

# Professors: Elon Musk's Cybertruck reminiscent of apartheid-enforcing vehicle in South Africa

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COLLEGE FIX STAFF

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*‘An iconic global symbol of apartheid oppression’*

A pair of Rice University professors say Elon Musk’s Tesla Cybertruck is reminiscent of a vehicle that “patrolled and terrorized” black townships in apartheid South Africa.

As such, Professors Vivian Chenxue Lu and Nana Osei-Opare **write in *Slate*** that the Cybertruck’s similarities to the Casspir military vehicle (*pictured, below*) — intentional or not — “blur the boundaries between the battlefield and the public street.”

“[T]he Cybertruck’s harsh, sharp edges remind us [...] of something from the past: the larger armored personnel vehicles that patrolled streets throughout Musk’s youth in apartheid South Africa,” the professors write.

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Lu and Osei-Opare do their very best to link Musk to the Casspir, noting he “likely” would have seen the vehicle in his youth ... around the time of the Soweto uprising.

However, Musk never had to travel in the Casspir, as he departed South Africa a year before he could be conscripted into the South African Defence Force.

Still, the Casspir was used by the United States military during the second Gulf War and invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan, and is now utilized by various police departments in the U.S.

Lu and Osei-Opare note the Casspir was part of the “spectacular use of force” shown in Ferguson, Missouri during Black Lives Matter protests.



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militarism” of American pop culture:

Its marketing, for example, explicitly taps into the current apocalyptic visions pervading both right- and left-wing political imaginaries—from climate disaster to nuclear, civil, and class warfare. Heralded as being “built for any planet,” it showcases a Bioweapon Defense Mode and a “built-in hospital grade HEPA filter” that “helps provide protection from 99.97% of airborne particles.” One third-party Tesla modification company, aimed at civilian and government clients, sells Cybertruck upgrades so it can run on jet fuel, diesel, biodiesel, and electricity.

The idea that a Cybertruck could become an artillery vehicle is not just hypothetical. Unsanctioned by Tesla, various users, ranging from a YouTuber to Chechen forces fighting for Russia in Ukraine, have modified a Cybertruck by mounting machine guns to its bed, turning it into a lightly armored weaponized machine.



“Whether or not Musk or the Cybertruck’s designers made a conscious decision to draw inspiration from the Casspir,” the authors conclude, the vehicle’s “pseudo-futuristic vision is militaristic, stainless-steel fortified, masculinist, individualistic, and unforgiving.

“Whether through Casspirs or the Cybertruck, apartheid’s militarized, cultural, and psychological legacy roams our streets.”

According to her faculty page, Lu’s (*pictured*) work focuses on the “cultural politics of profit, transnational commerce, ethnonationalism, and diaspora.”

Osei-Opare has written about “black radicals’ relationship to Marxist-Leninism,” “labor and labor agitation in postcolonial Africa,” and “the insertion of white supremacy and racism as an analytical category into the Cold War theoretical paradigm.”

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MAIN IMAGE & CAPTION CREDIT: A Cybertruck is parked in a deserted area; Cybertruck/X. INTERIOR IMAGES: Rice University, *Slate*/X

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