoticized, eroticized, and immobilized—after 9/11, it was rearticulated as an *active* threat requiring constant surveillance and intervention (Said, 1979, pp. 103, 208). Had then-President George W. Bush allowed the White American public to fully grieve and come to terms with the “loss” of colonial power, that is, the “notion of the world itself as a sovereign entitlement of the United States,” he might have opened a door to a more democratic international order (Butler, 2004, p. 40; see also Morton, 2012). But instead, just nine days after the attack, he announced that America had finished grieving and that their grief had “turned to anger, and anger to resolution” (Bush, 2001). Bush positioned America as the bearer of a self-appointed, quasi-divine mission to “civilize” the “uncivilized” Muslim Other, conveniently overlooking colonial legacies and ongoing imperialist forays in Muslim-majority states (Ahmed et al., 2012; Amin-Khan, 2012). And so, on September 20th, 2001, President Bush declared the so-called Global War on Terror (GWOT), “an international, American-led military campaign” that sought to eliminate al-Qaeda, Taliban, and other militant groups (George W. Bush Presidential Library, n.d.).

In the days, weeks, and months to come, “people from various ethnic and religious groups in the United States were targeted for the blame” (Peek, 2003, p. 271). The conflation of diverse groups gave rise to a broad-based xenophobia, in that all who were perceived as culturally foreign to Whiteness came under suspicion (Ahluwalia & Pellettiere, 2010). Arabs, Muslims, and other individuals who appeared to be of Middle Eastern descent or in any way culturally associated with Islam were subjected to increasing levels of “discrimination, harassment, racial and religious profiling, and verbal and physical assault” (Peek, 2003, p. 271). A 2007 report prepared for the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination revealed that, in the U.S., the War on Terror fomented a generalized climate of

impunity for law enforcement officers with regard to racial profiling, the use of excessive force, and sexual violence against people of colour (Ritchie & Mogul, 2007).

But this pattern was not just confined to the U.S.; Muslims across Canada and Europe also experienced a significant increase in harassment and violence (Ahmed, 2012; Aitchison et al., 2016; European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia [EUMC], 2006; National Council of Canadian Muslims, 2021). Islamophobia—“as a distinct, cognizable form of bigotry”—was taking shape (Aziz et al., 2022, p. 146).¹⁶

The 2008 U.S. Election of Barack Obama and Colour-Evasive Racism

The 2008 election and presidency of former American president Barack Obama, despite popularity in mainstream discourse as “a clear sign of racial progress,” further legitimized “the prevailing racial status quo” by conflating racial equity with colour-evasiveness,¹⁷ racial tolerance, and enlightened exceptionalism¹⁸ (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 164; see also Annamma et al., 2017; Gotanda, 1991; Kitossa, 2011). Indeed, Obama’s rise was “the culmination of nearly forty years of racial restructuring, wherein both political parties have promoted non-whites to work in the trenches of empire” (Bonilla-Silva et al., 2015, p. 147; see also Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Davis, 2005; Fanon, 1963). In fact, in many respects, Obama went even further than his White

¹⁶ Islamophobia can be understood as an irrational fear, prejudice, or hatred toward Islam or Muslims (Aziz et al., 2022). It is based on the belief that Islam is inherently violent, that Muslims are predisposed to violence, and that visible expressions of Muslim identity are linked to a propensity for terrorism (Aziz et al., 2022).

¹⁷ Historically, colour-evasiveness has been predicated on the notion that race is not relevant and, therefore, “should be disregarded”—that “all should have access to civil rights,” irrespective of race (Annamma et al., 2017, p. 147). Critics argue that this approach is reductive, as it overlooks the ways in which racism is embedded in social, political, and economic structures (Gotanda, 1991). By conflating the acknowledgement of race with racism, colour-evasive ideologies uphold white privilege, silencing racialized minorities who invoke race to articulate their lived experiences (Annamma et al., 2017).

¹⁸ Enlightened exceptionalism is a type of racism which “allows for and even celebrates the achievements of individual persons of color, but only because those individuals generally are seen as different from a less appealing, even pathological black or brown rule” (Wise, 2009, p. 9). That is to say, “Obama’s appeal among many Whites is predicated on the idea that he has overcome his Blackness. This, of course, presupposes that Blackness is a *de facto* source of shame and pathology that must be somehow abandoned, or at least molded to fit all standards of acceptability demanded by White society” (Esposito & Finley, 2009, p. 169).

“Republican predecessor, particularly in his redefinition of executive power to wage war, kill any person deemed an enemy (including Americans) without trial, use unmanned drones to terrorize [racialized] populations in multiple countries, detain people indefinitely,” and surveil American citizens (Bonilla-Silva & Reece, 2018, p. 214; see also Herold, 2012).

The Resurgence of Old-Fashioned Racism and White Ethnonationalism

Yet the *perceived* racial gains made during his tenure, despite ongoing racial disparities, catalyzed a resurgence of old-fashioned racism¹⁹ and white ethnonationalism (Esposito, 2011; Tesler, 2013). The myth of a post-racial America engendered racial apathy, heightened white resentment, and worsened anti-Black discrimination (Bonilla-Silva, 2018; Esposito & Finley, 2009; Gillion, 2017; Hutchings & Jardina, 2009; Reeves, 1997; Sniderman & Carmines, 1997). In fact, a set of Associated Press surveys released in 2012 revealed that white individuals demonstrated greater levels of both implicit and explicit racism compared to 2008 (GfK, 2012).

Trump’s 2016 Campaign, Presidency, and the Rise of the So-Called Alt-Right

During the 2016 primary season, right-wing populists, notably then-presidential candidate Donald Trump, capitalized on white grievance to consolidate power (Daum, 2023). Often relying on theatrical devices, he invoked racially charged rhetoric and proposed xenophobic policies to foment social unrest (Abbott & Bailey, 2021). His ascension to the presidency, made possible by far-right, white nationalist groups like the so-called alt-right, precipitated a plague of bias incidents and racially motivated attacks across the country (Andersen, 2018; Edwards & Rushin, 2018; Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016; Warren-Gordon & Rhineberger, 2021). The “outpouring of hate and xenophobia quickly resulted in 200 incidents within the first few days,

¹⁹ Old-fashioned racism (OFR) is a type of racism that embodies three elements: (1) the desire for racial segregation, (2) the belief in biological determinism, and (3) “support public policies insuring racial segregation and formalized discrimination” (Tesler, 2013, p. 114).

and then rose to over 300 in the first week after the election, amounting to a greater number than occurred even after 9/11” (Andersen, 2018, p. 487; see also Eversley, 2016).

The remainder of his term was characterized by the infamous travel ban, his “zero-tolerance” and family separation policies, the Unite the Right rally, the onset of fourth-wave racial profiling,²⁰ high-profile cases of racialized police violence, his public denunciation of critical race theory (CRT), and the ensuing 1776 Commission (Baker & Timm, 2021; Chughtai, 2020; *Exec. Order No. 13950*, 3 *C.F.R.*, 2020; Fredrickson, 2018; Harris, 2020; The Washington Post, 2024; The White House, 2020a; The White House, 2020b; Wang, 2017). His xenophobic remarks during the COVID-19 pandemic also facilitated a rise in hate crimes against Asian Americans—a trend that persisted well into the subsequent administration (Porterfield, 2021; Rubin & Wilson, 2021).

The Transnational Spread of Far-Right Ideologies

However, these attitudes are not confined to the U.S.; rather, they demonstrate the reciprocal influence between colonial powers (Connolly, 2017; Saini, 2019). The rise of neo-fascism in America is indicative of a broader global trend—one that encourages racists, xenophobes, and nativists to wear their prejudiced views as “a badge of honor” (Saini, 2019, p. 204; see also DiMaggio, 2022). Even scientific racism has re-emerged, with actors from across the political spectrum stoking racial resentment to advance their own agendas (Keay, 2022; Kopyciok & Silver, 2021; Kundnani, 2012; Lea, 2020; Saini, 2019; Tetrault, 2024; Winter & Carlaw, 2024). This phenomenon is particularly evident across Europe, South Asia, and so-called South America, where far-right groups have grown increasingly powerful (Araújo & Campos, 2023; Bangstad, 2013; Brooks, 2017; Cherribi, 2011; Clarke, 2002; Doerr, 2021; Donà, 2022;

²⁰ The fourth wave of racial profiling, or “profiling by proxy,” is a relatively new phenomenon where White civilians “summon police as their proxies” to investigate Black individuals (or other racial and ethnic minorities) they perceive as “out-of-place and therefore suspicious” (Harris, 2020, p. 16; see also Kumar, 2020).

Gomes, 2020; Haynes, 2025; Kirchick, 2017; Lorenzen, 2006; Marcos, 2020; Oberoi, 1994; Önnersfors & Krouwel, 2021; Patnaik, 1993; Romancini, 2023; Rydgren, 2008; Saini, 2019; Schmitt-Beck, 2017; Silva Júnior & Fargoni, 2020; Truschke, 2022).

The New Global (Dis)Order

Today, racial politics is moving at breakneck speed (Saini, 2019). Neoliberalism has evolved into necrocapitalism²¹ (Bing & Schectman, 2024; LeVine, 2020; Mbembe, 2003; Regilme Jr, 2024). Environmental racism²² continues to impact racialized minorities (Abimbola et al., 2021; Anderson, 2023; Atallah & Ungar, 2020; Casey, 2024; Cox, 2024; Ferreira-Filipe et al., 2025; Gilchrist, 2022; L. Fernandez, 2021; Li et al., 2024; Menzies et al., 2022; Orellana, 2023; Qumsiyeh & Abusarhan, 2020; Rougeot, 2023; Sharma, 2024; South African Human Rights Commission, 2016; Watson, 2013). Global warming has exacerbated climate-induced (internal and transboundary) migration in the Global South (Almulhim et al., 2024; Peša, 2023). The genocide in Darfur, Sudan and the humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) go largely ignored, as humanitarian struggles affecting Black communities are routinely minimized in the global (dis)order (Etahoben, 2025; European Union Agency for Asylum, 2025; Hess, 2006; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Human Rights Watch, 2023; Nderitu, 2024; North, 2021; United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2024; Wild, 2021). Even the latest technologies in artificial intelligence are not free from racial bias (Albers, 2019; Christian, 2024; Noble, 2018; Onwuegbuzia, 2024; Pazzanese, 2020; Raji, 2020; Yin & Sankin, 2020).

In short, we are “witnessing the re-colonization of people, identities and places” (Douglas, 2008, p. 41).

²¹ Necrocapitalism is the economic (il)logic of institutional accumulation through “dispossession and the creation of death worlds in colonial contexts” (Banerjee, 2008, p. 1548).

²² Environmental racism “refers to environmental policies, acts, and decisions that, intentionally or not, disproportionately disadvantage racialized individuals, groups, and communities” (Venkataraman et al., 2022, p. 567).

2.3 Orientalism

Once revered in Europe as a laudable domain of study that spanned the artistic and anthropological disciplines, Orientalism was reconceptualized in the late 1970s by public intellectual and cultural critic Edward Said (1979) to represent patronizing impressions of the Eastern world.

Inspired by Foucauldian discourse analysis and Antonio Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony, Said's analysis reveals how Orientalists propagate Western concepts of the East–West dichotomy, anthropocentric interpretations,²³ and racial stereotypes to constitute Western colonialism (Andreotti, 2011; Bhatnagar, 1986; Chandler, 1981; El Aidi & Yechouti, 2017; Gandhi, 2019; Huisman, 2011; Moosavinia et al., 2019; Said, 1979). Orientalist topoi perceive non-Western Others as *less* human, “quasi-living creatures” characterized by depravity and violence bridled by fatalistic tendencies (Said, 1979, p. 145; Samiei, 2010). Consequently, the East is typified by inertia, and therefore ossified—a static portrayal in “contrast with the West, supposedly impelled by rationality, material and technical dynamism, and individualism” (Kipp, 2000, p. 99). By fabricating such notions of ontological difference, Orientalists create a battlefield that invites “the West to control, contain, and otherwise govern (through their superior knowledge and accommodating power) the Other,” thereby delegitimizing Eastern “values and experiences and invalidating their worldviews and ways of knowing” (Said, 1979, pp. 47–48; Taha, 2022, p. 8).

Thus, Orientalism is not an autonomous concept but strictly dependent on the distribution of its geopolitical awareness (Tavalaie, 1998; Said, 1979). As Said (1979) aptly states, “Orientalism

²³ Anthropocentrism, or human supremacism, is the humanist belief that emphasizes the agency of human beings as central to existence (Chandler, 1981; Gandhi, 2019). Saidian notions of Orientalism correlate anthropocentrism's peripheralization of nature over human beings with ethnocentrism's peripheralization of outgroups over ingroups (Andreotti, 2011; Chandler, 1981; Plumwood, 1993; Plumwood, 1996). Gandhi (2019) elaborates: “the humanist valorisation of man is almost always accompanied by a barely discernible corollary which suggests that some human beings are more human than others” (p. 29). Orientalists employ this hierarchical framework to promote Western culture as the standard by which all things are measured.

is a school of interpretation whose material happens to be the Orient, its civilizations, peoples, and localities” (p. 203). So, for the academic study of this knowledge to go hand in hand with its use is simply a matter of course (Nayar, 2010). A “cumulative” force, Orientalism is “an area of concern defined by travellers, commercial enterprises, governments, military expeditions, readers of novels and accounts of exotic adventure, natural historians, and pilgrims” (Said, 1979, p. 203).

Expanding the notion beyond its conventional applications, this paper will identify Orientalism as a field of interest defined by package and label design. The study reframes (1) the graphic designer as Orientalist, who juxtaposes multimodal components to simulate orientalist motifs, thereby functioning as a dual agent that consumes *and* reproduces ethnocentric ideologies; (2) the consumer as ethnocentric, who reifies orientalist discourse through patronage, peripheralizing Arab voices; and (3) the package as neo-colonial device, which externalizes orientalist conceptions, imposing cultural hierarchies through design and messaging (Cormack & Cosgrave, 2018; Rosenblatt, 2009; Veresiu, 2023).

2.4 Self-Orientalism

In describing Orientalism’s treatment of the Orient as “a theatrical stage affixed to Europe”—a stage on which emerges an array of images designed to nourish the European imagination, Said fails to explicitly address the self-Orientalist actor who occasionally assumes the role of these characters (Said, 1979, p. 63; see also Holden, 2001).

Self-Orientalism—also referred to as internalized Orientalism (Heng & Devan, 1992), auto-Orientalism (Holden, 2001; Mazzarella, 2003), re-Orientalism (Lau, 2009; Lau & Mendes, 2011), “Oriental” Orientalism (Gladney, 1994), the Orientalism of the “Orientals” (Dirlik, 1996; Congrong, 1991), or reverse Orientalism (Abu-Lughod, 1991; Boroujerdi, 1990)²⁴—is most

²⁴ Reverse Orientalism initially meant to describe “attempts to reverse the power relationship proceed by seeking to valorize for the self what in the former system had been devalued as other” (Abu-Lughod, 1991, p. 144). Yet, critics

clearly articulated by Ong (1999), who writes:

Indeed, in a world of Western hegemony, Asian voices are unavoidably inflected by orientalist essentialism that infiltrate all kinds of public exchanges about culture. I use the term *self-orientalization* in recognition of such predicaments, but also in recognition of the agency to maneuver and manipulate meanings within different power domains. (p. 81)

Essentially, if Orientalism is the Western paradigm concerning imperialist and, therefore, racist perceptions of the East and its peoples, then *self-Orientalism* is its causal effect: the internalization of Orientalist perceptions by individuals or groups subjected to Orientalist stereotypes (Kano, 1997). While Said's critique re-articulates a "complete binary between the East and the West with a fixed, one-way power relation," Ong's analysis, although brief, is rather nuanced—balanced, calling attention to the deleterious implications of self-Orientalization while simultaneously discerning and acknowledging the potential advantages of strategic self-essentialism (Kobayashi et al., 2019, p. 158).

And this phenomenon extends beyond the public sphere. Akin to its predecessor, self-Orientalism is also a commercial preoccupation. Of course, this formulation should come as no surprise, considering the influence of Euro-American imperialism and capitalism in shaping the East's geopolitical, social, and economic landscape (Ong, 1999). Mazzarella (2003) explores this concept in great depth, revealing that the commodification of Orientalist stereotypes is a common advertising strategy used in Eastern countries, particularly India. Orientalist tropes are employed by self-Orientalists to tap into domestic and international markets (e.g., intra-national

argue that the act of ascertaining the Orient demands indulging in its further orientalization (Boroujerdi, 1990). The cultural delineation of the Orient as the Orient presupposes the existence of a dialectical counterpart, in this case, the Occident, thus engendering notions of essentialism and alterity that ultimately mimic the Orientalist framework (Boroujerdi, 1990). And so, despite this "newly acquired capacity as the speaker, author, and actor," the reverse Orientalist "continues to be over-determined by the Occidental listener, text, and audience" (Boroujerdi, 1990, p. 61). Or to borrow Gramsci's terminology, "the beleaguered subject wages their 'war of position' within the territory of the contestant" (Boroujerdi, 1990, p. 61).

and international tourism), to promote ethnonationalist agendas (e.g., Hindutva nationalism), and to perpetuate racial hierarchies within racialized groups, or in other words, *othering within othering* (Hong et al., 2022; Mazzearella, 2003; Ramalaine, 2022).

Kobayashi et al. (2019) take this further, identifying the following modes of creative alliance and dominant structural tendencies when representing Eastern, namely Japanese culture and identity:

1. *Orientalization*: Western transnational corporations (TNCs) that partner with Western advertising agencies, often developing exoticized representations of the Orient to merchandise their brands and products.
2. *Self-Orientalization*: Eastern TNCs that collaborate with Western advertising agencies, resulting in European constructions of the Other.
3. *Glocalization*: Eastern TNCs that work with Western advertising agencies to adapt their products and services to suit the Western market.
4. *Counter-Orientalism*: Eastern TNCs that employ Eastern advertising agencies, asserting “possibilities of self-representation in challenging Orientalist discourses within the Western media” (p. 159).

Expanding upon this framework, this study will approach the theme of self-Orientalism from a diasporic context. More specifically, I will analyze how Western transnational and national corporations enlist Asian-led, Western-based advertising agencies to develop self-orientalizing consumer packages to sell to Western audiences.

2.5 Cultural Appropriation

Cultural boundary-crossing—the act of borrowing, imitating, or adapting from other cultures—spans millennia (Lamont & Molnár, 2002; Oshotse et al., 2023). The idea that “such

cross-cultural adoption is a form of unauthorized taking is a fairly recent historical phenomenon,” one that has engendered both scholarly and public debate (Oshotse et al., 2023, p. 1). And so, defining cultural appropriation is a highly complex task.

Configurations of what constitutes cultural appropriation vary across the ideological spectrum (Eze, 2018). Some scholars interpret cultural appropriation as exploitative co-option, calling attention to the harmful ways we engage with cultures outside our own (Bradford, 2017; Kaplan & Pease, 1993; Lipsitz, 2006; Scafidi, 2005). Others take a more neutral stance, describing cultural appropriation as a legitimate form of cultural exchange and thus highlighting the complex and fluid boundaries of transcultural interaction (Malik, 2017; Young, 2008; Young & Brunk, 2009). Eze (2018) presents a case for multiple humanity(ies), distinguishing between two kinds of cultural encounters: *encounter-in-dialogue*, characterized by subjective appreciation and celebration of the Other as an equal, and *encounter-to-possess*, characterized by domination, obsession, and objectification of the Other. Oshotse et al. (2023) contend that cultural perceptions of cultural appropriation are increasingly shaped by *cultural tariffing*, a process in which the acceptability of cross-cultural adoption is determined by perceived costs and benefits, serving as a form of redistributive justice.

While my own interpretation aligns best with Eze (2018), the exigencies of this study necessitate distinct parameters within which to approach cultural appropriation.

Born out of racial regimes of ownership, cultural appropriation can be loosely defined (within the context of this study) as “the unacknowledged or inappropriate adoption of the practices, customs, or aesthetics of one social or ethnic group by members of another (typically dominant) community or society” (OED, 2023a; see also Bhandar, 2018; Dowling, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). Cultural appropriation involves the suppression of marginalized

voices, the “selective adaptation of cultural goods,” the ensuing manipulation and reinterpretation of those cultural goods, and finally, the violation of sacred cultural heritage and visual material culture (Couchie et al., 2018; Eze, 2018, p. 12; Kennedy & Makkar, 2020).

Within the realm of the arts, which consumer package and label design is part of, or at the very least, intersects by way of its inherent role as a form of visual communication, three types of cultural appropriation can be identified (Young, 2005):

1. *Subject Appropriation*: When outsiders represent members or elements of another culture.
2. *Content Appropriation*: When outsiders co-opt the cultural products of another culture.
3. *Object Appropriation*: When outsiders take possession of cultural artifacts.

While object appropriation is less prevalent in contemporary Western marketing, subject and content appropriation have transformed branding and merchandising into multibillion-dollar industries (Kennedy & Makkar, 2020). Designers are frequently enlisted to appropriate Othered cultures to appeal to and be probed by Western European consumers (Kennedy & Makkar, 2020; Reed, 2021; Rogers, 2006). But on occasion, the intended *target* of these appropriations is the members of the very culture being appropriated—a concern which will be addressed (along with the countervailing dynamics of appropriation and appreciation) in chapter four.

2.6 Racism in Packaging and Labelling Design

15th–18th Centuries

Before analyzing commodity racism in the contemporary supermarket, it is important to consider the historical roots of racial commodification (van der Pijl & Goulordava, 2014).

Expanding the concept of the package to a more abstract, ideological form, racialized packaging can be traced back to the Spanish colonization of the so-called Americas.

Columbus, heavily influenced by the merchant-explorer Marco Polo and the putative

author Sir John Mandeville, drew upon their travel narratives to legitimize colonial hegemony (Honour, 1975). These chronicles were accompanied by fantastical illustrations and orientalist descriptions, blurring the boundaries between fiction and ethnography (Honour, 1975). Setting sail on the first of four Spanish transatlantic expeditions, Columbus anticipated encountering a people with “no heads but eyes in their shoulders, people with ears so long that they hung down to their knees, with the heads of dogs or the feet of horses,” and so on (Honour, 1975, pp. 3–4). But of course, these absurdities did not materialize. Nevertheless, the imperial visions conjured by the graphic accounts were so powerful that Columbus systematically sought to resolve the contradictions in his favour (Major, 1847). In letters recounting the voyage, Columbus and his proxies never explicitly acknowledge their misconceptions; instead, they revise the outlandish morphologies that preceded them to include fabricated evidence of absolute docility and so-called “brutality,” portraying Indigenous Peoples as *both* excessively submissive and violently “savage” (Major, 1847; Moore, 1973). His claims were translated, illustrated, and circulated throughout early modern Europe, including Spain, Italy, France, and the Low Countries (Honour, 1975). Columbus crafted a sellable package designed to fuel colonial fervour, securing the commission of successive voyages and eventual dominion.

This ideological packaging of the so-called Americas has not only proven a hallmark of colonial history but also offers a glimpse into the packaging and labelling practices that followed.

19th–20th Centuries

Characterized by the rapid industrialization of Victorian-era Britain, racism in package and label design took on a more tangible form in the 19th and 20th centuries. Mechanization and automation ushered in mass production, bringing with it the need for utilitarian packaging and labelling designed to protect, preserve, contain, and communicate instructional information

(McClintock, 1995). Advertising was scarce and considered a tawdry, desperate option (McClintock, 1995). However, with the rise of commodity fetishization and advanced printing processes, entrepreneurial advertisers envisioned new capabilities for the humble package (McClintock, 1995). Thus, commodity culture pioneered and cemented the use of pictorial advertising in business.

Consequently, commodities were distributed with identifiable packaging bearing corporate signatures, thereby initiating the rise of brand identity (McClintock, 1995). Soon enough, advertisers began incorporating aspects of European popular culture, including racist ideologies, into packaging (McClintock, 1995). And unlike scientific racism, which at that time travelled through means inaccessible to most Victorians (e.g., academic journals), commodity racism was packaging, marketing, and disseminating racism on an unprecedented and highly accessible scale (McClintock, 1995). For example, A&F Pears, a British soap brand, repeatedly peddled Rudyard Kipling's *The White Man's Burden*, a racist poem beseeching the United States to "assume colonial control of the Filipino people and their country" during the U.S. invasion of the Philippines (Ward, 2020, p. 53; see also McClintock, 1995). By the late nineteenth century, the middle-class home was plastered with images of the empire; seals of colonialism were stamped on "matchboxes, biscuit tins, whiskey bottles, tea tins," and more (McClintock, 1995, pp. 208–209). In short, commodities were being mass-marketed via racism and imperial jingoism.

Following the formal abolition of chattel slavery in the U.S., white supremacists, particularly those in the Antebellum South, adopted these marketing practices to maintain colonialism (Foxworth, 1994; Henry, 2010; Luders, 2010; McClintock, 1995; Williams, 2019). While terrorist organizations like the Ku Klux Klan relied on terrorism, violence, and intimidation, racism in package and label design promised spiritual salvation and national

regeneration, assuring and enlisting the white audience (Cunningham et al., 2018; Foxworth, 1994; Luders, 2010; McClintock, 1995). Colonizers who had formerly profited from slavery now turned to marketing, specifically, commodity racism and imperial advertising, to immortalize and modernize colonial archetypes, thereby maintaining the status quo that the Emancipation Proclamation claimed to eradicate (Foxworth, 1994; McClintock, 1995).

21st Century

Despite the anti-racist achievements of the 20th century, racism in package and label design continues to persist. However, unlike the commodity racism and imperial advertising of Victorian-era Britain, or consumer packaging in the Jim Crow era, racism in contemporary package and label design is far more subliminal—invisible, even (Fresco, 2018; Mercer & Moses, 2023; Pater, 2016; Redden, 1999; Roozbeh, 2018; Williams, 2019).

2.7 Conclusion

As this literature review demonstrates, racism is far from linear. However, racism's non-linearity does not necessarily translate to chaos, as chaos can oversimplify the complex patterns embedded in racism (Agozino, 2007). If the world were essentially chaotic, it stands to reason that the "organization of change would also have to be disorganized rather than disciplined" (Agozino, 2007, p. 7). Such an anarchic perspective of social change can undermine efforts to eliminate racism. Though my historical analysis of racism discerns a general cycle of oppression, resistance, reform, and backlash—examining the reappearance of various themes across (and at the same) time—racism is an evolving force, one that, while deeply organized, systematic, and institutionalized, is shaped by shifting social, political, and economic contexts.

Chapter Three: Theoretical Framework and Methodology

3.1 Theoretical Framework

The main theoretical framework underlying my analysis is transversal cosmopolitanism (i.e., transversalism), a policy which not opposed but alternative to identity politics, that acknowledges intersectionalities and proposes that interlocutors transcend their ideological differences to support a common cause, including anti-racism (Brown, 1989; Crenshaw, 1991; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Grünberg, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a). A form of coalition politics that celebrates “universality in diversity,” transversalism does not require collocutors to self-decenter to center others (which can result in an uncritical solidarity); instead, it encourages them to pivot the centre (Barkley-Brown, 1989; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a). This process requires participants to exercise a “critical openness” and make “systematic attempts to co-create common(ing) platforms for transformative perspectives, plans, and praxes” (Gills & Hosseini, 2021, p. 188). Thus, transversalism mandates: “(1) recognition of diversity and difference, (2) dialogue (deliberation across differences), (3) systemic self-reflection, (4) intentional openness (intention to explore the reality of the Other), (5) critical awareness of the intersectional nature of power relations that affects interconnections,” and (6) a “strong commitment to creating alterity through hybridization and creolization of ideas and actions” (Gills & Hosseini, 2021, p. 188).

As a result, this study considers a variety of data and attempts to distill and reconcile otherwise antithetical perspectives on race and ethnicity in visual design.

3.2 Methodology

To effectively broach the subject of racism and ethnocentrism in contemporary package and label design, this study incorporates a qualitative mixed-methods approach, combining autoethnography and purposive sampling, followed by a comprehensive visual analysis informed

by ethnic and racial studies. The samples, including (1) Pride of Arabia Whole Bean Arabica Coffee, (2) Wong Wing Fried Rice, and (3) Golden Temple Atta No. 1 Fine Durum Atta Flour, were observed and photographed at the Canadian Supermarket chain, Real Canadian Superstore (also known as *Superstore*), located at 1755 Brimley Rd, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada (see Figure 1). To enhance the study's generalizability and capture the potential impact of external marketing factors, such as visual merchandising, comparative observations were conducted at neighbouring chain stores. Secondary field sites included Walmart Supercentre (1900 Eglinton Ave E), No Frills (3401 Lawrence Ave E), and FreshCo (2650 Lawrence Ave E).

Figure 1

Real Canadian Superstore, 1755 Brimley Rd, Scarborough, Ontario, Canada



From Real Canadian Superstore Brimley Road, by C. Shaowei, 2020, Google.

(<https://goo.gl/maps/BeeZsY4b8Yx8gBYx5>). Copyright © 2020 Chen Shaowei.

Autoethnography

Postmodernism inspired methodological reforms in Western social science inquiry. Canonical modalities, such as traditional ethnography, proved sterile, parochial, and colonial,

prioritizing a “white, masculine, heterosexual, middle/upper classed, Christian, able-bodied perspective” and exploiting the cultures (and cultural members) being observed (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275). Autoethnography—the description and analysis (graphy) of personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno)—emerged as a positive response that recognized the limitations of universality, replaced dichotomies with continuums, reconsidered the researcher-research-researched relationship, and realized the epistemological salience of storytelling (Ellington & Ellis, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Stahlke Wall, 2016). At the interstice of autobiography and ethnography, autoethnography reinterprets the inquirer as also the object of inquiry, engaging both particularities and commonalities (Ellington & Ellis, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnographers critically link phenomenologies of the self to broader social, cultural, and political concepts and, as a result, produce transformative research (Ellington & Ellis, 2008; Ellis et al., 2011; Stahlke Wall, 2016).

As such, autoethnography serves as a promising qualitative methodology to make intelligible the very structures and mechanisms of systemic oppression, particularly within the context of this study (Lee & McAvan, 2021). By intertwining autobiography and ethnography, autoethnography enables the researcher to engage more deeply with racial and ethnic imagery and text, extrapolating these interpretations to the broader socio-cultural context and thereby extending sociological understanding of racism and ethnocentrism in consumer packaging, as well as supporting the evaluation and development of existing anti-racist interventions. As Lee and McAvan (2021) outline: (1) since autoethnography can serve as a source of expression and reclamation for those experiencing minoritization, it is liberationist, and therefore political; (2) the micro-narratives that emerge from autoethnography triumph over the macro-machinations of oppressive discourse; (3) by situating themselves within the cosmos, autoethnographers can

further conceptualize their ideas, allowing for a deeper understanding of said sociological extrapolations; and (4) autoethnography considers how social categories, such as race, ethnicity, and gender, intersect to create co-constitutive systems of discrimination and privilege.

Data Collection

Although racialized and ethnicized media span a wide range of spaces and mediums, this project focuses on consumer packaged goods sold in chain stores—specifically supermarkets,²⁵ superstores,²⁶ and supercentres.²⁷ The reason for such site-specific autoethnography lies in the sociocultural significance of chain stores. As Redden (1999) explains, chain stores are remarkable institutions that operate not only as retailers but also as vast funds of “contemporary synchronic cultural memory” (p. 1).²⁸ They are “the site of aggregation of multiple discourses by which the individual is sewn into and sews the fabric of collective life” and are thus emblematic of the postmodern condition (Redden, 1999, p. 1). Week after week, consumer-citizens return to these databases of collective human tastes of their own accord (Armstrong et al., 2016; Cormack & Cosgrave, 2018; Redden, 1999). This relationship was only exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, during which federal restrictions limited social outings to utilitarian spaces, unwittingly positioning supermarkets, superstores, and supercentres as excursionary spaces that offered a change of scenery and social contact (Bogart 2020; Rules for Areas in Stage 1, n.d.). Similarly, the consumer package emerged as a substitute for international tourism, offering consumers imagined representations of cultural immersion and exploration (Rosenblatt, 2009).

²⁵ A supermarket is a “large, low-cost, low-margin, high-volume, self-service store that carries a wide variety of grocery and household products” (Armstrong et al., 2016, p. 435).

²⁶ A superstore is a “store much larger than a regular supermarket that offers a large assortment of routinely purchased food products, nonfood items, and services” (Armstrong et al., 2016, p. 436).

²⁷ A supercentre, or big-box store, is a “physically large retail establishment, often part of a chain, whose size allows for enormous quantities of goods to be sold under one roof” (Schoolman, 2015, p. 45).

²⁸ For more on the theme of cultural memory, see Nora (1996), and for cultural memory as it relates to consumer culture, see Cormack and Cosgrave (2018).

And since marketing rhetoric is deeply rooted in consumer purchasing behaviour, an analysis of consumer packaging can reveal the racist and ethnocentric typologies that exist within contemporary society (Armstrong et al., 2016; Redden, 1999). After all, akin to the social construct of nationalism that Anderson (2016) so exhaustively studied, racialization and ethnicization demand spaces and mediums through which to articulate themselves (see also Redden, 1999).

Limitations

Although this study draws from a wide range of perspectives, it is important to acknowledge that it does not capture all positionalities. While some areas of consensus exist, interpretations of race and ethnicity remain diverse and continually evolving (Bhabha, 2004; Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Das Gupta et al., 2018; Gerstle, 1995; Halliday, 1993; Kendi, 2016; Lipsitz, 2006; Lupton et al., 2021; Martinez, 2014; Rubio, 2021; Williams, 2019; Wonkeryor, 2015).

Going forward, the addition of in-depth consumer interviews, stakeholder focus groups, and co-designs would supplement observational fieldwork. In-depth interviews, for example, would allow researchers to ask consumer-participants about their perceptions of consumer packages that invoke race and ethnicity. This would also enable researchers to evaluate its influence and offer insights into how packaging and labelling design, or graphic design more broadly, shapes societal narratives. At the same time, focus groups with stakeholders who invest in racist and ethnocentric brands would foster dialogue, reveal their perspectives on race and ethnicity in visual design, and help identify areas requiring further investigation. Co-designs, on the other hand, would offer a collaborative approach that could help deconstruct the creative processes behind racist and ethnocentric consumer packaging, potentially unveiling (sub)conscious biases and encouraging critical consciousness.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Pride of Arabia 100% Arabica Whole Bean Coffee

Introduction

Western supermarket shelves are routinely lined with packages that employ terminology coterminous with the past. Walking into almost any aisle, the shopper is soon surrounded by words like “tradition,” “authentic,” “olde,” and “century,” among others. These words—often set in old-timey typefaces—are typically paired with historical images, from black-and-white photos of proud founders to monochromatic pointillisms of elderly mascots. Some packages further situate their brand’s history by featuring map outlines, landmarks, or cultural emblems. What results is an almost performative attempt to conjure white nostalgia, whereby the package-turned-artifact influences the customer-turned-nostalgist to imagine a bygone, halcyon era (Cormack & Cosgrave, 2018; Nora, 1996; Thompson, 2021).

Nostalgic packages, however, are not only limited to representations of distance in relation to time but also to space. The spatial variety is no less archetypal than its temporal counterpart. Descriptors such as “olde” are substituted for “olde country;” founders and mascots are replaced with mysterious figures, demoted to staffage, or erased completely; and isolated geographical elements, which previously played a peripheral role, are now superseded by landscapes central to the concept (Redden, 1999). The overall picture proves a celebration of modern occidental culture in capriccio style, naturalizing white settler presence on Indigenous land. Renditions of the East, however, are less than benign (Said, 1979).

While spatial representations of Western locales often peddle ethnonationalist notions of pastoral life—portraying European culture as innocent, happy, and peaceful and thereby (white) washing colonial history—consumer packages inspired by Southwest Asia and North Africa

(SWANA)²⁹ are also fraught, with Western marketers and designers frequently resorting to racial and ethnic stereotypes (Gargano, 2006; Redden, 1999; Tebaldi & Del Percio, 2024; Wachendorff, 2018). Arab countries, in particular, are highly exoticized, projecting the American fantasy of the region as a land of despotic—albeit handsome—sultans, lustful sheikhs who abduct white women, cosmopolitan oil tycoons, sorcerers atop flying carpets, and sensual belly dancers (Jarmakani, 2011; Michalak, 2002; Shaheen, 1987; Weber, 2013). Confronted by these exaggerations, the Orientalist viewer is momentarily transported, succumbing to their adventurous fantasies of hedonism and heroism (Cohen, 1973; Daher, 2006; Rosenblatt, 2009; Said, 1979; Sheller, 2004). They overthrow the tyrannical potentate, surrender to, or defeat the lecherous sheikh, surpass the business magnate, levitate alongside the wizard, and emerge either an uninhibited terpsichorean or voyeur (Jarmakani, 2011; Said, 1979). The package effectively becomes a conduit through which the shopper can escape the mundanities of everyday Western life—all at the expense of the ever-absent Orient (Cohen, 1973; Rosenblatt, 2009; Said, 1979; Documentary Tube, 2014).

Such packages, however, prove more egregious than mere typecasting. The exotic package not only appeals to the customer's touristic and sadomasochistic curiosities but also reinforces the pre-existing orientalist perceptions conjured in their own mind (Gargano, 2006). Beyond Disraeli-esque romanticisms, the orientalist classifies the great “Asiatic mystery” as despotic, aberrant, inaccurate, and backward and “Orientals” as “subject races” that “in everything oppose the clarity, directness, and nobility of the Anglo-Saxon race,” therefore requiring Occidental interventionism (Said, 1979, pp. 39, 44; see also Daher, 2006; Disraeli, 1881). The fetishistic package, with its anti-empirical exoticism, materializes the Western gaze,

²⁹ Following Egyptian feminist writer, activist, and physician Nawal El Saadawi's critique of the term “Middle East” as a Eurocentric label, I use the term SWANA to recognize the region's own geographic and cultural identities (De Balie, n.d.; Mounir Samuel, 2015).

perpetuating “the assumption that although the Western consumer belongs to a numerical minority, he is entitled either to own or to expend (or both) the majority of the world resources” (Said, 1979, p. 108; see also Willmott, 2004). Simply put, this corporate branch of exotica is characterized by the colonial civilizing mission (McClintock, 1995; Said, 1979; Willmott, 2004).

Despite the prevalence of these pictorial tropes, Orientalism in packaging and labelling design remains largely underexplored within academic discourse. Perhaps a discursive investigation informed by cultural studies and postcolonial theory—of which Orientalism is a primary text—could offer a more nuanced and rigorous approach to examining this phenomenon, thereby serving as a catalyst for further theorization and attracting increased scholarly attention to racialized packaging. Through a comprehensive visual analysis of Pride of Arabia 100% Arabica Whole Bean Coffee (hereafter shortened to *Pride of Arabia*)—a Toronto-based coffee brand established in 1930—this section demonstrates how visual and textual elements are juxtaposed and combined in consumer packaging to reproduce ethnocentric constructions of “Arabia” (see Figure 2; Loblaw Groceries, 1930).

Figure 2

Loblaw Groceterias Introducing Pride of Arabia in The Evening Citizen (1930)

95
Groceterias
in Ontario

**Self
Serve**

**LOBLAW
GROCETERIAS**

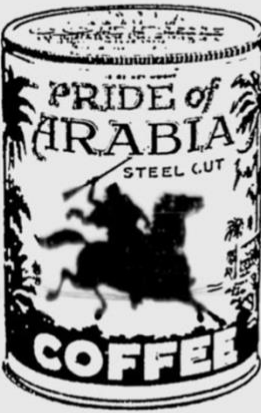
**Cash
and
Carry**

We Sell
For
Less

INTRODUCING

PRIDE OF ARABIA

**STEEL CUT
COFFEE**




**To Our Many Thousands of
CUSTOMERS**

The result of exhaustive research
on the part of coffee specialists,
this coffee under "Pride of Arabia" Brand comes to you
direct from our modern roasting plant.

The same fine flavor which captivated the pilgrims to Mecca five hundred years
ago has been re-discovered and improved until we are able to offer you a coffee
which, while within the price reach of every household, has the flavor and aroma
of the finest coffee produced. This is made possible by the fact that after this wonderful coffee leaves our roasting
oven, it reaches your kitchen directly with only one delivery cost. Roasted fresh daily and delivered to our Groceterias
in air-tight containers, this coffee naturally retains its wonderful flavor, and as only weekly supplies are delivered to
our Groceterias, stocks are guaranteed to be always fresh.

WATCH OUR WINDOWS FOR SPECIAL
DISPLAY OF OUR NEW "PRIDE OF
ARABIA" COFFEE

$\frac{1}{2}$ lb. **25^c** 1 lb. **49^c**
Tin Tin

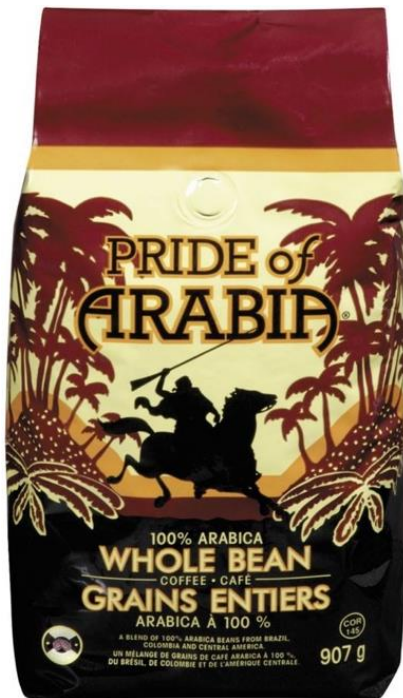
Note. Mythmaking is a key element of Orientalist marketing. For example, the promotional copy in this early advertisement asserts that Pride of Arabia recreates—and even improves upon—the “same fine flavor which captivated the pilgrims to Mecca.” By reframing Hajj as a coffee pilgrimage, Loblaw Groceterias co-opts and trivializes an otherwise sacred Islamic ritual to lend its brand an air of cultural mystique and legitimacy. From “Loblaw Groceterias Introducing Pride of Arabia Steel Cut Coffee,” 1930, *The Ottawa Evening Citizen*, p. 17 (https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=wtE0AAAAIBAJ&sjid=g_UIAAAAIBAJ&pg=6453,356169). Copyright 1930 by Loblaw Groceterias/The Ottawa Evening Citizen.

Pride of Arabia

Housing Arabica coffee beans, *Pride of Arabia* depicts a rifle-wielding figure clad in what appears to be Arabian dress—possibly the keffiyeh (headdress), bisht (cloak), and thawb (ankle-length garment)—atop an Arabian horse, in the middle of a desert, surrounded by palm trees (see Figure 3). Superimposed on this dramatic scene is the brand name, in a rather cinematic typeface characteristic of classical Hollywood title sequences. Other extrinsic cues—namely product name, product message, and place of origin—are scaled down and placed beneath the landscape, while intrinsic and transactional cues play a more peripheral role, being relegated to the back. The sides of the packet detail an alleged account of the discovery of coffee.

Figure 3

Pride of Arabia Front of Package (FOP)



Note. From *Pride of Arabia Whole Bean Arabica Coffee*, n.d., Cornershop (<https://s.cornershopapp.com/product-images/464144.jpg?versionId=kDvarE2vpZyN6TXYNn.AIK4m8n8QGZfB>).

Copyright by Loblaws Incorporated/Cornershop.

Colour

The package features a warm colour scheme, consisting of burgundy, orange, and pale yellow. Of course, these selections are not arbitrary but based on geographical, ecological, and other environmental data. From a psychological standpoint, the human mind associates temperature concepts with colour (i.e., red-hot vs. blue-cold; Lorentz et al., 2016). This cognitive process of pairing thermal stimuli with colour in the natural world is mimicked in the corporate sphere (Biggam, 2012; Casson, 1994). The Arabian subcontinent, for example, is characterized by a hot and arid climate. Hence, the application of hot colours (e.g., heat = red) in consumer packages inspired by the region is not uncommon. Colour-object associations are also relevant. Marketers, designers, and consumers frequently compare colours to existing prototypes—for instance, brown to sand, yellow to the sun, and red to fire (Griber et al., 2018). Such colour relationships have led to metonymic colour expressions, for example, “Sahara sand, ... arabian [sic] night, ... desert dusk, ... desert wine, ... gold coin, and burnt sand” (Casson, 1994, pp. 5–7). This reaffirms the connotative nature of colour words. Whereas “Sahara sand” illustrates a shade of prototypical brown, the colour word brown is indicative of sand, the very substance that constitutes the Sahara Desert (Casson, 1994, p. 5). Hence, *Pride of Arabia* simulates the Arabian landscape, true to its natural colouration. The intersection of colour and political symbolism also plays a significant role in colour selection. Many Arab states self-identify with the Pan-Arab colours. Consisting of black, white, green, and red, these colours are also found in their national flags, with previous iterations also employing variations of yellow. Green notwithstanding, *Pride of Arabia* incorporates all Pan-Arab colours.³⁰ It can be argued, then, that Loblaw’s has merely

³⁰ Notably, the absence of green—a colour commonly associated with Islam—coincides with the package’s avoidance of religious specificity. This omission reflects a consumer-oriented Orientalism that retains aestheticized markers of “Arabness” while suppressing elements that resist commodification or complicate pleasurable consumption (Pastoreau, 2023; Said, 1979).

adopted a tonal arrangement that aligns with Arabia's environmental and sociopolitical reality.

However, the issue lies not in the rationale but in the connotations. *Pride of Arabia* uses tones commonly assigned to Southwest Asia. Historically, colonial representations of the Arabian Peninsula and its cultures are limited to warm hues (Rosenblatt, 2009). The 19th-century Orientalist aesthetic, for example, was characterized by the yellow and red colour families (e.g., Jean-Léon Gérôme's *The Slave Market*), with any deviations—which were typically of feminist provenance—considered revisionist or subdued (Kuehn, 2011). Even when this artistic epoch waned, its chromatic traditions persisted, heavily influencing Victorian-era consumer society (Edwards, 2000b). North American advertisers also recognized the commercial possibilities of the Orientalist aesthetic, modifying its formerly deep colour palette into a brighter variety to suit a more material purpose: mass production (Edwards, 2000a; Edwards, 2000b; Rosenblatt, 2009). Lining retailer aisles, these vivid packages served as an exotic appeal to consumers; tableaux vivants of dromedaries plodding across expanses of orangey-browns (e.g., Camel cigarettes, Karavan coffee, Ward spices) to mysterious, sultanic figures juxtaposed against intense fields of yellow or red (e.g., Hills Bros. coffee, Widlar's Genuine Mocha and Java coffee). The Orientalist colour scheme offered a relational alternative to vulgar materialism, appealing to the emotions of white, middle-class consumers by disguising the transactional nature of consumerism with colours that espoused colonialist values (Bernstein & Studlar, 1997; Rosenblatt, 2009). This marketing gimmick has survived into the 21st century, as evidenced by *Pride of Arabia*, albeit modern Orientalia proving glossier. What remains consistent, though, is the effect. Chromatic clichés paint Southwest Asia as homogeneous, ignoring its true physical and cultural diversity (see Figure 4). This seemingly undying practice of utilizing warm colours in representations of Arabia also reinforces the colonialist notion that it is to be presented as it is interpreted in the

orientalist psyche (Said, 1979). The region is reduced and totalized through colour profiling.

Figure 4

Pride of Arabia Package Colouration and Colour Mean (Average)



Note. Colour data was obtained using a photoelectric sensor, which identified and converted each colour into a hexadecimal colour code. Codes were then added and divided to calculate the mean (average) colour, #a47253, coincidentally named *Dirt* (#A47253 Hex Code, n.d.). Own work.

Type

The strategic composition of imagery and typography in *Pride of Arabia* reproduces antiquated cinematic tropes. The front of package (FOP), with its highly stylized typesetting and illustrative tableau vivant, possesses more the functionality of a film poster than a consumer package. This filmic reading is influenced by historical adaptations of orientalist literature—a tradition that has long plagued Western theatre and cinema (Labidi, 2021; Shaheen, 2001; Jhally, 2006). Cropped, *Pride of Arabia* resembles the numerous release posters of Western works that perpetuate unfavourable stereotypes and misrepresentations about Arab people, notably the epic historical drama *Lawrence of Arabia* (see Figure 5).

The typography's theatricality also emphasizes spectacle over authenticity, fabricating an exotic Arabia "by outsiders, for outsiders" (Scurry 2018, p. 18). Such dramatization not only tailors a fantasized version of Arabia for Western consumption but redefines it as a fictitious realm that exists solely within the confines of Western consciousness (Said, 1979). This is not to suggest that Westerners should avoid engaging with Southwest Asian cultures entirely or that they cannot use consumer packaging as a legitimate mode of intercultural dialogue. However, by imitating the typographic aesthetic of past Orientalist media, *Pride of Arabia* rehashes anti-Arab

sentiments immortalized by American show business (Labidi, 2021).

Figure 5

Lawrence of Arabia Film Posters (1963 and 1962) next to Pride of Arabia



Note. While clearly discernible in the left poster (1963), Peter O'Toole (as T.E. Lawrence) is only semi-visible in the middle poster (1962). His shadowed face, tanned skin, and receding features symbolize the character's progressive Arabization throughout the film. In *Pride of Arabia*, the silhouetted character is coloured in solid black. In the orientalist mind, the Arab is an archetypal "other" that does not necessitate self-representation but representation by the European "self" (i.e., whitewashing; Macfie, 2007, p. 79). Left image from *Lawrence of Arabia*, by H. Ternping, 1963 (http://www.impawards.com/1962/lawrence_of_arabia_ver3.html) Copyright 1963 by Columbia Pictures Corporation. Middle image from *Lawrence of Arabia*, 1962 (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/lawrence_of_arabia/pictures). Copyright 1962 by Columbia Pictures Corporation. Right image adapted from *Pride of Arabia Whole Bean Arabica Coffee*, n.d., Cornershop (<https://s.cornershopapp.com/product-images/464144.jpg?versionId=kDvarE2vpZyN6TXYNn.AIK4m8n8QGZfB>). Copyright by Loblaw's Incorporated/Cornershop.

Imagery

The pose of the central figure, who is brandishing a rifle while horsebound, implies a reality incongruous with Arabia's firearm culture. Prior archaeological investigations of epigraphic, pictographic, and petroglyphic evidence from prehistoric human settlements in northwestern Arabia suggest that guns were used by infantry rather than cavalry (Guagnin et al., 2017; Schiettecatte & Zouache, 2017). And hunting traditions in pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arabia were typified by on-foot bowhunting, mounted archery or lancing, and trapping (Alofs, 2014; Maraqtan, 2015). For practical purposes, firearms were used when dismounted (Guagnin et al., 2017). These customs continued into the mid-20th century and were eventually superannuated (Alofs, 2014; Maraqtan, 2015). It seems a fair inference, then, that the image is projecting settler-invader American Frontier tropes onto Arabs, notably the sport of cowboy-mounted shooting. By repictorializing Arabia's firearm history, *Pride of Arabia* allows the white viewer to enjoy controversial (colonial) customs without guilt. This strategy of typecasting Arabs as wild is reminiscent of vaudevillian "Wild West" performances that exploited and villainized the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island (Bold, 2021).

The recurring motif of armed Arab men marooned on desert lands also speaks to "America's enduring romance with the unencumbered nomad" (Oren, 2007, p. 520; see also Rosenblatt, 2009). Notwithstanding modern developments in peripatetic lifestyles, the scene envisioned in *Pride of Arabia* simulates the settler-colonial pursuit of drifter tourism on so-called ancient lands. The image of the lone rider, shown with little material possessions, ignores the complex realities of Bedouin communities and suggests that the "wandering Arab" has no belonging(s) in contemporary society, unlike his European counterpart (Stephens, 1838, p. 14).

Visual stereotypes that portray distinct subcultures as static have adverse effects on

internal perceptions and representations of traditional ways of life. In former, official iconographies of Saudi Arabia, for example, “Bedouin dresses, postures and ornaments” were frequently “hidden and/or manipulated in order to ‘modernize’ them and ‘expunge’ any element which” impinged “on their ‘nationalization’ according to an idea of progress” (Ugo, 2014, p. 51; see also Pouillon & Mauger 1995). Yet Bedouin cultures are not immune to evolution, progressing autonomously while actively adapting to societal change (Cole, 2003). Unfortunately, European colonial thought has expertly fortified the image of Bedouins as perpetually unchanging (Cole, 2003; Ugo, 2014). In the same dualistic manner with which Orientalists have long viewed Arabian nomads, suspended between mysticism and barbarism, in Arabia, “the Bedouin seem to be between two fires: their ennobling as ancestors of the country, and their ‘de-bedouinization’ in the name of their ‘backwardness’ and national development” (Ugo, 2014, p. 51).

Form

By definition, silhouettes are featureless. While the graphic designer is tasked with conceiving a shape suggestive of the subject, the viewer must, conversely, perceive the subject through that shape. Thus, the silhouette in *Pride of Arabia* is not only a depiction of an Arabian man but an oversimplified interpretation of Arabian men. By attempting to outline race, ethnicity, and gender, the silhouettist forces the viewer to fill the blank space with preconceived notions of Arab masculinity (Schollaert, 2014). Of course, these imagined (re)constructions are anchored in racist attitudes, reifying essentialist ideologies that effectively homogenize Arab identity and deny intercultural diversity. The process of imposing cultural biases via outline falsely suggests that the complexity of Arab identity can, in fact, be reduced to rigid categories, conceptualizing the Arab Other as a monolithic and immutable entity. In reality, the Arab man as

a gendered subject is not fixed within a biological mould, but rather a multifaceted phenomenon inextricable from femininity—“a mercurial and overflowing category fraught with ambivalence and equivocation and operating within particular historical settings and discursive formations” (Aghacy, 2009, p. 2).

Reducing the rider to a mere silhouette also renders him unidentifiable. The character develops an enigmatic quality, consequently encouraging the viewer to investigate further. This explored/explorer dichotomy is emblematic of the hermeneutical relationship between the Orient and the Orientalist, in which the Orientalist longs to unveil and penetrate the “inscrutable” East—to exercise “dominion over palm and pine” (Said, 1979, pp. 222–224). As echoed by Said (1979), this sentiment is best captured in *Heart of Darkness*,³¹ where the protagonist reflects on his childhood fascinations with maps:

I would look for hours at South America, or Africa or Australia and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say: When I grow up I will go there. (Conrad, 2018, p. 8)

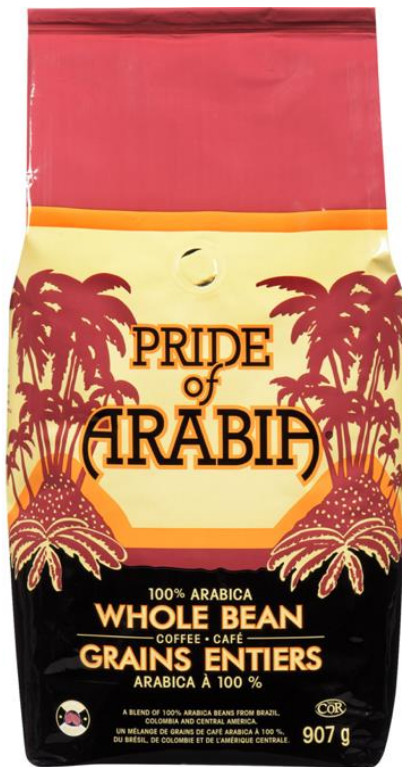
Mystification appeals to Western sensibilities by personifying and revitalizing a romantic perception that does not dispute the Orientalist imagination (Said, 1979). The silhouetted stereotype, despite being highly charged and widely communicable, offers—at best—only a one-dimensional portrayal of Arabian identity (Walker, 1996).

³¹ A controversial novella, Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, recounts the tale of Charles Marlow, a sailor tasked with retrieving the enigmatic ivory trader Mr. Kurtz (2018). Set in the African interior (understood as the Congo River), the novel explores several themes, including the brutal realities of European colonialism, the psychology of power, and morality (Conrad, 2018). Conrad’s portrayal of Africa in *Heart of Darkness* has been the subject of ongoing debate; on the one hand, deplored for perpetuating racist stereotypes, and on the other, interpreted as a timely critique of imperialism (Achebe, 1978; Watts, 1983).

Revivalist Orientalism

Although the individual elements depicted in *Pride of Arabia* are authentically Arabian, Loblaw's manipulates them like theatrical prop(erty) to reanimate a mishmash of tropes and motifs derived from colonialist literature and cinema. To start with, the highly stylized typography, which reconceptualizes the package as a movie poster, sensationalizes the Orient in classical Hollywood fashion. In addition, the pose of the central figure is rather unusual, and when juxtaposed with contemporary merchandising (e.g., computerized typesetting), becomes outmoded, thereby reducing Arab culture to an archaism. Adopting a colour palette reminiscent of Neolithic cave paintings only reinforces this antiquated perception. Furthermore, by falsifying Arabian gun culture through a silhouetted stereotype, *Pride of Arabia* capitalizes on Orientalist misconceptions born out of anti-empirical bias (Said, 1979). Employing the imagery of a mounted rider to advertise a non-Arab, Toronto-based Coffee company—especially when coffee in Arabic culture is more associated with academic exchange—is injudicious (Cowan, 2011). It would have been more logical, for example, to illustrate a coffeehouse. A revival of stock Orientalist clichés, *Pride of Arabia* effectively essentializes Southwest Asian cultures as bloodthirsty and boorish. Ultimately, this anachronistic representation is indicative of a cross-cultural myopia, where the white European is self-appointed as ambassador for the so-called “East.”

As of 2021, the silhouetted rider has been removed from the package (see Figure 6). Recent protests over brands investing in racist currents—part of the international reckoning on race following the murder of George Floyd by former police officer Derek Chauvin in 2020—may have influenced this decision (Bonaparte, 2020). However, Loblaw's Inc.'s *resolution* to erase the Arab character is controversial. The white-owned brand, once managing the racialized character's presence, now manages their absence (Redman, 2021).

Figure 6*Pride of Arabia FOP 2021–Present*

Note. From *PRIDE OF ARABIA: Whole Bean Arabica Coffee*, n.d. (https://www.realcanadiansuperstore.ca/whole-bean-arabica-coffee/p/20081005_EA). Copyright by Loblaw's

Incorporated/Real Canadian Superstore.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis demonstrates how graphic designers and marketers utilize visual forms to reconstruct Orientalist notions, thereby actively engaging in the process of racialization. Package designers and marketers who internalize cultural stereotypes frequently regurgitate their biases back into the same societal context, enlivening racist tropes through merchandising (Veresiu, 2023). Pride of Arabia, for instance, effortlessly captures the simultaneous fascination and aversion, exotification and villainization, psychological projection and introjection that have come to characterize Orientalist treatments of Southwest Asia (Huisman, 2011).

4.2 Wong Wing Fried Rice

Introduction

The production of racist typologies by white marketers and designers, as exemplified by Pride of Arabia, precipitates their consumption and reproduction by IBPOC marketers and designers. Building on Section 4.1, this analysis explores the externalization, internalization, and re-externalization of Orientalist tropes in package and label design, specifically self-Orientalism. The deconstruction of this output-input-output relationship will not only demonstrate the interconnectedness of graphic design and race but also show how and why graphic designers of colour who internalize oppression perpetuate racism through the same visual medium.

Globalization has prompted a multicultural retheorization of both consumer and market (Fu et al., 2014; Riefler et al., 2012; Kipnis et al., 2019). Beyond ethnocentric purchasing behaviours, white North American consumers are increasingly exhibiting cosmopolitan and even xenocentric reorientations (Cho et al., 2019; Diamantopoulos et al., 2019; Kipnis et al., 2019; Li, 2020; Riefler et al., 2012; Thompson & Tambyah, 1999). Recognizing the viability and competition of imported goods, domestic companies have diversified their portfolios to market internationally inspired products. This demand has not escaped diasporic enclaves either; in other words, entrepreneurial networks that have been purveying transnational goods tailored to local palettes since the 19th century (Jacobs, 2009; Jung, 2010; Hoe, 1990; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Uneke, 1996). In short, the multicultural market comprises international goods that are authentic, domestic goods that purport authenticity (e.g., Orientalizing), and multinational, fusion innovations that are authentic-*ish* (e.g., self-Orientalizing; Hui, 2019; Li, 2020; Stephens, 2021). What can result is a fetishistic commercialization of multiculturalism, where brands are packaging race and ethnicity to vie for consumer attention. This section focuses on the latter

variety—self-Orientalist packages designed for products born out of (formerly) diaspora-owned enterprises, namely Wong Wing Fried Rice (see Figure 7).

Figure 7

Wong Wing Fried Rice Package



Note. From *Wong Wing Fried Rice*, n.d. (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Wong-Wing-Fried-Rice/6000197758910>). Copyright 2024 by MLW Foods Inc./Walmart.

Wong Wing Foods Inc.

Founded in 1948, Wong Wing Foods Inc. was established by Chinese French-Canadian siblings Marcel and Lucille Wong (“Our Story,” n.d.). Named after the founders and financial backer, Mr. Wing, the family firm soon grew to become Canada’s largest purveyor of North American Chinese cuisine—effectively placing Montréal on the gastronomical map (McGovern, 1994; Van Praet, 2002; Won, 1989; “Wong Wing Foods,” n.d.). Such was the enterprise’s reputation that it was the sole supplier of Chinese-style cuisine at Expo 67 and 86 in Montréal and Vancouver, respectively (McGovern, 1994). In 2002, after several advances, the Wong family relinquished ownership to McCain Foods Ltd (Van Praet, 2002). The acquisition ushered in several new developments, including package redesigns—an effort to reposition the brand and

increase profit margins (see Figure 8; “Good Fortunes,” 2005; “Origami Communication Design,” 2004). In 2021, McCain Foods sold its majority stake to investor group MLW Foods Inc., led by Champlain Financial Corp (Champlain Financial Corporation, 2021; The Globe and Mail, 2002).

Figure 8

Wong Wing Fried Rice Packages (1988 and Post-Acquisition by McCain Foods)



Note. Left image from “Wong Wing Foods Have More Chinese Character,” 1988, *Toronto Star*, p. D15 (<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1357306318>). Copyright 1988 by Wong Wing Foods Inc./Toronto Star. Right image from *Wong Wing Fried Rice*, n.d. (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Wong-Wing-Fried-Rice/6000197758910>). Copyright 2024 by MLW Foods Inc./Walmart.

Wong Wing Fried Rice

Wong Wing Fried Rice is packaged in an oyster-pail-shaped paperboard container. The FOP features the trademark in both English and traditional Chinese characters (“黃榮”) atop a red-gradated, horizontal banner with yellow lineation and scroll detailing (Lai & Chan, 2015). Directly underneath is a green, gradated vertical banner with a yellow outline, displaying the

product name in English and French. Accompanying these extrinsic cues is a vivid photograph of the Americanized product when prepared (Jung, 2010; Li, 2020; Semple, 2021). Above, wrapping around the box, is a decorative T-shaped meander border with *lóng* [Chinese dragon 龍] and *xiángyún* [auspicious clouds 祥雲] imagery atop an orange gradient mimicking a sunrise (Beer, 1999; “Good Fortunes,” 2005; Welch, 2012). The other sides of the packet comprise intrinsic cues, such as ingredients and instructions; extrinsic cues, such as product message and place of origin; and transactional cues, such as barcode and production lot code.

A Blast From the Past: Self-Orientalism Reimagined

Former Director of Marketing Julien Roel’s description of the redesigned package as a “new image” is somewhat inaccurate, as it recycles and modifies visual elements—including trademarks, symbols, and motifs—from advertisements, packages, and labels created under the original proprietorship (“Good Fortunes,” 2005). For example, although the trademark has been reconfigured to include the brand name in traditional Chinese characters vertically between “Wong” and “Wing,” forming a criss-cross arrangement, the sinicized English typeface is fully retained (see blue markers in Figure 9). Meanwhile, the *lóng* [Chinese dragon, 龍] symbol—historically used in Wong Wing advertisements to mark the Year of the Dragon—has been repurposed as a decorative element stripped of its original context (see yellow markers in Figure 9). Another modification involves the meander, or decorative border. Whereas past visual communications used *léi wén* (thunder pattern 雷紋) borders, the redesigned package incorporates the T-shaped thunder-scroll or wave fret (see red markers in Figure 9; Fo Guang Shan Nan Tian Institute [NTI], n.d.).

The intent behind the “new” package becomes clearer when noting that McCain Foods commissioned Montréal-based brand agency Origami Branding (formerly Origami), led by

President and Creative Principal Michael Wou, a designer of East Asian descent, to oversee the redesign (Origami, 2009; Origami Branding, n.d.; “Origami Communication Design,” 2004; Volckmann, n.d.). Wou himself describes the rebranding strategy as “both authentically Asian and exotic” (“Origami Communication Design,” 2004). His choice of words reflects Wong Wing’s long-standing approach and, more broadly, (self-)Orientalist branding strategies, in which Asian-coded products are made to appear to Western audiences as they imagine them—that is, foreign and spectacularized (Said, 1979). Could Wong Wing Fried Rice, then, be seen as a self-orientalist reinterpretation of a self-orientalist interpretation?

Figure 9

Wong Wing Ad (1998) and Fried Rice FOP with Colour-Coded Magnifications



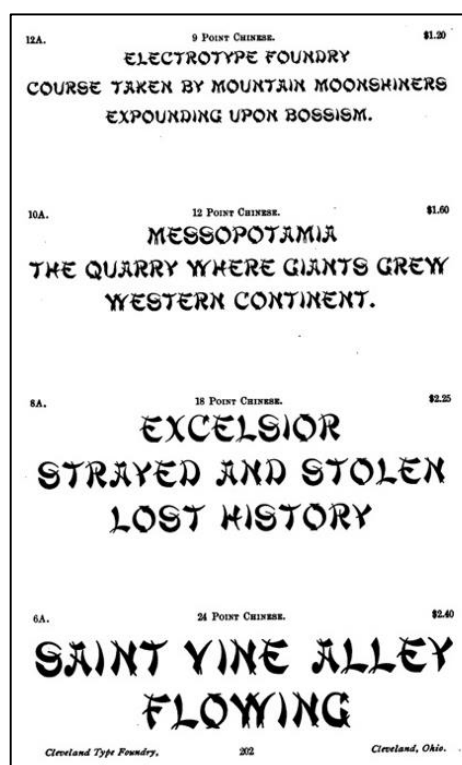
Note. Left image adapted from “Wong Wing Foods Have More Chinese Character,” 1988, *Toronto Star*, p. D15 (<https://www.proquest.com/docview/1357306318>). Copyright 1988 by Wong Wing Foods Inc./Toronto Star. Right image adapted from *Wong Wing Fried Rice*, n.d. (<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Wong-Wing-Fried-Rice/6000197758910>). Copyright 2024 by MLW Foods Inc./Walmart.

(Stereo)Typography

The trademark’s typeface mimics the calligraphic nature of Chinese characters. Historically referred to as “Wonton,” “Chop Suey,” “Chopstick,” and “Chinatown,” this font was developed to evoke “Asianness” for Western audiences (Pater, 2016, pp. 42–45). Although the exact origin is unclear, research suggests it is a derivative of an earlier permutation by the Cleveland Type Foundry, eponymously named “Chinese” and later “Mandarin” (see Figure 10; Quito, 2021).

Figure 10

Cleveland Type Foundry’s Type Specimen Sheet for “Chinese” Typeface (1893)



Note. From *Catalogue and Price List of Type and Material* (p. 202), by Cleveland Type Foundry, 1893, The Foundry (<https://archive.org/details/ATF1893ClevelandSpecimen/page/n205/mode/2up>). In the public domain.

Quito (2021) suggests the font family’s release in 1883—a year after the American Chinese Exclusion Act and two years prior to the Canadian Chinese Immigration Act—was not coincidental

but concomitant (see also Anderson, 2007). “Chinese” is merely one of the innumerable manifestations of Anti-Asian sentiment, which “coursed feverishly through the West” (Quito, 2021). The font was often juxtaposed with caricatures evoking the racial colour metaphor “Yellow Peril,” which characterizes East Asian people as a societal threat (see Figure 11; Kil, 2012; Lee, 2007). In other respects, the typeface is assimilatory. The sinicization of English type can be seen as a colonial attempt to de-sinicize the East Asian diaspora, coercing them into a proclivity for English and orientalist interpretations of Chinese and Chinese typography. This longstanding relationship with prejudice, bigotry, and intolerance has come to characterize the typeface; “Wonton” cannot escape its racist dimensions (Seals & Ellsworth, 2022). The self-orientalist reproduction of *stereotypography* in Wong Wing Fried Rice only rubber-stamps its colonial usage (Pater, 2016).

Figure 11

Anti-Japanese Propaganda Poster (1941–1945)



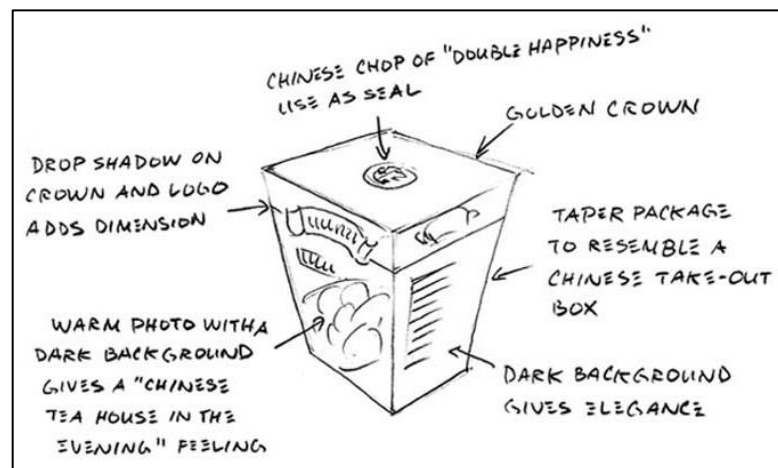
Note. From *Go Ahead, Please—Take Day Off!*, by Texaco Inc. and Office for Emergency Management. Office of War Information. Domestic Operations Branch. Bureau of Special Services, 1941–1945 (<https://catalog.archives.gov/id/516234>). In the public domain.

(Mis)Shape

The tapered package conforms to the colonial misconception and fetishistic obsession with orientalized innovations as *authentically* Asian. Contrary to popular belief, the oyster pail is an American post-World War II invention, not a traditional Chinese utensil (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). WWII ushered in the rise of fast food, and paper pails were a functional answer (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). However, in the 1970s, a graphic designer for the now Fold-Pak company designed an oyster pail with a pagoda motif and the phrase “thank you” in the stereotypical “Chinese” typeface (Greenbaum & Rubinstein, 2012). The superimposition of Orientalist typography and Buddhist imagery on an origami-like container was enough to beguile the North American public. The creatives in charge of the Wong Wing redesign appear to have fallen for the same myth, describing the new package as resembling a “Chinese Take-Out Box” (see Figure 12).

Figure 12

Preliminary Sketch for Wong Wing Package Redesign by Origami Branding



Note. From *Wong Wing*, by R. W. Volckmann III, n.d., *Romantic* (<https://romantic.li/portfolio/wongwing/>). Copyright by Origami Branding.

However, the package’s shape does more than misrepresent Chinese foodways; it participates in the broader Western cultural practice of Othering and exoticizing East Asian

cultures, thereby further legitimizing the oyster pail's use in this way. Ever since the oyster pail has been falsely iconized as a symbol of Chineseness, it has been used simultaneously to exoticize and marginalize those of East Asian descent (King, 2020). For example, in 2020, former art director of British Columbia-based Lululemon Athletica Inc., Trevor Fleming, Instagrammed a racist, xenophobic t-shirt proselytizing a now-debunked belief that COVID-19 was a result of bat consumption in Wuhan, China (see Figure 13; Chieh, 2020). The garment, named "Bat Fried Rice," features an oyster pail with bat wings and the phrase "No Thank You" in the aforementioned stereo(type). Fleming's post occurred during a critical time in the global pandemic, when scientific data revealed healthcare disparities that marginalized people of colour (Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, n.d.; Gupta & Aitken, 2022). The t-shirt was condemned for instigating COVID-related anti-Asian sentiment, which has since risen (Balintec, 2022; Chieh, 2020; Gover et al., 2020; Guo & Guo, 2021; He et al., 2021). For many in the Chinese community, the oyster pail has come to represent racially charged mockery ("Full Text of Michelle Wu's Statement," 2019; Leung, 2019).

Figure 13

Reproduction of Jess Sluder's "Bat Fried Rice" T-Shirt



Note. From "Lululemon Apologises After Staffer Promotes 'Bat Fried Rice' T-Shirt," by Y. H. Chieh, 2020, AirAsia Play (<https://www.airasia.com/play/assets/blt9a5540d034653ad8/lululemon-apologises-after-staffer-promotes-bat-fried-rice-t-shirt>). Copyright 2024 by AirAsia Group Berhad.

Chinoiserie

Wong Wing Fried Rice decontextualizes Chinese motifs and symbols. The hanging scroll, for example, which is historically preserved for calligraphic and painted works meant for temporary display, is repurposed here as a static, commercial ornament (Sze, 1963). The use of saturated tones also contrasts with traditional conventions, which favour a more harmonious balance of neutral and vibrant colours (Sze, 1963). Moreover, hanging scrolls are typically hung vertically, whereas only hand scrolls are in a horizontal format (Sze, 1963). The dragon imagery, which wraps around the package's banner, vilifies the national symbol's origins. In Chinese culture, the *lóng* [Chinese dragon 龍] is a sacred, legendary creature which has come to represent auspiciousness, virtue, wisdom, and community. Providing spiritual sustenance and physical safety, the *lóng* is deified for summoning wind and rain (Maguth & Wu, 2020; Zhou, 2015). Such is the creature's popularity that birthrates are known to spike in the Year of the Dragon, and those with the zodiac are touted as "charismatic, innovative, free-spirited, and flamboyant" (Maguth & Wu, 2020, p. 36). *Lóng* varieties that exhale fire are rare and regarded as punishments for moral transgressions (Hua, 2016). And so, the juxtaposition of the *lóng* with fiery tones in Wong Wing Fried Rice fuels the perception of the Chinese dragon as *solely* a fire-breathing monster. The malevolent European beast popularized by the likes of J. R. R. Tolkien and J. K. Rowling is projected onto the benevolent East Asian avatar (Maguth & Wu, 2020). Zhu (2015) classifies such false impressions as contagions, adding, "if one mistakes the virtuous Chinese Dragon as those evil Western dragons, then misunderstanding the whole nation is possible" (p. 100). His argument—although controversial—is not without basis. The perpetual misinterpretation of East Asian cultural components as evil mythologizes Chinese people as having aggressive manners of expression.

Self-Othering: A Means to an End?

The retail industry “both publicly declares and perpetuates the idea that there is pleasure to be found in the acknowledgement and enjoyment of racial difference” (hooks, 2014). The commodification of Otherness offers consumers “more intense, more satisfying than normal ways of doing and feeling” (hooks, 2014). Racialized packages have quite literally become the spice, adding piquancy to the mundanities of everyday Western life (hooks, 2014; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Uneke, 1996). To this day, Canadian supermarket aisles are stocked with varying degrees of performative Chineseness. But Wong Wing Fried Rice is unique in that it embodies multigenerational self-orientalism. The package reproduces self-orientalist components including (1) typographical appropriation, or *bad characters*, which attempt to reduce the entire demographic to a letterform; (2) the oyster pail, an American innovation that has although helped Chinese restaurateurs gain economic leverage, is used ad nauseam to perpetuate anti-Asian sentiment; and (3) chinoiserie, the European exploitation of Chinese visual language that decentres cultural tradition for colonial interpretations (Giampietro, 2004; Lyakhovich, 2020; Pater, 2016; Seals & Ellsworth, 2022; Wachendorff, 2018). Ironically, Wou is a person of East Asian ethnicity imitating other persons of East Asian ethnicity imitating white people imitating East Asianness. Even though he has not created these stereotypes, his redesign helps cement them into Western consciousness (Wang, 2012). And unlike other orientalist brands which *package* race as a positioning strategy, Wong Wing sells race itself—having even once “launched an initiative called ‘Discover Your Asian Side’” (“The Industry Rings in Chinese New Year,” 2011). This campaign promotes the harmful notion that Asianness can not only be sold but also consumed *and* purged at the customer’s convenience. Wong Wing Fried Rice is essentially a “contemporary revival of interest in the ‘primitive,’ with a distinctly postmodern

slant” (hooks, 2014). Packages that reinforce the colonial gaze simultaneously ease wayfinding for orientalist consumers, further privileging whiteness. The phenomenon of racialized packages—although mediagenic—can do a great disservice to people of colour.

Yet this self-Othering is hardly ill-intentioned. The historical application/enactment of racial stereotypes by members of the culture in question is not always a form of internalized racism; rather, it is a necessary strategy for survival (Hunter and Nettles, 1999; Kern-Foxworth, 1994). People of colour are cognizant of the symbolism that represents them, possessing a clear perception of themselves, their racialization, and how others perceive them (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). This cultural hyperawareness is best deconstructed in W.E.B. Du Bois’s Theory of Double Consciousness.³² He states:

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, —a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his two-ness, —an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder” (Du Bois, 2018).

By tapping into this hyperconsciousness, IBPOC people can access social structures and services they would otherwise not be privy to (Kern-Foxworth, 1994). Since the century 19th century, Chinese Canadians have overcome socioeconomic barriers by way of self-caricature and

³² Although the Theory of Double Consciousness was originally meant to describe the Black experience, Hunter and Nettles (1999) extend Du Bois’s application to include all people of colour.

standardization, expanding the limited scope of employment opportunities available to East Asian people at the time (Hoe, 1990; Hui, 2019; Jacobs, 2009; Jung, 2010, 223; Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Seals & Ellsworth, 2022; Uneke, 1996; Wang, 2012).

Thus, the use of orientalist tropes in original Wong Wing media can be interpreted as a calculated effort to shatter the glass ceiling; a negotiated acculturation between the Chinese diaspora and the mainstream Canadian community (Lee, 1992; Li, 2020; Liu, 2009; Zine, 2012). For example, one of the brand's earliest advertisements, which hung at the "company's production facility on Rue Urbain until 1974," strategically juxtaposed Chinese visual elements (e.g., a pagoda and a pagoda tree) with the English stereotype "Chinese" to attract customers and generate profits, securing the company's future (see Figure 14). Reflecting on his family's Chinese restaurant that adapted to the local, white clientele, Darren Lee states, "When deciding what business path to pursue years earlier, my grandfather, who had already lived through lean times in China and America, decided that at the very least he and his future family would never go hungry in the restaurant business" (Jung, 2010). Monetizing self-orientalism can also benefit racialized communities at large. The Wong family was known for their philanthropic and humanitarian efforts. Former President Richard Wong generously donated to Chinese orphanages, held numerous volunteer positions on behalf of East Asian causes, and continually advocated for the Chinese-Canadian community (Parkes, 2000).

Wou's self-orientalist motives behind the redesigned package are equally nuanced. As ethnicity is more and more commodified, racialized cultural workers' livelihoods hinge on self-Othering (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). Although he describes the redesign as "both authentically Asian and exotic," Wou goes on to say the combination is "sure to appeal to Canadian consumers" ("Origami Communication Design," 2004). His predictions materialized, of course,

with Roel admitting the new image sells “like crazy” (“Good Fortunes,” 2005). Evidently, Wou is cognizant of Orientalist interpretations and the saleability of Orientalia. He strategically presents Chinese culture through the colonial gaze to ensure profit margins.

In all its iterations, Wong Wing Fried Rice presents the depressing polarities of self-Othering, which designers of hyphenated, racial, and multiracial identities must endure.

Figure 14

Wong Wing Advertisement by Richard K. Wong



Note. Image from “Wong Wing Foods,” by Richard Wong, 2020, Montréal Signs Project (<https://www.montrealsignsproject.ca/sign/wong-wing-foods>). Copyright 2024 by MLW Foods Inc./Montréal Signs Project.

Of course, such self-Othering representations, despite their pragmatisms, are highly contested (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). Yet, polemics against self-Orientalizing are also debated (hooks, 2014; Yeh, 2021). As Chatelain (2021) reminds us, we must “be more compassionate toward individuals navigating few choices” and instead direct our criticisms at the institutions and systems that took those choices away (p. 21). For some people of colour, the act of self-stereotyping is “easier psychologically than maintaining or developing an oppositional standpoint in the face of white hegemony” (Hunter and Nettles, 1999, p. 391). Still, beyond these interpretations lie positionalities overlooked: self-orientalism as counter-orientalism. Chinese-

Canadian artist JJ Lee, who explores cultural hybridity through the lens of Chinese foodways, argues that self-orientalism can also be a form of “equal opportunity” appropriation; reclamation of cultural elements formerly co-opted and misappropriated by the dominant culture (Lee, 2018). The cathartic ritualization of destroying *or* preserving and reproducing what is generally considered racist memorabilia (Orientalia in this case) as a form of racial liberation is not a new practice (Colvard, 2019; Motley et al., 2003; Patterson, 2011; Pilgrim, 2015; “SRD 2022: Catharsis, Complaining and Destruction with Boxcheckerz,” n.d.; Obenson, 2019).

The preceding study confirms the non-neutrality of self-Orientalist packages, revealing how self-Orientalist package and label design is discursively negotiated as both internalized racism and anti-racist resistance. In the case of Wong Wing Fried Rice, while the original package speaks to the notion of Chinese authenticity, actively positivizing negativized cultural components, the redesigned package centers on a creative alliance that accommodates a European *representation* of Chineseness, making a “spectacle of the Other” (Kobayashi et al., 2019). While the original package reconstructed orientalist notions as counter-orientalist, the redesigned package reconstructs counter-orientalist packaging as self-orientalist.

4.3 Golden Temple Atta No. 1 Fine Durum Atta Flour

Whereas the previous analysis visually dissects the projection, introjection, and reprojection of ethnocentric tropes in racialized packaging geared toward white consumers, the subsequent analysis explores cultural appropriation in racialized packaging aimed at IBPOC, namely Indian diasporic consumers. Tracing the transcontinental histories of appropriated and reappropriated elements, this analysis disentangles the exploitative rearticulation of culturally embedded traditions through consumer packaging, revealing how graphic designers and/or marketers producing packages for multicultural products routinely prioritize external perceptions

over the internal self-interpretation of ethnicized and racialized consumers.

Western brands are extremely adept at appropriating the Other. Whereas most consumer packaged goods (CPGs) appropriating minority cultures target non-minorities, occasionally, they target the very culture being appropriated. While the former glorifies colonial imaginaries, reconstructing ethnocentric tourism via domestic regime, the latter brings these hegemonic ambitions to fruition, *subjecting* the racialized consumer to the racist simulacrum (Ahmad, 2011; Cook & Crang, 1996; Elliott, 2008; Deleuze & Guattari, 1977). Inspired by the culinary evolution of Italian gastronomy amid globalization, this process of re-enculturation, informed by European imperialist values, is understood as the *pizza effect* (Arya, 2021; Bharati, 1970; Borup, 2017). Simply put, the *pizza effect* occurs “when a dominant culture takes from a marginalized culture, re-packages the cultural object through commodification, and sells it back to the original culture” (Arya, 2021, p. 5). And although this theory was originally meant to describe the cultural appropriation and re-exportation of performative mechanisms, in graphic design, the *pizza effect* is applied quite literally. Package designers routinely appropriate the visual material of Othered cultures to facilitate the monopolization of the multicultural market (Elliott, 2008). Generally, these colonial versionings are met with positive reception, with the cultural form garnering a heightened sense of social significance due to its popularity with the appropriating culture—a “coolnessification,” if you will (Borup, 2017, p. 26; see also Bharati, 1970). However, racialized and ethnicized consumers who are familiar with the implications of their racialization and ethnicization—particularly diasporic enclaves within the so-called West—historically object to the superficial commercialization of their cultural identities, therefore problematizing the *pizza effect* (Scafidi, 2005). A visual analysis of Smucker’s Golden Temple No.1 Fine Durum Atta Flour, herein referred to as Golden Temple Atta, can help to deconstruct this lens further.

Golden Temple

In 2004, American-based food and beverage manufacturer The J. M. Smucker Company purchased International Multifoods Corp (CPG Connect, n.d.; Weber, 2004). The acquisition comprised several additions to its Canadian subsidiary, Smuckers Foods of Canada Corp, including Golden Temple, a brand geared toward the Indian diasporic community (Smucker Foods of Canada Corp, n.d.-a). Golden Temple promises premium quality and authenticity, offering wheat flour products, namely atta [transl. flour] and sooji [transl. semolina], which are commonly used to make Indian flatbreads, such as parathas, pooris, and rotis; appetizers, such as kachoris and samosas; and snacks, such as mathris and onion bhajis (Smucker Foods of Canada Corp, n.d.-a; Smucker Foods of Canada Corp, n.d.-b). Golden Temple Atta is a “durum wheat flour and wheat bran blend” intended for “light-textured breads like rumali roties,” and serves as an “alternative for samosas, Malabar parathas and puran polis” (Smucker Foods of Canada Corp, n.d.-c).

Golden Temple Atta

Golden Temple Atta is encased in a Block Bottom Bag³³ with a folded flat top (see Figure 15). The laminated package features a trompe l'oeil³⁴ yellow banner with a golden border, superimposed on a chartreuse background with a green dotted floral pattern. The FOP includes the Country of Origin (CO), brand logo, brand name, product description (in English and French), and product weight, alongside an image of wheat stalks. The sides of the packet reiterate the extrinsic cues in addition to intrinsic cues (i.e., ingredients, nutrition facts, and instructions), and transactional cues (i.e., barcode and production lot code).

³³ Also known as AD*STAR, Block Bottom Bags are packages with a rectangular-shaped base. The Block Bottom shape allows the package to maintain structural integrity and can therefore be stacked, stored, or displayed flat or upright (Gotschall, 2020; Knack Packaging Pvt. Ltd., n.d.; Starlinger Group, n.d.).

³⁴ Trompe L'oeil (transl. eye-deceiver) is a memetic device used by artists and designers to represent things “so that the representation of a thing seems to *be* the thing itself” (Ebert-Schifferer, 2003, p. 17).

Figure 15*Golden Temple Atta*

Note. From Golden Temple No.1 Fine Durum Atta Flour Blend 9kg, 9.07 kg, n.d.

(<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Golden-Temple-No-1-Fine-Durum-Atta-Flour-Blend-9kg/6000188765353>). Copyright 2024 by Smucker Foods of Canada Corp./Walmart.

Iconographic Appropriation

Located in Amritsar, Punjab, India, Sri Harmandir Sahib [transl. Temple of God ਸ੍ਰੀ ਹਰਿਮੰਦਰ ਸਾਹਿਬ]—popularly known as the Golden Temple—is the central Gurdwara [transl. Door to the Guru ਗੁਰਦੁਆਰਾ] or place of worship and pilgrimage in Sikhi [transl. Sikhism ਸਿੱਖੀ] (Purewal & Kalra, 2016; Jutla, 2016). Famous for its golden dome, the site was considered complete in 1604, after the fifth Sikh Guru [transl. spiritual guide, teacher ਗੁਰੂ], Guru Arjan Dev, placed the Adi Granth [transl. first book ਆਦਿ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ]—the first version of the Guru Granth Sahib [Guru = spiritual

guide, teacher; Granth = book, volume; Sahib, honorific signifying master or lord ਗੁਰੂ ਗ੍ਰੰਥ ਸਾਹਿਬ]³⁵ within the Gurdwara (“Harimandir Sahib,” 2011). Since 1920, Sri Harmandir Sahib has been administered by the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC),³⁶ which, alongside managing the temple’s day-to-day maintenance, issues and enforces guidelines to protect it from Sikh and non-Sikh alike (Gandhi, 1993; Jamwal, 2023; “Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee,” 2004). Inspired by the Guru Granth Sahib and the Rehat Maryada [rehat = to live, to remain; maryada = “bounds or limits of morality and propriety, rule or custom” ਰਹਿਤ ਮਰਯਾਦਾ],³⁷ these regulations concern orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and sacrosanctity (“Rahit Maryada,” 2011; Singh, 2010; *The Code of Conduct and Conventions*, n.d.). The temple is never to be replicated, exploited, or disparaged (Bajwa, 2022; Rajput, 2022). Yet despite these ordinances, Golden Temple Atta appropriates the holy site as a trademark—a move that, while likely intended to differentiate the brand from its competitors, ultimately capitalizes on an otherwise sacred space.

Over the years, Sikh politicians have aired their grievances, denouncing Smucker Foods of Canada Corp for breaking religious code, recommending international sanctions, and placing a ban on Golden Temple Atta (Watts, 2016).³⁸ Former Kotkapura Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA), Ripjit Singh Brar, states: “Sikh sentiments have been hurt by this. The SGPC should take notice immediately, get this banned and punish the culprit” (Watts, 2016).

³⁵ The Guru Granth Sahib is the most authoritative scripture in the Sikh faith (“Sri Guru Granth Sahib,” 2004). Appointed as successor by the tenth Guru, Guru Gobind Singh, the Guru Granth Sahib is considered a living Guru (“Harimandir Sahib,” 2011; Moura, 2023).

³⁶ The SGPC is “the apex governing body of all the Sikh Gurdwaras in India & Abroad” (“About SGPC,” n.d.).

³⁷ The Rehat Maryada is the official Sikh Code of Conduct and Conventions (“Rahit Maryada,” 2011).

³⁸ Time and again, history demonstrates the polarizing effects of sacrilege, religious insults, and hate speech (General Assembly Resolution 13/16, Combating Defamation of Religions, 2010). Religious affronts often spark widespread controversy, provoke reprisal, and impact diplomatic relations (Flood, 2022). Past government inaction and lack of recourse in cases of beadbi [transl. sacrilege ਬੇਅਦਬੀ] has only contributed to the rise of Sikh vigilantism (Sethi, 2021; Sethi, 2023; Singh, 2017; Singh & Kaur, 2022). While it is important to note that these incidents largely arise from inter-and intra-communal conflict, localized cases of retaliation against non-Sikhs still occur (Shahed, 2019; Singh, 2017).

The visual reproduction of the Golden Temple on a commodity package also raises concerns about deconsecration and desecration. Golden Temple Atta forces the consumer to reconcile a consecrated site (i.e., the Golden Temple) with a banausic object (i.e., the consumer package), consequently denying the former's spiritual pre-eminence. By mere utterance, the consumer likens a bag of flour to a revered temple—an associative act of blasphemy. And like any other package, housing any other product, Golden Temple Atta possesses a life cycle. Golden Temple Atta is bought, hauled, shelved, torn, sullied, and eventually discarded—contrary to Sikhi demands of strict obeisance to religious material culture. Brar adds:

The company should have avoided the name Golden Temple for its products. Besides, the image of Golden Temple is printed on the packets. They did not even bother that the empty packets of atta may amount to disrespect of the shrine. I demand the SGPC should initiate action against the company. (Watts, 2016)

Former president of the Delhi Sikh Gurdwara Management Committee (DSGMC), Manjit Singh GK, took matters further, beseeching Minister of External Affairs of the Government of India, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar to inform both Canadian and American embassies and retailers to halt production of commercial products featuring the Golden Temple—should they be concerned for Sikh sanctity (*Mr. Manjit Singh GK*, n.d.; “Stop Sale of Rice Packets With Golden Temple Image: Gk,” 2019). He elaborates:

The image of the Golden temple is being used on packets of Kirkland Signature Traditional Basmati Rice and ‘Golden Temple Flour’. The entire Sikh community has serious objections ... the Golden Temple is the highest religious pilgrimage for us and it cannot be used to promote a commercial brand. The packets would eventually go into the dustbin because of which the holy place is insulted. (“Stop Sale of Rice Packets With

Golden Temple Image: Gk,” 2019)

Even high-ranking religious officials have vocalized their opinions, notably the former Jathedar [transl. leader ਜੱਥੇਦਾਰ] of the Akal Takht [transl. Throne of the Timeless One ਅਕਾਲ ਤਖ਼ਤ],³⁹ Giani [transl. one who possesses knowledge or spiritual understanding ਗਿਆਨੀ] Gurbachan Singh (“Akal Takht,” 2002; “Giani,” 2011; “Jatha,” 2011; Singh, 2008; Watts, 2016). Singh notes:

It is morally wrong to print the picture of Harmandar Sahib or any other religious place on the packet of any eatable product. Someone had earlier brought this matter to our notice and the company had agreed to remove the photo from the packets. ... I am not sure whether they have removed the photo or not.” Watts (2016)

By holding the trademark, Smucker Foods of Canada Corp not only defies the unified political and religious ruling in India surrounding the sanctity of the Golden Temple but also demonstrates how historically white-owned enterprises actively weaponize ignorance to perpetuate racism (Fenelon, 2016; “Jerome M. Smucker,” n.d.; “Jerome Smucker,” 2019; McKeever, 2022; Veresiu, 2023).

But the impact of this issue is not localized to the Indian Sikh community; rather, it alienates Sikh diasporic networks in Canada also. As Shahed (2019) explains, Sikh emigration is primarily “a product of the colonial administrative process in the Indian subcontinent which created a transnational labour market in search of profit and prompted the migration of ethnic communities to the colonial labour markets in the West” (p. 329). Sikh emigration also lends itself to racial discrimination and the ethnicization of politics in India, specifically the “Hindu nationalist project to socialize Sikhs into the mainstream Hindu nationalist discourse” (Shahed,

³⁹ The Akal Takht “is the primary seat of Sikh religious authority and central altar for Sikh political assembly” (“Akal Takht,” 2002, p. 56).

2019, p. 329). Canadian multiculturalism, with its shifting attitudes towards immigrants and post-colonial modifications to Canadian immigration policies, offered Sikh immigrants new social, cultural, economic, and political opportunities (Judge, 2003; Modood, 2013; Shahed, 2019). With a population exceeding 700,000, Canada maintains the largest Sikh community outside India (Shahed, 2019; Statistics Canada, 2022). A distinguishing feature of the Sikh diasporic community “is the dedication with which gurdwaras have been built”—safe spaces that have long “served to alleviate the loneliness, heartache, and sense of unease that came from being in an alien land” (Helweg, 1993, p. 81; Tatla, 1999, p. 73; see also Shahed, 2019; Singh, 2017). By culturally appropriating the Sikh diasporic notion of safe space—despite community protest—Golden Temple Atta denies ethno-religious autonomy and reconceptualizes the gurdwara as a site of contention. Golden Temple Atta chooses not to accommodate the lived realities of the Sikh diaspora who want to maintain Khālsā,⁴⁰ thereby perpetuating harm and instigating an intra-national tension characteristic of the Sikh struggle for independence in India (“Khālsā,” 2011; Nesbitt, 2005; Shahed, 2019).

Appropriation of Motif and Pattern

The package’s floral pattern mimics paisley, an imitation of Boteh-Jegheh [Boteh = bush, shrub, or thicket; Jegheh = plume بنه جقه], a pre-Islamic, Persian motif, typically “shaped like a teardrop with a curved, pointed tip” (Respass & Niziolek, 2016, pp. 85–86; see also Bagheri Hasankiadeh, 2016; Eduljee, n.d.-a; Karl, 2019a; Latif, 2018; Zahra & Fatemi, 2021).⁴¹ Boteh-Jegheh is likely named after the jiqa [transl. plume بنه جقه], a feathered and/or bejewelled headdress

⁴⁰ From the Arabic Khālis [transl. pure, unsullied] and the Perso-Arabic Khālisah [transl. pure; crown lands], Khālsā is the collective name for baptized Sikhs and, over time, has come to signify spiritual purity (“Khālsā,” 2011).

⁴¹ Boteh-Jegheh’s shape is not uniform, varying in size and orientation, and occasionally appearing almond-shaped (Respass & Niziolek, 2016).

ornament originally adorned by Persian monarchy and officials.⁴² The inspiration behind the motif's form is disputed, with some scholars attributing it to the Mediterranean cypress tree (esp. when windswept leeward) or Simurgh [سپهر],⁴³ cosmic symbols in the Zoroastrian, including Parsi, tradition (Compareti, 2020; Darbinian & Esmail Ramaji, 2023; Diba, 2011; Djamali et al., 2017; Farrokh, 2007; Rouhina & Ahmad Panah, 2018; Skarratt et al., 2018; Taheri, 2009; Untracht, 1997; Zahra & Fatemi, 2021). Boteh-Jegheh was used in pre-Islamic Persian handicraft and later incorporated into architecture during the Islamization of Iran; however, due to the “slow progress of archeology in contemporary Iran,” there remains a paucity of information on the subject (Compareti, 2021, p. 9; see also Djamali et al., 2017; Eduljee, n.d.-a; Eduljee, n.d.-b; Finastiian et al., 2019).

Available research ascribes the height of its development to the Mughal Empire,⁴⁴ where Kashmiri artisans incorporated highly stylized floral embellishments and elaborate borders to create the iconic toponymic shawl (Skarratt et al., 2018). First, a royal and aristocratic Mughal preoccupation, the patterned garment subsequently captivated European colonial enterprises, including the British East India Company, which co-opted the cloth as a hegemonic device (Chatterjee, 2020; Skarratt et al., 2018). By the late 18th century, Kashmiri shawls were transported to Europe via British (and possibly French) officials as souvenirs, and eventually privately exported as luxury *exotica* intended “to dress predominantly female European nobility” (Karl, 2019a, p. 26; see also Cherneski, 2017; Skarratt et al., 2018). The Kashmiri shawl soon garnered widespread popularity, becoming a fashion staple in European society (Skarratt et al., 2018).

⁴² The *jiqa* later culminated into the *sarpech-sant-kalgi* [transl. turban ornament and ornamental plume] combination, an insignia of the Mughal Empire and precursor to the European aigrette and *sarpech-aigrette* (Untracht, 1997).

⁴³ The Simurgh is a polymorphous she-bird in Zoroastrian literature and Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* (Compareti, 2020; Taheri, 2009).

⁴⁴ The Mughal Empire, which lasted from the 16th to the 19th centuries, was an imperialist Turco-Mongol empire that extended across much of the Indian subcontinent (Lefèvre, 2011).

However, high production costs became unfeasible for European patrons, leading to the emergence of European textile centres dedicated to replicating the intricate cloth (Cherneski, 2017; Skarratt et al., 2018). Imitations were first produced in Edinburgh, followed by Norwich, and then Paisley—the latter of which the reproduction gets its name (Cherneski, 2017; Latif, 2018; Skarratt et al., 2018; Trilling, 2003). And although paisley was unable to match the high quality of authentic Kashmiri shawls, it facilitated innovative methods of production and was therefore lauded in an ethnocentric attempt to buttress European industrial dominance (Cherneski, 2017; Karl, 2019b). Moreover, paisley's lower price point made it accessible to the wider public, allowing the textile to flourish (Cherneski, 2017; Martineau, 1852; Zutshi, 2009).

Twentieth-century pop culture, particularly the psychedelic era of the 1960s, bolstered the pattern's cultural salience, and so to this day, paisley remains an iconic influence in and out of the colonial metropole (Cherneski, 2017; Misiroglu, 2009).

Given paisley's association with Indian culture, it is not surprising that Golden Temple Atta takes on an inspired form. But what this historical analysis reveals is the motif's pre-colonial function as a ceremonial ornament reserved for architecture, garments, and textiles. Golden Temple Atta's casual placement of a reductive reinterpretation (of a colonial iteration) on a banal consumer package deviates from conventional applications, typifying the cursory level of ethnography that has come to characterize Eurocentric treatment of Indian culture. While cultural appropriation can sometimes prove beneficial, increasing visibility and therefore normalizing the appropriated culture, Eurocentric reconstructions of Othered cultures are "informed by a sense of entitlement," justifying colonialism and racism (Barbieri, 2017, p. 104; see also Maskiell, 2002). Chatterjee (2020) adds "that superficial knowledge can devalue an object," allowing for "simplistic adoption and cheap reproduction" (p. 58). Decontextualization, she argues, "negates

the social, economic, and political weight” authentic materials hold (Chatterjee, 2020, p. 59).

Consequently, Golden Temple Atta’s appropriation of Boteh-Jegheh defies the motif’s historicity and peddles a diluted, European version of an otherwise authentic by-product of Indo-Persian culture to the Indian diaspora. The cultural product is hypostasized as a marketing gimmick.

By incorporating Orientalia, or *Indianerie*—as Kalb (2011) describes it—Golden Temple Atta ignores the asymmetries in paisley’s transcontinental history, and what that entails for the Indian, and in particular, Sikh diasporic community (Chatterjee, 2020). As mentioned previously, the early to mid-1800s saw a burgeoning effort by the “European textile industry to imitate the famous Kashmir shawl” (Skarratt et al., 2018, p. 6). But the British took a supplementary approach to mitigate this demand: ratifying exploitative treaties during colonial conquests. Following the First Anglo-Sikh War, the British enforced the Treaty of Amritsar (1846), which demanded that Maharaja Gulab Singh Jamwal acknowledge British suzerainty over the princely states of Jammu and Kashmir (Skarratt et al., 2018; Zutshi, 2009). Article 10 of the treaty stipulated that Gulab Singh would “in token of such supremacy present annually to the British Government ... twelve shawl goats of approved breed (six male and six female) and three pairs of Kashmir shawls” (Zutshi, 2009, p. 424). Golden Temple Atta’s travestied imitation of the floral motif reconstructs these European attempts of plagiarism and indigenization, naturalizing the violent “colonial possession of shawl design as well as the earlier possession of Kashmiri shawls as trade goods” (Maskiell, 2002, p. 29).

Fontroversy: Typographic Appropriation

The brand name’s stylized typeface, Victorian Regular, normalizes the fetishistic appropriation of Indian culture. Designed by Freda Sack and Colin Brignall and published by the International Typeface Corporation (ITC) in 1976, Victorian Regular is supposedly inspired by

the “ornateness” and “refinement” of 19th-century European typography (ITC, n.d.; “Victorian,” n.d.). But despite its motivating force, the font, with its rounded (rather than sharp) curlicues and heavy (rather than modulated) weight, is more akin to the bohemian, groovy typefaces that characterized the concurrent psychedelic and hippie movements. It is highly possible that Sack and Brignall conflated these 20th-century countercultures with the Victorian era, given that both periods were preoccupied with the overt romanticization of Indian culture (Ferraris, 2016; Jones, 2011; Karl, 2019a; Karl, 2019b; Misiroglu, 2009). While the Victorians were concerned with exerting authority and superiority, Hippies converged hallucinogens and Eastern spirituality to propel a new way of being (Ferraris, 2016). As Ferraris (2016) explains, “Hippies only slightly modified the project of their colonialist grandfathers” (p. 742).

The typeface also co-opts Hindu spiritual and religious tradition. For example, the glyph representing the letter “O” in Victorian Regular mimics the Cyrillic Monocular O (O; see Figure 16). From the outset, this may seem immaterial—the Slavonic detail merely enhances the decorative aesthetic of the eclectic typeface. However, the Monocular O, much like the Binocular O (O), Double monocular O (OO), and Multiocular O (OOO), is reserved for derivatives of the root word *eye* (Everson et al., 2007; Shardt et al., 2011). Considering the sociolinguistic context, the character may have been used as a typographic placeholder for the Ajna [transl. to perceive, to command आज्ञा] or *third eye*, the sixth primary chakra [transl. wheel चक्र], which is located between the eyebrows and represents intuition (Marathe & Acharya, 2020).⁴⁵ Practicing Hindus symbolize this philosophy with a tilaka (तिलक) or bindi (बिंदी), decorative marks worn on the forehead (Mittal & Thursby, 2006). This connotation is not lost on Golden Temple Atta

⁴⁵ An integral aspect of Hindu and Buddhist tradition, chakra refers to one of the many psychic focal points in the human body (Marathe & Acharya, 2020).

either, having recently removed the distinctive feature from its packaging (see Figure 17). Still, Smucker's and Smucker Foods of Canada Corp have yet to omit the glyphic detail in their online advertising (Smucker Foods of Canada Corp, n.d.-d; The J.M. Smucker Company, 2025).

Figure 16

“Golden Temple” in Victorian Regular

GOLDEN TEMPLE

Note. The figure uses the typeface Victorian Regular, designed by Freda Sack and Colin Brignall, International Typeface Corporation (ITC). Copyright Monotype ITC Inc. Own work.

Figure 17

Real Canadian Superstore Flyer Clipping for the Week of June 3–9, 2016



Note. The flyer clipping catalogues Golden Temple Atta packages with and without the Cyrillic Monocular O (O). Adapted from “Golden Temple Atta Flour,” by Loblaw Companies Ltd., 2016, *Real Canadian Superstore Weekly Flyer*, p. 11 (<https://flyers.smartcanucks.ca/canada/real-canadian-superstore-west-flyer-june-3-to-9/all>). Copyright 2016 by Smucker Foods of Canada Corp./Real Canadian Superstore.

Evidently, Golden Temple Atta consciously capitalizes on typographic Indomania. Similar to the importation and re-exportation of Yoga, the brand's use of Victorian Regular imposes cheap reworkings of Indian visual material culture on the Indian diaspora. Although these sacred embellishments were "originally indicative of adherence to Hindu spirituality," Golden Temple Atta rearticulates them to include Indo-chic and pseudo-spiritualism (Antony, 2010). This is a colonial attempt to eclipse Indian self-imagery and agency, and underscores a lack of meaningful consultation (Meletis, 2021; Saloojee, 2003).

Since 1963, Hindi—commonly written in the Devanagari script—and English—written in the Latin script—have been the only two official languages of the Republic of India (Official Languages Act, 1963). So, one could argue that Victorian Regular is also a botched hybridization of the typefaces of India's official languages. However, the historical standardization of Hindi and formalization of English are consequences of British tutelage and pale in comparison to India's true sociolinguistic area (Chavan, 2013; Lelyveld, 1993a; Lelyveld, 1993b; McConnell & Mahapatra, 1990). The 2011 Census of India, for example, saw an overwhelming raw return of 19,569 mother tongues, which were subsequently rationalized into 1369 mother tongues (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2021; Mallikarjun, 2002; Office of the Registrar General & Census Commissioner, India [ORGI], 2018). The mother tongues were then classified into five language families (i.e., Indo-European, Dravidian, Austro-Asiatic, Tibeto-Burmese, or Semito-Hamitic) and further defined into 270 mother tongues and 121 languages (Department of Higher Education, Ministry of Education, 2021; ORGI, 2018). The Eighth Schedule to the Constitution of India recognizes 22 of the 121 as languages, including the Indo-European languages Assamese, Bengali, Dogri, Gujarati, Hindi, Kashmiri, Konkani, Maithili, Marathi, Nepali, Odia, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Sindhi, and Urdu; the Dravidian languages Kannada,

Malayalam, Tamil, and Telugu; the Austro-Asiatic language Santali; and the Tibeto-Burmese languages Bodo and Manipuri (ORGI, 2018). Corresponding writing systems are equally diverse, featuring Brahmic (or Indic) scripts, a category of Abugidas;⁴⁶ Arabic scripts, a category of Abjads;⁴⁷ and alphabetic scripts, which compose the Alphabetic writing system.⁴⁸

Thus, Golden Temple Atta's cultural homogenization of Indian writing systems into a singular typographic form obscures the profound and complex graphemic and typographic histories that exist within India. Moreover, the substitution of Indian languages with an orientalized English typeface to advertise to the Indian diaspora reconfirms the linguistic legacies of British imperial and colonial structures.

Linguistic Accessibility and Typeface Legibility

The English-only labelling on the Golden Temple Atta package also poses several accessibility issues, particularly for Indian individuals with limited English proficiency and/or those who prefer communicating in their own language. A 2020 Statistics Canada report on English and French language proficiency revealed that most Canadians unable to carry out a conversation in English or French were adults, in particular, women aged 65 and over (Bastien & Lemyre, 2020). The report also detailed the main mother tongues of persons unable to converse in English or French, with the third-largest group being Punjabi speakers—the predominant language amongst Sikhs (Bastien & Lemyre, 2020; The Daily, 2022). Therefore, a considerable number of Indian, or more specifically, Sikh consumers would not be able to decipher the meaning of the written and printed material on Golden Temple Atta. And the only word on the

⁴⁶ Also called alphasyllabary, “an Abugida is a writing system where the consonant letters represent syllables with a default vowel and other vowels are denoted by diacritics” (Ding et al., 2018, p. 1)

⁴⁷ An Abjad is an Arabic-derived writing system “in which primary graphemes represent only consonants or long vowels” (Haralambous, 2021).

⁴⁸ An Alphabetic writing system “is one in which each symbol corresponds more or less closely to the phonemes of the language” (Chao, 1968, p. 108).

package, which is transliterated (i.e., Atta), fails to meet procedural requirements for colour accessibility (see Figure 18; Rallo et al., 2021). Golden Temple Atta quite literally peripheralizes Indian culture and Indo-Canadians.

Figure 18

Colour Contrast Ratio of Product Description on Golden Temple Atta Package



Note. Colour data was obtained using a photoelectric sensor, which identified each colour and converted it into a hexadecimal colour code. Codes were subsequently fed into Web Accessibility in Mind's (WebAIM) colour contrast checker. Both Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.2 and the Association of Registered Graphic Designers (RGD) guidelines recommend a minimum contrast of 4.5:1 for web content and print material to maintain a level AA (mid-range) legibility (Campbell et al., 2023; Rallo et al., 2021). With a failed contrast ratio of 1.85:1, the examined foreground type is illegible. Own work.

Ensuring product descriptions are readable for racialized target markets is a key aspect of inclusive design and marketing (Gopinath et al., 2013; Koslow et al., 1994). Even something as simple as an image of the prepared product can enhance the overall shopping experience, helping consumers to visually identify their needs (Gil-Pérez et al., 2020). While Golden Temple Atta fails to take these considerations into account, flour products owned by Indo-Canadian brands more effectively incorporate common Indian diasporic languages and identifiable imagery relevant to product preparation into their labelling and packaging (Ashton et al., 2015; Rumley, 2021; Statistics Canada, 2023). For example, a bag of **ਵੇਰਕਾ**/Verka Chakki Atta (Whole Wheat Flour) features the brand name in the Punjabi written in the Gurmukhī script and an image of the

prepared product, in this case, roti or chapati (see Figure 19; Rumley, 2021). Brar Natural Flour Milling Inc.'s SHER brand goes further by offering multilingual descriptions in English, Punjabi, Gujarati, Hindi, Urdu, and French (see Figure 19; Ashton et al., 2015).

Figure 19

Golden Temple Atta next to Verka Chakki Atta and SHER Atta



Note. Left image from Golden Temple No.1 Fine Durum Atta Flour Blend 9 kg, 9.07kg, n.d.

(<https://www.walmart.ca/en/ip/Golden-Temple-No-1-Fine-Durum-Atta-Flour-Blend-9kg/6000188765353>). Copyright 2024 by Smucker Foods of Canada Corp./Walmart. Middle

image from Verka Whole Wheat Flour Chakki Atta, n.d. (https://www.loblaws.ca/whole-wheat-flour-chakki-atta/p/21443700_EA) Copyright by Verka Food International Ltd./Loblaws Inc.

Right image from Sher White Whole Wheat, n.d. (https://www.realcanadiansuperstore.ca/white-whole-wheat/p/20869519_EA). Copyright by Brar Natural Flour Milling Inc./Loblaws Inc.

Appreciation or Appropriation?

Sometimes confused with cultural appreciation, cultural appropriation that hinges on idyllic generalizations is actually very harmful and perpetuates dichotomous thinking. These

romantic exaggerations are indicative of a much larger hermeneutical problem where India is either glamorized or vilified in the Western mind. Jones (2011) elaborates:

For many, the images of India seem to capture the imagination. One might entertain thoughts of a faraway land full of wise mystics with miraculous powers, beautiful architecture, quaint scenes of rural life, and throngs of devotees worshipping in temples. Of course, these images have led some to believe that this is all that India is, a land of gurus, spicy food, meditation, and yoga, while being completely blind to social inequities, bureaucratic corruption, and grinding poverty. On the other hand, there are those who only focus on the aforementioned problems of India, while failing to see the transcendent ideals that originated from the culture. (p. 3)

From an outsider's perspective, using an image of the Golden Temple on a consumer package could be seen as a form of homage to Sikh religious architecture. But this interpretation would be presumptuous, ignoring Sikh edicts of inviolability that prohibit the tasteless reproduction and commercialization of religious objects. Moreover, the clichéd depiction of the sacred landmark reflects the touristic approach with which Asian cultures are usually marketed and can thus be regarded as a form of colonialist exploitation (Ahmad, 2011; Kalb, 2011). And the package's ornamental pattern—although recodifying paisley as a European appropriation of Asian courtly production—prioritizes colonial visual ethnographies and overshadows the entwined histories of authentic Indo-Persian artistic traditions, offering only filtered images of Eastern visual material culture.⁴⁹ The trademark—despite its visual appeal—recycles a typographic aesthetic rooted in 18th–20th-century Indo-Orientalist whimsy, diverting from India's linguistic and typographic

⁴⁹ To reiterate: whereas Kashmiri shawl production reflects a sustained transcultural exchange between Persian and Kashmiri artisans during the Mughal Empire (i.e., composite Indian culture), European paisley emerged under colonial conditions that were largely extractive and commercialized, often decontextualizing the motif from its original sociocultural significance (Maskiell, 2002; Mohamed, 2023; Skarratt et al., 2018; Zutshi, 2009).

reality. To make matters worse, the English-only labelling and insufficient colour contrast of foreground and background elements pose unique challenges for non-English-speaking and vision-impaired consumers and, as a result, ignore the intra-group intersectionalities within Indian and Sikh communities. Rooted in romantic appropriations of Indian and Sikh culture are paternalistic attitudes toward its people (Borup, 2017). Colonization serves as a “framing condition for contemporary understandings of how ‘the other’ is used” (Borup, 2017, p. 17). Golden Temple Atta fails to authentically represent the Indian Canadian and, in particular, Sikh Canadian communities, instead re-presenting orientalist imaginings (Mehta, 2013).

Such pictorial tropes also serve as a catalyst for the very narratives that homogenize the Indo-Canadian diaspora. Quite often, the monolithic racialization of consumer packages precipitates congruent advertising. As shown in Figure 20, Golden Temple Atta’s placement in Superstore flyers commemorating Eid—the Islamic festival marking the end of Ramadan—and Diwali—the Hindu festival of lights—juxtaposes Sikh iconography with Islamic geometric patterns (left) and Hindu Rangoli designs (right). Although reflective of the pluralistic nature of South Asian communities, this decontextualized collage of Eastern religious markers conflates the notion of Sikhism with Islam and Hinduism. Breeding such misconceptions poses severe consequences for the Sikh diasporic community, particularly post-9/11 (Jhutti-Johal & Singh, 2021). Oddly enough, Real Canadian Superstore has yet to advertise Golden Temple Atta during popular Sikh holidays, including Vaisakhi, Bandi Chhor Divas, and Gurpurab. Consequently, Golden Temple Atta not only co-opts Indian and Sikh visual culture but also foists upon the Indian and Sikh diasporas non-negotiated projections of self-conception and self-interest.

Figure 20

Superstore Flyer Clippings, June 30–July 6 and October 13–19, 2022



Note. Left image adapted from “Eid Mubarak,” by Loblaw Companies Ltd., 2022, *Real Canadian Superstore Weekly Flyer* (<https://flyers.smartcanucks.ca/canada/real-canadian-superstore-on-flyer-june-30-to-july-6/all>). Copyright 2022 by Smucker Foods of Canada Corp./Real Canadian Superstore. Right image adapted from “Have a Super Diwali,” by Loblaw Companies Ltd., 2022, *Real Canadian Superstore Weekly Flyer* (<https://flyers.smartcanucks.ca/canada/real-canadian-superstore-on-flyer-october-13-to-19/all>). Copyright 2022 by Smucker Foods of Canada Corp./Real Canadian Superstore.

4.4 Conclusion

The preceding data analysis, which considers the positionalities of experts, practitioners, laypersons, and consumers, investigates the phenomenon and nuances of ethnicized and racialized consumer packaging and labelling. Pride of Arabia, for example, demonstrates how white graphic designers and marketers routinely juxtapose multimodal components to simulate Orientalist motifs, thereby functioning as dual agents that consume *and* reproduce ethnocentric ideologies through merchandising (Cormack & Cosgrave, 2018; Veresiu, 2023). Meanwhile, Wong Wing Fried Rice unpacks self-orientalist consumer packaging and labelling, exploring how Othered graphic designers and marketers frequently regurgitate Orientalist themes and how

this form of internalized racism can be perceptually evaluated as self-hatred, strategic self-Othering (aimed at navigating systems and mechanisms of oppression), or even reclamation. Golden Temple Atta, on the other hand, examines a more axiomatic occurrence of racism in graphic design, notably culturally appropriative consumer packaging and labelling. The analysis not only maps the deliberate reworkings of authentic cultural products but also demonstrates how these unauthorized reappropriations are sometimes re-exported back to the insider culture, trumping external perception within the context of insider/outsider articulation. Collectively, the three analyses not only reflect a symbiotic relationship but reaffirm the intersection of graphic design and race(ism). And while the primary objective of this chapter is to identify, deconstruct, and critique contemporary instances of racism in package and label design, thereby broadening scholarly understanding of the consumer package as a cultural interface, the overarching aim of this thesis is to explore anti-racist interventions that can address these concerns. As we navigate the subsequent chapter, I will examine existing anti-racist approaches in graphic design, introducing transversalism—the theoretical framework guiding this study—as a more robust method for decolonial praxis.

Chapter Five: Apropos Anti-Racist Graphic Design?

5.1 The Evolution of Critical Design Practice

Historically, design culture has prioritized *making* over theory, limiting design professionals' ability to engage with the broader social, cultural, political, and economic implications of their work (Grant & Fox, 1992). This trend persisted well into the 1990s, during which rapid technological developments often overshadowed efforts to educate young designers about the context of their practice (Grant & Fox, 1992; State of Black Design, n.d.; Xu, 2011). Designers “who possessed more than just a creative flair then began to apply their craft and knowledge to different—and bigger—fields,” such as anthropology (State of Black Design, n.d.; Xu, 2011). However, at the turn of the 21st century, designers began increasingly engaging in critical self-reflection and social awareness, questioning the ethical dimensions of their practice (Roberts, 2006). In recent years, design scholars *and* professionals alike have begun increasingly engaging with critical race theory, anti-racism, and, to a lesser extent, decolonial thought (Mercer & Moses, 2023). Consequently, there has been a marked increase in card decks, manifestos, guidebooks, field guides, and toolkits.

5.2 Influential Anti-Racist and Decolonial Works in Design

What follows is a summary of works that directly informed my investigation into operationalizing anti-racism in package and label design, or more broadly, graphic design.

Drawing on ideas from anthropology, psychology, communication studies, and cultural studies, *The Politics of Design: A (Not So) Global Manual for Visual Communication* (2016) by Reuben Pater is a compendium of useful information on the politics of visual communication. The manual is arranged according to the elements of design: language and typography, colour and contrast, image and photography, symbols and icons, and information graphics. Throughout

the book, Pater illustrates how designers, communication specialists, and image-makers perpetuate stereotypes, reinforce systemic bias, engage in cultural appropriation, prioritize a Eurocentric worldview, and disseminate dis-, mis-, and malinformation, contributing to miscommunication, conflict, and, in some cases, even violence. For example, in the section on language and typography, he discusses “ethnic typography” or typographic clichés, such as the “Chinatown” type (discussed in Chapter 4 of this paper), Neuland, Lithos, the ornamental typeface developed for the Africa Museum in the Netherlands, and Papyrus, and how these *stereotypes* can minoritize Othered cultures. At various points, he also offers practical advice on how designers can approach cultural work more meaningfully, for instance, encouraging non-Arab designers to better understand the cultural context of Arabic audiences before designing for and with them. Although *The Politics of Design* is not explicitly framed as an anti-racist or decolonial text, I have included it here because it engages with themes of ethnicity and race and decolonial thought. It also serves as a key inspiration for this thesis.

The Designer’s Critical Alphabet (2019) by Dr. Lesley-Ann Noel is an alphabetical card deck that introduces critical theory concepts to design students and professional designers. After assigning an interview activity in a research-intensive course on oceanic environments at Stanford University, Noel observed that most of her students had chosen to interview white men (Cohen, 2022). This pattern prompted her to develop the deck—not only to encourage more inclusive research methodologies among her students, but also to challenge the broader issue of institutional racism in the U.S. (Cohen, 2022). Each concept card is accompanied by a brief definition and a question(s) as it relates to design. The deck engages a broad spectrum of themes related to knowledge, ethics, power, identity, and social, cultural, and spatial contexts. Some of the concepts explored include assumptions, bias, critical race theory, linguistic hegemony,

marginalization, neo-colonialism, and xenophobia. The card deck also discusses liberatory methodologies, such as emancipatory research, transformative research, and unlearning oppression.

Critical Design Lab is “a multi-disciplinary and multi-institution arts and design collaborative” engaging in themes of “disability justice, critical design, intersectional feminist design theory, and crip techno-science to address thorny questions about accessibility” (Critical Design Lab, n.d.). In 2020, Critical Design Lab issued a collective statement, titled *Statement on Design Commitments to Abolishing White Supremacy*, calling attention to Black and Indigenous victims of white supremacy and police brutality, affirming solidarity with Black Lives Matter, and outlining commitments toward anti-racist critical design praxis. Because designers shape the world through what they create, and are therefore world-builders, Critical Design Lab argues that the only possible way forward is to create anti-racist worlds. The statement outlines eight key commitments: valuing human life over property and recognizing the built environment’s role in sustaining white supremacy; embracing direct action as a form of liberatory design; centering Black disabled leadership in disability justice; rejecting eugenic design logics and advocating for care-centered infrastructures; resisting depoliticized design solutions that uphold existing hierarchies; calling on all designers to practice explicit anti-racism and follow Black and Indigenous leadership; urging university communities to confront institutional complicity in racial violence; and committing to anti-ableist, anti-racist mutual aid and solidarity through concrete protocols for abolitionist design.

The Conscious Creative (2020) by Kelly Small is an actionable guidebook featuring a collection of over 100 “choose-what-works-for-you” prompts designed to help creatives achieve a more ethical practice and heightened consciousness within the capitalist framework (p. 2).

Small believes that “the notion of an inherently unethical industry with absolute ideals about goodness and badness simply does not exist,” and so rather than a “theoretical pursuit of extricating all creative work from the marketplace,” creatives should work to subvert from within (Small, 2020, pp. 12–14). The book is divided primarily into four sections: personal, economic, social, and environmental actions. The *personal* section emphasizes the importance of discovering and establishing core values, and of aligning one’s creative practice with them to achieve healthy self-care and inner fulfillment. The *economic* section builds on personal actions and provides guidance to creatives on how to better navigate the capitalist system—earning a living and supporting their career—without fully compromising their values. The *social* section examines the social context in which creatives work and offers guidance on social empathy, good citizenship, workplace ethics, cultural consultation, representation, and social justice. And finally, the *environmental* section outlines the importance of integrating climate action into creative praxis as part of a broader effort to sustain the planet and its creatures, emphasizing the deep interconnectedness of social and climate justice. Although Small’s book addresses ethics more broadly, it also engages with themes of racism, anti-racism, and decolonization.

Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Anti-Racist, Nonbinary Field Guide for Graphic Designers (2021) by Ellen Lupton, Farah Kafei, Jennifer Tobias, Josh A. Halstead, Kaleena Sales, Leslie Xia, and Valentina Vergara, is a hybrid field guide filled with the experiences, stories, and insights of creative professionals who have been historically excluded from mainstream discourse. Part *theory*, part *history*, and part *work*, *Extra Bold* uses a multifaceted theoretical framework to explore themes of feminism, racism, binary thinking, and disability as they relate to art and design. The first section explores a range of topics, including distinctions between equality and equity, Audre Lorde’s concept of the *mythical norm*, mansplaining,

embodied ways of knowing, and experimental and nonbinary typography. The subsequent section charts the history of art and design, highlights relevant contributions from historical figures, traces the evolution of the International Symbol of Access, and presents a broad timeline of queer history. The final section offers practical guidance, tools, and examples for navigating internships, career development, diversity hiring, and workplace challenges (including discrimination), as well as personal topics such as confidence, equity, mentoring, and activism. The book is enriched by interviews with both emerging and established design professionals.

Decolonizing Design (2023) by design anthropologist Dr. Elizabeth (Dori) Tunstall is a cultural justice guidebook aimed at transforming design institutions and practice through IBPOC inclusion. The book is organized into five chapters, based on how her “lived experiences have shaped what decolonizing design means” (p. 11). In Chapter 1, Tunstall defines decolonizing design as “putting Indigenous first in your decisions and actions,” including the importance of “co-creating conditions for Indigenous sovereignty” (p. 15). She introduces two theoretical frameworks that inform her work: the Settler-Native-Slave triad by Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang and Fernando Ortiz’s concept of transculturation. Reflecting on her experiences with Indigenous communities in the United States, Australia, and Canada, she highlights the importance of positionality, learning colonial histories, making real amends when mistakes are made, and designing objects that transmit liberatory joy. In Chapter 2, Tunstall critiques the European modernist project and its techno-colonial legacies. Drawing on her experience in Chicago’s tech sector, she identifies four steps for decolonizing design technology: (1) rejecting the colonial narrative that the modernist tech project benefits all, (2) recognizing the harm caused by the modernist tech project, (3) understanding the master-slave relationship between humans and technologies, and (4) reorienting design technology towards abolitionist principles and

Indigenous frameworks for relational ethics. In Chapter 3, Tunstall examines racist bias in the European modernist project and its harmful application outside Europe, particularly in the United States. She critiques the Bauhaus's Eurocentric notion of the "universal man" and its exclusion and oppression of diverse designers and communities, and utilizes the research of Drs. Kenneth Jones and Tema Okun to examine white supremacy cultural values. She also highlights a 2010 Fundamental Design Studio course co-developed with Dr. Norm Sheehan (Wiradjuri), which integrated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander principles into 2D Design, modelling a mediated approach that preserves redeemable elements of European modernism while centring Indigenous frameworks. Drawing from her experience as the first Black dean of design at OCAD University, Chapter 4 critiques the limitations of DEI initiatives, including "supertokenism" and the forced assimilation of diverse employees. Tunstall recounts leading OCAD University's first Indigenous and Black cluster hires, detailing various bureaucratic challenges and the considerable personal and professional strain involved. She offers actionable recommendations for fair hiring, including forming diverse search committees, writing calls that center the community members being sought, and evaluating candidates using non-traditional criteria such as practical experience and community engagement. The chapter stresses that meaningful decolonization requires sustained institutional commitment and structural change, not symbolic gestures. Chapter 5 addresses the material demands of decolonization, including the redistribution of resources, authority, and investment toward IBPOC communities. Tunstall recounts her 2019 XXII Triennale di Milano Symposium presentation, "'B*tch Better Have My Money': Reparations and Design's Values, Design, Experiences for BIPOC Communities," where she discussed OCAD University's Black Cluster Hire and called for \$600,000 annually to sustain it. Although the talk shifted the symposium's discourse, the funds were not raised,

highlighting the gap between performative allyship and real financial commitment to decolonial action. A distinctive element of this chapter is Tunstall’s hypothetical rent calculation—estimating what she owes as a Black woman on stolen Indigenous land and extrapolating it to settlers more broadly—to demonstrate the need for material compensation that supports Indigenous sovereignty, economic independence, and self-determination. She extends this logic to include reparations for Black and immigrant communities whose labour continues to be exploited by settler-colonial capitalism, arguing that decolonizing design requires sacrifice—a willingness to redistribute resources and reallocate budgets as a core design value. Even when debts feel immeasurably large, taking action—however small—begins to repair ongoing harms.

Racism Untaught (2023) by Dr. Terresa Moses and Lisa E. Mercer, is a book, curriculum, and toolkit that uses the design research process, or in other words, context, define, prototype, ideate, and impact, to (1) identify how design reinforces and perpetuates oppression, including racism, (2) critically assess existing anti-racist approaches, and (3) develop anti-oppressive interventions. The *Racism Untaught* framework is “iterative and allows for design-led interventions that are imperative in the design research process to prompt dialogue and critical analysis when working collaboratively toward a solution of responsible, equitable, and liberatory design” (Mercer & Moses, 2023, p. 6). *Racism Untaught* is especially relevant in that it includes discussions on racialized packaging and introduces the concept of “interim package design,” a reparative method of transitional package design meant for brands investing in racist currents (Mercer & Moses, 2023, p. 58).

5.3 Limitations and Gaps in the Literature

While these interventions meaningfully contribute to design ethics, anti-racism, and decolonial thought, they remain situated within, and at times conform to, the very systems they

seek to critique. This is not to diminish their significance, but to recognize and acknowledge the positionalities of the authors, who, based on their intersecting social identities, must navigate complex systems of privilege and oppression—and who, despite these constraints, choose to respond to an urgent ethical imperative within a field historically entangled in injustice. Moreover, a recurring theme throughout these texts is that institutions can be subverted, transformed, and decolonized from within.

Still, I am compelled to engage in further critique. As a student design researcher committed to anti-racism, I have a responsibility not to treat existing literature as beyond reproach. To do so would risk an uncritical solidarity—a stance that, while perhaps well-intentioned, may inadvertently reduce anti-racist and decolonial coalition-building to agreement rather than engagement, thereby flattening the diversity of anti-racist perspectives (Yuval-Davis, 2012a). Withholding critique, moreover, does a disservice to the authors themselves—many of whom acknowledge that anti-racism and decolonization are ongoing projects.

My stance is deeply informed by the coalition politics of scholar and social activist Dr. Bernice Reagon, who cautions against the allure of gathering only with individuals who share the same values and/or social identity(ies). These spaces, while they last, can be nurturing—allowing for personal reflection, identity formation, and collaboration (Reagon, 2023). They may also provide temporary refuge from oppression, functioning as sites of restoration, collective survival, and strategic mobilization (Reagon, 2023). But ultimately, they are isolated and offer insufficient preparation for engaging with the broader world (Reagon, 2023). Likening these spaces to a room, Reagon (2023) warns that eventually, “the door of the room will just be painted red and then when those who call the shots get ready to clean house, they have easy access to you” (p. 403). Consequently, “people invested in justice work must leave their ‘home’ spaces and venture

out into uncomfortable ‘coalition’ space” (Rubio, 2021, p. 14).

This leads to two issues in the design literature examined. First, there is an absence of an explicit dialogic framework. While the aforementioned works demonstrate the importance of dialogue—through personal narratives, interviews, collaborations, and co-designs—few, namely *Racism Untaught* and *Decolonizing Design*, offer a sustained or clearly articulated method for navigating the interpersonal and often uncomfortable dimensions of anti-racist design work. These skills are essential for sustaining meaningful change, and without such guidance, designers risk withdrawing from anti-racist work altogether. Second, despite these resources, there remains an insufficient level of engagement on the topic of racism, anti-racism, and decolonial thought across the design disciplines. In 2015, designer Becky Nasadowski observed:

Social design literature is often rooted in the premise that it is possible to provide clear guidelines or ready-made toolkits in order to achieve social justice. Despite designers in this field stating their commitment to social change, their awareness of sociopolitical dynamics and histories of conflict is often insufficient. As a field, social design remains oblivious to or unwilling to look to the useful lessons that can be learned from activists and scholars in other disciplines. Minimal scholarship currently exists that acknowledges race, class, and gender positioning in social design and what bearing it might have on power relationships throughout the design process. (p. 44)

Six years later, she reiterated this concern, critiquing design’s “insistence on the social as a *marketable* passion project that escapes history and socio-political relations” (Nasadowski, 2021, p. 160). And stated that “despite the increased interest for design students to make ‘socially aware’ work in recent years, designers and educators have often skipped along the surface,” reproducing a “hollow engagement” that encourages “a vague moral goodness” and ignores the

complex web of power relations Smith (1993) described as relations of ruling (Nasadowski, 2021, p. 160). Since Nasadowski's initial critique, a growing number of design works have emerged that engage with race, often in response to major cultural events, several of which have been discussed in this chapter. However, only a few, including the *Critical Design Lab Statement on Design Commitments to Abolishing White Supremacy, Decolonizing Design*, and *Racism Untaught*, even begin to provide a critical framework that moves beyond neoliberalism.⁵⁰

As demonstrated above, anti-racist design requires more than good intentions and toolkits and guidelines that are too often decontextualized or under-contextualized. Anti-racist design demands depth—that is, rigorous, situated knowledge anchored in the historical, material, and ideological conditions that shape the specific context(s) in which the designer is operating. It requires historical specificity, sustained political critique, and a direct confrontation with existing relations of power. Otherwise, decolonization risks becoming a metaphor (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

5.4 Towards a Transversalist Approach

Hence, this thesis proposes transversalism—the theoretical framework guiding this study—as a potential modality for anti-racist praxis within graphic design.

To reiterate, transversalism is a feminist, dialogic model of coalition politics “founded on an *evolutionary* [emphasis added] move into a post-capitalist network of democratically governed relatively autonomous alternative systems, and by the strong aspiration to build meaningful common (shared) ideological and political action orientations that transcend counterproductive divisions among transformative movements,” including anti-racism (Hosseini et al., 2017, p. 677; see also Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a). Transversalism “seeks an accommodative mode of social consciousness centered on a common ground for dialogue,

⁵⁰ Another excellent resource is *Design Justice: Community-Led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need* (2020) by design researcher and activist Sasha Costanza-Chock, though its scope extends beyond the parameters of this study.

collective learning, and concrete action among multiple progressive identities and ideological visions within the field of transformative movement praxes,” all while holding accountable the power asymmetries that exist within (Hosseini et al., 2017, p. 677; see also Yuval-Davis, 2012a). Whereas identity politics risks factionalism by assuming ideological homogeneity within single-axis and intersectional group identities, transversalism fosters solidarity across inter-and intra-group differences by recognizing the diversity within such formations (Yuval-Davis, 2012a; see also Baron, 2022; Satgar, 2019a). Transversalism is not confined to local or grassroots particularities. Instead, it aims to “consolidate political coalitions and ideological accommodation between social groups on both a class and a non-class basis” (Hosseini et al., 2017, p. 677). It does not, however, imply “uniformity, a general theory of social emancipation” or “the collapse of differences, autonomies and local identities” (Hosseini et al., 2017, p. 677).

This process requires participants to exercise a critical openness and exchange experiences and ideas “across a variety of local fields of resistance” (Hosseini et al., 2017, p. 677). Thus, transversalism mandates: (1) “recognition of diversity and difference within the field of transformative action,” (2) “dialogue and deliberation across differences,” (3) “systemic self-reflection,” (4) intentional engagement with the Other, (5) “acknowledgment of power relations between sources of resistance,” and (6) a “commitment to creating common agendas, proposals, and programs directed at gaining practical political leverage” (Hosseini et al., 2017, pp. 677–678).

And while transversalist policy resists prescriptive, reductive, totalizing, or universal approaches to anti-racism—emphasizing that it cannot be reduced to a fixed set of rules, a short-term exercise, a singular method, or a practice divorced from its social, political, or historical context—some degree of translation is nonetheless required for its operationalization within situated contexts, including graphic design.

Operationalizing Transversalism: Prompts for Anti-Racist Design Practice

Outlined below are a series of prompts, grounded in transversalist principles, to help graphic designers navigate ethnicity and race in packaging and labelling design and operationalize anti-racism in their praxis.

1. **“Decolonization is not a metaphor” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1).** Designers should take care not to overlook Indigenous sovereignty or the essential project of land repatriation (Tunstall, 2023). To effectively confront racism, we must remain attentive to how settler colonialism continues to shape the land on which we work. What is your relationship to the land? Do you know the territory where you live and work? Are you aware of the Indigenous peoples connected to that land? Are you familiar with their cultures, histories, and ongoing struggles? How might you practice meaningful allyship? Online tools such as Native Land Digital can help identify the traditional, treaty, or unceded territories where you live and work.
2. **Interrogate your own positionality and assumptions about ethnicity and race.** How do your social identities and lived experiences shape your understanding (of these concepts)? What assumptions or biases might you hold? What are some of the steps you can take to confront and unlearn these biases? And how might that process shape your design practice going forward?
3. **Interrogate the commodification of ethnicity and race in the marketplace.**
4. **Determine whether incorporating ethnic or racial ideologies into consumer packaging is even necessary, and if so, for whom, by whom, and under what conditions.** What are the social, cultural, political, and economic implications for the individuals or groups whose ethnicity or race is being invoked?

5. **Critically examine how and why you have been assigned this task and whether you should take it on.** Was this project assigned to position the brand within a dominant or multicultural market? What is your racial or cultural proximity to the social identity/ies being represented? Is the client using your identity and involvement to make the project seem more “authentic” or neutral? Is this project extractive?
6. **Critically evaluate the brief.** Is it problematic? What assumptions or stereotypes are being made about race, ethnicity, or culture? Does the brief center certain perspectives while excluding others? Does it risk commodification, tokenism, or harm? What are the potential impacts if executed as written? If concerns arise, consider: (1) raising the issue, (2) engaging in dialogue with the client, (3) assessing whether they are willing to (un)learn and shift direction, and (4) collaborating only if that shift is possible, ethical, and safe for you. If the client refuses to acknowledge problematic elements in the brief, reflect on your ethical responsibilities as an anti-racist designer. You may choose to: (1) withdraw from the project, (2) document your concerns to protect yourself, (3) provide the client with educational resources, (4) refer them to a cultural consultant or agency, or (5) involve a trusted intermediary (e.g., creative director).
7. **Acknowledge when a project falls outside your area of expertise.** Consider stepping back and referring the project to, or co-creating with, associated community members. Your role may shift from “lead creator” to “facilitator” or “amplifier,” and that’s okay, because these efforts help to reallocate resources and opportunities in a just manner (i.e., redistributive justice).
8. **Evaluate the client’s business ethics, social responsibility, stakeholder management, cultural competence, and governance.** To what extent does the client actively engage

with and empower the community whose ethnic, racial, or cultural identity/ies are represented or referenced in the design? Have they previously engaged in unethical behaviour, and if so, what steps have they taken, if any, to repair the harm caused to the affected community/ies? Are they connected to a parent organization with a history of unethical conduct?

9. **Consider the broader market implications of your assignment.** Is the brand you are designing for part of a smaller, IBPOC-owned/led business? If not, how might your work impact the brand awareness and survival of smaller, IBPOC-owned/led businesses?
10. **Whether you are working in-house or within a design agency, strive to collaborate across disciplines and hierarchies, both within and outside creative teams, from concept development to final production.** If you're working freelance, don't let that limit you. Seek opportunities to collaborate with cultural stakeholders to maintain accountability. Throughout the process, discuss whether and how textual and visual elements in your design reinforce or subvert ethnic and racial stereotypes.
11. **"Nothing about us without us."** Refrain from designing consumer packages that incorporate ethnic and racial ideologies or cultural elements without the sustained and meaningful involvement of individuals from associated communities. Facilitate dialogue, collaborative learning, and the co-creation of solutions and recommendations, all while respecting the self-determination, agency, and expertise of cultural stakeholders.
12. **Consult with cultural stakeholders, including cultural consultants and associated community members, not as static representatives of an ethnic or racial identity to be mined for authenticity, but as multidimensional participants with situated knowledge and agency—that is, the right to question, contest, and reshape the**

design process on their own terms, timelines, and modes of deliberation (Costanza-Chock, 2020; Tunstall, 2023).

13. **Avoid relying on visual shorthand, such as cultural stereotypes in imagery or typography.** While stereotypes are highly charged and widely communicable, they tend to flatten ethnic and racial diversity (Giampietro, 2004; Lippmann, 1997; Pater, 2016; Wachendorff, 2018; Walker, 1996). Instead, research and engage in meaningful dialogue with cultural stakeholders, including cultural consultants and associated community members, to co-create new, hybrid expressions that transcend essentialist imagery.
14. **Remain open to constructive feedback, especially when cultural stakeholders identify elements in the design that may be harmful or problematic.** Treat these moments as opportunities to reflect on personal assumptions and biases and take meaningful steps toward accountability and repair. Revise the design in ongoing dialogue with the appropriate cultural stakeholders.
15. **Resist social and ideological enclaves.** While these spaces can be nurturing, affirming, and healing, meaningful anti-racist design work requires stepping beyond comfort zones and echo chambers (Reagon, 2023; Rubio, 2021).
16. **The representation of ethnic and racial ideologies in media is fraught.** Try not to shy away from contradiction and discomfort when engaging with diverse perspectives, as they can serve as generative opportunities for (un)learning, meaningful (re)design, and building solidarity (Rubio, 2021). In the words of Reagon (2023), “most of the time you feel threatened to the core, and if you don’t, you’re not really doing no coalescing” (p. 401).
17. **Ensure that the cultural consultants and associated community members you co-create with are properly credited and compensated for their time, labour, and**

expertise. If you are part of a design agency, advocate for transparent and equitable compensation—that is, clear, fair, and upfront payment terms—and credit for all cultural collaborators.

5.5. Conclusion

The preceding chapter evaluates a range of existing anti-racist and decolonial resources in the field of design, including *The Politics of Design* (2016), *The Designer's Critical Alphabet* (2019), Critical Design Lab's *Statement on Design Commitments to Abolishing White Supremacy* (2020), *Conscious Creative* (2020), *Extra Bold* (2021), *Decolonizing Design* (2023), and *Racism Untaught* (2023). Collectively, these works contribute meaningfully to design justice by centring the experiences of historically marginalized designers and communities and engaging with Othered epistemologies. However, some nonetheless remain, at times, constrained by—and even inadvertently reproduce—the very systems of power they seek to critique. For example, several authors advocate subverting and decolonizing oppressive structures from within, even as they acknowledge the enduring harms those structures perpetuate, such as obstructive bureaucratic procedures, performative allyship, and forced assimilation. While this tension illustrates the complexity of anti-racist and decolonial practice, it stops short of fully embracing more liberatory and pluralistic methodologies that accommodate both reformist and abolitionist orientations.

Furthermore, although many works emphasize the importance of dialogue, only a few—namely, *Decolonizing Design* and *Racism Untaught*—offer concrete frameworks for navigating the interpersonal dimensions of anti-racist and decolonial design work. Thus, despite a growing body of literature, there remains a paucity of design research that rigorously interrogates racism or offers more transformative, contextually grounded methodologies that move beyond reformist

approaches. As a result, designers are left with limited guidance beyond generalized principles. To address this gap, Chapter 5 introduces transversalism—a feminist, dialogic framework that emphasizes critical self-reflexivity and cross-boundary collaboration—to develop a series of prompts to help graphic designers engage more ethically with multicultural marketing and better operationalize anti-racism in their practice.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

As this thesis demonstrates, racism persists not only in the form of overt discrimination but in the material-discursive space of the marketplace, where its logic is neutralized and therefore normalized. Graphic designers, whether intentionally or not, routinely apply the elements and principles of visual design to encode consumer packages with ethnocentric and racist ideologies and messages that, once circulated, are internalized by consumers and recursively projected into the social context, thereby perpetuating “various levels of oppression: individual beliefs, agentic action, institutional, and cultural” (Mercer & Moses, 2023, p. 6; see also Rounds, 2023; Veresiu, 2023). Some examples discussed in this paper include:

1. *Orientalism*: When Western graphic designers and/or marketers design consumer packages that exoticize, essentialize, and therefore patronize the East (McClintock, 1995; Rosenblatt, 2009; Said, 1979).
2. *Self-Orientalism*: When graphic designers and/or marketers of Eastern descent design consumer packages that reproduce Orientalist tropes (Kobayashi et al., 2019). Self-orientalism can be perceptually evaluated as either internalized racism, strategic self-Othering (aimed at navigating systems and mechanisms of oppression), or even reclamation (Kano, 1997; Mazarella, 2003; Ong, 1999).
3. *Cultural Appropriation*: When graphic designers and/or marketers design consumer packages that co-opt elements from Othered social or ethnic groups (Kennedy & Makkar, 2020; Young, 2005).
4. *Pizza Effect*: When graphic designers and/or marketers design consumer packages that co-opt elements from Othered social or ethnic groups in order to gain market share within the very communities whose visual material culture they are appropriating (Arya, 2021;

Bharati, 1970; Borup, 2017; Elliott, 2008).

And while the primary objective of this study is to investigate racism in package and label design, thereby broadening scholarly and professional understanding of the consumer package as a cultural interface, the overarching aim of this thesis is to explore anti-racist interventions that can address these concerns.

Accordingly, Chapter 5 surveyed existing anti-racist interventions and decolonial efforts within the field of design and marketing, including card decks (Noel, 2019), manifestos (Critical Design Lab, 2020), guidebooks (Small, 2020; Tunstall, 2023), field guides (Lupton et al., 2021), and toolkits (Mercer & Moses, 2023). While these initiatives play an essential role in understanding how racial and ethnic injustices are perpetuated by design(ers) and provide useful strategies for critical self-awareness, they are sometimes prescriptive and operate “within a register of reformist inquiry” (Rubio, 2021, p. 14). In problematizing the relationship between the “how-to anti-racisms” and multiracial coalition, Rubio (2021) states, “‘settling’ anti-racism into a repertoire of predetermined steps,” “constrains the contradiction, anger, and uncertainty that is fundamental to forging the radical accountability central to abolitionist work” (p. 1). Moreover, “how-to anti-racism” risks reproducing neoliberal logics—such as tokenism—by negotiating ethnic-racial representation within a colonial-capitalist framework. It asks: “How can we do a bit ‘better’ within structures that we know aren’t working?” (Rubio, 2021, p. 14). But again, that is not to say that this genre is without merit or that it opposes the struggles that challenge the material and ideological structures underlying racism (Rubio, 2021). Rather, it builds upon emerging critiques of over-systematized approaches and formulaic paradigms, necessitating a renewed approach for sustained anti-racist design practice. As a result, Chapter 5 introduces transversal cosmopolitanism—the very modality outlined by the methodological

component of this study—as a more robust framework for decolonial praxis.

To summarize, transversalism is a feminist, dialogic model of coalition politics that emphasizes solidarity across inter-and intra-group differences, while holding accountable the power asymmetries within these dynamics, in pursuit of transformative social change, including anti-racism (Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a). Unlike models grounded in identity politics, transversalism does not require collocutors to self-decentre to centre others, which can result in an uncritical solidarity, but instead requires them to pivot the centre (Barkley-Brown, 1989; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a). It affirms that solidarity work is inherently fraught and thus practitioners should not shy away from the generative contradictions inherent in meaningful coalition work (Brunt, 1990; Rubio, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a).⁵¹ This process requires participants to exercise a “critical openness” and make “systematic attempts to co-create common(ing) platforms for transformative perspectives, plans, and praxes” (Gills & Hosseini, 2021, p. 188). Moreover, transversalism moves beyond localized, siloed struggles, reorienting anti-racist practice toward an internationalist configuration that fosters cross-border solidarity and interconnectedness (Yuval-Davis, 2012a). This stands in contrast to more domesticated forms of anti-racism, shaped by individualism and moralism, which often ignore the transnational dimensions of racism as well as the cultural particularities, solidarities, and struggles that exist outside of them (Rubio, 2021). Thus, transversalism mandates (Gills & Hosseini, 2021):

1. Recognition of difference and the multiplicity of identities and experiences
2. Engagement in cross-difference dialogue
3. Self-reflexivity

⁵¹ While Rubio (2021) does not explicitly use the term “transversalism,” their emphasis on the importance of generative conversations to revolutionary work aligns closely with the core principles of transversalist theory.

4. Intentional openness to Other(ed) ontologies
5. Critical awareness of intersecting power relations
6. Commitment to creating inclusive solidarities through the hybridization of ideas and actions

In doing so, transversalism can help to avoid what Chicana feminist Elizabeth Martínez called “Oppression Olympics,” as well as tokenism, essentialism, political fragmentation, and the epistemic overload of marginalized agents (Davis & Martínez, 1994; Gills & Hosseini, 2021; Yuval-Davis, 2012a; Yuval-Davis, 2012b).

But of particular relevance to this study’s aims, transversalist policy acknowledges its own limits of applicability. It neither attempts nor claims to offer an all-encompassing anti-racist framework and is therefore not dogmatic. To borrow from Yuval-Davis (2012a), transversal politics are not always possible, as the positionalities and material interests of interlocutors are not always reconcilable, although, as Pettman (1992) points out, “there are almost always possibilities for congenial or at least tolerable personal, social and political engagements” (p. 157). It is this openness that enables transversalists to remain vigilant to the conditions under which—and when—reconfiguration is necessary (Yuval-Davis, 2012).

And while transversalist policy resists prescriptive, reductive, totalizing, or universal approaches to anti-racism—emphasizing that it cannot be reduced to a fixed set of rules, a short-term exercise, a singular method, or a practice divorced from its social, political, or historical context—some degree of translation is nonetheless required for its operationalization within situated contexts, including graphic design. To that end, Chapter 5 concluded with a series of prompts, grounded in transversalist principles, to help graphic designers navigate ethnicity and race in package and label design and operationalize anti-racism in their praxis.

To start with, graphic designers are highly encouraged to exercise critical reflexivity by interrogating their positionality and assumptions about ethnicity and race, as well as the commodifying logics of these categories within the marketplace, and to determine whether the incorporation of ethnic or racial ideologies in consumer packaging is even necessary, and if so, for whom, by whom, and under what conditions.

Before committing to a project, graphic designers are advised to critically evaluate the brief and the client's cultural competence, business ethics, social responsibility, stakeholder management, and governance. In addition, they should consider reflecting on their own motivations and the broader market implications of their involvement, particularly in relation to smaller, IBPOC-owned/led businesses. If the brief proposes the use of ethnic, racial, or cultural ideologies or elements in ways that are ethnocentric, racist, or appropriative, graphic designers should raise their concerns and, where appropriate, engage the client in critical dialogue to reassess the project's direction, and if meaningful change is not possible, reconsider their participation. Designers should also recognize when a project falls outside their own positionality or lived experience, and advocate for collaboration with or redirection to more appropriately positioned practitioners.

If and once the brief is approved and creative teams assembled, graphic designers are encouraged to actively collaborate across disciplines and hierarchies to determine whether the textual and visual components of assets reinforce or subvert ethnic and racial stereotypes, thereby maintaining mutual accountability. At the same time, graphic designers are invited to engage in respectful and responsive dialogue with cultural stakeholders, approaching them not as fixed representatives but as multidimensional participants with situated knowledge and agency, who possess the right to question, contest, and reshape the design process on their own terms,

timelines, and modes of deliberation. For example, rather than relying on visual and typographic tropes, designers can collaborate with cultural stakeholders to incorporate relevant cultural iconographies or co-create new, hybrid expressions that move beyond static representations of marginalized groups. Throughout this process, graphic designers should be careful not to shy away from the generative contradictions inherent in anti-racist work, while taking meaningful steps towards accountability and repair. And finally, graphic designers should work to ensure that cultural stakeholders are properly credited and compensated for their time, labour, and expertise.

As the nature of racism continues to shift, so too does our understanding of anti-racism and decolonization. As previously noted, not all ideas are enduring and therefore, subject to obsolescence. Other ideas require gestation periods and are improved upon over time. Some ideas that were once considered innovative are now subject to critique and problematization. While the prompts outlined in Chapter Five offer a useful entry point for graphic designers to begin incorporating transversalism as a modality for anti-racist practice, they are not intended to serve as a definitive formula for success. Nor does it claim to resolve the contradictions that underlie anti-racist work. Rather, they constitute an iterative framework that invites reflection, critique, negotiation, rearticulation, and reconfiguration in response to shifting cultural, social, political, economic, and historical contexts. Indeed, anti-racism is not a process that can be completed or perfected, but an ongoing, reflexive, and relational process that requires graphic designers to remain attentive to the material and ideological terrain of visual culture.

But do these prompts—despite my best intentions—risk becoming yet another iteration of the *many* ethical frameworks within the creative industries that Small (2020) describes as inflexible, inaccessible, and difficult to incorporate? Or do they, however imperfect, constitute

what philosopher Anthony Grayling referred to as “bottom-up” ethics, “which rests on individuals being conscious of their involvement in society and the impact they have on it” (Roberts, 2006, p. 36)? And can this degree of labour exist meaningfully in an industry, within a market-oriented, capitalist system that is profit-driven, fast-paced, and often hierarchical? Or does it narrow the radical scope of transversalism, perpetuating the very neoliberal logic that Esposito (2011) and Rubio (2021) critique?

Although transversalism creates space for graphic designers to contest, refuse, or withdraw from projects that perpetuate harm—a political latitude often discouraged or denied by reformist frameworks—graphic designers remain entangled within a colonial capitalist system that continues to commodify racial and ethnic identities. This contradiction is indicative of a growing sense of disillusionment within the field, as practitioners increasingly confront the limits of existing anti-racist modalities (Tunstall, 2023). After all, when the structures to which transformative or radical frameworks are applied co-opt or thwart these efforts, they impose an untenable burden on those striving to effect meaningful change.

Thus, future research could investigate whether and how transversalism functions as an anti-racist approach across diverse design contexts, including package and label design, as a preliminary step towards evaluating its potential to more radically challenge the constraints imposed by market logics.

In the words of Brown (2018), advertising messages, whether creative or directional, “influence consumers either to actualize meanings from their own lived experience or to indulge fantasies of a far-fetched reality” (p. 859). Advertisers—graphic designers included—“must be aware of their role as cultural producers who create and disseminate messages that not only shape experiences, but also reproduce insidious and harmful ideologies” (Brown, 2018, p. 859).

In a political climate where the racialized Other is increasingly dehumanized, it is vital for graphic designers to consider the broader implications of their creative praxis, so as not to perpetuate historical patterns of oppression, instead embracing their role as agents of social change.

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