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# From Beadwork to Africanfuturism: Exploring MaXhosa Africa's SS22 Collection

by

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## SUMMARY

| | |
|---|---|
| Title of dissertation | From Beadwork to Africanfuturism: An Exploration of MaXhosa Africa's SS22 Collection |
| Name of student | Hlengiwe Mnguni |
| Supervisor | Dr Adéle Adendorff |
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The study investigates Africanfuturism within the broader framework of Afrofuturism through the SS22 collection of MaXhosa Africa to offer a view of the future of Africa by embracing its past. As a secondary aim, the study considers these pieces as social designs and concludes their ability to shape Africanity, inspire cultural imaginations, and effect transformation. I follow Bruce Cadle's (2020, 74) view that Afrofuturism, in its current understanding, needs to be revised to fit the needs of the present by considering the futures that merge with the present instead of just focusing on the future imaginings. With what he has termed Afro-now-ism, Cadle (2020, 81) seeks to offer a "more African-voiced, more derived-from-an-African-identity, more representative solution to the sweeping Afrofuturist/Afrofuturism mentality that is being popularised in media of every sort". I explore Cadle's (2020, 67) correlation between Afrofuturism, cultural significance, and social design, what he calls Afro-now-ism, through an analysis of MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection. The analyses include the campaign video accompanying the collection and the garments, focusing on the designer's alliance with the past (his indebtedness to traditional isiXhosa design elements and practices) and the future-present (his adoption of digital design processes and the future-oriented adaptation of conventional isiXhosa beadwork).



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# KEY TERMS

Afrofuturism

Africanfuturism

Afro-now-ism

Protopian

Afrocentric

Afropolitan

Utopian

Science Fiction (SF)

Afro Luxe

Counter-memory

Afrodiaspora

Technology

Computer aided design (CAD)



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"Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let your hands not be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well."
Ecclesiastes 11:6 (NIV)

I began this journey with that Word and truly, the journey outweighs the destination. Thank you Lord Jesus.

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# CHAPTER ONE

# INTRODUCTION

Figure 1: Laduma Ngxokolo, MaXhosa Africa SS 22/23 Collection, 2021 (maxhosa.africa 2021)

## 1.1 Introduction

The contemporary South African fashion brand that encourages consumers worldwide to engage with African traditions of thought, history, philosophy, and futurity is MaXhosa Africa. This local luxury knitwear brand was founded in 2012 by the fashion designer Laduma Ngxokolo (maxhosa.africa 2021). MaXhosa Africa is culturally significant for positioning African origin in its designer items as premium and desirable – a historically suppressed position. Today, MaXhosa Africa is known as a brand that draws



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on Africa's rich design heritage as its designs successfully shape history in a way that may adequately address the future. Ngxokolo's design draws on traditional beadwork practices to produce clothing designs that beckon African futurity rooted in technological advancement. Therefore, this study explores MaXhosa's reinterpretation and remediation of conventional African beadwork in his SS 22/23 fashion collection titled *We are the ones they've been waiting for* (2021). The collection's title hints at the brand's suggestion that the current generation of Africans is fulfilling dreams and visions of justice and peace while imparting traditions proffered by their ancestors as they usher Africa into the future. But MaXhosa Africa's straddling of the past and the future is far more evident than the title suggests – a sentiment born during Ngxokolo's final year of study in 2011 with the range showcased in Johannesburg, *The colourful world of the Xhosa culture.*[1] The research for this debut project explored how traditional Xhosa beadwork may be reinterpreted in a contemporary South African setting for Xhosa initiates to wear as part of their initiation process. Traditionally, during these Xhosa initiation rites, the graduate initiates *(amakrwala)* return from the mountain wearing westernised clothing (formal pants, hats, and blazers) to symbolise their transition from boyhood to manhood (De La Harpe, De La Harpe, and Derwent 2001). For Ngxokolo, the lack of Xhosa attire, in this instance, seemed out of place. Thus, along with the research component, Ngxokolo designed clothing to address this gap, opening up a space for Xhosa traditions and practices in contemporary fashion design markets.

Traditionally, through patterns and the style of wear, beadwork items are important visual markers of life stages, social roles and positions within various South African tribes, creating communal identities and politico-religious units (De La Harpe et al. 2001; Nettleton 2018). For example, Ndebele women use the beads to make dolls, bangles, and necklaces that display their marital status, while Zulu and Xhosa traditional healers are identifiable by their intricately beaded headdresses of coordinated black, white and red strings of beads (De La Harpe et al. 2001, 34, 52–53). Although taking inspiration from cultural and historical African roots, MaXhosa Africa also uses computer-aided

[1] Ngxokolo completed his BTech degree in Textile Design and Technology in 2011 at the Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth (TEDx Talks 2019).



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design (CAD)[2] to finalise the clothing designs. The creative process that MaXhosa Africa implements entails selecting traditional isiXhosa beadwork to inspire new knitwear designs[3]. The inspiration soon translates into drawn patterns on paper, and a specialist digitises the patterns to finalise the designs (TEDx Talks 2019). The working process is first to observe past beadwork patterns, which are then translated into a new design on paper and finally captured by CAD software to produce partially machine-manufactured garments. The analogue is translated into digital in this process, adapting a traditional creative approach to the modernised contemporary. Considered from an Africanfuturist perspective, this process is not an erasure nor the succession of the traditional, but rather an expansion thereof to adapt to the culture of fashion of the twenty-first century (Paulicelli 2022, 475). According to Sinclair (2015, 672), CAD also speeds up the design process, establishing a global standard for visual communication to different parts of the fashion production, manufacturing, and marketing strategy. MaXhosa Africa's marketing strategy is also adapted to the impact of technology with a strong presence on social media.

As established through the working process, it can be suggested that MaXhosa Africa's reinvention of local traditions in ways fit for the future takes ownership of the representation of black history in a contemporary context. In this regard, the brand links with Afrofuturism's basic tenets, described by British-Ghanaian theorist Kodwo Eshun (2003, 287) as "the war of countermemory". By shifting focus from the past to the future, Afrofuturism extends counter-memory as an alternative to the historical ideals that shaped the Enlightenment,[4] including the notion that only white people were pioneers of

[2] CAD refers to the use of computer technology and graphics equipment such as Coreldraw, Photoshop, and Vectorworks along with other design programmes to help designers and engineers achieve the goal of automatic production (Chen 2016, 175–176).
[3] Ngxokolo's chosen medium of knitwear shares similarities with the production of isiXhosa beadwork. The process of sewing the beads can be compared to knitting as the techniques of stitching are similar (Richards 2015, 123 -124). The process of passing fibres over and under each other and building upon existing rows of beads is comparable to the brick stitch beadwork technique where beads are passed over and under on different threads (Richards 2015, 123 - 124). Ngxokolo has also expressed how both mediums are detail oriented and time consuming (Richards 2015, 123 - 124).
[4] The Age of Reason or the Enlightenment was an intellectual and philosophical movement from the seventeenth to eighteenth century in Europe led by influential philosophers such as Immanuel Kant and David Hume (Kant 1784; Habermas 1981, 25). The movement, which has influenced and informed modern thought, encouraged a paradigm shift from superstition and religious authority to ideals such as scientific reasoning, rationalism, individualism and freedom (Habermas 1981, 26). According to Habermas (1981,



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civilisation, positioning black people as examples of backwardness[5] (Eshun 2003, 289). African Americans were dehumanised, systematically banned and suppressed from expressing aspects of African culture during slavery (Amoah 2020, 21; Eshun, 2003, 287–288). The same strategy of banning and suppressing the expression of African culture and tradition was applied by the apartheid government[6] in South Africa using Christianity, commerce and civilisation[7] (Nettleton 2017). African Americans' contribution to building modern America has also been disregarded (Dery 1994, 181). Afrofuturism was born to acknowledge African Americans' historical presence in America (Eshun 2003, 287–288). As seventeenth-century philosophers asserted, black people were without history and

26), the core tenet of rationalist theory is that reality is essentially rational and that by making the proper deductions, an individual could achieve knowledge of self, others, and the world. “"Have courage to use your own reason!” – that is the motto of enlightenment” (Kant, 1784).

[5] Sonja Eismann (2019, 67) refers to seminal postcolonial and anticolonial writers such as Homi. K Bhabha and Frantz Fanon in alignment with this view. The Eurocentric worldview held that black people on the continent of Africa were living in the “projective past” that is, being late to modernise (Eismann 2019, 67). Achille Mbembe in his 2015 talk “Decolonizing knowledge and the question of the archive,” also pointed to the concept of time colonialism, stating that “Colonization itself was a negation of time.” Incapable of change and creation, black people were relegated to not having any future (Eismann 2019, 67). Journalist Steven W. Trasher (Eismann 2019, 68) also asserts that Afrofuturism emancipates black people from various limitations including the impression that in the past black slaves did not rebel, in the present black people in the United States are passive people who are beaten up and shot by police without fighting back and, and that in the future, black people simply do not exist.

[6] The intersection of colonialism, civilisation and commerce worked efficiently for colonial South Africa to be integrated into the world capitalist economy. Integration into the world capitalist economy called for the displacement of the bartering system with the cash economy.

Increasing cash circulation during the burgeoning cash economy era in colonial South Africa extended to the apartheid era. According to Nettleton (2017), this phenomenon also manifested in the dressing requirements of black migrant labourers in the cities by the apartheid government (see footnote 46). Other means of increasing cash circulation included embellishing aspects of ethnic culture and tradition and constructing collective group identities. According to Rovine (2015, 193), isiXhosa wear, especially skirts, were produced in large quantities in centers funded by the Xhosa Development Company (XDC) intended for commercial outlets such as tourist centers, ethnic boutiques and craft outlets whose primary clientele was white in the Transkei (Rovine 2015, 193). Clothing choices would later also become a resistance strategy amongst apartheid victims and opposers as Nelson Mandela wore traditional Xhosa regalia at the 1963 Rivonia Trial, of which the apartheid government banned until his time in 1990 (Rovine 2015, 194).

[7] Scottish Christian missionary David Livingstone’s ideas of Christianity, commerce and civilisation were a framework upon which he sought the development of Africa (Nkomazana 1998). In this paradigm, Christianity was to provide principles for moral guidance while legitimate commerce and civilisation through education and literacy would encourage Africans to trade in equality with Europeans (Nkomazana 1998, 44). This idea has been criticised for laying the foundation for European colonisation and imperialism in Africa (Nkomazana 1998, 44). Nkomazana (1998, 44 - 48) argues that Livingstone’s intention was to alleviate the suffering of Africans from inhumane European and Arab Swahili slave trade systems to fair commercial activity and good government guided by Christian principles and not to exploit human rights as colonialists and imperialists eventually perpetrated (Nkomazana 1998, 44 - 48).



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any noteworthy achievements (Washington 2019, 11).[8] Counter-memory entails telling history from an alternative perspective. In the case of Afrofuturism, history is offered through an African American lens. Working from this angle implies they have indeed been present during the Age of Reason. African Americans have been crucial to the development of the West despite their exclusion from the hegemonic narrative (Washington 2019, 11).

Cultural critic and theorist Mark Dery coined Afrofuturism in 1994 (Celnik, 2019). The main principle of Afrofuturism is founded on the notion that black people need constructive images of a future in which they partake as a way forward. Afrocentric[9] reimaginations can be presented in various forms, such as fine art, films, music, and videos. According to Nicolas Celnik (2019), the most popular inclination of Afrofuturism is a colourful aesthetic that mixes ethnic themes and pioneering technology. The mix of Ndebele hand-painted walls with modern high-rise glass walls architecture and costume designs of Ruth Carter in the 2018 film *Black Panther* attest to this observation (Becker 2019, 12–13). Postdoctoral research fellow Danielle Becker (2019, 12–13) argues that even the cultural practices and religious rituals performed in the film align with modernity and are a technology often depicted in science fiction (SF). As a metaphysical engagement, their speaking to the ancestors does shift time and place (Becker 2019, 12–13). Afrofuturism as a style has evolved into a coherent mode, both aesthetically and in terms of its political mission (Yaszek 2006, 47). Black speculative fiction writer and theorist Reynaldo Anderson (2016, 230–231) positions Afrofuturism's political aim as

[8] According to Curran (2011, 1-4), during the Enlightenment era European anatomists and naturalists supplied scientific reasoning for the justification of racism. The findings of scientific research and experiments on black bodies included smaller and darker brains among Africans compared to Europeans, black skin being formed of dark scales, and studies on African male reproductive organs. Curran (2011, 1-4) further states that knowledge on African people in Europe in the era was derived from travel and "adventure" books. Scottish Philosopher David Hume (1753) stated "I am apt to suspect the Negroes, and all other species of men . . . to be naturally inferior to the whites. There never was any civilized nation of any complexion other than white" (Hume 2018, 162–175). This white supremacist thinking underlies the assumption of black people being without history and intellectual contribution during enlightenment (Washington 2019, 26).

[9] Afrocentricity is a theory developed in the early 1980s by Molefi Kete Asante that aims to center African philosophy and perspectives (Amoah 2020, 30–31). The framework is based on viewing the world from an African cultural, philosophical, and historical lens (Amoah 2020, 30–31). Afrofuturism is a movement that has an Afrocentric foundation.



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creating a framework for a humanity that is not aligned with the ideals of white Enlightenment universalism.[10] Moreover, within this Pan-African[11] Afrofuturist movement, there are regional differences such as Caribbean Futurism[12], Black Futurism[13] and African Futurism[14] (Anderson and Jones 2016, x).

African art historian Elizabeth Hamilton finds that aligning African artists to Afrofuturism favours them. Hamilton (2013, 71) argues that contemporary African artists desire to work in new aesthetic modes, media, and conceptual frameworks due to Afrofuturism's ability to transform spaces of alienation, including those left behind in technological progress and transpose them into spaces of original imagination. Further, Hamilton (2013, 70–79) argues that African art and culture are often constrained to a single mode of artistic production, or 'tradition', limiting artists' reach in global markets. In her opinion, Africa needs to be liberated from the pressure to stay "authentic",[15] archaic and traditional to juxtapose the technologically and socially progressive Western world (Hamilton 2013, 72). When tradition meets advancement, as in MaXhosa Africa's case, innovation is formed; therefore, Hamilton believes Africans should embrace Afrofuturism and technology (Hamilton 2013, 78). Although the visual and conceptual tenets of

[10] According to nineteenth century philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche (2002, 151), all aristocratic societies are built on slavery. The philosophical pillars of the Age of Reason and Western Enlightenment were the foundation that allowed the white slave owners to dehumanise black slaves, yet these white individuals ironically view themselves as more civil and human (Nietzsche 2002, 151). "Men whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every terrible sense of the word, predatory people who still possessed an unbroken strength of will and lust for power threw themselves on weaker, more civilized, more peaceful races of tradesmen perhaps, or cattle breeders; or on old and mellow cultures…" (Nietzsche 2002, 151).

[11] Pan-Africanism is the idea that African people, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history of oppression through slavery and colonialism but a common destiny that connects African Americans and Africans' pasts and futures (Amoah 2020, 9).

[12] Caribbean Futurism, Black Futurism and African Futurism are all rooted in Afrofuturism but acknowledge that slavery and colonialism affected all regions differently thus the need for unique expressions of Afrofuturism (Amoah 2020, 9; Mashigo 2018). Unique cultures emerged within black communities from the convergence of Euro-American culture and the various cultures and traditions of the different African ethnic groups (Amoah 2020,9). Carribean Futurism is specific to black people in the Carribean, with stories and the future being centered in the Carribean.

[13] Black Futurism is specific to diasporic or black people in America and forms part of black culture. The futures imagined are centred in America or projected from a Western point of view (Amoah 2020; Cadle 2020).

[14] African Futurism or Africanfuturism centres African people and philosophy (Talabi 2020, 8).

[15] Authenticity from the Western gaze implies static and fixed practices that remain untouched by technology or globalisation; conversely authenticity from an Afrocentric perspective implies an evolution of traditions to fit new ways of living (de Greef 2020; Hamilton 2013).



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MaXhosa Africa's designs speak to Afrofuturist ideas, I do hold the view that African art is often constrained to a monolithic expression which is 'tradition', but I do not entirely agree with Hamilton that this is the ideal alignment for present artists and designers due to the cultural and historical differences located among black individuals from Africa.

In aligning her ideas in a uniquely African context, South African cultural theorist Tegan Bristow offers a challenge to the Afrofuturist label. For her, exploring art, digital media, and technology in Africa from an Afrofuturistic perspective undermines the possibility of uniquely African criticisms and interpretations (Bristow 2015, 6). In 2015 Bristow curated the exhibition *Post African Futures*[16] at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. The show revealed that most African artists were concerned with how they became absorbed by Afrofuturism – a label that was essentially not their own (Bristow 2015, 6). Bristow (2015, 4) contends that understanding how Africa is culturally positioned in media and technology should be explored from an Afrocentric perspective. Afrocentricity as a theory aims to centre Africa in all dialogues and productions regarding African people, culture and people of African descent globally (Amoah 2020, 30–31). The framework is based on viewing the world from an African cultural, philosophical, and historical lens (Amoah 2020, 30–31). From this perspective, African people are the main characters and subjects of historical experiences rather than objects used in Western Enlightenment narratives (Amoah 2020, 30–31). To emphasise "that practice originating in Africa that deals with a creative use of technology, science fiction or forms of futuristic mythologies", Bristow (2016, 6) opts for *African Futures*. Following this, I agree with Bristow's arguments, concurring that I consider MaXhosa Africa as not absorbed into Afrofuturist ideals within the context of this research. As such, I offer a critique of Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism may be understood as a movement started by exiled peoples: the descendants of enslaved people in the United States of America, who tried to make sense

[16] The exhibition was displayed from 21 May to 20 June 2015 at the Goodman Gallery, Johannesburg. Artists including Tabita Rezaire, NTU, Haythem Zakaria, Dineo Seshee Bopape, Jean Katambyai Mukendi, Sam Hopkins, Jepchumba, Kapwani Kiwanga, Brooklyn J Pakathi, Emeka Ogboh and CUSS Group included their works (Bristow 2015).



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of their new location, their possible futures and their past (Dery 1994, 180). From this position, Afrofuturism remains centred on the West for survival and imagining its future. Several African SF writers share this sentiment. For example, scholar Bruce Cadle (2020, 74) suggests that Afrofuturism, in its current understanding, needs to be revised to fit the needs of the present by considering the futures that merge in the present instead of only focusing on the future imaginings. In this view, he offers Afro-now-ism as a paradigm and applied model to offer an Afrocentric view of the African future (Cadle 2020). According to Cadle, Afrofuturism was understood initially from the framework of the 1960s/1970s SF literature and the trans-planetary Space Age.[17] Speculative fiction writers of the twentieth century were primarily concerned with escaping the planet and conquering outer space. Current African writers imagine the future on Earth (Woods 2020, 40). Scholar and writer Tomasz Stompor (2016) adds that Afrofuturism is an evasive term and should be cautiously approached: he contends that the word is a composite of *Afro* and *Futurism*. Afro refers to Africa's vague Western cultural imaginary, combining the continent's cultural diversity into one imagined place.

In contrast, futurism refers to an avant-garde art movement oriented to the future (Stompor 2016). Stompor (2016) states that while Afrofuturism in the North American context is usually characterised by the harrowing legacy of slavery, Afrofuturist expressions from the African continent address separate concerns, such as ecology, sustainability, and problems of postcolonial politics. In the preface of Intruders: Short Stories (2018), Mashigo concurs, stating that Africa needs an Afrocentric movement parallel with Afrofuturism. Coined by Okorafor in 2019, the term Africanfuturism (or African futurism) fits this study more comfortably. Africanfuturist stories encourage readers worldwide to actively engage with African traditions of thought, science, philosophy,

[17] The Soviet Union began the Space Age with the launch of Sputnik, the world's first artificial satellite (Garcia 2017). The Space Age refers to the era of exploration of outer space starting from 1957 up until 2011 (Garcia 2017). The Space Race between the United States and Soviet Union as superpower countries led to advances in technology, science, medicine etc. (Garcia 2017). Both countries competitively developed space capabilities, first putting animals and then humans in space and sending automatic enquiries to the Moon and planets (Garcia 2017; Millbrook 2009, 5). According to Millbrook (2009, 2), the launch of Sputnik transitioned space flight from SF into science fact and even inspired more cultural productions such as Star Wars and Star Trek movies. Afrofuturistic pop cultural productions from this era were also inspired by the Space Age, as evident of several albums by jazz musician Sun Ra such as *Super-Sonic Jazz* (1957), *The Futuristic Sounds of Sun Ra* (1962) and *Astro Black* (1972) etc.



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history, and dreams of being (Talabi 2020, 8). Africanfuturism does not centre or privilege the West (Talabi 2020, 8). To this end, I align myself with Okorafor. Within this study, I employ the term Africanfuturism to refer to a technologically infused Afrocentric approach to cultural production – one I will explore in the SS22 MaXhosa Africa collection mentioned above. Technologically infused hereby implies technology usage in the African context as innovation, tool, and symbol of advancement. Furthermore, according to Nigerian Art Curator Azu Nwagbogu (in Cadle 2020, 69), technological advancement in Africa is critical if African creative talent is to change the vision of the continent. Consequently, the continent must embrace the same tools used to perpetuate the dominant fabricated narrative of a regressive Africa. The reclamation and understanding of regional usage of technology makes it Afrocentric. This implies an African epistemological orientation in whatever cultural production is labelled as Afrocentric. For this reason, the study draws on the rich ideas formulated by Afrofuturism but applies them to a distinctly African sensibility that may depart from African-American notions.

## 1.2 Research Problem

Focusing on the South African fashion brand MaXhosa Africa, this study explores the Africanfuturist ideals that its SS22 collection put forward. I argue that through the designer's reinterpretation of traditional African beadwork and his adoption of new technology, the collection exemplifies Africanfuturism's desire to embrace the past in shaping a productive view of the future. The study will also navigate a critical approach to Afrofuturism through this argument.

## 1.3 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The study investigates Africanfuturism within the broader framework of Afrofuturism through the SS22 collection of MaXhosa Africa to offer a view of future Africa by embracing its past. As a secondary aim, the study considers these designs as social designs and concludes that they have an ability to shape Africanity, inspire cultural



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imaginations, and effect transformation. To fulfil the aim of this study, the research identifies the following objectives:

- To offer a broad overview of Afrofuturism as it pervades contemporary pop culture on a global scale
- To contextualise Africanfuturism in the more general concerns of Afrofuturism
- To position MaXhosa Africa within the discourse of Africanfuturism with the purpose of analysing MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection by referring to
    - the past through exploring traditional African beadwork practices
    - the present through discussing the designer’s technologically enhanced approach to design and branding approaches
    - the future through identifying and unpacking the aspects evident in the collection as these elements beckon an African-oriented future
- To consider Cadle’s Afro-now-ism as a speculative discourse in offering an Afrocentric view of the future of Africa and thus apply Cadle’s model for analysing African designs in terms of their social and cultural significance to MaXhosa Africa’s SS22 collection

## 1.4 Literature Review

The study is contextualised by unpacking the concept of Afrofuturism and will be discussed along with adjacent theories and Africanfuturism. South African black-owned luxury fashion brands and isiXhosa beadwork will then be discussed alongside MaXhosa Africa as an Africanfuturistic brand.

### *1.4.1 Afrofuturism*

Dery (2016) claims to have coined Afrofuturism at the beginning of a narrative that WIRED, as a publication, was disseminating about the new myth makers, the advocates of technological progress and the utopian possibilities of Silicon Valley – all of whom were white (Celnik 2019). Dery (1994, 184) defined Afrofuturism as



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> speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future.

It is important to note that this definition points to, firstly, the influence of speculative fiction on Afrofuturism; secondly, its reference to twentieth-century technoculture; and thirdly, the adoption and infusion of technology to telling African-American stories. Afrofuturism is a predated concept that was already practiced for decades before it was conceptually theorised (Montefinese 2019). African Americans began the practice of Afrofuturism out of a need for constructive black images to inspire change and build confidence in black communities. Nama (2009, 134) states that the 1940s doll experiment conducted by psychologist Kenneth Clark was the theoretical framework for the drive for positive black images. Clark resolved that black children in segregated schools who rejected the black doll for a white doll demonstrated internalised feelings of racial inferiority (Nama 2009, 134). SF superheroes such as Superman were criticised for representing American imperialism and racial superiority. It was problematic that black children were identifying with white heroic figures. In this era, the race of superheroes became increasingly crucial, along with the need to create black superheroes for black children to identify with rather than white ones (Nama 2009, 134).

The wave of Afrofuturism as a theory began with black cultural critic, writer, and musician Greg Tate's ideas on the intersection of SF and black technological music in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Eshun 1998, 175). Labelled the "Godfather of Hip Hop journalism", Tate was credited for elevating hip-hop and street art to the same level as jazz and Abstract Expressionism as art styles (Risen 2021). As the founder of the Black Rock Coalition, he also facilitated crediting Rock 'n Roll as a black music genre (Harrison 2021; Risen 2021). According to Harrison (2021), Tate's work was dedicated to contextualising black music and art in its more comprehensive creative histories and the emergent influence of hip-hop culture on the arts. Mark Sinker, a music and film writer for *The Wire*[18] magazine, conducted an interview with Tate and then wrote "Loving the alien

[18] *The Wire* is an independent print and online music magazine established in London in 1982 covering a wide range of global alternative, underground and experimental musics (TheWire n.d.).



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– Black Science Fiction", the impactful essay about black SF, slavery, and the futuristic (Eshun 1998, 175). The essay explores the idea of what it means to be a human in recognising the resemblances between the idea of alien abduction and the real events of slavery (Eshun 1998, 175).

Anthropologist Kholeka Shange commends the Afrofuturistic film *Black Panther*[19] (2018) for being a vehicle for reimagining blackness and a means to disrupt the white saviour complex[20] in cinema. Shange (2018, 3) points to the scene in which Shuri, a young black woman, saves the life of an old white American man who works for the CIA. Shange (2018, 3) describes the CIA as an organisation notorious for criminalising blackness. This scene disrupts the dominant cinematic futuristic image wherein white heterosexual men and women continue to save planet earth from extraterrestrial attacks and in this world, North America is the whole earth (Shange 2018, 3). Shange (2018, 3) further states that this earth is where black men and women are meant to serve as backdrops and as casualties of violence, not saviours in spacesuits. Through the reimagination, Africans in Africa and the diaspora cease to be a poverty-stricken, violent, diseased, and primitive people (Shange 2018, 3).

The theorisation of Afrofuturism had unclear boundaries; thus, throughout the years, it has been freely appropriated by artists and thinkers with divergent motivations and interests (Celnik 2019). But Afrofuturism has evolved into a coherent mode not only aesthetically but also in terms of its political mission (Yaszek 2006, 47). Therefore, in this study's context, Afrofuturism's political mission is identified as enriching the imagination

[19] Marvel Studio's *Black Panther* (2018) is an afrofuturistic film co-written and directed by Ryan Coogler. The film follows King of Wakanda, T'Challa as he goes back home to the secluded and technologically advanced African nation of Wakanda to take the contested throne after the death of his father (Marvel, n.d.). The film is acclaimed for imagining a technologically advanced African country that had never been colonised.

[20] The term *white saviour industrial complex* was coined by Nigerian-American author Teju Cole in 2012 and refers to the "confluence of practices, processes, and institutions that reify historical inequities to ultimately validate white privilege" (Anderson 2013, 39). This definition emphasises that through the guise of altruism, white people seek to be heroes or rescuers of non-white communities facing challenges, and according to Anderson (2013, 39) this is problematic as white intervention, as opposed to local empowerment, becomes the solution. This denies autonomy and self-respect among the "helped" communities (Anderson 2013, 39). The white saviour complex trope in films therefore refers to depictions of white people as liberators or uplifters of non-white people, or films that centre white characters in non-white communities (Feagin 2003, vii-viii).



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of black people and commanding positive futures into reality. According to sociologist Alondra Nelson, the task of the Afrofuturist scholar is to "explore futurist themes in black cultural production and how technological innovation is changing the face of black art and culture" (Yaszek 2006, 42). I maintain that this clearly defined responsibility of Afrofuturistic scholars and critics is productive. Still, I also propose that it is considered how black art and culture change technological innovation as an active approach that sees black people as creators and even innovators of said technology.

Nelson has also contributed to developing Afrofuturism as an organised method of critical inquiry. Nelson and multimedia artist Paul D. Miller created the Afrofuturism listserv[21] in 1998 (Yaszek 2006, 42). In 2000, they launched www.afrofuturism.net (Yaszek 2006, 42). In 2002, Nelson introduced her group's work to scholars with a special issue of *Social Text*, 'Afrofuturism', wherein she shows how the insights generated by members of the Afrofuturist listserv may reveal new areas of inquiry (Yaszek 2006, 42).[22] Lombardi-Diop and Grechi (2019) refer to Afrofuturism as "a laboratory of knowledge and Afrocentric practices, electro-funk sounds, cosmos-sounds, intersection of culture and technology, ethno-cosmogonies, syncretism and mysticism, cinema, the visual arts, and other times and spaces."

### *1.4.2 Afrofuturism 2.0*

Afrofuturism was primarily concerned with twentieth-century technoculture, the digital divide, technology, music and literature in the West (Anderson and Jones 2016, ix-x). Afrofuturism 2.0 is its early twenty-first-century expansion, which has grown into a diasporic technocultural "Pan-African" movement, according to Anderson and Jones

[21] Listserv is a peer information resource and online discussion service that allows users to subscribe to receive emails from the sender (Lambert 2009, 8). According to Nelson (2002, 15), the initial focus of the listserv was to create a space to discuss SF metaphors and technocultural production in the African diaspora. The discussions eventually spread to all parts of contemporary black existence (Nelson 2002, 15) Contributors and moderators to the Afrofuturism listserv included musicians, authors, scholars and artists such as Alexander G. Weheliye, Sheree Rene Thomas, David Goldberg and Ron Eglash, among others (Nelson 2002, 9–13).

[22] The special issue, 'Afrofuturism', was published in *Social Text* volume 20 issue 2 in 2002. Nelson included contributions of Ron Eglash, Anna Everett, Tana Hargest, Kali Tal, Fatimah Tuggar and herself as a way to challenge mainstream technocultural assumptions.



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(2016, ix-x). Afrofuturism 2.0 is further defined as contemporary expressions of Afrofuturism emerging in the areas of metaphysics, speculative philosophy, religion, visual studies, performance, art and philosophy of science or technology that are described as “2.0”, in response to the emergence of social media and other technological advances (Anderson and Jones 2016, ix-x). Moreover, within this Pan-African Afrofuturist movement, there are regional differences such as, and not limited to, Caribbean Futurism, African Futurism and Black Futurism (Anderson and Jones 2016, ix-x). Celnik (2019) further states that emerging trends such as Africanfuturism fall under Afrofuturism 3.0 with the common feature that African artists and thinkers mainly drive them. Africanfuturists on the other hand argue that Africanfuturism has always been part of African oral tradition and creation, and although related to Afrofuturism in framework and theorisation, it takes on its own distinctiveness.

### *1.4.3 Africanfuturism*

Kenyan film director, producer, and author Wanuri Kahiu asserts that science, fantasy, mythology, and speculation, have always been part of African oral tradition and are not merely responding to Western popular culture (Cadle 2020, 68). Kahiu maintains that Afrofuturism and speculative fiction predate Western images of SF, which is evident through the creation of myths from various African countries (Cadle 2020, 68).

Recognising that some cultural productions in the form of films, comic books and animation are adapted from SF literature, this study considers the African speculative fiction genre significant to the advancement of Africanfuturistic productions. Africanfuturism has been defined and refined by African SF writers such as Wole Talabi, Nnedi Okorafor and Mohale Mashigo. Nigerian American Africanfuturist and Africanjujuist writer Nnedi Okorafor (2019) asserts that she coined the term Africanfuturism as she needed to regain control of how she was being defined as a SF writer. One could say the term Afrofututurist was causing misinterpretations of her position and the intentions of her writing. Joanna Woods (2020, 36) claims that speculative fiction is not new to the African continent but has recently been reinvigorated, evident through the rise of short stories



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published by new and established authors. In Southern Africa, speculative fiction contributes to the ongoing conceptual shift in thinking about the continent and is supposedly written in accordance with Cameroonian philosopher and political theorist Achille Mbembe's claim that there is implied consensus that global destiny will be realised in Africa (Woods 2020, 38).

South African SF writer Mohale Mashigo draws from South African folklore and urban legends to tell Africanfuturistic stories where African languages and cultures are working with technology to reflect the philosophy and condition of African peoples (Mashigo 2018). While SF was used by Western imperial states such as Britain and Soviet Russia to drive constructs of patriotism and colonial expansion, Southern African fiction reroutes to the fundamental perspective of globalist narratives and socio-political contexts (Woods 2020, 38). Three themes identified in Southern African speculative fiction include decolonisation, artificial intelligence and climate change (Woods 2020, 40–41).

Southern African speculative fiction must consider the context of changing cultural and institutional structures and decolonial movements such as #RhodesMustFall and #FeesMustFall (Woods 2020, 38). According to Mashigo (2018), her Africanfuturistic stories are focused on speculating on the answers to questions such as

> Is the future still filled with (generational) inequality? Are there any smart cities, or has corruption stolen the opportunities for young people to influence the direction of technology? If resources and education currently benefit only one group, what does that mean for the use of technology in the future? How does who we are right now affect an imagined future?

Mashigo (2018) argues for Afrocentric stories as opposed to diasporic narratives, which use Africa as a backdrop, and are needed in Africa. Reimagining the future or even the present requires postcolonial predictions. These will differ for each country as colonialism (apartheid) affected each country in different but similar ways. Mashigo and Nigerian-American writer and art historian Teju Cole argue that all futures are specific and local (Woods 2020, 37). Cole further states that these futures are simultaneously local and woven into global realities (Woods 2020, 37). Whereas black Americans have



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fought for media representation as a minority in most white people, Africans living in Africa don't have the same struggle. Media catered to black people in various indigenous languages in South Africa, but the challenge has been the relegation of indigenous culture, language and presence to the primitive (Mashigo, 2018). Africanfuturism is meant to be rooted in Africa and to embrace all black people of the diaspora, including the Caribbean, South America, North America, Asia, Europe, Australia etc. (Talabi 2020,10).

Anderson and Jones (2016, ix) countered Bristow's understanding of Afrofuturism by stating that Africa and its diaspora are connected via cyberculture and have exchanged ideas, art, politics and even through sending money back home through digital means. Anderson and Jones (2016, ix) further argue that Afrofuturism is a Pan-African project since the African diaspora has been institutionally designated the sixth zone of the African Union, and Pan-Africanism has had early developments in the African diaspora. Additionally, they argue that for white South Africans living in a post-apartheid society is challenging their "traditional" view of Africans who are transforming their identities. My position is in accord with Bristow's view as I understand Afrofuturism as a framework dominant of Western perspectives of futurity, Africa, and black identity. Western voices are still prevalent in those spaces, even with the exchange of ideas between Africans and the diaspora. Established African authors such as Nnedi Okorafor (2019) still find their cultural productions misinterpreted under the framework of Afrofuturism. I put forward that Africans must make sense of their interactions and encounters with technology and should define those outcomes.

Mashigo (2018) compares co-opting and referring to Afrofuturism in African contexts as wearing shoes that are too tight – the narrative does not fit in Africa. I put forward that one contemporary African brand that encourages consumers worldwide to engage with African traditions of thought, history, philosophy and futurity is MaXhosa Africa.



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### *1.4.4 Afro-now-ism*

South African scholar and theorist Bruce Cadle's (2020, 74) view is that Afrofuturism in its current understanding needs to be revised to fit the needs of the present by considering the futures that merge in the present instead of only focusing on the future imaginings. According to Cadle, Afrofuturism was understood initially from the framework of 1960s/70s SF and the transplanetary space age. This Afrofuturism is located more in a state of mind than in design, creative or cultural expressions, even as these artefacts are physical embodiments of the mindset of Afrofuturism (Cadle 2020, 74). With what he has termed Afro-now-ism, Cadle (2020, 81) seeks to offer a "more African-voiced, more derived-from-an-African-identity, more representative solution to the sweeping Afrofuturist/ Afrofuturism mentality that is being popularised in media of every sort."

Cadle (2020, 67) asserts a correlation between Afrofuturism, cultural significance, and social design. This correlation produces a concept he calls Afro-now-ism. The primary tenet of this theory is the prioritisation of the present over the futuristic. Cadle (2020, 81) argues that Afro-now-ism is essential for design creativity in Africa because it challenges having to wait for a distant future in hopeful expectations and it rather designs change in the now. Cadle's (2020, 74) rationale for this proposition is that if artefacts emerge from an Afrofuturist conceptual space, that is, drawing from the past to speculate on the future in the present time, they ascribe to the "future present" and "future is present" mindset and improves people's lives in pursuit of this.

According to Twigger Holroyd (2017, 26), culturally significant design, product or practice is necessary due to its social, historical and/or aesthetic values to be discussed in Chapter Three. Völkers and Farenholtz (2015, 15) note that the design process is now also understood as a social process:

> It is about the ability of architects, fashion designers or graphic artists to combine the material things of life with intangible ideas in a manner that helps the emergence of a new way of thinking and a different behaviour pattern that will ultimately bring about new social realities.



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Social design is considered as design that addresses and solves social problems (Cadle 2020, 73). Social design allows for social engagement, awareness, co-design and experiential events that encourage artists and designers to see themselves as agents of change (Cadle 2020, 73). Cadle proposes seven methodological steps to determine Afro-now-ism, which is discussed in Chapter Three.

In view of my argument and contextualisation of my study, Cadle's Afro-now-ism concept and methodology is the most practical instrument to assess the impact of Africanfuturistic work in terms of cultural significance. Cadle's instrument will be employed to explore MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection.

### 1.5 MaXhosa Africa

MaXhosa Africa is known for using identifiable geometric patterns and isiXhosa beadwork-inspired knitted clothing designs for men and women. With stores and stockists located in local and international metropolises including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, Port Elizabeth, London, Washington, and New York, among others, the brand aspires to become a leading premium luxury African and mass heritage fashion and lifestyle brand (maxhosa.africa, n.d.). MaXhosa Africa uses quality raw materials such as pure Angora Kid Mohair and Merino wool, all sourced in South Africa, and other natural fibres such as silks, cotton and linen to create premium clothing, accessories and lifestyle designs (Mjongana 2020, 21; Careers Magazine 2020).

Since 2013, MaXhosa Africa has created several collections emanating from Afrocentric themes, including reimagination, *ubuntu*,[23] Pan-Africanism and fulfilling the ancestors' visions and dreams. MAXHOSA by Laduma pivoted in 2018 and evolved into MaXhosa Africa. Ngxokolo appointed his three siblings in creative design,

[23] *Ubuntu* is embodied in the African proverb – *Umuntu ungumuntu ngabantu,* which is translated as I am because you are / a person is because of other people. According to Augustine Shutte (2001*)* *ubuntu* is a communal and ethical concept that expresses an understanding of what it is to be human and what is necessary for human beings to grow and find fulfilment. This philosophy represents humanity, humanness and morality.



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communications management and financial management positions to create a family luxury house (Careers Magazine 2020). The brand also expanded in vision and accepted the responsibility of having an impact by representing the African continent in the luxury fashion space (Careers Magazine 2020). Fashion curator and researcher Erica de Greef observes the productions of contemporary South African luxury fashion houses Black Coffee[24] and MaXhosa Africa as cultural activism[25] (de Greef 2018, 173). The designs of these designers present alternative sociopolitical and cultural imaginaries similar to the work, actions and performances of twenty-first-century cultural activists (de Greef 2018, 173). They challenge the identity of African fashion of stereotypical exoticness and timelessness (de Greef 2020, 903). According to de Greef (2018, 173–174), these fashion houses redefine African fashion by drawing on notions of the past and the marginalised via creative acts grounded in the need for social change. Before discussing the MaXhosa Africa SS22 collection, I will briefly explore South African luxury fashion and isiXhosa beadwork history.

### *1.5.1 South African Black Luxury Fashion Designers: A Brief History of the Industry*

Dressing the body has a delicate history in South Africa as it was part of the regulation of access to power in a race and ethnicity-based society (Rovine 2015, 192). Westernised dress codes were enforced by colonial Christian missionaries and the apartheid government, and some were restricted as access was associated with privilege (Rovine 2015, 192). Whilst ethnic diversity was previously used as a repressive tool in oppression, fashion now provides a way for it to be celebrated in post-apartheid (Rovine 2015, 191). A brand like MaXhosa Africa which is proudly worn by persons of different

[24] Black Coffee is the fashion label formed in 1998 by South African designer Jacques van der Watt (Black Coffee, n.d.). According to de Greef (2018, 179), Black Coffee creations blur corporeal and cultural boundaries as well as collapse the boundaries of cultural distinction and difference, inviting new spaces for cultural blending.
[25] Cultural activism refers to practices aimed at disrupting and reorienting the cultural and political space by attacking and challenging the dominant narratives of truth in society such as media hoaxing, street art, flash mobs etc. (Ozden Firat and Kuryel 2011, 10).



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ethnic and cultural backgrounds as a proudly South African creation, contributes to the manufacturing of a nation state with goals of a new start and unity.

Rogerson (2006, 215) states that until 1994, the year of democratic transition, South Africa's fashion industry was limited in scope and mediocre in quality. The design sector was white led, dominated by the demands of the country's retail chain stores and largely by American youth culture. Typically, the chain stores would send scouts out to London, Paris, and New York in search of the latest fashions, returning to South Africa to design imitative fashion clothing (Rogerson 2006, 215). Before the construction of the Johannesburg fashion district, as supported by the City Council of Johannesburg, fashion houses were fragmented in the northern suburbs of Johannesburg. The hub was established for fashion design to reinvigorate the city's clothing economy not based on mass-produced goods, but rather on individual fashion items using African design (Rogerson 2006, 222).

Post-1994, the South African fashion industry took steps to grow and lead in the fashion industry through the establishment of dedicated fashion trade journals (Pursuit Magazine), fashion training institutions, and trade shows, most importantly South African Fashion Week (SAFW), which premiered in 1996 (Rogerson 2006, 216). By 2005, SAFW was attracting over 200 exhibitors and 60 designers (Rogerson 2006, 216). New and emerging black designers produced clothing for specialised markets by developing indigenous South African brands, some of which used 'traditional' designs, and others used contemporary African designs (Chang in Rogerson 2006, 227). Among the most notable of these new brands were Black Coffee, Craig Native, Loxion Kulca, Stoned Cherrie, and Sun Goddess (Rogerson 2006, 216). In addition to drawing inspiration from a complex history, indigenous symbolism and social structures, there is evidence of influence from Dutch, British, Indian, Indonesian and other international cultural influences brought by European and Asian settler populations from the seventeenth century, in fabrics such as shweshwe and Basotho blankets (Rovine 2015, 191). Sun Goddess and Stoned Cherrie were enterprises initiated only in 1999 to 2000, and each exhibited a different design emphasis (Chang in Rogerson 2006, 227).



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*1.5.1.1 Sun Goddess*

Sun Goddess was founded by husband and wife, Thando and Vanya Mangaliso, in 2000 to positively contribute to reconstructing a South African identity and an inner need to preserve African culture and heritage (particularly Xhosa). In what may be described as the Afro-fusion style, Sun Goddess offers updated variations on traditional wear, including Eurocentric references (Farber 2010, 141). Tapping into Pan-Africanism, their AW 2007 collection was presented as "Inspired by the Venda, Himba and Herero cultures" and "This collection [presents] an opportunity to tap into the sapience of ithongo (our ancestry), handed down from generation to generation" (SunGoddess 2008 in Farber 2010, 141). Farber (2010, 141–142) also notes that, however, the presented Pan-African identity collated from South African, Central African and West African traditional cultures can also be considered homogenous, pointing to an imagined "Africanness" (Farber 2010, 141). The Mangalisos believed they had a moral responsibility to uplift South Africa's black population, who were previously disadvantaged under apartheid; therefore, the design process remained in-house. Sun Goddess made a concerted effort to employ only black designers (Rogerson 2006, 229). Sun Goddess concentrated on producing what can be described as 'ethnic' South African clothing. Although targeted at the middle to upper class, the designer label market included foreign tourists and domestic customers, particularly affluent orthodox Muslim and Jewish women, who favoured the brand's long, traditional A-line skirts (Rogerson 2006, 229). By the end of 2005, Sun Goddess had four retail outlets; these affluent locations being Rosebank, Gateway Shopping Centre in Durban, the V&A Waterfront in Cape Town, and Mandela Square in Sandton, Johannesburg (Rogerson 2006, 228). The brand is still operating, with waned popularity.

*1.5.1.2 Stoned Cherrie*

Stoned Cherrie, founded in 2000 by Nkhensani Manganyi, was a luxury lifestyle brand for clothing, accessories, and homeware. It was inspired by its founder's vision to develop a new form of African expression that was both dynamic and sophisticated (Rogerson 2006, 230 – 231). Manganyi was influenced by the history and nostalgia of



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black pop culture which thrived in Sophiatown[26] and was represented in Drum magazine, as well as black youth urban culture which was emerging in the 2000s more than traditional wear, which is associated with the rurals (Rovine 2015, 220 - 227). The brand dedicated collections to musicians such as Mariam Makeba and print Drum magazine cover images of black South Africans icons such as Nelson Mandela, Mariam Makeba, Dolly Rathebe etc. (Rovine 2015, 226). According to Rogerson (2006, 230–231), Manganyi argued that one of the key reasons why the business was received so well by the local fashion industry was because the fashion industry was negotiating a new South African identity. The brand ceased operating in 2014 (Stoned Cherrie 2021).

Stoned Cherrie was known for its boutique couture range, which retailed from its Rosebank store and studio. In addition, Stoned Cherrie produced a more 'basic' range that was retailed through selected Woolworths stores nationwide. Manganyi described the designs supplied to Woolworths and Truworths as the "basic essentials for building up a Stoned Cherrie wardrobe" and would include garments such as a classic skirt, jeans, a denim jacket and a formal dress (Rogerson 2006, 230–231).

### *1.5.2 The Contemporary South African Fashion Industry and Luxury Consumer*

Rovine (2015, 191) recognises three elements which distinguish South Africa's fashion industry in the post-apartheid era, namely, ethnic diversity, a history of racial inequality, and a highly developed industrial and commercial infrastructure. South Africa's post-apartheid fashion industry is far advanced and closer to European or American standards in comparison to other African countries (Rovine 2015, 194). It comprises of textile and clothing manufacturers, outlets from small boutiques to national and international chain stores, fashion journalism and public relations (Rovine 2015, 194). South Africa is the prime shopping destination in Africa, with shopping precincts such as Sandton City's Diamond Walk (Mjongile 2020). The country is also seen as the gateway

[26] Sophiatown was a multiracial Johannesburg suburb where a community of artists, social activists, writers, and musicians co-existed before and during apartheid (Rovine 2015, 222). The community favoured urban American culture as a form of political resistance to apartheid (Rovine 2015, 222). "Sophiatown" nowadays evokes an era and place where fedora hats and pencil skirts marked everyday wear (Rovine 2015, 221).



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to the continent's luxury market, primarily due to its well-established shopping culture, increased international exposure, significant innovation, relatively stable and transparent pricing and convenience (Makhitha 2021, 28). According to the Department of Trade Industry and Competition (DTIC), South Africa's fashion designers contributed at least R1 billion to the GDP in 2019 (Mjongile 2020, 23). Makhitha (2021, 30 - 35) asserts that African middle-class consumers are evolving into newly affluent shoppers with greater exposure to Western cultures, habits, needs and tastes. The perception of luxury has grown from a materialistic choice and now includes aspirational, accessible and democratised shopping options (Makhitha 2021, 30 - 35). However, South Africa is an emergent luxury growth market; therefore, the patterns and motivations of luxury consumption differ from established markets in Europe, the USA and Japan (Mafoko and Peschken 2021).

Mafoko and Peschken (2021) validate that for luxury brands to succeed in Africa, they have to uphold communal ethics, cohesion, and common upliftment by assigning meaning and social values that drive self-perception and transcend individuality. Afro Luxe is a term used to identify the emergent and affluent class of African consumers embracing their heritage and reclaiming their traditional pride. They make purchases that reflect and enhance their status (Mafoko and Peschken 2021). According to Mafoko and Peschken (2021), in South Africa, the celebration of heritage is giving rise to more culturally significant African luxury, which has increased consumers' desire to enjoy unique products without diminishing their cultural identity. The Afro Luxe prefer luxury brands to understand their unique challenges, tastes, preferences, behaviours and consumption needs (Mafoko and Peschken 2021).

Locally, Thebe Magugu and Rich Mnisi are some of the contemporary black-owned luxury brands with which MaXhosa Africa shares the national and international market. Thebe Magugu incorporates film/storytelling and South African historical aspects in his collections. South Africa's espionage community operation inspires the SS21 Counter Intelligence collection during apartheid (Thebe Magugu n.d.). The SS2022 Geneology collection was an interpretation of old photos of his mother and aunts, using the "idea of



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memory as a reservoir for optimism" (Thebe Magugu n.d.). On the other hand, Rich Mnisi leans towards a mix of Tsonga tradition, pop culture-inspired, gender-fluid collections (Rich Mnisi, n.d.).

## 1.6 IsiXhosa Beadwork Brief History

Figure 2: Artist Unrecorded, Zulu belt. Thread, glass seed beads and string. 13 x 71cm. Late 19th century. Collection of Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum) (Nettleton 2018).

Before glass beads became widely available during the nineteenth century in Southern Africa, Zulu men and women wore strings of beads carved from wood or crafted from seeds and berries (De La Harpe et al. 2001, 34). According to De La Harpe et al. (2001, 34), the glass beads associated with the Nguni[27] people were made in Eastern Europe and Italy and introduced to the Zulu people by Portuguese traders and sailors. According to Nettleton (2018), the development of beadwork traditions in South Africa was part of a global cultural phenomenon of the nineteenth century. Nettleton (2018) states that identifiable ethnic patterns in beadwork emerged only in the early twentieth century, parallel to the strict and generalising ethnic divisions of people under the colonial regime and the introduction of the Land Act of 1913, which separated Zulu from Xhosa, Tswana from Sotho, Ndebele from Ntwane, Venda and Tsonga-Shangaan. The early beadwork collections from particular geographic locations show diversity in colour, pattern

[27] Two African ethnic groups exist in South Africa: Nguni and Sotho. Nguni refers to isiXhosa, isiNdebele, isiZulu and isiSwati speaking tribes in Southern Africa (La Harpe and Derwent 2001, 6).



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and technique (Figure 2). Beadwork thrived in Europe, and black African recipients of beads, like their colonised counterparts in many other parts of the world, seized this new material and exploited its potential to create new modern traditions (Nettleton 2018).

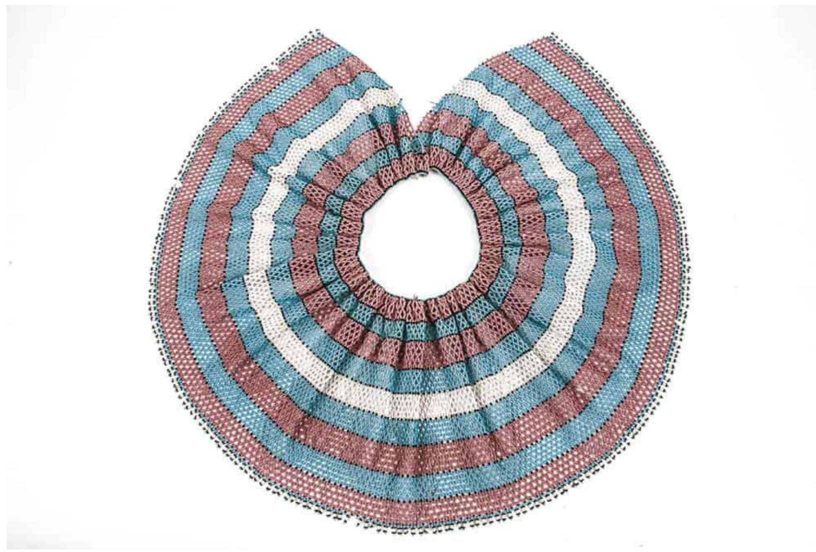

Figure 3: Artist unrecorded, Xhosa collar. Thread, glass seed beads, 14.4 x 40cm. Mid-20th century. Collection of Standard Bank African Art Collection (Wits Art Museum) (Nettleton 2018).

In the way they were worn, and in the patterns they used, beadwork items were important visual markers of social roles and positions, creating communal identities and politico-religious units (Figure 3) (De La Harpe et al. 2001; Nettleton 2018). Among Xhosa people, beadwork formed part of the visual messaging system, communicating the various stages of a Xhosa woman's life (Nettleton 2018). Through the nineteenth century, bead workers experimented with patterns and colours without needing to conform to particular local trends (Nettleton 2018). Sometimes broad ethnolinguistic and clan divisions are further broken down – for example, in the "Xhosa" category, "Mpondo", "Mpondomise", "Thembu", "Gcaleka", and "Mfengu" (among others) (Nettleton 2018).



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According to Rozani and Goduka (2017, 135–136), colonial education and religion set African people in cultural conflict. Missionaries viewed abaThembu beadwork as pagan and Christian converts were forbidden from wearing traditional clothing and colourful beadwork, although many did not forsake traditional dress entirely (Rozani and Goduka 2017, 135–136)[28]. Rozani and Goduka (2017, 135–136) further argue that colonial systems marginalised indigenous knowledge, cultural practices, and communities' ethnic identity. Colonisation alienated African people from their traditional dress code and languages, restricting the transmission of knowledge, customs and beliefs to following generations[29].

Due to globalisation and modernisation, the Western clothing style takes precedence as everyday wear in all parts of the world (Twigger Holroyd 2018, 30). Nowadays, beadwork is primarily worn not as everyday wear but during traditional rituals and ceremonies, including weddings, coming of age celebrations and initiation rituals. Glass beads have also mostly been replaced by larger bright plastic beads because of the expense of imported glass beads (De La Harpe et al. 2001, 35).

## 1.7 The MaXhosa Africa SS22 Collection

> For centuries now our forefathers and generations before them fought for justice and peace, many have failed and some passed the baton from one generation to the next. We, the current generation, are meant to reach the pinnacle of our ancestors' sacrifices. We are the ones our ancestors have

[28] According to Nettleton (2017, 20) as beadwork designs became more distinct and several genres were formed from 1890s to 1950s, when beadwork appeared in published photographs, it served the purpose of separating "traditional" or "tribal" black people both from each other and from those who refused to follow traditional ways. Beadwork was also emphasised and styled by photographers and book publishers because it was also essential in the white gaze of the primitive native and their tribal belonging in South Africa (Nettleton 2014, 349 – 350).

[29] Mbembe (2015, 27 – 28) asserts that the introduction of the colonial system of modernity confronted and instilled particular grooming, dress and habits to black persons. With apartheid-era Homelands and Bantustan's policy, dress practices that are currently associated with specific regions, cultures and communities may also be layered with apartheid-era classification systems (Rovine 2015, 192). Juliette Leeb du Toit (in Rovine 2015, 192) particularly notes that a constructed Xhosa identity was prioritised and promoted by the government of the Transkei Bantustan, at the expense of other ethnic groups. Richards (2015, 110) states that a collective "Xhosa" identity is also one constructed by the apartheid government through the group areas act - historically located in the former Transkei and Ciskei southeastern region of the country.



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been waiting for centuries. This collection takes on a utopian view of how we desire to evolve and showcase our culture to the world. While we create the perfect world (maxhosa.africa 2021).

Figure 4: Screenshot of MaXhosa Africa SS Collection campaign video, *We are the ones they have been waiting for*, 2021 (maxhosa.africa YouTube 2021).

The four-minute campaign video shot at HallMark House Hotel in the Maboneng precinct in Johannesburg was aimed to enhance the essence of the message behind the SS22 collection (Figure 4). MaXhosa Africa's vibrant and creative designs are showcased by the models, diverse in gender and race. To depict the current generation, the models are of the same age group: young millennials[30] and Gen Z[31]. The soundtrack is Xhosa rhythm and poetry (rap) performed by three Xhosa women: Kanyi Mavi, Ninae Magugumele and Yolanda Fryus Xashi.

Arrington (2022, 127) argues that artistic productions appeal to affluent consumers more than advertisements. Luxury brands use quality and artistic beauty to establish an

[30] Millennials are a demographic group comprised of people born between 1982 to 1995. Also known as Gen Y, millennials are characterised by being digital thinkers and initiators (Sladek and Grabinger 2014, 7).
[31] Gen Z is a demographic group comprised of people born between 1996 to 2009. Also known as Digital Natives, Gen Z is hyper connected through digital platforms (Sladek and Grabinger 2014, 7).



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image of sophistication and uniqueness (Arrington 2022, 123). Arrington (2022, 127) also contends that online marketing is the most effective medium in this digital age as it allows luxury brands to create artistic images that reinforce the image of the brand while reaching a larger audience than granted by traditional marketing mediums. MaXhosa Africa barely implements paid traditional media advertising campaigns, their fashion campaign videos are designed to be consumed by new media audiences. Two out of three luxury consumers worldwide use social media on a weekly basis and almost 80 percent of luxury sales are now digitally influenced (Arrington 2022, 123). The constant access to the internet has changed the purchasing journey of affluent consumers (Arrington 2022, 118). According to a 2015 McKinsey survey, the 'decision journeys' of 7,000 global luxury consumers and found digital resources, including web browsing and social media, influenced their purchasing (Arrington 2022, 118).

This collection firstly acknowledges the colonial and apartheid historical context of South Africa, where freedom was brought by means of fighting for justice and peace. It also speaks of the responsibility of carrying and evolving culture for the benefit of the next generation. Furthermore, this collection refers to the active creation of a perfect world where African design is showcased and celebrated in the world of the present. I maintain that through MaXhosa Africa designs, African culture, values and histories are communicated, documented and preserved.



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Figure 5: Screenshot of MaXhosa Africa 22/23 Collection campaign video, *We are the ones they have been waiting for*, 2021 (maxhosa.africa YouTube 2021).

## 1.8 The Theoretical Approach to the Study

Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are the theoretical approaches for this study. Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism can be located within the broader framework of critical theory. According to Sim and Van Loon (2004, 39), critical theories combine philosophical and social scientific techniques with broad applications. Critical approaches analyse and form judgements on any cultural event from art, music, race relations, to sport and so on (Sim and Van Loon 2004, 4). Critical theories include Postmodernism, Second-wave Feminism, Cultural Materialism, Postcolonialism, Black Criticism, and Queer Theory to name a few (Sim and Van Loon 2004, 6–7).

Regarding this study, some of the critical theories that have shaped Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are Futurism, Postmodernism, Black Criticism, Afrocentrism, Decolonisation, and Pan-Africanism. The views mentioned align with my aspiration to give attention to the philosophical positions and socio-cultural role through which luxury fashion is produced in South Africa. Approaching the study from an Afrofuturistic and Africanfuturistic lens will enable me to critically examine how the productions of MaXhosa Africa enrich the imagination of black people and command positive futures into reality.



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## 1.9 The Research Methodology

This research follows a qualitative research approach. In pursuit of a better understanding of the research focus, the nature of this research study will be exploratory. An in-depth analysis of Cadle's Afro-now-ism model will be used as the methodology. This emerging methodology is recognised as most relevant and applicable to this study because Cadle seeks to address the same issues identified in this study: challenging pop culture Afrofuturism, offering an African-based Afrofuturism, seeking the future in the present, recognising artists adding value and changing lives in the now.

As an exploratory study, texts and sources within design, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism, Postmodernism, Afrocentricism and Pan-Africanism will be explored and interpreted according to Pauwels' visual analysis model and Stuart Hall's theory of encoding and decoding of media texts (1980), which is by default interpretivist. Textual data will be collected by reviewing existing literature to discover prevalent thinking and significant theoretical debates using various academic and non-academic sources (Webb and Pollard 2006, 31). Texts (found materials) in the context of the MaXhosa Africa brand include words, phrases, images, graphic design, videos, events, collaborations, interviews and clothing designs.

Fashion designers use five basic tools or elements to create coordinated designs: line, shape, colour, texture and patterns (Kennedy, Stoehrer, and Calderin 2013, 11). This study will focus on the printed and patterned elements as MaXhosa Africa, known for its prints, interprets traditional isiXhosa beadwork to form the patterns on the clothing designs.[32] Negotiated reading will be applied to analyse the patterns. Past beadwork will be compared to present MaXhosa Africa designs, and aspects of the SS22 collection pointing to an African-oriented future, will be identified.

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[32] Fashion theories concerning luxury are focused on consumers, market segmentation and diffusion therefore I have chosen not to focus on the business and lavish side of fashion, but on the craft and technology.



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## 1.10 Feasibility and Ethical Implications of the Study

The study is feasible regarding the available time and scope of the research. Copyright laws relating to the use of data will be followed. Sources cited in the study will be appropriately acknowledged. This study does not rely on any human or animal subjects and does, therefore, not hold any ethical implications.

## 1.11 Significance of the Study

Alondra Nelson states that the task of the Afrofuturist scholar is to “explore futurist themes in black cultural production and how technological innovation is changing the face of black art and culture” (Yaszek 2006, 42). While MaXhosa Africa as a luxury African brand has been explored and the concept of Afrofuturism has been studied reasonably, the emerging field of Africanfuturism is yet to be explored in relation to fashion and, specifically, the MaXhosa Africa brand. This research contributes new knowledge in the application of the new Afro-now-ism model proposed by Cadle. This study aims to cover the gap and add to the growing discipline of redefining Afrofuturism in Africa for Africans.

## 1.12 Preliminary Outline of Chapters

Chapter One introduces the study by outlining the research focus, aim, theoretical frameworks and methods employed.

In Chapter Two, I give an in-depth discussion of Afrofuturism, and adjacent theories such as Afrocentricism and counter-memory, as these inform the debate and the emerging field of Africanfuturism.

Chapter Three offers an in-depth discussion of Cadle’s theorisation of Afro-now-ism and a detailed explanation of his model to evaluate what a social and/or inclusive design is and the possibility of rethinking Africanity's effect in the future.



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Chapter Four introduces MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection, followed by an analysis of the designs' particular aspects as they straddle the past and future through an Africanfuturist visual idiom. This chapter also offers an analysis of the collection to ascertain if MaXhosa Africa's SS22 may be considered a social design able to shape cultural imagination and promote transformation, as Cadle's model reveals.

The conclusion of the study follows in Chapter Five. A summary of the findings and common issues identified by the researcher during the investigation is presented. Limitations from the survey will be discussed, and suggestions for future research will be proposed.



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# CHAPTER TWO

# AFROFUTURISM AND AFRICANFUTURISM: AN INTRODUCTION

As a central feature, the study draws on the commingling of ideas relating to futurity and Africa. To this end, the study is contextualised within the broader frameworks of the emerging field of Africanfuturism. The latter simultaneously adopt and resist ideas put forward in the discourse of Afrofuturism with its emphasis on Afrocentricism and counter-memory. In contextualising Afrofuturism within the broader context of digital culture, this chapter culminates in acknowledging an assortment of questions in relation to MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection: How is contemporary African fashion, which is rooted in African traditions and culture, MaXhosa Africa's designs, influenced by digital culture? This is in question while acknowledging that forces such as colonialism and globalisation have also impacted the brand. Is technoculture welcomed enthusiastically or with apprehension on the African continent? Is this embrace different from how it manifests in the West? Counter-memory enquires if there is any technology recognised as originating from Africa. Africanfuturism answers yes. This chapter offers a critical overview of Afrofuturism, providing a brief historical account of its origin, its centrality to Africa and its people, and counter-memory. In conclusion, I focus on the emergence of Africanfuturism by discussing its central tenets and showing its relevance to MaXhosa Africa's design products to shed light on these questions.

## 2.1 From Technoculture to Afrofuturism

From its foundation, Afrofuturism reproduced the ideologies of Afrocentricism[33] while infusing them with SF concepts to speak to African-American concerns with identity, origin and being in a land strange and hostile to Afrodiasporic people (Dery 1994, 180–181; Sunstrum 2013, 113). SF narratives generally centre around how technology shapes

[33] Afrocentric in the context of this study refers to African origin or coming from African people in Africa. This implies African epistemological orientation in whatever cultural production is labelled as Afrocentric. For this reason, the study draws on the rich ideas formulated by Afrofuturism but applies a distinctly African sensibility that may depart from African-American notions.



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culture and how society is shaped by technology. In this section, I expand on the overview offered in the introductory chapter by elaborating on ideas relating to the shaping of Afrofuturism with its distinctly African American, rather than African, influences. I position Afrofuturism as a source of power and diversion to uniquely shaped African ideas as these address issues particularly relevant to the local context.

Dery (1994, 184) and Anderson and Jones (2016, viii) refer to late twentieth-century technoculture[34] in their descriptions of Afrofuturism, making it a key concept to untangle. Technoculture and digital culture are used interchangeably in this study. Digital culture and technoculture are terms used that came to the fore during the 1990s and early 2000s, describing how computational technologies impacted culture (Bollmer 2018, 17). According to Bollmer (2018, 1), digital media provides a material, infrastructural basis for practices and interactions, which affect identities, bodies, social relations, the arts, and the environment in ways that reflect power dynamics in society. As technoculture grew in the late twentieth century, black people, particularly African Americans, also made sense of this culture and technology and ascertained how they were excluded from the zeitgeist.

From a documentary perspective, culture is described as a wide range of human enactments, documenting life, creating and reinventing the world around us (Bollmer 2018, 37). From an ideal perspective, rooted in agriculture, Bollmer (2018, 33–44) states that "to culture is to tend, cultivate and pacify minds", as this process refers to human training.

Gere (2008, 17) suggests that digital technology is, in fact, a product of digital culture in the sense that the worldviews and values that are embodied within technology precede the way technology is developed and programmed. Gere (2008) recognises the influences of current digital culture, the first being the computers and machines created

[34] Dery (1994, 184) defined Afrofuturism as "speculative fiction that treats African American themes and addresses African American concerns in the context of the twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future." Anderson and Jones (2016, viii) similarly draw attention to Afrofuturism's American roots, noting that it offers "a techno-cultural perspective accompanying engagement in a form of cultural production, originating in practices of black urban dwellers in North America after World War II."



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as Cold War defence technologies in the US in the 1950s. Secondly, the avant-garde art movement superseded the Cold War as artists adopted cold and mechanical technologies in their practices to create art and anti-war messages. Thirdly, the counter-cultural techno-utopianism of the 1960s to 1970s then followed the liberal and individualistic ideals of private ownership of computers, which were previously state and corporate-owned. In this era and paradigm, power was to be distributed to the individual. Finally, the growth of postmodernist cultural theory as a field in the 1980s produced new-wave subcultural styles such as cyberpunk, which expressed critical thinking in terms of how societies were being, and going to be, impacted by digital culture and technology. These subcultural styles were popularised through films, books, video games and fashion aesthetics (Gere 2008). Pop culture films such as *Blade Runner* (1982) and *The Matrix* (1999) are well-known productions from this subculture.

Afrofuturism was also evolving during these eras as jazz musicians such as Sun Ra and Parliament Funkadelic,[35] inspired by the space era of the 1950s, created songs and imagery that depicted ambitions of outer space travel in the 1960s. What was particularly deviant was their identification with aliens as strangers, their preference to find a place to belong, and to be black people in outer space instead of exploring and conquering. Hip-hop[36] as a subculture emerged in the mid-1970s as an integrated series of live black community-based habits, which encompassed breakdancing, MCing, DJing and graffiti artistry (Blanchard 1999; Dimitriadis 2009,1). Now also riddled with lyrics and imagery promoting violence, drug abuse, misogyny and materialism, the art form began with a counter-cultural stance inspired by the economic and socio-political realities that African Americans were facing. Black cultural critic Greg Tate recognised and wrote of hip-hop as a legitimate form of art as much as jazz and abstract expressionist art from

[35] Parliament Funkadelic was a collaboration of two bands led by George Clinton in the 1970s (Apple Music n.d.). Parliament brought funk, and Funkadelic brought rock, combined with absurdist humour, comic book style mythology and Afrofuturism, which became Parliament Funkadelic (Apple Music n.d.).

[36] Hip hop is generally understood to have been pioneered by DJ Kool Herc in South Bronx, New York, in 1973 (Blanchard 1999). Kool Herc originated breakbeat DJing by breaking and repeating the most danceable parts of songs (Blanchard 1999). The parties Kool Herc would throw would have MCs introducing songs and breakdancers dancing, and graffiti was used for advertising upcoming events (Blanchard 1999). Other seminal DJs of the era included Afrika Bambaata and DJ Grandmaster Flash, who helped popularise the genre before it entered wide commercial success in 1979 through Sugarhill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" (Blanchard 1999; Dimitriadis 2009, 1).



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the late 80s (see Chapter One, Section 1.4.1). In the same decade, Jean Michel Basquiat[37] was striving for his graffiti-inspired paintings to be recognised in the New York art scene, disrupting the establishment at the time. Tate (in Rodrigues 2011, 277) claims Basquiat's art was abstract enough to confuse academics and was hip, sufficient to capture the attention of the hip-hop movement. Metcalf (2018, 110) recognises Basquiat as an unignorable contradiction; an artist who undermined formal training and rejected the respectability expected from a black artist while honouring black athletes and artists who were forced to be respectable in his artworks. Tate and Basquiat have inspired contemporary Afrofuturist artists and critics such as Jayz, Genesis Tramaine, and Kodwo Eshun, among many others. Afrocentricity[38] as a theory also emerged in the 1980s, alongside postmodern cultural theory (Amoah 2020, 30–31; Gere 2008, 204–205).

American SF has long been recognised as a legitimate tool for imagining potential futures and addressing modern society's social, environmental, and technological issues (Guthrie in Anderson and Jones 2016, 46). Afrofuturist storytelling "parallels and intersects" that of the literary genre SF, according to scholar and writer Lisa Yaszek (2006, 43). SF is a term that came to use in the 1930s, with themes evident in the genre having been diffused in Western society for a while before (Bould and Vint 2011, 1). Existing stories, such as folklore, legends and myths, were extended to include modern nineteenth-century scientific theories and technological developments (Yaszek 2006, 44). SF became the newer mode of speculative literature with tropes such as "the encounter with the alien other" and "travel through time and space", directly engaging the changing relations of science and society (Yaszek 2006, 47). These tropes also told the story of African Americans as descendants of enslaved Africans; therefore, black speculative (BS) and SF literature emerged in the same era from the end of the nineteenth century to the beginning of the twentieth century (Yaszek 2006, 47). Sheree Renee Thomas (in Barber

[37] Jean Michel Basquiat (1960–1988) emerged in the New York City street art scene in the late 1970s as a graffiti artist in the duo SAMO (Rodrigues 2011, 227). He transitioned into a painter and became famous in the early 1980s (Metcalf 2018, 110).
[38] Afrocentricity is a theory developed in the early 1980s by Molefi Kete Asante that aims to centre African philosophy and perspectives (Amoah 2020, 3031). The framework is based on viewing the world from an African cultural, philosophical, and historical lens (Amoah 2020, 30–31). Afrofuturism is a movement that has an Afrocentric foundation.



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2018, 137) positions sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois as a BS and SF writer for his short story 'The Comet',[39] published in 1920. Yaszek (2006, 43) states that artists project black futures in writing by implementing SF tropes and narratives or writing from an Afrodiasporic perspective within the SF community. Yaszek (2006, 43) identifies Ralph Ellison's novel *Invisible Man*[40] (1952) as an essential text in Afrofuturism. Invisible Man uses SF motifs such as alienation, disillusionment, and systematic control to critique American institutions and practices that erase black people and their history from imagined futures. The other is only recognised as extra-terrestrial in conventional SF, and Afrodiasporic people are excluded as part of the futuristic narrative. Van Heen (in Anderson and Jones 2016, 64) claims that there is a need to turn to various science fictional motifs and tropes to read them not just as metaphors for the traumas of oppression and slavery in other worlds but as concepts also evident in Afrodiasporic practices and becoming.

Outside of SF literature, jazz music became another art form in which Afrofuturist ideals were expressed by musicians such as Sun Ra, who depicted themselves as the "descendants of aliens who came to Earth to prepare humanity for its eventual destiny among stars" (Yaszek 2006, 46). According to Nelson on afrofuturism.net (2021), Afrofuturist artists are originators of a new sonic and social world. They challenge, redesign, and recreate the everyday use of music technology, genre, and expectations of race, gender, and sexuality (afrofuturism.net 2021). While early Afrofuturists questioned whether there was any future for black people, contemporary Afrofuturists undertake that race will continue to matter to individuals and society (Yaszek 2006, 43), and non-racialism is therefore not an aspiration. Writer and cultural critic Tiffany E. Barber (2018, 37) finds the idea of 'raceless' or 'race-free' futures often depicted in white genres of SF literature and film in which racial identity no longer matters problematic. Alternately, writer Ytasha L. Womack endorses the idea of a world without the notion of race (Womack 2013,

[39] 'The Comet' is a SF short story written by African American sociologist and intellectual W.E.B. Du Bois and published in 1920. The story follows a black man and a white woman's relations as they figure out their survival after a comet hits the city of New York, and they are the only surviving people (Du Bois 1920).

[40] *Invisible Man* follows the experiences of an unnamed black young man with ambitions of becoming a national leader in the 1930s (Yaszek 2005, 304–305). According to Yaszek (2005, 304–305), this ambition is not realised due to the systematic limitation of black persons, which erased a possibility of a black future.



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41). She encourages the reader of *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-fi and Fantasy Culture* (2013) to imagine a world where skin colour, hair texture, national origin, and ethnicity are not determinants of power, beauty and class. I agree with Eshun's claim of race being a continually reformatted division within the human species (Eshun 2018). Therefore, race continues to matter in the future. Afrofuturism.net (2021) asserts that Afrofuturism can see parts of the present and future that are overlooked by the status quo. While futurists may enquire about artificial intelligence (AI) and android consciousness, Afrofuturists seek to know how race may be connected to AI and android consciousness.

Another criticism is from an Afropessimist position that argues that Afrofuturism is overly utopian and partially fails to confront slavery as a persistent issue in the political life of black America (Eshun 2018). According to scholar and theorist Suidaya Hartman (2007), it is not because of a historical obsession with the past that one has to trace ways black life is still impacted by slavery. However, it is because black lives are still evidently imperilled and devalued by a racial calculus and the political arithmetic that were embedded centuries ago. I agree with the Afropessimist view that the systematic structures, laws and policies enforced during slavery, and even after, should be questioned and reformed. Even in postcolonial Africa, remnants of colonialism persist. It may seem as if the Afropessimist wants to face the realities of black life while the Afrofuturist seeks to escape it by imagining a fantastical future for black people. However, the Afrofuturist wants to depict that it is not only struggle that black people should be hyperaware of and always in anticipation of. Freedom of the past is told from the perspective of the oppressed, and the future is fashioned by hope.

Eshun (2003, 297) also distances and differentiates Afrofuturism from competing for revisionist worldviews that seek to reorient the history of black people while acknowledging that they have inspired writers in the field and have acted as an entry point to Afrofuturism for some writers. These worldviews are identified as Egyptology, Dogonesque cosmology, Nation of Islam ideology and "Stolen Legacy-style" Afrocentricity, which seeks to Africanise myths and histories not from Africa. All these



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theories seek to compensate but are regressive in their manner (Eshun 2003, 297). Revisionist logic is evident in some of the works of Sun Ra, Toni Morrison and Greg Tate, among other intellectuals and artists (Eshun 2003, 297). Eshun (2018) identified multiple criticisms that have been made against, and in challenging, Afrofuturism at the 2017 Narratives of a Near Future International Conference. First, American centricity or African Americanism attempts to monopolise the global understanding of blackness. Zambian American novelist and scholar Namwali Serpell (2016) argues that abduction, intolerance, dismemberment, experiments, and weaponry have also been inflicted on black bodies in Africa; therefore, these should not be African American themes only.

According to Anderson and Jones (2016, viii), the root of Afrofuturism is how black artists engaged with the US techno-cultural movement after the Second World War. Afrofuturism may be understood as a movement started by exiled peoples, the descendants of enslaved people in the United States of America, who tried to make sense of their new location, their possible futures, and their past (Dery 1994, 180). From this position, Afrofuturism remains centred on the West for survival and imagining its future. Several African SF writers, such as Masego Mashile and Nnedi Okorafor, share this sentiment.

Initially conceptualised as an Afrofuturistic brand because of infusing futuristic elements with African culture, MaXhosa Africa is more appropriately recognised as an Africanfuturistic brand in this paper, as it encourages people to engage with African culture and philosophy worldwide. The brand is also rooted in African culture, as opposed to an imagined one or a Eurocentric foundation, and joining with technology offers a new opportunity to rethink African identity, culture and/or objects in a future context. According to Cadle (2020), the future present is as imperative as the projected future in Africa therefore MaXhosa Africa's designs are culturally significant, with transformative power in the present as well.

British-Ghanaian theorist Kodwo Eshun's *Further Considerations on Afrofuturism* (2003) paper is seminal to the Afrofuturism discourse and has inspired other prolific writers in the field, such as Lisa Yazsek, Reynaldo Anderson, and Ytasha Womack. The



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text also advanced the conversation by centering Africa in the conversation and contextualising the research and financial industry behind the SF industry. Eshun's *More Brilliant than the Sun* (1998) also contributed to the Afrofuturism discourse by analysing Afrofuturistic sonic texts (Eshun 1998). This paper draws various perspectives and themes from the former paper because they are relevant to Africanfuturism's desire to embrace the past in shaping a productive view of the future. Eshun (2003, 287) describes Afrofuturism as "the war of counter-memory". Counter-memory relates to ideas of a counterargument or a counterculture (see Section 1.1.3). Eshun (2018) argues that futurisms are not inherently progressive. It is because of their potential regressiveness, near fascism, conspiracy and complicity, that certain artists and theorists of colour should conduct themselves as futurists. The threat in this is by categorising themselves as Afrofuturist; Black Futurists may reduce Afrofuturism in attempts to place themselves in established SF narratives rather than challenge them (afrofuturism.net 2021).

Afrofuturism is a counter-memory taken in the same measure as a counter-futuristic. Afrofuturism counters futurism rooted in the Futurism[41] movement of the early 20th century (Anderson and Jones 2016, viii; Eshun 2003, 291). The counter-future element illuminates what Eshun (2003, 301) calls "recovering histories of counter futures created in a century hostile to Afrodiasporic projection." The progression of the Futurism movement is evident in the current age, where power is drawn from the futures industry (Eshun 2003, 291). Therefore, Afrofuturism studies the appeals that black artists, musicians, critics, and writers made to the future when it was challenging to imagine (Eshun 2003, 294).

## 2.2 Afrofuturism and Counter-Memory

Much of modern life is impacted by the powerful but mediated forms of knowledge from previous centuries (Hirsch 2008, 106). History and memory are significant in how

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[41] Futurism began in Italy as an avant-garde movement among European scholars and artists, and during and after WWII in the ideas and work of Isaac Asimov, Claude Shannon, Philip K. Dick, Bertrand de Jouvenel, The Rand Corporation and others. Futurists sought to discard Western history and its icons in pursuit of technological evolvement (Anderson and Jones 2016, ix; Nora 1989)



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individuals and collectives define themselves (Nora in Aldarando 2013, 43–44). Under this theme, I will elaborate on philosophical understandings of memory and counter-memory as French philosopher Michel Foucault initially termed it. The ideas of other seminal authors and theorists relevant to this study, who have written about history, memory and the politics of remembering, will be explored. The concept of counter-memory will finally be discussed in the context of Afrofuturism as introduced by theorist Kodwo Eshun who argues that both the widely accepted narratives of the past and future for African and Afrodiasporic people should be refuted.

Following Nietzsche's *Geneology of Morality* (1887), Foucault (in Wegner 2020, 1220) wrote of history as a site of power. From this perspective, a large sum of history written from the Age of Enlightenment was to be approached and understood cautiously and critically (Eshun 2003, 287–288; Wegner 2020, 1220). According to Wegner (2020, 1221), Foucault devised the term counter-memory to introduce a critique of the academic disciplines of metaphysical philosophy and historiography in the 1970s. Foucault maintained that (historical) knowledge gains a distinct power and modification through its institutionalisation, and this power is evident at physical, social, political and economic levels in society (Gibbons 2007, 52–53). In *Language, counter-memory, practice*, seven of Foucault's essays make the connection between language and history being fashioned by power (1977, 17). The West's fascination with language makes Western history void of objectivity, which leads to the possibility of constructing a language capable of representing the world (Foucault 1977, 17). Through language, history is supposedly objective and logical, yet this history justifies prejudice and colonialism while granting privilege to the author's vision (Bouchard 1977, 8; Wegner 2020, 1221).

Aldarondo (2013, 42–43) argues that the modern archive is not an objective mandate but a fundamental instrument for colonial conquest. If information control was fundamental to colonial regimes' control of bodies, land and resources, then is this true for the postcolonial era? From the perspective of coloniality, meaning the continuance of the colonial in the form of remnants and structures built during the colonial period, then it is true (Tlostanova 2019, 165). Eshun projects this view to the future. Control of



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projections in the form of the future's industry is how bodies, land, and resources are controlled in the present (Eshun 2003, 291).

Counter-histories and counter-memories are practised by those who have been socially and politically oppressed because of gender, political belief or race (Gibbons 2007, 54). According to scholar Joan Gibbons (2007, 4), the public's enthusiastic attitude towards memory has been affected by artificial memory. Artificial memory refers to conventional and advanced storage and organising systems outside the natural mind (Gibbons 2007, 4). Libraries, museums, computer-stored databases, and the internet change people's perceptions of memory as they do not have to rely on their efforts to remember. Gibbons (2007, 54) distinguishes between memory and history, especially in academic historical research, asserting that history is often empiric, chronological, and interesting to the general public.

On the other hand, memory is usually not of collective interest or necessarily precisely chronological (Gibbons 2007, 54). Yet, she believes that memory and history do not necessarily contrast but have a complementary relationship. American historian Dominick LaCapra (1998, 19) asserts that narrative relies heavily on memory as a source, yet history also offers a way to assess memory critically. This complementary relationship allows history to function as a form of memory that interprets and verifies the testimonies of primary witnesses and sources (LaCapra 1998, 19). Sociologist Barbara A. Misztal (2003) believes that memory is often a social activity or even a means of socialisation, while historical research can be seen as the framework for navigating memory.

In an opposing opinion, historian Pierre Nora (1989, 8–9) argues that history suppresses memory. This results from history, being of intellectual and secular production, summons analysis and criticism. Nora (1989, 8–9) contrasts memory and history, positioning memory as dynamic, ongoing, authentic, collective, plural, yet individual. On the other hand, history is manufactured, widely distributed, and claims universal authority (1989, 8–9). Foucault (in Wegner 2020, 1221) argues that memory invokes devotion and identification in subjects in claiming absolute truths. On the other hand, counter-memories relativise or reveal the fictitious origins of fundamental truths and



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free subjects from identification (Wegner 2020, 1221). For some, the expression of counter-memory has included marginalised memories in recollections; for others, it has been opposing present acts of remembrance (Wegner 2020, 1220).

Scholar Jarula Wegner (2020, 1219) identifies four characteristics of counter-memory: it is automatically related and is resistant to another memory; it engages two different eras in time and allows for transcultural memory discussions; its uses vary from moderate to radical; and counter-memories can be conservative or progressive, constructive or destructive, factual or fabricated. Concerning these four characteristics, Afrofuturism aims to be divergent from the history and representation of African and Afrodiasporic people sourced from the Enlightenment era (Eshun 2003, 287–288; cf. Section 1.4.1). Afrofuturism engages the past, present and future and allows for different cultural engagements in Africanfuturism, Caribbean, and Black Futurism (Anderson and Jones 2016, x). Afrofuturistic expressions vary from moderate to radical, subject to each artist and each interpretation. The discourse over the film *Black Panther* sees intellectuals such as Danielle and Kholeka Shange commend the film for accurate representation in mainstream culture and reimagining blackness to power (Becker 2019; Shange 2018), while writer Jonas Celnik and academic Christopher Lebron argue that the film is not radical and, to which they validate the concerns of the antagonist in the film, who thinks Wakanda is selfish in its secret liberation (Celnik, 2019; Lebron 2018). Afrofuturism is generally progressive and constructive and can be factual or fabricated due to using imagination to create productions. MaXhosa Africa's productions inspired by the authentic beadwork and circumcision tradition of Xhosa descendants are seen as cultural activism (de Greef, 2018). According to de Greef (2018), the brand presents alternative sociopolitical and cultural imaginaries and challenges African fashion's identity.

While Marianne Hirsch and other scholars write about postmemory, which is the generational transference of past, often traumatic, events and their consequences (Hirsch 103, 2008) my focus is on how MaXhosa Africa is working to keep in remembrance the constructive, productive, and communal tradition of the Xhosa people. This can be interpreted as a counter-memory because the practice of beadwork expanded during the



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oppressive era of colonialism and apartheid. MaXhosa Africa then advances the tradition by introducing it into luxury wear in the contemporary.

Out of collective or cultural memory are political positions such as nationalism, tribalism, and other movements such as Afrofuturism, to an extent, are constructed. The understanding of collective and/or cultural memory is thus relevant to this study. Furthermore, beadwork practices and Xhosa traditions are collectively shared among the Xhosa people as part of Xhosa culture. As the concepts of memory and history are discussed briefly in this section, one can conclude that memory and history are closely related and sometimes understood in opposition. Moreover, Afrofuturism counters memory and history. Nora (1989, 8–9) states that memory is an ever-flowing phenomenon, the bond that binds us to the eternal present (Nora 1989, 8–9). Afrofuturism, as it fluidly refers to the past and future in the present, offers a counter-memory.

## 2.3 Afrofuturism to Africanfuturism

Anderson and Jones (2016, x) describe Afrofuturism 2.0 as contemporary expressions of Afrofuturism that respond to the emergence of social media and other technological advances. Web 2.0, with elements such as public authorship, user participation, the web as a publishing platform, and more, has advanced and influenced Afrofuturism in the present age.[42] The movement has reached all parts of the world, and this study is interested in how Afrofuturism is received, understood, and advanced in Africa. Stompor (2016) states that while the legacy of slavery usually characterises Afrofuturism in the North American context, Afrofuturist expressions from the African continent address separate concerns, such as ecology, sustainability, and issues of postcolonial politics. In this section, I will discuss Afrofuturism in the new media age and Africanfuturism as a diversion of this movement. Africanfuturism is of interest because

[42] The web's initial version (Web 1.0) was characterised as a race and gender-neutral space with the idealistic potential to change society and eventually eliminate race and gender disparities (Anderson and Jones 2016, viii). This dream has not been realised in the Web 2.0 age.



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Africans interact with digital and new media in diverse ways, sometimes divergent from Western practices.

### *2.3.1 Afrofuturism 2.0*

Afrofuturism 2.0 sees artists and creators using social media, virtual reality, augmented spaces, artificial intelligence, gaming, software, and more to imagine an alternative past, future, and present. According to Gaskins (in Anderson and Jones 2016, 37), the value of augmented space for Afrofuturists is how it offers creators new and different ways to overlay, view, encode, and decode cultural systems and objects with dynamically changing information. Creative technologist Alex Fefegha, in collaboration with Google Arts & Culture Arts Experiments, has recently created an Afrofuturist AI experiment called The Hip Hop Poetry Bot (Fefegha n.d.). The Bot is an open-source platform where rap and hip-hop artists can contribute their lyrics to "help create a project for the community, by the community". Fefegha (n.d.) claims that rap and hip-hop have historically used technology as a medium to communicate priorities of black culture and alternative futures for black communities. This project advances rap and hip-hop by introducing them to new technology.

### *2.3.2 "Is Africa Ready for Science Fiction?"*

The title of this section is a question posed by Nigerian-American author Nnedi Okorafor. In a 2009 blog post, both her expert interviewees disagree: Award-winning Nollywood director Tchidi Chikere, whose films are speculative in classification, asserted that Africa was not ready for "pure science fiction" such as Star Wars (Okorafor 2009). According to Chikere (in Okorafor 2009), the concerns of Africans are the realities of poor leadership, poor infrastructure, and food and water shortages, not spaceships; therefore, producing stories that reflect such is optimal. Scholar Naunihal Singh aligns with Chikere's claim that any SF created in Africa must be adapted to other categories, such as magic realism and allegory (Okorafor 2009). This is so that it can be better understood by African audiences as a genre they are already familiar with through oral traditions.



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Singh (Okorafor 2009) further argued that while stories about computers, androids, and artificial intelligence ruling the world in the future may fail in Africa because of the digital divide and poor technological infrastructure, stories about Africans on a spaceship and the idea that Africans might be dominant in the future would resonate well with nationalism. Singh's observations from 2009 seem to be accurate a decade later, considering the success of director Ryan Coogler's American superhero blockbuster film *Black Panther* (2018).

Serpell (2016) states that South Africa is notably ahead of the rest of the continent regarding SF tropes because of its apartheid past, which allowed for technology and infrastructure to be built by black (immigrant) labour. This has inspired cultural productions such as the SF films *District 9* (2009) and *Apocalypse Now Now* (2017) and the hip-hop-techno group Die Antwoord (Cadle 2022, 27; Serpell 2016).

Motswana artist and scholar Pamela Phatsimo Sunstrum (2013, 114) states, "postcolonialism, neocolonialisms, transglobal identities, transcultural identities and the de-defining, de-writing, and transcendence of these historical, geographical, national, political, cultural, economic and temporal specifiers" as the prime concerns of African Futurism. According to Mashigo (2018), her Africanfuturistic stories are focused on speculating on issues of generational inequality, state corruption discouraging young people from imagining, and the digital divide. Mashigo (2018) argues for Afrocentric stories instead of diasporic narratives, which use Africa as a backdrop and are needed in Africa. Nigerian-American writer and art historian Teju Cole argues that all futures are specific and local (Woods 2020, 37). Cole further states that these futures are simultaneously local and woven into global realities (Woods 2020, 37).

Years later, Okorafor responds to her question by claiming that some SF and technology are actually of African origin. Okorafor (in Whitted 2016, 208–209) boldly states that to be African is to merge technology and culture. This merging, according to Okorafor, is only natural because, in Africa, the ordinary and supernatural have continuously concurred (Whitted 2016, 208–209). It is expressed within the explanation of things, in ways of doing things, and the reasons for doing something (Okorafor in



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Whitted 2016, 208–209). So, being part of African life, technology also becomes an African way of doing things.

Africanfuturist stories encourage readers worldwide to actively engage with African traditions of thought, science, philosophy, history, and dreams of being (Okorafor 2019). Africanfuturism does not centre or privilege the West (Okorafor 2019). Although Okorafor (2019) insists on the term Africanfuturism as opposed to African Futurism, this study uses the terms interchangeably with the understanding of futurisms derived in Africa by Africans. I employ the terms within this study to refer to a technologically infused Afrocentric approach to cultural production. In my view, Okorafor, as a Nigerian-American who refers to herself as Naijamerican, a blend of two words, is applying something personal to her identity on a broader scale. Okorafor (2019) reasons that Africanfuturism blends two words to create something new, and the concepts of Africa and futurism are prevented from being separated and replaced with something else.

Okorafor, in her rejection of the Afrofuturist label, claims to write from a mystical place and experience and not from a position of using speculative fiction or Afrofuturism as a tool (Whitted 2016, 208). She uses aspects of fantasy, magic realism, hard SF, and dystopian horror for a broad and diverse readership in her speculative literature, which defies easy classification (Whitted 2016, 207). The role of family and community is often highlighted well in her writing as surrogate parents, siblings, and mentors emerge to take the place of traditional family units in times of trouble in the lives of her characters (Whitted 2016, 209–210).

Sunstrum (2013, 114) suggests that SF has the potential to express marginalised African oral histories. Sunstrum (2013, 116) maintains that African mythic stories concur with SF themes such as space travel, parallel dimensions, the paranormal, and more. This is evident in *Indaba, My Children*[43] by South African traditional healer and author

[43] *Indaba, My Children* (1965), authored by Credo Vusumuzi Mutwa, is a collection of myths, including "The Coming of the Strange Ones" and "The Story of Lumukanda", which tell of ancient and otherworldly empires that come into contact with Nguni people of the South of Africa (Sunstrum 2013, 116).



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Credo Mutwa, *The Famished Road*[44] by Nigerian author Ben Okri, and Dogon creation myths[45] articulated by the Elder Ogotemmeli (Sunstrum 2013, 116). Sunstrum (2013, 116) argues that Afromythology is emancipated from being relegated to the past through the trope of SF time travel. Sunstrum only offers a subjective description of Afromythology as means of the oral and narrative practice of African origin (2013, 115). Afromythology's and African Futurism's travels to the distant past also journeys to parallel or alternative presents and travels into futures not yet formed (Sunstrum 2013, 117). African Futurism in the contemporary is expressed in music such as South African musician Simphiwe Dana's *Zandisile* (2004) album, the literary work of South African writer Masanga Ntshanga, *Triangulum* (2019), Ivorian designer and visual artist Lafalaise Dion's cowrie shell designs (Figure 6), and South African based MaXhosa Africa's designs, among others.

Contemporary designers across Africa are confidently infusing their designs with tradition, histories, language, rites and rituals, symbols, and mythologies indicative of their belonging and ethnicities, but also broadly embracing being African (Cadle 2022, 255). Lafalaise Dion's designs have been worn by musician Beyonce and former Miss Universe Zozibini Tunzi (Mitchell 2019). Her belonging to the Ivorian tribe of Dan inspired her to use cowry shells as the primary medium in her designs (Lafalaise Dion n.d.). According to some African mythologies, the cowrie shell symbolises wealth, prosperity, fertility, and a means to communicate with the supernatural (Mitchell 2019). Her brand's mission highlights African cultures and spirituality by celebrating the cowry shell (Lafalaise Dion, n.d.).

[44] *The Famished Road* (1991) by Ben Okri is told from the perspective of a young boy living in poverty-stricken postcolonial Nigeria. Rooted in Yoruba spirituality and African magical realism, the boy journeys between the physical world to the metaphysical repeatedly (Sunstrum 2013, 116).

[45] The Dogon tribe of West Africa believes in an Afro-mythological genesis, where extra-terrestrial beings from the star Sirius B came into contact with the tribe and gifted them with knowledge, cultural practices, and technology (Sunstrum 2013, 116).



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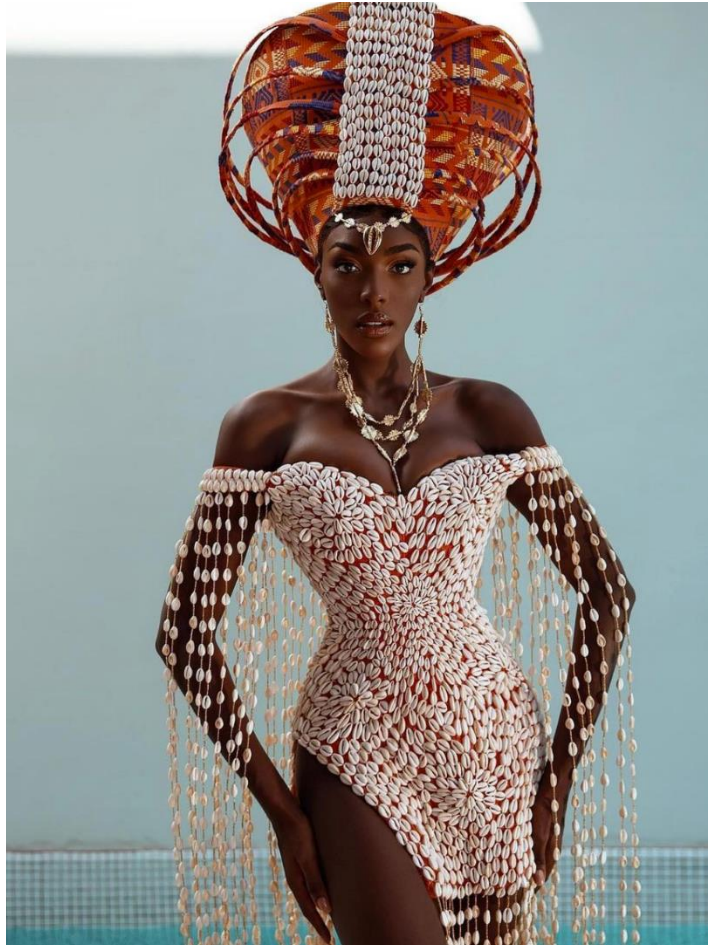

Figure 6: Instagram profile @lafalaisedionn (November 2021). The dress is worn by Miss Cote d'Ivoire 2021, Olivia Yace.

### *2.3.3 Afrofuturistic Fashion Applied in Mainstream Media*

To imagine the clothing worn in the fictional African nation of Wakanda, without the influence of the Dutch, the British, and other colonisers, film director Ryan Coogler was compelled to be strategic in selecting the costume designer for the film[46]. Having designed

[46] Wakanda, of course, is a fictional country. It is to be argued that in reality, the influence of trade between continents and colonialism is evident in "traditional" clothing across Africa. Taking the example of beadwork, Nettleton (2018) argues that beadwork was used as "survivance", a process termed by native north American scholar and writer, Gerald Vizenor. Survivance is a combination of survival and resistance and in this case refers to the use of beads to replace or complement older practices to modernise and resist European cultural impositions (Nettleton, 2018). In apartheid South Africa, female family members of the migrant mineworkers created the beaded components of "traditional" dress "at home" in the rural areas to



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successful black films such as *Coming to America* (1988), *Do the Right Thing* (1989) and *B.A.P.S.* (1997), among many others, Carter was appointed (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020). Ruth E. Carter became the first African American to win the costume design Oscar at the 2019 Academy Awards (ABC News 2022). Carter's visual style for the film mixes and celebrates traditional and contemporary African design[47]. She achieved this by visiting various parts of Africa to collaborate with some of the most skilled craftspeople and to educate herself on the different ethnic groups in Africa (ABC News, 2022). Carter also managed a team of over 100 buyers dispersed in various African and Asian countries, jewellery makers, mould makers, blacksmiths, fabric painters, and tailors (Newbold, 2018). Whilst costume design is distinct from fashion design, three of the costumes Carter designed for the first film are discussed below for the purpose of exploring Afrofuturistic dress in pop culture.

#### 2.3.3.1 Queen Ramonda's *isicholo*

Carter (in Vanity Fair 2020) maintains that if Wakanda is a forward-thinking nation leading in technology, design pieces should reflect the honour of tradition using innovative methods. Carter claims that she intentionally used design to express the regality of Queen Ramonda's character, which is not seen in the comic book version of her character as she is depicted as relaxed, barefooted and with white dreadlocks (Vanity Fair 2020). In the movie version, she wears a 3D-printed white shoulder mantle and isicholo.[48] Carter

be worn at weddings, funerals, and celebrations which all took place in rural homesteads (Nettleton 2017, 20). According to Nettleton (2017, 18), beadwork was integral to the performing and maintaining multiple interconnected identities for black migrant workers during apartheid and even in the post-apartheid. These include the "traditional" associated with rural homelands, the particular ethnic grouping emphasised upon challenging other ethnicities during mine dances and the modern, wherein the urbane in modern clothing returns to the homeland (Nettleton 2017, 18). Beadwork also had the transforming power of traditionalising the modern as the addition of studs and beads to modern wear would make it easier for multiple identities to be represented across different contexts (Nettleton 2017, 24 - 25).

[47] This Afrofuturistic film's goal was to advance a view of an Africa which had not been colonised and exploited of her resources and people. Ruth E Carter was careful to design costumes for characters who are not from Wakanda with materials and styles that are different from those who are from the fictional country. When Wakandan characters go outside of the country, they also get to wear clothing which is Western influenced.

[48] An *isicholo* is a traditional Zulu woman's hat, made with materials such as grass fiber, beadwork and ochre, that serves as a symbol of marital status and a sign of respect to the husband and his family (Art Institute Chicago, n.d.).



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(Vanity Fair 2020) accounts how she started her career doing illustrations on paper with pens and brushes but now illustrates using computer-aided design (CAD[49]). This is advantageous as there is an opportunity to create and print 3D renderings of a costume to observe it from all angles before the build process (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020). This ensures perfection in the completed outcome and saves time as the digital process allows for alterations earlier in the design process (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020).

There are increasing cases of fashion brands managing the combination of traditional handcraft and cultural heritage with technological development and attention to environmental consciousness (Faedda 2022, 124). Faedda (2022, 123) notes that adopting technology in fashion is not without tension and resistance, especially in haute couture or high-end fashion. This tension, according to Faedda (2022, 123), has a variety of positions ranging from rejection to silent resistance, to moderate agreement, to enthusiastic approval. Fashion designers often use recurring words and themes such as past, future, memory, and exploration to create narratives that indicate their position. Even Carter (Vanity Fair 2020) feels the need to claim that drawing will always be crucial and have its place in the design process.[50]

The hand versus machine debate is ongoing in the field of fashion as high-end designers, in the span of their careers, are called to take a position and justify their choice, either in favour of or against the use of 3D technology in high-end fashion (Faedda 2022, 125). Some designers claim that 3D technology is better suited for ready-to-wear fashion only. 3D technology enables the creation of new materials, new production techniques, and the speeding up of the creation process (Faedda 2022, 125). High fashion,

[49] CAD was initially developed as an interactive computer design system for the textile industry (Sinclair 2015, 672). It was later introduced to the apparel industry for pattern making and grading and further developed for fashion design (Sinclair 2015, 672). At present, effective graphics software is incorporated into the fashion design process, which facilitates the creation of technical drawings (Sinclair 2015, 672). According to Sinclair (2015, 672), the software has accelerated the design process and set the global standard for visually communicating designs for the fashion industry's manufacturing and marketing departments.

[50] Faedda (2022, 126) asserts that even the high-end designers that high technology appeals to feeling the need to constantly reference tradition, heritage, the handmade and hours spent producing a garment which becomes “a work of art”. Faedda (2022, 126) conceptualises this process as the beautification of technology. Beautification occurs through a continuous attachment to traditional craftsmanship.



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conversely, is thought to be experimentation, research, and study, a form of art and culture that a machine cannot replace (Faedda 2022, 125 – 126).

Figure 7: @Marvel Studios. Black Panther Film Frame. 2018. (Vogue India 2018).

2.3.3.2 The Dora Milaje uniform

The uniform of the Dora Milaje army is the most diverse in drawing inspiration from different parts of the African continent. The beadwork on the costumes, which suggests the wearer's marital status, is inspired by the Turkana tribe from East Africa (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020). The leather skirts are inspired by the traditional wear of the women of the Himba tribe, which originates from North Namibia (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020). The neck and arm rings are inspired by the Ndebele tribe in Southern Africa (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020).



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Figure 8: @Marvel Studios. *Black Panther* Film Frame. 2018. (Vanity Fair 2020).

Scarification,[51] practised by multiple tribes throughout Africa, is represented in the texture of the costumes (Carter in Vanity Fair 2020). In addition, the different talismans on each fighter's uniform symbolise the fighter's skill set and spirituality (Newbold, 2018). Carter added this element in her imagination of unique Wakandan artisans creating custom armour to present to a fighter during a ceremony to commemorate reaching a distinct level of fighting (Newbold 2018).

2.3.3.3 The Basotho Blanket

According to Carter in ABC News (2022), the resource trip to Lesotho inspired the Border Tribe's costumes in the film. The prints and style of wearing the Basotho blanket were kept, and vibranium was printed on each side of them so they could be used as shields in combat (ABC News 2022). With considerate research and respect for representation, *Black Panther*'s costumes were carefully crafted to represent tradition in a technologically advanced future. Through *Black Panther*'s costumes, technology is

[51] Scarification is achieved through cuts of the skin, removal of skin parts, burns and branding, chemical imprinting, skin laceration, and a variety of other techniques for the achievement of irreversible change in one's skin (Garve et al. 2017, 708–709). Indigenous dark-skinned ethnicities widely accepted fewer cases of this practice in most parts of Africa, Melanesia, and Australia (Garve et al. 2017, 708–709).



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imagined to advance Wakandan traditions and customs in opposition to surpassing and replacing them with convenient modern culture. Designing for the movie *Coming 2 America*[52] (2021), Carter collaborated with MaXhosa Africa to create pieces for African King Hakim and his daughter, played by South African actress Nomzamo Mbatha. According to Anderson and Jones (2016, ix), this intercultural collaboration between Africa and the diaspora is Afrofuturistic.

Africanfuturism, on the other hand, according to Okorafor (Whitted 2016, 212), is interested in writing about solid African characters, who are not royalty, and how these characters occupy Africa in the future. According to Okorafor (2019), Africanfuturism is a subcategory of SF. Africanjujuism is a subcategory of fantasy that honours existing African spiritualities and mythologies, and blends them with the imaginative (Okorafor 2019). When confronted with the unfamiliar, Western audiences and critics tend to refer to African and other ethnic stories with what is familiar to them, which Okorafor criticises as a lazy and reductive mentality (Whitted 2016, 212). Okorafor, who has been compared to and described as being similar to J.K. Rowling and Lewis Carroll, is also known for rejecting the Afrofuturist label for the same reasons (Whitted 2016, 212). According to Okorafor (in Whitted 2016, 212), Western audiences miss out on the details and the essence of a story or artwork by reducing it to labels they comprehend instead of genuinely engaging with indigenous cultures on their terms.

The success of *Black Panther* has allowed for an intercultural connection between Africans and African Americans. Still, African writers Okorafor and Mashigo argue for African-centered futurism. Through counter-memory, writers and artists like Sunstrum and Okorafor identify original Afro-mythological stories with SF motifs. While Sunstrum (2013, 115) argues that circumventing the present in favour of imagining the future is a radical act of taking ownership of what is to come, scholar Cadle (2020) argues that the immediate should be prioritised for productive futures to emerge. Cadle (2020) proposes

[52] *Coming 2 America* (2021) is a sequel to *Coming to America* (1988). Starring Eddie Murphy, the film follows King Akeem from the royal country of Zamunda through a period of travelling to New York again (Scott 2021).



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Afro-now-ism in place of Afrofuturism and even Africanfuturism. Afro-now-ism as a theoretical paradigm is discussed in Chapter Three.



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# CHAPTER THREE

## AFRO-NOW-ISM: THE "NOW-NOW" OF AFROFUTURISM

In Chapter One, I introduced the concept of Afro-now-ism as a correlation between Afrofuturism, cultural significance, and social design (Cadle 2020). The primary tenet of Afro-now-ism is prioritising the present over the futuristic set in an African, rather than American, context (Cadle 2020). In this chapter, I expand on Afro-now-ism while advancing an African sensibility of making. Afro-now-ism, coined by American transdisciplinary artist Stephanie Dinkins in 2020, was appropriated and further developed by the theorist Bruce Cadle in the same year. For Dinkins (2020), Afro-now-ists are protopian,[53] striving towards empowered communities and individuals. Building on this, Cadle (2022) suggests in *"Now-Now" of Afrofuturism: The Nexus of Afrikanness, Design, and Cultural Production* that Afro-now-ism's protopian approach to the future is echoed in the South African colloquial phrase "now-now".[54] Cadle also sidelines idealistic utopian thoughts and pessimistic dystopian narratives in the paper by co-opting for an inclusive South African sensibility with its emphasis on the present. These ideas are reflected in his use of terms such as "Afrikans", "Afrikanness" and "Now-Now". As I unpack Afro-now-ism, this chapter briefly introduces and contextualises the term: first in its birthplace, America, and then locally as I discuss Cadle's understanding of Afro-now-ism in the (South) African context. The chapter concludes with a summary of the ideas covered in this section.

[53] According to the founding editor of Wired magazine Kevin Kelly, protopia is an incremental direction, not a destiny, towards better futures (BigThink n.d.). Describing it as the world's potential to improve by 1% every year, Kelly argues that compound change trumps 1% overnight change. The protopian view acknowledges that most of the future problems are caused by today's technologies but still strives for better technology instead of advocating for less or no technology (Kelly in BigThink n.d.). It also considers optimistic and pessimistic views of technology and the future to envision a grounded ideal to aspire to (BigThink, n.d.).

[54] Used in informal South African English, now-now refers to within a short time or that which occurs soon or in the immediate future (Cadle 2022, 27).



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### 3.1 What is Afro-now-ism?

Dinkins' primary view of America is a nation that represses its citizens in thought and mobility, and this view informs her thinking of Afro-now-ism (Dinkins 2020). Firstly, Dinkins appropriates the African-American writer Toni Morrison's attitude in writing about Afro-now-ism. To be able to write Nobel prize-winning literature, Morrison (2019) specified that she allowed her imagination to be "as unencumbered as possible and as responsible as possible". The outcome was an Afrofuturistic novel, *Beloved* (1987), which was both African American culture-specific and race-free, in a way that features black characters that are not racialised.[55] In Morrison's novel, "rememory" is used in a conversation about the difficulty of forgetting between mother and daughter (Morrison 1987, 35–26). Rememory refers to how the novel's main characters reconstruct and recollect a sensible past in a context where society suppresses their history (Morrison 2019). Rememory is, for Morrison (2019), a process of "recollecting and remembering as in reassembling the members of the body, the family, the population of the past." Morrison's novels explore the tension between remembering and forgetting, where remembering was a form of significant discomfort for Morrison's characters; however, forgetting was also unavoidable (Morrison 2019).

Inspired by Morrison's (2019) "pitched battle between remembering and forgetting", Dinkins fleshed out her theory. In a collection of essays, speeches, and meditations that question the world in which we live, *Mouth full of blood* (2019), Morrison recalls that she chose to rely on her memory rather than history while writing *Beloved* as history treats black bodies as objects rather than subjects. Vanessa Lynn Lovelace (2021, 131) explains that Morrison's approach in *Beloved* "employs rememory as a noun, using it to refer to a place where images of the past can be stored", much like an archive of

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[55] The book *Beloved* was inspired by the true story of Margaret Garner, who escaped slavery with her family in the American state of Kentucky in 1856 and was eventually seized by US Marshals in another state where she was free. After being taken, Margaret Garner killed one of her daughters so she would not have to watch her become enslaved again (Strong 2016). *Beloved* received the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1988; in 1993, Morrison received the Nobel Prize in Literature (Strong 2016). Morrison gave a historical story context through memory. Through *Beloved,* Morrison takes on the Afrofuturistic, counter-memory position of disregarding Western literary history and relies on her own memory and the literary heritage of slave narratives (Morrison 2019). Morrison wrote *Beloved* by creating a narrative infused with authentic characteristics of African American culture (Morrison 2019).



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sorts. In short, rememory draws on ancestral memory and knowledge to enable us to make sense of our experiences and our place in the world today (Lovelace 2021, 132). For Lovelace (2021, 135), rememory "center[s] blackness." It is in response to Dinkins' (2020) question, "How do we rediscover ourselves anew? How do we right our collective rememory?" that she proposes a way of thinking with the past in the present – an approach she names Afro-now-ism. Drawing on the memory (and knowledge) of the past, transferred from generation to generation via ancestors, Morrison's idea of rememory features strongly in MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection, discussed in the next chapter.

Dinkins (2020) positions her argument amidst the COVID-19 pandemic and the American uprisings protesting against systemic racism, noting that these surface as "symptoms" of an unequal civil society. She continues that this, coupled with the rise in "artificially intelligent ecosystems based on opaque algorithms and biased data proliferate and biological design gains momentum", demands that we reconsider, or "reimagine", ourselves and our societies (Dinkins 2020). Progress in machine learning and biology holds opportunities to reconceive society as built on "mutuality and lateral coexistence among species and computational machines" (Dinkins 2020). For Dinkins (2020), Afro-now-ism as the "spectacular technology of the unencumbered black mind in action" offers a response to the rise of the term Afrofuturism, with its distinctly American origins to recentre debates around new technology and identity in the present, rather than projecting it onto an unrealised future. As a transdisciplinary artist, Dinkins (2020) focuses on black Americans' struggles with political and social inequality evident in cultural and creative expressions. At the centre of Afro-now-ism is the plea for the black mind to be free from reproducing actions and ideas that serve the oppressive, Eurocentric systems they seek to be free from (Dinkins 2020). Therefore, education and consciousness are tools to effectively discern and think from a counter perspective. In doing so, Dinkins (2020) relies on rememory

> as an undoing, unravelling and rewriting of corporeal constitutive elements. In the changingness of rememory, could we find transcendence? Or perhaps a trace of a former history that gives us the opportunity to draft something entirely new?



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Dinkins (2020) suggests that amidst our rapidly changing technological world, it is imperative that we move towards more comprehensive and unbiased notions of what is and can be; we need to examine and reconcile our "perceived human differences closely". Relying on Afro-now-ism's rememory, we may shape incremental habits in the now, which shape the future (Dinkins 2020).

Cadle (2022, 71) maintains that from an Afrofuturist perspective, the term "technology" should not be reduced to the pervading definition pointing to applied science and engineering but should be associated with multifaceted practices of art, craft, skill, and knowledge. This helps create new hybrids of art, design, and technology where the outcome is a creative activity that is more valued in itself rather than how it came into being. Dery (2016) puts forward that Afrofuturism is in vogue because the twenty-first century, traditionally synonymous with the future, is finally in the now with constant and rapid shifts experienced in digital culture. According to Dery (2016), these shifts inspire a new expression of time, the future-present. It is behind this idea that Cadle (2022, 67–85) builds an Africanfuturistic Afro-now-ism – an approach that highlights a soon and urgent future-present that is even more critical for the developing continent of Africa, which is using the foundation of rich and matured culture and heritage to advance along with progressing technologies. Afro-now-ism, according to Cadle (2022, 68), is the prioritisation of the future-present or present-future in envisioning and creating a new tomorrow through symbolic art and design production and critical review. As such, Cadle's theorisation of Afro-now-ism and his rootedness in Africa and its broad range of creative expression in its moving towards the future offers a well-suited framework to consider MaXhosa Africa.

### 3.2. Afro-now-ism in America

Globalised modern civilisation, founded on colonisation, slavery, and other white supremacist foundations, reflects inequality and prioritisation of enlightenment era ideals (Fry 2017, 3). Digital culture also reflects these power dynamics as artificially intelligent ecosystems rely on non-transparent algorithms and partial data, often resulting in extreme



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(gendered, ethnic, and racialised) bias (Dinkins 2020; Gere 2008). The opacity of these systems conceals the discriminatory and exploitative practices embedded in technological algorithms and software. What scholar and author Safiya Umoja Noble (2018, 1) terms “technological redlining” refers to the power of algorithms and how they reinforce prejudiced and discriminatory social orders and introduce new ways of racial profiling. Redlining, a practice widespread in the finance and real estate industries, furthers oppressive cycles of poverty through computerised (biased) decisions such as offering higher interest rates to black buyers or declining loan applications (Noble 2018, 1). With the view that this practice persists in digital platforms, mistakenly considered neutral due to being driven by AI, Noble (2018), in her book *Algorithms of Oppression: How search engines reinforce racism,* argues that search engine results are biased and oppressive. For example, “black girl” search results in 2011, which have since declined, used to bring up pornified results, while “gorilla” searches used to bring up images of black people (Noble 2018, 4–7). Dinkins (2020) argues that intersectional black politics must be amended to include practices and theories addressing science and technology's social relations. The now – the present or the current – is corrupted with unequal power dynamics resulting in systemic racism, legal injustice, and poor service delivery, which affects black communities in America and globally (Dinkins 2020). According to Dinkins (2020), for the human-nature-technology ecosystem to succeed in the future, concepts, histories, institutions, and systems need to be realised to support the inequitable distribution of resources and power confronted in the now. With a focus on dignity, human rights, sustainability, and eco-awareness, Dinkins (2020) calls for Afro-now-ism in changing the now for the manifestation of a productive future for black people.

For Dinkins (2020), Afro-now-ism is the open black mind in action, actively resisting discouragement and indifference to do community-sustaining work and imagining and defining oneself beyond systematic oppression. Afro-now-ism demands recognising, acknowledging, and dismantling, or as Morrisson would say, rememorying, internalised ideas that do not align with productive futures for black people (Dinkins 2020). Therefore,



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it does not align with Afropessimism,[56] although it must acknowledge the pessimism (in its relation to corrupt systems of exploitation) to envision a new and grounded ideal.

Dinkins' (2020) reliance on rememory puts forward an American imagination, viewed through Blackness. In this reconsidered identity of black Americans, she draws, just like Morrison in *Beloved,* on both tragedies and glories experienced in a nation built on slavery. While promoting a kind of undoing of the past to weave a more productive tomorrow, Dinkins (2020) argues that systematic barriers will reappear repeatedly. Therefore, one cannot be paralysed by inaction. Through discernment, one can ascertain where obstacles are hard and soft and when they can be ignored (Dinkins 2020). Therefore, Dinkins' (2020) aspiration is that diverse communities invest more in the now to create new black-populated futures rather than merely fighting against what is. Dinkins (2020) argues that for the black mind to be free, it needs to not be in constant awareness and confrontation of oppressive systems and people.

Dinkins' (2020) conception of Afro-now-ism also assumes a positive outlook on AI. Despite the concerns regarding biased algorithms raised earlier, Dinkins (2020) explains that AI provides opportunities for everyday people to define how the technological future should function, administer critical social relations, and design methods to help achieve collective goals. Direct public participation can also assist by introducing ideas, values, and beliefs about the equitable allocation of resources and cooperative governance systems into AI ecosystems (Dinkins 2020). I consider the potential impact of AI overly optimistic among Afrofuturists as big tech corporations with capitalistic objectives still

[56] Afropessimism, according to (Wilderson III 2017, 7–9), is the theoretical understanding of the intersectionality of slavery, race, and anti-blackness and all how these forms of racialised oppression have been reconceptualised and persist in the modern day. As such, afropessimists perceive the formerly enslaved person as a racialised black subject who still faces structural violence and oppression in the present day. Afropessimists argue that the black person on the street in the modern-day United States is in danger of violence by police enforcement (Wilderson III 2017, 8–9). Blackness is criminalised, as demonstrated by police murders, mass incarceration, urban planning, and surveillance (Wilderson III 2017, 10). The pessimism is in the lack of faith in any movement that seeks to supposedly empower black people or unify in diversity, as there is no existing or possible solution for racism. Afropessimism challenges any movement to preserve society and work with institutions that sustain anti-blackness, such as schools, prisons, and hospitals, hoping to reform them (Wilderson III 2017, 11).



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encode AI.[57] However, as Dinkins' reliance on rememory makes clear, being cognisant of the past and using its insight in the present, the embedded bias and exclusionary practices built into new technologies may be challenged in the present.

In conclusion, Afro-now-ism's focus on the future-present and its rooted sensibility of rememory ensures that the past serves a productive purpose in shaping future visions and drawing on indigenous knowledge to express the present without the reliance on Eurocentric notions creatively. In line with this, Afro-now-ism offers a useful framework to consider the designs of MaXhosa both in its dependence on the past and in its capitalisation of the "unencumbered black mind" to provide a "wellspring of possibility" in the world of luxury fashion design, to quote Dinkins (2020). In the next section, I consider the local theorist Cadle's (2022) interpretation of Dinkins' Afro-now-ism in the South African context. In expanding Dinkins' ideas, Cadle (2022) extracts an African sensibility by suggesting that Afro-now-ism is the "Now-Now" of Afrofuturism and, thus, a more suitable framework to position and analyse MaXhosa Africa designs. Cadle developed a tool for analysis as part of his exploration, which will be discussed and applied to MaXhosa Africa's designs in Chapter Four.

### 3.3. Afro-now-ism in Africa: The "Now-Now"

"Now-now" is often heard in South African vernacular and refers to the short-term future, within seconds to minutes, of the term being declared; or it can mean 'soon' (Cadle 2022, 27–28). The linguistic format, also found in the Afrikaans lexicon and other African countries, is known as reduplication (Cadle 2022, 27; Mesthrie 2015). The repetition of words compounds the meaning of a word, thus affording it "intensity to meaning" (Cadle 2022, 27; Mesthrie 2015). The term also has Indian English influences predominant in KwaZulu-Natal since the arrival of the first Indian people in 1860 (Cadle 2022, 27; Mesthrie 2015). Cadle (2022, 27) notes that the term, while used widely by Zulus, is more

[57] The world's largest technology companies include Amazon, Apple, Facebook (Meta), Google and Microsoft, with overwhelmingly white executive suites and ownership. The technology these companies developed is designed to serve the West, excluding minorities and other geographies.



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associated with Afrikaans, “Ek kom nou-nou” (“I will be there in a very short while”). He continues that as people migrate across Africa from South Africa, this notion of reduplication is also taken up among Zimbabweans (Cadle 2022, 27). In “now-now”, Cadle (2022, 28) sees

> a way of being that is familiarly Afrikan, especially to Southern Africans, and scaffolds nearly toward the Afro-now-ist concept, not only as wordplay but also as validator of the definition.

In giving Afro-now-ism an African sensibility, Cadle (2022, 28) strengthens his argument by noting that the allusion to the future or futurism in Afrofuturism does not embody the same sensibility, noting that futurism depends on Western thinking.[58] Cadle (2022, 28) continues that Afro-now-ism, in its departure from Afrofuturism’s “tilt toward the future imaginary”, does not sidestep the importance in Africa to address the present rather than dream about possibilities the future may hold, concurring that “systemic transformation is a social imperative.”

While Dinkins (2020) addresses political and social injustice, Cadle (2020) focuses on visual creativity, social design, and cultural expression as a suitable vehicle to address a renewed sense of Africanity[59]. Cadle (2022, 30) suggests that the essence of this Afro-

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[58] Cadle (2022, 28) mentions the Italian futurist artists’ fascination with technology during the early 1900s. They believed that modernity (exemplified by machine and technological advancement) might deliver Italy to the future. As part of structuralist thinking, modernism supports grand narratives that prioritise the West and is therefore not productive in an attempt to bring African ideas and thinking into its own.

[59] Whilst there are multiple, complex and shifting definitions associated with the concept of Africanity. The one that fits this study is the ‘values indigenous to a group which identifies with African ways of being and thinking’ (Landman & Yates 2017, 2). Ojong, Ashe & Otu (2018, 124) argue that similar to its adjacent notions, Afrocentricity and Pan Africanism, Africanity formulated from the necessity of finding a means to unite Africans against colonial oppression and redefine African identity in empowering means. Since colonial rule came to an end and globalisation took hold, political identities have expanded beyond their historical context to encompass the institutional practices and policies that currently shape them (Ojong et al. 2018, 124). Initially conceptualised by Jacques Maquet in his 1972 book Africanity: The Cultural Unity of Black Africa, the outlook inspired by Pan Africanism, focused on the uniformity of African cultures despite cultural and ethnic diversity across the sub-Sahara (Ojong et al. 2018, 125). Africanity is described by Maquet as the ‘state of being African or having African origins’, reflecting on the aspects that bind African cultures together (Landman & Yates 2017, 1). According to Landman & Yates (2017, 1), black scholars only started using the term in the 2000s as it was initially rejected for its “white” origins. Even so, it is used generically to indicate racial or cultural identity (Landman & Yates 2017, 1).



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now-ism is Afrikanness, noting that African design and visual communication have origins in expressing the mystical and shamanistic, ritualistic, mythological, cultural, and traditional, influenced by centuries of intra-African diasporic knowledge transfer. Cadle (2022, 28) prefers the term “Afrika” in alignment with Prof. Es’kia Mphahlele’s intention to deter from a Eurocentric point of reference. According to The Eskia Institute, Africa spelt with a “c” has no identifiable Afrikan root and cannot be traced in many Afrikan languages (Cadle 2022, 28). “Afrika” prioritises an African audience, language, and pronunciation (Cadle 2022, 28). Afrika and Africa are used in the same understanding in this study about the continent. Afrikanness and Afrocentricity/Afrocentric are also used in the same sense of that which has foundations in Africa and is then widely dispersed to other regions. To this end, Cadle (2022, 30) urges local designers to lay claim to their being members of (South) Africa and to produce work that expresses the current thinking where “speculative design is an affirming space of plausible possibilities and solutions” rather than idealism and SF.

Cadle (2020, 2022) expands the concept of Afro-now-ism to fit a local narrative into a methodology of reading culturally significant African designs. In addition to being influenced by Amy Twigger Holroyd’s idea of cultural significance, Cadle incorporates Hall’s “negotiated reading” visual methodology and Pauwels’ visual analysis model to argue in favour of a design that embodies tradition, culture, history, and appropriation to express Afro-now-ism. In what follows, I offer a summary of these theorists’ ideas, explaining how they inform Cadle’s notion of Afro-now-ism.

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South African scholar and theologian, Rothney Tshaka is recognised as the forefront voice in the contemporary description of Africanity (Landman & Yates 2017, 1 - 2; Ojong, Ashe & Otu 2018, 125). Tshaka (2017, 539 - 542) centers the question of who is African in his approach and concludes that an African is one who cannot separate the material from the spiritual as inspired by Biko and one who is committed to the ideals of the continent of Africa, not dependent on race, as inspired by Former South African president Thabo Mbeki. Landman & Yates (2017, 2) further assert that Africanity not only confronts the socio-economic and political context of African people but includes the indigenous values of African cultures that are not necessarily traditional. To say MaXhosa Africa’s designs have an impact on Afrikanness and can shape Africanity, is to note that they offer symbolism to accompany contemporary and traditional identities in South Africa, they invoke cultural pride and uplift communities, amongst other functions of social design in action.



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### *3.3.1 Cultural Significance*

According to Twigger Holroyd (2017, 26), culturally significant designs, products, or practices are necessary due to their social, historical, and/or aesthetic values. Social value reflects a sense of identity, uniqueness, and social interaction. It refers to the connotations a design, product, or practice has for a particular cultural group, along with the social, cultural or spiritual meanings it holds for them. Historical value originates from how aspects from the past can be merged with the present through designs, products, and practices. It may be based on the time a tradition has developed, its association with specific people or events, or its rarity or uniqueness. Aesthetic value refers to a design, product or practice's visual, sensory, and perceptual experience. It includes objects and patterns with exceptional qualities and attractiveness that evoke strong emotional states or special meanings (Twigger Holroyd 2017, 27). Cadle is primarily concerned with Twigger Holroyd's definition and framework of cultural significance. With modernisation and globalisation, traditional artefacts and craft practices and processes, often associated with specific geographical communities, are declining, which renders it worthwhile to support designers who are revitalising and evolving these (Twigger Holyrod 2017, 25).

Twigger Holroyd (2017, 26) draws cultural significance from the conservation of heritage sites and adapts them to a select focus on tangible, durable, and portable artefacts significant to local, regional, and national communities. According to Twigger Holroyd (2017, 25–27), cultural significance emerges from revitalising designs, products, and practices important to particular communities because of their social, historical, and/or aesthetic values. Social value refers to a specific cultural group associated with a design, product, or practice. Historical value refers to how a design, practice or product honours the past and is part of tradition (Twigger Holroyd 2017, 27). Aesthetic value refers to distinct perceptible qualities of a product, design or practice (Twigger Holroyd 2017, 27). According to Cadle (2020, 75), culturally significant products strongly possess all values and are considered social designs.



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Twigger Holroyd's cultural significance framework is of interest to Cadle (2020, 73) as he uses it to determine where social design practices are evident in Afrofuturist production. Cadle (2020, 74) states that if it can be established that contemporary artefacts, concepts, and the like that are regarded as being examples of Afrofuturist practice, thinking, ideology, or writing, are culturally significant and are, in fact, examples of social design in action, then they can have a transformative impact on people and their "Africanity".

### *3.3.2 Integrated Framework for Visual Research*

In practising visual analysis or in reading artefacts and productions that are visual materials, Pauwels' Integrated Framework for Visual Social Research identifies and seeks to integrate a variety of intersected visual methods available to researchers when analysing visual expressions of society and culture (Pauwels 2011, 4). The framework is built around the three themes of origin and nature of visuals, research focus and design, and format and purpose, which are briefly unpacked below.

#### 3.3.2.1 Origin and Nature of Visuals

This section recognises the origin or production context of the visual material researched as either preexisting or researcher-instigated (Pauwels 2011, 6–10). The subject or referent of visual material is discussed as being typically human behaviour or material culture, and the visual medium and technique selected to present data are also discussed within this section of the model (Pauwels 2011, 6–10).

Existing or "found" visual material can be used as primary data, or the researcher can conduct first-hand observations of visual products (Pauwels 2011, 6). Examples of found visual materials include institutional archives, advertisements, photographs, posters, and so on, or secondary research produced by other researchers (Pauwels 2011, 6). Secondary research uses and respondent-generated material is classified as research-generated data. Respondent-generated materials refer to prompted responses through



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the respondents or culture under study producing their own cultural data in a visual form (Pauwels 2011, 8).

According to Pauwels (2011, 8), the subject or referent in visual research in social sciences is typically material culture or human behaviour. Visual material culture includes artefacts and objects such as boardrooms, home settings and art objects, and larger visible structures that may provide beneficial information about both the material and the values of a society embedded in the immaterial qualities (Pauwels 2011, 8).

The researcher then must select a medium or technique in the form of either transcribed direct observation without visual recording, non-algorithmic/intentional techniques such as drawings, or algorithmic/automated techniques, which include photography, film, and so forth (Pauwels 2011, 10). The researcher has to decode the culturally influenced elements of the chosen medium or technique (Pauwels 2011, 10).

#### 3.3.2.2 Research Focus and Design

Analytical focus, theoretical foundation, methodological issues, and the format and purpose of study are discussed in this section of the framework. The analytical focus of visual research is dependent on the research questions of the study (Pauwels 2011, 11). The focus may vary from a detailed analysis of visual material, the process of making the material, the uses of the material, or the verbal feedback received about it (Pauwels 2011, 11). Researcher-generated visuals typically focus on the depicted (the content), while found visuals normally focus on the depiction, which is a representational practice in form and style (Pauwels 2011, 11).

To have a theoretical foundation, visual researchers are to select theories related to visual analysis/production, such as semiotics, cultural studies, and so forth, as well as theories related to aspects and themes of the applied field of study (Pauwels 2011, 13). An Afrofuturistic framework is used for this research study. Methodological concerns to be considered include visual competencies, sampling and data production strategies,



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controlling intentional and unintentional influences and modifications, the nature and degree of field involvement to respondents, provision of the necessary context to respondents, and finally, ethical and legal aspects of visual research (Pauwels 2011, 13–17).

#### 3.3.2.3 Format and Purpose of the Finalised Research Project

Lastly, the presentational format of the study, the visuals added to the study, and intended or secondary uses are considered. This research study includes numerous visuals in support of the arguments made (Pauwels 2011, 17–19). The final dissertation document is to be uploaded on UPSpace (http://repository.up.ac.za/), where it will be accessible to be used as secondary research.

Cadle (2022) does not follow every step of the framework nor expound on the section used extensively. Cadle applies Pauwels' visual methodology upon acknowledging that visual representations of Afrikanness need a visual methodology that acknowledges indigenous ways of knowing, where cultural beliefs and value-imbued interpretations inform how knowledge is generated, as opposed to strictly modernist scientific methods (Cadle 2022, 35). This is in synthesis with decoding cultural beliefs and values according to negotiated reading in the next section; Encoding and Decoding Media Texts. Cadle also uses a criterion to motivate his sampling choices of found materials as he had to be intentional in selecting items suggesting "Afrikaness" or Afro-now-ism, which is design that embodies tradition, culture, history, and appropriation (Cadle 2022, 27). For the purpose of this exploratory study, opportunistic sampling is used, mainly sampling images that are good for comparison purposes (Pauwels 2020, 14).

Pauwels (2011, 14) asserts that researchers need to have general knowledge of the technical and expressive components of visuals and representational techniques to read them effectively. The historical and cultural context of production and consumption should also be examined (Pauwels 2011, 14). Cadle motivates his competency in reading visuals and representational techniques with 30 years of experience critiquing and



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analysing visual arts systems that should support the findings of a negotiated reading (2022, 39).

Samples of the SS22 collection are to be read through negotiated reading in comparison with isiXhosa beadwork in Chapter Four as the chapter analyses the visual material culture as well as select instances of human behaviour shown in the campaign video and the ideology of the collection. Samples of audience responses to the campaign and capsule are also provided. Chapter Two outlines the historical and cultural context of isiXhosa beadwork which will be crucial in reading the collection and campaign video.

### *3.3.3 Encoding and Decoding Media Texts*

Encoding/decoding media texts is a concept developed by cultural theorist Stuart Hall in 1980 to illustrate how audiences understand television programmes (Hall 1980, 117). The model advanced the sender/message/receiver communication model by identifying further complex moments of communication, namely, production, circulation, distribution/consumption, and reproduction (Hall 1980, 117). One must be able to read or decode, throughout all moments, the signs that are encoded to shape reception by audiences or respondents (Hall 1980, 118). “Reading” refers to the ability to recognise and interpret a variety of signs, as well the subjective and collective ability to creatively relate those signs to one another and to other signs (Hall 1980, 124). Reading can be preferred, negotiated or oppositional. Preferred reading refers to the intended or denotative meaning by a producer, often upholding hegemonic myths or ideas being received by the audience (Hall 1980, 126–127). Different societies and cultures tend to impose arrangements of the social, cultural, and political world, and this dominant cultural order organised is the norm for audiences (Hall 1980, 123). Oppositional reading is when a researcher understands both literal and connotative meanings yet chooses to oppose them (Hall 1980, 127). The searcher subverts preferred code and uses an alternate framework to understand the message (Hall 1980, 127). The synthesis of preferred and oppositional reading is negotiated reading (Cadle 2020, 38; Hall 1980, 126–127). Negotiated reading “acknowledges the legitimacy of the hegemonic definitions to make



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the grand significations (abstract), while, at a more restricted, situational (situated) level" (Hall 1980, 127).

Cadle (2022, 38–39) applies negotiated reading as he interprets signs and meanings pointing to "Afrikaness", while also acknowledging that cultures and cultural meaning is in constant change. Negotiated reading allows for identifying similarities in intent, meaning, and ideology while considering culturally specific experiences, worldviews, and knowledge (Cadle 2022, 38–39).

Hall (1980, 123) argues that every visual sign in advertising connotes a quality, situation, value or supposition, which is present as implied meaning. One has to recognise codified ideologies at work in a society to unpack denotative and connotative meanings accordingly (Hall 1980, 123). While I also apply negotiated reading in identifying signs and interpreting meaning presented in the SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video as discussed in Chapter Four, I also consider the audiences' responses as well, as was originally intended by Hall. The foci in Pauwels' Integrated Framework for Visual Social Research will be used as they also point to the knowledge of historical and cultural context as the base to support effective negotiated readings (Cadle 2022, 39).

According to Cadle (2020, 74), exemplifying Afrofuturism, social design and cultural significance qualifies a production as Afro-now-ism. Janzer and Weinstein (2014, 328) define social design as using design to address and resolve social problems. Social design can then be described as design for and with the community. Social design focuses less on designing objects and emphasises designing social change (Janzer and Weinstein 2014, 328). Social designers also recognise language as an essential tool affecting how people perceive and experience society; therefore, language shapes ideas and philosophies and ultimately creates social change and transformation (Cadle 2022, 73). Janzer and Weinstein (2014, 328) also argue that social design solutions devised far from affected communities are less effective than the beliefs, knowledge, and perspectives of the people involved. This perspective supports Cadle's (2020, 2022) assertion that Afrofuturism is less relevant in Africa and Afro-now-ism is more significant.



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The Afro-now-ism methodology is influenced by Nathan Holbert, Michael Dando, and Isabel Correa (2020), writing from what they refer to as a “critical constructionist design practice” and an Afrofuturist aesthetic (Cadle 2020, 30). This framework builds on critical design, constructionism, and Afrofuturism. Critical design assumes that the global challenges humanity faces today, such as climate change, culture wars, predatory technology algorithms, and more, cannot be solved by science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), as is often proposed (Holbert, Dando, and Correa 2020, 328–329). Furthermore, these challenges require changes in collective and personal values, beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (Holbert, Dando, and Correa 2020, 329). Constructionism is an educational design paradigm that encourages learners to create and share designs that express their interests and values, to train learners to perceive their immediate and external world as adaptable with the fitting tools, practices, and community to achieve the desired change (Holbert, Dando, and Correa 2020, 329). Holbert, Dando, and Correa (2020, 329) also convey Afrofuturism as a design aesthetic that infuses SF, magic realism, and non-Western cosmologies to project a productive past and future for black people. Holbert, Dando, and Correa (2020, 329) motivate working through an Afrofuturism framework because black people are historically excluded from STEM. Through the critical constructionist design practice, Holbert, Dando, and Correa (2020, 329) invite black youth to connect to the past by reflecting on personal and family histories, reflect on the present by challenging existing inequitable systemic structures that are felt within the immediate community and personally, and finally project forward and create futures that centre their experiences, perspectives, and values.

Cadle (2022, 31) builds a connection between critical constructionist design practice and Afro-now-ism through their shared desire to explore how an artefact designed from an Afrofuturist perspective is a critical/social design, which allows for the designer to use personal experiences and cultural histories to question the status quo and project a desired future.



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### 3.4 Cadle's Afro-now-ism Methodology

In "From Afrofuturism to 'Afro-now-ism': a speculation on design as transformative practice" (2020), Cadle acknowledges Afrofuturism as an important orientation in the process of "reimagining the traditional with future awareness and a sense of opportunity" on the African continent. Cadle (2020, 67) highlights how cultural, traditional, fantastical and technological aspects play an important role in creative expression. Cadle's paper considers the work of several African practitioners as they address the continent's issues innovatively and identifies this impulse as a confluence between Afrofuturism, cultural significance, and social design.[60] The connection between these practices, ideologies, and discourses is offered as a seven-step methodology designed by Cadle to evaluate creative work from Africa. In Chapter Four, I employ Cadle's approach to assess MaXhosa's recent creative expressions; however, I unpack the seven-step methodology here for clarity.

Cadle's (2020, 74) Afro-now-ism methodology focuses on the artefact, cultural production or work presented or identified in the public or academic field, considering its allusion to Afrofuturism through its approach to expression and style. The second step requires one to ascertain whether most or all of the following Afrofuturism qualities listed below are expressed in the work (Cadle 2020, 75). Cadle (2020, 75) notes that it is unlikely that all of the qualities mentioned will be evident in a work. Drawn from various theorists contributing to the discourse on Afrofuturism, Cadle (2020, 75) offers the following attributes:

- it refers to future possibilities
- is science, fantasy, mythology and speculation
- imagines a better world
- is innovative
- is visionary
- is an attitude, approach or questioning of 'tomorrow'
- expresses African values and cultural identity
- recognises cultural artefacts and symbolic capital
- is an Africa-based technology

[60] In Cadle's paper he considers the creative work of South African fashion designer Thabo Makhetha and Nigerian founder of comics company and illustrator, Somto Ajuluchukwu.



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- includes creative reference to ancestral spirituality.

The third step determines how culturally significant the work is by drawing on Twigger Holroyd's (2017, 27) model, which assesses the strength of the robustness of social, historical, and aesthetic value expressed by the work (Cadle 2020, 75). See Section 3.3.1.

The fourth step acknowledges that "cultural significance" indicates that the work is a product of social design (Cadle 2020, 75). The fifth step assesses if all or most of the criteria pertaining to a social design apply to the work (Cadle 2020, 75). Social design characteristics include promoting dialogue and the exchange of ideas, combining the tangible with intangible ideas in an approach that develops a new way of thinking, seeking to address and, where possible, solve social problems, being human-centred and focused on spirituality, using language for shaping ideas and philosophies around social constructs and transformation, leads social engagement, awareness, co-design and experiential events, and inserts ethnography into practices of material and immaterial making, speculation, and change (Cadle 2020, 75). Cadle (2020, 75) clarifies that not all these criteria may be present in a work, but to qualify as a social design, and thus "a vehicle of transformation", an adequate amount should be present. The sixth step requires examining whether "the transformative power of the work functions or operates in the present" (Cadle 2020, 75). The last step, the seventh, suggests that the work may be viewed as a delegate of Afro-now-ism in that it projects "transformation in action" onto a future vision.

## 3.5 Conclusion

This section has explored the concept of Afro-now-ism, its developments in America, and its manifestation in Africa. Both working on the foundation of Afrofuturism, Dinkins' view of Afro-now-ism is identified as a protopian ideology fitting for the American context. Cadle's Afro-now-ism is an action-based method based in Africa. I employ



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Cadle’s seven-step methodology in the following chapter to evaluate MaXhosa’s creative work.



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# CHAPTER FOUR

## *LINDELWA – WE ARE THE ONES THEY HAVE BEEN WAITING FOR*

This chapter commences by introducing MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection, *Lindelwa – We are the ones they have been waiting for* to evaluate the designs against the notions of Africa, technology, and futurity discussed throughout this paper. To realise the argument in this paper, I will consider MaXhosa's approach to the designs and the final products as they straddle the past and future through an Africanfuturist visual idiom using negotiated reading.

This chapter also evaluates the collection to ascertain if it may be considered a social design able to shape cultural imagination and promote transformation based on Cadle's seven-step model. The first section analyses the SS22 collection's campaign video, and the following section analyses the SS22 clothing designs and patterns showcased in the video through negotiated reading. The final section investigates the MaXhosa Africa ethos and brand through Cadle's Afro-now-ism model.

### 4.1 Looking through an Afrofuturist Lens: MaXhosa Africa's *Lindelwa* (2021)

Overlapping with Afrofuturism's notions of fusing African culture, ideas, and sensibilities with technology and futurity, Africanfuturism departs from this American-conceived sensibility to encompass a geographical emphasis on the African continent. As suggested in Chapter Two, Africanfuturism is evident in MaXhosa's design process and creative work. In what follows, I will unpack the ideas related to Africanfuturism first concerning the campaign video accompanying the designer's SS22 collection and, secondly, by considering the creative designs conceived for the same collection. The brand's website summarises the focus of the collection *Lindelwa – We are the ones they have been waiting for* (maxhosa.africa 2021) as such:

> For centuries now our forefathers and generations before them fought for justice and peace, many have failed and some passed the baton



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> from one generation to the next. We, the current generation, are meant to reach the pinnacle of our ancestors' sacrifices. We are the ones our ancestors have been waiting for centuries. This collection takes on a utopian view of how we desire to evolve and showcase our culture to the world. While we create the perfect world.

The collection's emphasis on fusing the past with the present and looking towards a progressive and technologically advanced future is vital to the discussions that follow and the interpretations of the aesthetic qualities of the collection.

Figure 9 (Left): MaXhosa Africa. Model walking down the runway at the SS22 Collection show and campaign video shoot at Hallmark House. 12 September 2022. (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

Figure 10 (Right): MaXhosa Africa. Models walking down the runway at the SS22 collection show and campaign video shoot at Hallmark House. 12 September 2022. (MaXhosa Africa 2022).



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Naming the capsule *Lindelwa (We are the ones they been waiting for)* (Figure 4) has a double meaning to the founder Ngxokolo[61]. A nod to his late mother, who passed away while he was still in high school, *Lindelwa* is a Nguni name meaning "the awaited one" or "long waited for" (TEDx Talks 2019). His late mother was a knitwear designer who taught the Ngxokolo siblings multiple crafting methods and techniques such as beadwork, knitting, and stitching (TEDx Talks 2019). According to Ngxokolo, she used South African anthropology books to inspire her four children to learn about their isiXhosa culture and motivate them to create items that reflect their culture (TEDtalks 2019). Ngxokolo cites isiXhosa rural lifestyle and dress photography book *African Elegance* (1973) by Alice Mertens and Joan Broster as a recurring inspiration for his styling choices (@Maxhosa 2018)[62]. Ngxokolo's mother's home training and ambition for the siblings to embrace, celebrate, and showcase their culture through crafts is fulfilled by establishing the MaXhosa Africa brand. In the *Lindelwa* collection, MaXhosa Africa claims to be the generation ancestors have waited for to continue modernising the present and passing on traditions and cultural practices (Maxhosa Africa 2021). The brand is Africanfuturistic as it not only takes on a technologically infused Afrocentric approach to cultural production, but it also uses that which is personal for Ngxokolo for communal advancement. There is a recognition that Lindelwa and many other African ancestors,

[61] Ngxokolo's intentionality in his designs, inspiration, entitling of capsules is recognised by Richards as personal and long established (2015, 120). Naming a capelet garment "Somikazi", after his older sister in the 2014 Buyel'mbo collection, Ngxokolo casted a dark skinned model to showcase the navy blue and black piece adorned with gold buttons on the runway (Richards 2015, 120. The name of the black bird is given to beautiful dark skinned girls amongst Xhosa people in the rurals (Richards 2015, 120).

[62] According to Richards (2015, 113 - 114), the polarising photographs of Irish born South African photographer Alfred Martin Duggan-Cronin in his book *The Bantu tribes of South Africa* (1928) where collective Southern African tribal identities were captured, constructed, idealised and styled, influenced other books by anthropologists and photographers such as Joan Broster, Aubrey Elliot and Alice Mertens. Richards (2015, 113) asserts that it is through the images depicted in Joan Broster's *Red Valley Blanket* (1967), Aubrey Elliot's *The Magic World of the Xhosa* (1970) and Joan Broster and Alice Mertens's *African Elegance* (1973) that associations with certain styles of beadwork to abaXhosa were further established to populations. In addition to sharing these images on Instagram, Ngxokolo also accessorised models with the books during the MaXhosa by Laduma My Heritage, My Inheritance collection runway show in 2013. Richards (2015, 114) argues that these representations sought to showcase customs, traditions and cultures that different ethnic groups could ground themselves upon and look back upon as tradition in modern times (Richards 2015, 114). I argue that Ngxokolo primarily uses the images in the book for the purposes of fashioning an aesthetic, styling and accessorising. Richards (2015, 110) suggests that Ngxokolo's design will come to partly signify a homogenised Xhosa identity in the future, built upon his personal experiences and philosophies and embedded in the brand.



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such as Steve Biko[63], must have shared the same ambition. Ngxokolo uses MaXhosa Africa and its productions to advance the ancestors' vision and showcase it to the world.

The origins of "we are the ones we have been waiting for",[64] as a phrase now assumed in pop culture and literature, is from African American writer and activist June Jordan's poem titled "Poem for South African Women" (June Jordan 2005). The poem is a tribute to the 20 000 women and children who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria, the capital, on 9 August 1956 to protest the "*dompass*" during the oppressive apartheid regime (June Jordan 2005; SAHO 2011).

The poem acknowledges the inner strength of women and rallies women to contest injustice in the face of strong opposition. The last line is "we are the ones we have been waiting for", in recognition of the fact that women had to fight the system themselves, as black men were oppressed as well. The women sang as they protested, "*Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo*" (Now that you've touched the women, you've struck a rock) (SAHO 2021).

In the post-millennial context, *We Are the ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in Times of Darkness* is the title of African American Writer Alice Walker's 2006 book. In this book Walker, who was friends with Jordan, inspires people to take progressive action in challenging racial and societal injustice and teaches spiritual grounding and values as a solution to living in difficult times (Walker 2006). In the introduction of the book, Walker (2006, 3) states, "We are the ones we have been waiting for because we are able to see what is happening with a much greater awareness than our parents or grandparents, our ancestors, could see". Yet, Walker still argues that this

[63] Steve Biko (1946 – 1977) is the well-known self-sacrificing hero of the South African anti-apartheid movement. In addition, he wrote, organized, and led the Black Consciousness movement (Vincent 2007, 80). He was arrested, subjected to torture, and eventually killed while in the custody of the state police in 1977. As a result, he became a symbol of resistance in the 1980s apartheid mass mobilisations (Vincent 2007, 80).
[64] The poem was presented at The United Nations on 9 August 1978 (June Jordan 2005). The phrase was quoted by former American President Barack Obama during his 2008 presidential campaign speech which centered the message of hope (Sullivan 2008). Sullivan states this phrase is a "self-indictment as well as a self-congratulation". Sullivan argues (2008) that this participatory position makes the people responsible for both their progress and failures.



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generation, having a fuller picture of how all oppression is connected, universal, and insistent, does not have to believe in "fixing" things (Walker 2006, 3). The essence of Walker's message is that injustices can still be protested without sacrificing the self.

MaXhosa Africa pivots the phrase, changing the subject to "they" to refer to the original people who inspired it. Having greater awareness is an advantage MaXhosa Africa recognises and uses to conceptualise, design, and call upon a utopian future for Africa, with the advantage of using technology as well. "They" did not have the privileges they fought for[65]. MaXhosa Africa is choosing not to be complacent with the "freedom" it fought for but continues the pursuit of evolving tradition.

#### *4.1.1 We are the ones they have been waiting for (2021)*

Posted online towards the end of 2021, MaXhosa Africa's campaign video, *We are the ones they have been waiting for* (Figure 4), was designed to craft a narrative around MaXhosa Africa's SS22 capsule, *Lindelwa,* that highlights the designer's practice of drawing inspiration from his cultural past, fusing it with technology in the present and projecting it as a desired future for Africans. The four-minute video[66] was shot at HallMark House Hotel in the Maboneng precinct in Johannesburg to enhance the essence of the message of a long-awaited vision from the ones who have since passed on, coming to pass. Set against the visual background of a hotel and positioned by the modern African

[65] Ngxokolo (in Richards 2015, 115-116) states that his mother could not achieve commercial success in her knitted garment making due to access barriers during apartheid thus the added motivation to pass on the baton.
[66] Whilst I do not have access to the production process, some technical aspects of the video can still be recognised. While most luxury fashion campaign videos are no longer than two minutes, have fantasy elements and have hyper visible supermodels and celebrities as leads, MaXhosa Africa subverts this norm in fashion by casting unknown models for the video and making a richer, longer video (4 minutes, 16 seconds). To support this reading, a sample of videos are used from lifestyle channel "Every Deep Moment" YouTube playlist of luxury fashion campaigns mostly comprised of Western luxury brands. This playlist, titled "Fashion campaigns" has 755 videos up to date and is constantly updated to include the most recent fashion campaign videos.
The brand has a short stylistically shot behind the scenes video as well via @Maxhosa's Instagram stories. Snippets of Ngxokolo briefing in patterns, the staff measuring, knitting, cutting, working on machinery and computers and stitching beadwork is shown. The excited models and fashion show attendants' posts are also shared, conveying emotions of enthusiasm, gratitude and gratification.



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chic sub-code, it connotes an African with a lifestyle of habitually travelling internationally and sharing where they come from through fashion (Hall 2005, 123). In support of this reading is MaXhosa Africa's aim of this collection "showcasing our culture to the world". The story of MaXhosa Africa begins with traditional Xhosa beadwork, handmade in communal settings in the rural Eastern Cape during the colonial era in South Africa. MaXhosa Africa's designer knitwear is inspired by this cultural practice; Ngxokolo pays tribute to the designs used in beadwork pieces, but, projecting his ideas (and Africa) into the future, the brand reimagines this traditional, analogue craft technique using technological approaches to making to lend his creative products a cutting-edge and forward-thinking slant. Ngxokolo is honouring indigenous traditions and practices while catapulting his designs into the future, allowing an Africanfuturist interpretation. The communicative objective of the campaign video is identified as persuading the audience and reinforcing the brand narrative of MaXhosa Africa as a luxury brand rooted in African culture. This narrative appeals to an Afro Luxe (see section 1.5.2) audience possessing multiple, if not all, of the following characteristics: pride in ethnicity and nationality; the search for representation in affluent spaces; balancing an urbanised and globalised identity with the traditional; and wanting to invest in middle- to upper-class status symbolism that is still proudly evocative of African tradition. Secondary research and contextual factors such as store location, pricing, representation and affinity through media personalities and aspirational lifestyle influencers, social media following and discourse are used to come to this negotiated reading (Pauwels 2011, 6).



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Figure 11: Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).

Figure 12: Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).

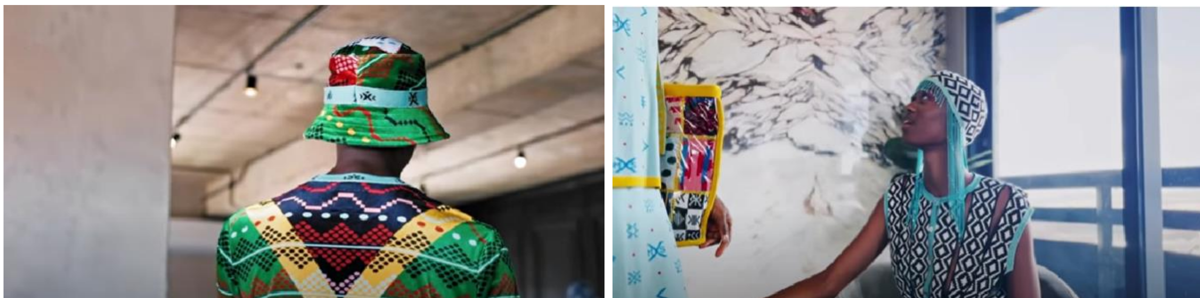

Figure 13 (Left): Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).



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Figure 14 (Right): Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).

This scene in Figure 10 depicts a choreographed pose by a male model dressed in a yellow two-piece, lying on the floor while he puts his shades on as the other male models congregate around him. The slow down in this momentous scene emphasises attention on the one wearing yellow and putting shades on. Yellow, gold, and copper, according to Design Indaba (Google Arts & Culture n.d.), are the colours of vitality, dreams, the future, and joy in modern African art. MaXhosa Africa embodies these ideals through the emphasis on yellow and shades indoors (also seen in Figure 11), which symbolise a bright African future on the horizon, and even perhaps, already current in the MaXhosa Africa utopian multiverse (see Section 4.3.1).

In Figure 12, the videographer follows a model wearing a velvet bucket hat and a top with the South African flag. Signifying a young democratic country, at 27 years by the time of the shoot, the outfit is worn by a Gen Z model. According to Southafrica.net (n.d.), the unofficial meanings of the South African flag are as follows:

> Red symbolizes bloodshed and sacrifices made in South Africa's struggle for independence
>
> White stands for Europeans and peace and harmony between native people and Europeans
>
> Green represents the fertility of the South African land
>
> Yellow stands for the mineral and other natural wealth of South Africa
>
> Black represents the native people of South Africa
>
> Blue stands for blue sky and endless opportunities for South Africans.

Southafrica.net (n.d.) drew the meanings from the motto on the National Coat of Arms, which reads: “!ke e:/xarra //ke”, which is the Khoisan language of the /Xam people,



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meaning “diverse people unite”. The V or Y shape on the flag represents the merging of diverse people towards a unified nation (Southafrica.net, n.d.). The beginning and end of the video depict all models posing, forming a V shape, as seen in Figure 4. MaXhosa Africa adds geometric and artistic elements to the design for a more ethnic representation of the people. As a collection that speaks of previous generations fighting for justice and peace, the history of South Africa is reckoned within this capsule, and the future of the country is projected positively as the model walks to go congregate with all other models in the choreographed scene in the opening and closing of the video. The last scene to be discussed in this section (Figure 13) depicts a conversation between a standing model and one who is sitting on a chair, respectably cross-legged. This is the only model wearing the accessory wig in the video, while most models are either wearing bucket hats or do not have head accessories. As the wig draws inspiration from headgears and hairstyles of Xhosa traditional healers (see Section 4.3.2), this one model can be interpreted as one holding a dignified position among others as she is also filmed as the only one sitting on a pedestal towards the end of the video, while the camera zooms out starting from her until all models are in the frame. According to Long (2006, 61–62), Xhosa traditional healers live a life of separation and normally have other traditional healer friends. This interaction can then be read as a simulated consultation as normally would be with a traditional Xhosa healer, although in a real-life context, it would be mandatory that both persons would be sitting on a traditional reed mat. One could consult about a wide range of situations, from diagnosing sickness to assisting with communicating with ancestors, to enquiring about the future (Long 2006, 61–62). The consultation shown in the video can be read as an enquiry and guidance towards a utopian future as the theme of this collection. I propose that this should not be read as MaXhosa Africa wanting to evolve the dress of traditional healers but rather only honouring and using it as inspiration for MaXhosa Africa's design (see Section 4.3.2).

The beginning of isiXhosa rapper Kanyi Mavi’s[67] song sets up a rural ambience through countryside sound effects of wind, trees blowing in the wind, birds, and crickets

[67] Kanyi Mavi is a Cape Town-based rapper and performer known for covering social issues such as drugs, sexuality, domestic abuse and overcoming circumstances in her music (Afternoon Express n.d.; Renford 2021).



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as the African drum progressively gets louder.[68] The rural sounds of the music contrast the luxurious marbled interior in which the models appear wearing designs of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 collection. In addition, the opening sequence appears in reverse, showing the models almost retracing their steps to take up previous locations. Here, while contrasting the notion of moving forward into the future, the strategy reinforces ideas of Africans, perhaps coming from the realm of the future or present, retracing their steps back to the indigenous roots that gave birth to an African sensibility. Again, alluding to the future, the title sequence, "SS2022 Collection", followed by "We are the ones they have been waiting for", appears on the screen.

The models, diverse in gender and race, are of the same age group: younger Millennials and Gen Z. They are the now, or as Cadle may suggest, the now-now generation that ancestors have been waiting for to reach the pinnacle of foundations laid by generations of the past, while setting up a productive future for generations to come. There is a smooth transition into the following shots. This part of the video progresses much slower as the designs are showcased. Other musical instruments and sounds, such as cinematic bass booms and drums, piano, and bells, are progressively layered, and vocals are introduced to build tension. It is the norm that a Xhosa traditional spoken word performer or praise poet, *Imbongi*, is preferred for isiXhosa cultural events. Still, for this fashion show, isiXhosa rap music is used. This is significant because rap music is currently pop-culture relevant, is globally recognised, and is rooted in Afrofuturism. For this show, technology is used through modern sound production techniques mixed with software. Mavi's original song from her 2020 album, *Igubu lam* (My drum), is titled *Andizenzi* (I don't make myself/I was born this way) and features the Swedish percussion group, Yakumbé.[69] The music was composed by Ted Krotkiewski,[70] whose background

[68] The music was specifically curated for the video (also used at the subsequent fashion shows) and digitally mixed by Mashilo Massh Molalakgotla (MaXhosa Africa 2021).
[69] Yakumbé is a Swedish percussive musical group that mixes song with rhythms from around the world to create a unique sound (Yakumbé n.d.). Formed in 1993, the group uses the varied cultural influences that exist in Sweden, especially Swedish folk music, and the world to make music (Womex n.d.).
[70] Ted Krotkiewski is the Head of Production at Stockholm-based sound and music studio, Memento Studio, which offers postproduction services such as sound design, music production, mixing for film, TV and commercials (Memento Studio n.d.). As part of the Yakumbé band, Krotkiewski titles himself as a film sound designer, film composer and sometimes a music producer (Krotkiewski n.d.)



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in film sound designing and engineering is evident in most songs on the album. The theme is therefore optimised for digital media with the foreshadowing and slow build-up techniques and sounds used.

This song is appropriate for the collection's theme as it centres on the message of not being self-made and assuming responsibility. Throughout the music, the background vocals harmonise "*ndenziwe, ndenziwe nami andizenzi*" ("I was made, I don't make myself"), understood indirectly as, "I am shaped by lineage, circumstances and environment." Towards the end of the song, Mavi repeatedly asks, "*Uma ndingayenzi izakwenziwa ubani?"* ("If I don't do it, who will?"). The song aligns with Africanfuturism as it is an African language spoken word, which speaks of African circumstances and uses technology to mix elements of the analogue, such as *igwijo,*[71] highlighting the digital elements such as the scratch sound effect. The Afrofuturistic element of transcultural collaboration is apparent through working with a Swedish producer and music group. The remixed, curated song for the video introduces features such as scratching, nature sounds, and added audio speeches. The mixer breaks mid-song and uses a scratching technique to include the voice of a Cape Coloured individual to highlight the rapper's home city influences. The song is an eclectic mix of genres, influences, and sounds, which is the root of hip-hop (Blanchard 1999). This also reflects the collection, which uses traditional African sensibilities and mixes globalised clothing styles.

On par with the sound design is the video's location, the Hallmark House (Figure 14), with its architecture and interior design offering a fusion between industrial and modern chic, is equally invested in an Afrofuturist aesthetic (Hallmark House n.d.).[72] As

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[71] *Amagwijo* is a particular Xhosa practice of collective singing embedded in African culture that uses no instruments other than voices (De Tolle 2020*). Amagwijo* has traditionally been sung at weddings, funerals, initiations, and other rites of passage events and is now sung at sports stadiums (De Tolle 2020). According to De Tolle (2020), most songs take the call and response, where a singer says something and another has to respond to form a dialogue.

[72] Hallmark House was first repurposed as an upmarket mixed-use development in 2016, boldly introducing a trendy dimension to the inner city (Hallmark House n.d.). The design was by British-Ghanaian designer Sir David Adjaye whose largest project to date is the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture in Washington, DC, whose opening was named the Cultural Event of the Year by The New York Times in 2016 (Adjaye Associates n.d.). Regarding Hallmark House, Adjaye states, "I saw this as a transformative opportunity to combine an African aesthetic with a contemporary vision and also to



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mentioned, the models parade along a passage with marbled wallpaper and a graffitied carpet, complemented by a black steel staircase. The hotel has 46 rooms that feature specially selected art installations, modern fittings, and brightly printed African and MaXhosa Africa textiles (Hallmark House n.d.). The brand's collaboration with the hotel is distinct through having a unique MaXhosa Africa suite selection (Hallmark House n.d.). The collaboration further enhances MaXhosa Africa's appeal to a metropolitan Afro Luxe audience invested in celebrating the uniquely creative South African, as the Maboneng Precinct, art galleries, and nightlife attractions surround the hotel.[73] Therefore, the shooting location was strategic and convenient for the brand and hotel.

show that the relics of the old mode of the city could adapt and to change" (Hallmark House n.d.). The decision to appoint a renowned African designer recognised for a project serving African American history points to an alignment of enriching African talent and forward thinking.

[73] Hallmark House is surrounded by the now contemporary urban space, which is a collection of old manufacturing buildings retrofitted with steel, glass, and concrete (Maboneng Precinct n.d.). These original buildings contrasted with newer modern architecture are fitted with street facing retail, commercial workspaces and artist studios, residential loft apartments, penthouses, and boutique hotels (Maboneng Precinct n.d.). These have an appeal to a middle-class clientele and business owners from the suburbs and beyond, and they provide the chance to partake in an urban lifestyle that draws tourists and creatives (Marx 2018, 5). MaXhosa Africa, having been celebrated and supported by multiple creative platforms such as Design Indaba from the brand's inception, is inclined to attract a creative and design clientele who is found in spaces such as the Maboneng Precinct (Design Indaba 2013).



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Figure 15: The 66-metre high Modernist structure of Hallmark House, initially designed in the early 1970s as a diamond-polishing factory and later repurposed and designed by distinguished Ghanaian architect David Adjaye (Hallmark House n.d.).

Hallmark House's most recent refit and re-branding, launched in early 2020, highlights the building's industrial origins, with a sandblasted, exposed structure setting the scene for a contemporary, urban look that complements the extravagant textures and colours of the sophisticated interior architecture and contemporary art (Hallmark House n.d.). Figures 15 and 16 show that marble walls, floors, and panelled walls with mouldings suggest timeless and sophisticated Parisian-style decor (Chenal 2022). The glass staircase railing, graffiti, and open space are the industrial-inspired décor and gritty aspects. Repurposing the old, blending the two styles, and adding luxurious African textiles (Figure 17) point to an Afrofuturist outlook of appropriating colonial elements to build a postcolonial Africa (Celnik 2019).



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Figure 16: Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).

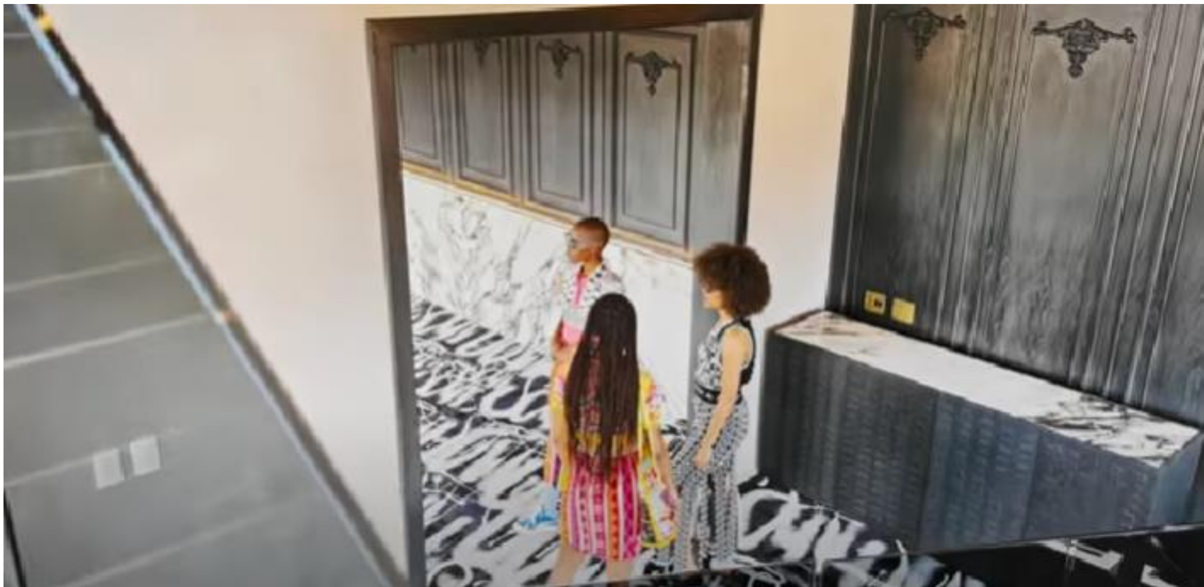

Figure 17: Screenshot of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 "We are the ones they have been waiting for" campaign video, YouTube (05 November 2021).



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Figure 18: The MaXhosa Africa suite is decorated with a MaXhosa Africa print wallpaper, MaXhosa Africa pillows and a throw at Hallmark Hotel. (Hallmark House n.d.).

MaXhosa Africa (2021) motivates that the SS22 portrays a "utopian view of how we desire to evolve and showcase our culture to the world. While we create the perfect world." This proactive, Africanfuturist and even Afro-now-ist stance is conveyed through the campaign video. The video tells the story of creating a utopian[74] future through camera effects and movements, natural lighting, curated audio, intentional model casting, and a selected location. Various camera movements are used, such as panning, to allow the viewer to track the movement of the models while also establishing the location. The

[74] Utopia, according to Levitas (1990, 1), is the idealised life people would live if they did not have to face the difficulties of their realities. The term coined by Sir Thomas Moore in his book *Utopia* (1516) describes an imagined society with a perfect social and political system (Collins Dictionary n.d.). Levitas (1990, 1) states that versions of Utopia differ according to different cultures and are normally embedded in myths and stories. Utopias may be literary, political, secular, or religious (Levitas 1990, 1). When regarded as more than an unattainable wish, but a possibility and claim of how things should be, then utopia becomes a vision to undertake (Levitas 1990, 1).



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vibrant colours of the designer wear are contrasting this location that is mainly in black and white interior. The natural daytime lighting highlights the African utopian[75] luminous ideal and practically shows the location and wear. The slow-motion effect used while the camera pans or zooms in creates tension, which is also supported by the soundtrack. Through coordinated movements and choreography, with the personality of the models shown, utopian unity and harmony is created. Aspects of everyday life in the modern day are simulated through smartphone usage and groupings of models talking. The ones who ancestors have been waiting for are shown to be free, self-assured, cheerful, and proud of who they are and where they come from in the modern world and the spaces they occupy. According to MaXhosa Africa, the perfect world is one where the old can be traced in the new, where the old inspires the youth, where vibrant colours light up sophisticated spaces, and where beauty, justice, peace, and hope exist because of richness of culture and tradition, which can be carried everywhere.

In the field of fashion, mediatisation[76] is evident in how practices of production, consumption, distribution and diffusion have been influenced and to different extents

[75] Ashcroft (2013, 94) asserts that utopia is the only place from which ideology can be resisted, and for Africa this means European history can be challenged and the narrative of crisis and adversity by which Africa is perceived by the West, can be countered. African utopianism is realised through the counter-memory of Afrofuturism (Ashcroft 2013, 94; Eshun 2003). What characterises African utopianism is hope and worldliness (Ashcroft 2013, 94). A hopeful future for Africa is a central theme in the works of African poets, novelists, artists, filmmakers, and speeches (Ashcroft 2013, 94–114). Former South African president Thabo Mbeki's 1997 *African Renaissance* speech, the 2006 film *Bamako* by Malian Abderrahmane Sissako, and Ghanaian Ayi Kweyi Amarh's novel *The beautyful ones are not yet born* (1968) exemplify African utopianism (Ashcroft 2013, 94–106). According to Ashcroft (2013, 103), African utopianism found its most significant expression in the persistence of hope for freedom from colonial oppression. MaXhosa Africa's statement of ancestors fighting for peace and justice points to a fight for a political and social version of African Utopianism. African worldliness is Africa's place and impact on the world (Ashcroft 2013, 106). With the premise of the African imaginary having the potential of shaping the modern world, worldliness points to Africa's cultural, spiritual, and political impact on the world as well as pan-Africanism and Afro modernity (Ashcroft 2013, 109). Modern Africans contribute and take from the world. Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism also acknowledge transculturalism, and Afropolitan and transnational identities (Anderson and Jones 2016, x; Sunstrum 2013, 114). MaXhosa Africa's statement of evolving culture and showcasing it to the world points to a worldly approach to designing that takes inspiration from different subcultures such as hip-hop and collaborates with the likes of Japanese Tokyo Knit.

[76] The transformative feature that media have on processes is referred to as mediatisation (Rocamora 2017, 727). Rocamora (2017, 727) describes media as transmitters of meaning and mediation as the circulation of messages through media. When day to day social, business and political processes are submitted to or becoming more dependent on media and media logic, media becomes the dominant force through which other institutions conform (Rocamora 2017, 727). Fashion designer Alber Elbaz (in Rocamora 2017, 725)



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reliant, as well as expressed through and by media (Rocamora 2017, 727). It is not only garments that are now designed with social media in mind, but fashion shows are also produced with an online audience viewing through digital screens in real time (Rocamora 2017, 727). I propose that the archival and conversational characteristics of social media also afford that such images and videos are accessible at any time thus not only creating a longer life span for the productions but laying a foundation for inspiration for subsequent collections and brand communication.

Decoded meaningfully by the audience, the video has a layered perceptual, cognitive, emotional, and ideological effect (Hall 1980, 119). A selection of YouTube and Instagram comments, as visual-centered social media platforms, as opposed to originally text-centred platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, are sampled below to demonstrate the effectiveness of the video campaign:

> @gogokutlwano (user on YouTube)
>
> Really enjoyed the expressions used in this video representing the brand Maxhosa, what it stands for and what it wants the continent to achieve in the music and the beautiful garments❤
>
> @GoddessSupreme (user on YouTube)
>
> High vibes beautiful Family! I can feel the LOVE POWER STRENGTH & HONOR jumping through the screen. My mind heart & spirit is engulfed with high energy & vibrations! Amazingly Inspiring Wurk.. Amazingly beautiful people. Thank you for sharing I am grateful. As above So below so it Shall BE. ASE'ASE'ASE'

---

stated that "social media has flattened fashion" in response to shifts he observed as a designer. The effect in reference is how 2D images now have more influence in fashion purchase decisions whereas 3D renderings were more important before the rise of social media (Rocamora 2017, 725). Elbaz observed that the women he had fittings with firstly, drew inspiration from social media where only the front of a dress was shown (Rocamora 2017, 725). Secondly, attention to the material quality and other tangible qualities are overlooked in favour of how photogenic the dress is (Rocamora 2017, 725). According to Rocamora (2017, 725) from these observations one can conclude that social media has transformed design practices, considering that the front of a dress matters more and social media has also transformed purchase decisions, considering that clothes need to photograph well for consumers.



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@thepositivetarot888 (user on YouTube)

This isn't a video, it's an EXPERIENCE.

@ sam_uys (user on Instagram)

@maxhosa Thank you for changing the face of the runway and breaking all stereotypes. I was really moved by @lamiez_holworthy post. This work is so important, you've gone beyond style and fashion 👏👏👏👏 You SEE people!!

@velvetbbc (user on Instagram)

WOW, BEYOND INTERNATIONAL

@knkunj (user on Instagram)

Enchanting

The responses expose and share a use of discursive language, meaning, and ideas common to MaXhosa Africa (Hall 1980, 118). There is a cultural and historical context of production and consumption in commonality between the producer and consumer, and in extension, myself as the researcher (Pauwels 2011, 14). The audience is decoded as having read the video through preferred and negotiated reading. The responses point towards a spiritual, emotional, mental, and perceptual shift experienced through viewing the video, and mostly, a hope that is connected to a productive future. These responses, being reproduction according to Hall (1980, 118), can also be used to inspire future communication and social designs from the brand.



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## 4.2 The SS22 Collection through Negotiated Reading

Figure 19: MaXhosa Africa. Models posing at the SS22 collection campaign video shoot at Hallmark House. 12 September 2022. (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

According to Cadle (2022, 27), more than empirical analysis is needed to argue for designs that embody Afro-now-ism. He employs Pauwels' visual analysis model to analyse designs and Hall's "negotiated reading" visual methodology, elaborated on in the previous chapter.



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Figure 20 (Left): MaXhosa Africa. Model wearing a coat walking down the runway at the SS22 collection show and campaign video shoot at Hallmark House. 12 September 2022. (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

Figure 21 (Right): Brent Stirton, A group of *abakwethwa* (Crosspolynations n.d.). A group of initiates at Qunu, Eastern Cape (14 December 2013).

In Figure 19, MaXhosa Africa revisits and builds on its original mission to create knitwear coats and jerseys for *amakrwala*. The multi-coloured coat has a semblance to the *abakwetha*[77] blankets that initiates wear during the initiation process, as seen in Figure 20. Although other blankets are associated with the *ukwaluko* (the initiation process), this particular blanket is most desired during the initiation process. Historically known as the 'Red Blanket People' in reference to their dress of blankets coloured with red ochre, AmaXhosa's use of blankets during *ukwaluko* is integral to culture (Crosspolynations n.d.). The *Abakwetha blanket* is a white felted blanket with stark red bands, symbolising

[77] Abakhwetha (umkhwetha in single form) is the Xhosa term for the initiates while they are going through initiation (Crosspolynations n.d.). The use of white ochre is symbolic of someone who is undergoing an initiation, whether into manhood, womanhood or traditional healing (ubungoma) (Long 2006, 63). Amakrwala (unripe fruit) is the term for graduates who have completed the initiation process. According to Long (2006, 63), upon their return from the mountain, amakrwala are smeared with red ochre to symbolise a return to normal tribal life and are welcomed back into the community by means of umgidi, a communal celebration (Long 2006, 63). They are also given a check tweed jacket, khaki pants, and a peaked checked cap to wear as new clothes to be worn for three months as the last step into becoming ripe men (Long 2006, 63).



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the blood associated with circumcision, which run along the length edges of the cloth (Crossploynations n.d.). With the initiation process beginning with the shredding of all the clothes the initiates own, each initiate wraps himself in a blanket during the initiation period as the only form of comfort and wear (Crosspolynations, n.d.). The blanket is to be burned along with the huts the initiates were staying in at the end of the initiation process (Crosspolynations n.d.). Contemporarily, these blankets are mass produced by Aranda Textile Mills, the oldest blanket manufacturer in South Africa established in 1953 by Italian textile engineer founders (Aranda n.d.; Crosspolynations n.d.). The blankets are acrylic and marketed for both traditional ceremonial use as well as 'homeware' and 'decor' for general consumption (Crosspolynations n.d.). According to Crosspolynations (n.d.), *amakrwala* are presented with new, generally more colourful and elaborate blankets as they rejoin their communities.

The diamond symbol, present in most of MaXhosa Africa's designs, makes its mark as the main pattern on the coat in five different designs and colourways. This unisex coat, paired with stockings, is worn by a female model instead of a male model considering its semblance to the blankets worn by *abakhwetha*. MaXhosa Africa draws inspiration from the red bands on the *abakhwetha* blankets (Figure 20) and incorporates them along the edges of the coat, although thinner (Figure 19). The coat which is dominantly grey and white, draws inspiration from the white blankets and white ochre smeared by the initiates. I acknowledge that the only interconnected visual marker on the body which marks the transition from being umkhwetha using white ochre to smear the body to ikrwala is the red ochre used to smear the body. The westernised clothing choices, as Ngxokolo's initial recognition and motivator, do not have a connection to the initiation process. The coat thus makes a strong visual connection from the stage of being an initiate to being a graduate and the privileges that come with that status. Both blankets and coats are used as overgarments over other garments and the body in general. Abakhwetha do not wear any clothing underneath their blankets whilst amakrwala are then given the privilege of wearing new clothes underneath their new coats and jerseys. The coat can also keep a closer memory of the initiation process as the blankets are burned. The model is also styled with white slip-on heels on the runway to complement



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the coat. This styling choice reflects MaXhosa Africa's Africanfuturistic desire for inclusivity and its commitment to creating and catering for the female market while being faithful to the brand's roots.

Figure 9 shows the vibrant short-length knitwear dress complemented by bright orange stockings. The diamond pattern appears on the paired items, with the dress also featuring horizontal lines that break through the joint triangle figures inspired by the beadwork in Figure 2. The cardigan style of the dress makes it adaptable to wear throughout all seasons of the year as it can be worn as is in warmer months and layered with items such as stockings and a coat in cooler months. The durable material of the dress, knitted with the finest mohair wool, is designed for sustainable long-term wear, which is meant to be passed down (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 261).

The male model wears a classic red two-piece outfit found in most MaXhosa Africa collections in different colours and patterns. The one in Figure 18 is knitted in MaXhosa Africa's MXS monogram and signature pattern. This two-piece design, made to be worn during summer and spring months, leaves the rural inspiration and targets an urban, metropolitan audience inspired by basketball and hip-hop culture. According to Marston (2017, 1), in the early 1990s, long, looser-fitting, 'baggy' shorts replaced the tight uniform shorts that had been standard throughout the history of basketball. Younger players in college and at professional level favoured larger cuts that were much looser on the body and came up to below the knees over the tighter, mid-thigh reaching shorts (Marston 2017, 2). The newly baggy aesthetic introduced by black athletes, rooted in hip-hop culture, soon pervaded mainstream culture (James 2023; Marston 2017, 1). James (2023) states that although former NBA star player Michael Jordan introduced the longer shorts in the 1980s, as he wanted to cover his lucky shorts underneath, the Fab Five, out of the University of Michigan, popularised the iconic look into the mainstream. The five college freshmen recruited by the University of Michigan were distinguished by their shaved heads, wearing of baggy shorts and black Nike socks, with black Nike high-top sneakers above their noticeable athletic talent (James 2023; Marston 2017, 6). More NBA basketball athletes such as Allen Iverson (Figure 26) embodied the strong, rebellious,



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and counter-normative aesthetic style of hip-hop as they played in the league (James 2023). The hip-hop basketball cultural intersection grew in the 1990s as athletes embraced the music and culture (Marston 2017, 6). Hip-hop music also served as the soundtrack for films and documentaries that explored the intersection of basketball and black urban life in America (Marston 2017, 6). Basketball in America is contemporarily understood as a stereotypically black sport, as dominated by black athletes, fans and culture (Marston 2017, 1-2). With this view, basketball has connections to other cultural expressions that aim to identify and portray Black people in contemporary times (Marston 2017, 1-2).

Figure 21 and 22 draw a parallel between the two-piece uniform featuring knee-length basketball shorts worn by National Basketball Association (NBA) players from the early 1990s and a SS22 two-piece design featuring knee-length shorts by MaXhosa Africa (Cadle 2022, 258). The style of the sneakers worn by the model (Figure 22) also compares with the footwear worn by African American former basketball player Allen Iverson in Figure 21, along with matching socks. Styled with bright-coloured socks, the outfit showcases a casual spring and summer style. Several shapes and geometric patterns are represented on the two-piece, including the MaXhosa Africa logo as an X, the diamond, the African hut, and other symbols as shown in Figures 27 and 28.



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Figure 22 (Left): Former NBA player Allen Iverson during his tenure with the Detroit Pistons. 9 December 2008. Image by Keith Allison, posted on Flickr on 8 August 2012.

Figure 23 (Right): A model walking down the runway at the MaXhosa Africa SS22 collection show and campaign video shoot at Hallmark House. 12 September 2022. (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

The fourth outfit, styled with bright yellow stockings, draws inspiration from mainstream Ndebele art geometric shapes and colours. The sleeveless spring/summer dress spots the diamond as the main duplicated symbol. The multi-coloured diamonds stand out on a white background and are divided by vertical black lines and multi-coloured horizontal strips. Contemporary Ndebele art is characterised by its bright colours, including yellow, blue, red, and white, which are used to bring out the geometry of the design. According to (Boyd 2017, 68), white bounded lines set diagonally or shaped like chevrons are part of renowned contemporary Ndebele artist Esther Mahlangu's[78]

[78] Esther Mahlangu (1935) is a South African Ndebele artist, native to the Mpumalanga province (sahistory n.d.). Mahlangu became a specialist in executing wall paintings a teenager, having been taught traditional wall painting and beadwork by her mother and grandmother as a child (sahistory n.d.). Since being discovered by French curators, Mahlangu's career has been marked with monumental milestones including painting geometric patterns on a BMW 525i in 1991, becoming the twelfth artist and first woman to take part in the BMW Art Car Project after figures such as Andy Warhol and Roy Lichtenstein (sahistory n.d.).



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signature patterns. According to Ndlovu (n.d.), aspects of Ndebele art designs have been appropriated by the post-apartheid government as part of constructing a national identity as expressed in paintings in streets, billboards and tourist vouchers. The visibility of Ndebele art forms in public spaces makes the patterns and colours easily recognisable by South Africans (Ndlovu n.d.).

The final model on the far right is essentially wearing a monochrome outfit with accents of blue on the MAXHOSA waist band and the hem of the skirt. This colour pattern is also seen in other designs in the collection (see Figure 22). This design mixes fabrics as the top is a long-sleeved chiffon blouse and the bottom is a pleated silk skirt which has separate pleats. The patterns on the skirt do not faithfully match the ones on the blouse. The blouse has fine zig zag details which are seen on the multi-coloured coat on the model on the far left while the skirt has the signature diamond motif. Whilst the outfit is not as easy going as Figure 22, the separate pleats make the skirt lively enough to be balanced with a bold patterned, yet modest blouse. It is an outfit reminiscent of mostly everyday corporate and evening wear and can thus be read a modern "professional" look. The separate pleats are also symbolic of traditional beadwork with tassels on Figure 23 and Figure 24.

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Mahlangu's work is featured in collections in South Africa and around the world including the United States, Japan, Germany, France and more (sahistory n.d.). Boyd (2017, 69 - 70) argues that Mahlangu has been too liberal with the carrying of her aesthetic heritage and in her entrepreneurial attitudes. According to Boyd (2017, 70), Mahlangu's commissioned work to her European clientele is treated as a "colourful pastime aesthetic" for Europeans or a celebration of African resistance against apartheid. Boyd (2017, 70) adds that through her commissioned work, aiming to celebrate tradition, traditional forms of Ndebele painting are translating to conventional European canvas painting on the contemporary symbol of global material culture – a BMW car. Whilst I acknowledge this view, I am also of the opinion that part of Esther Mahlangu's international and commercial success has motivated South African institutions and post-apartheid government to support indigenous art. Ndlovu (n.d.) states that "The visibility of Ndebele art forms in public spaces reflects the mutually constitutive ways of the appropriation of Ndebele culture as part of the South African traditional arts."



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Figure 24: Screenshot of TEDx Johannesburg talk by Laduma Ngxokolo, *The unexpected success of an authentic African brand*, 2019 (TEDx Talks 2019).

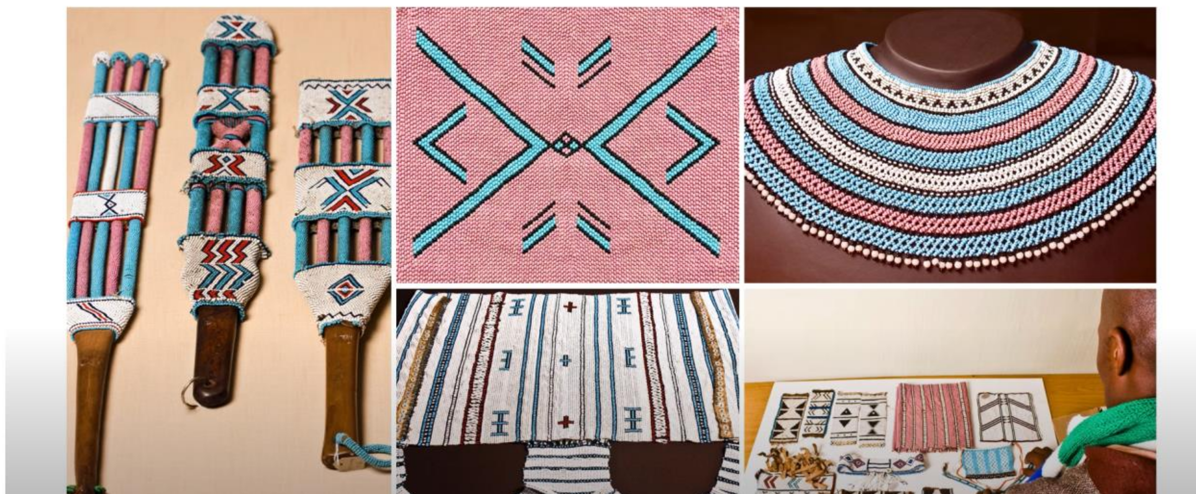


Figure 25: Screenshot of TEDx Johannesburg talk by Laduma Ngxokolo, *The unexpected success of an authentic African brand*, 2019 (TEDx Talks 2019).

## 4.3 MaXhosa Africa and Afro-now-ism

The following section discusses MaXhosa Africa as a brand that embodies Afro-now-ism. Inspired by Nigerian-British poet, essayist, and novelist Dr Ben Okri, Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 260) positions MaXhosa Africa as representing an Afrikan Utopia, which



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unfolds daily with endless possibilities.[79] This vision follows the protopian view of incremental change continuously evolving. MaXhosa Africa, a brand with an "Afroluxe design ethos", as Cadle (2020, 255) suggests, both fits and subverts the Africanfuturism and Afro-now-ism narratives. The brand possesses qualities of being rooted in Africa and African culture before branching out to the world, and it aims to shift the imaginations of Africans in the now. However, the brand has not openly suggested to be Africanfuturistic or Afrofuturistic. In what follows, I employ Cadle's seven-step model to evaluate MaXhosa Africa's SS22 capsule.

### *4.3.1 Afrofuturism / Africanfuturism*

MaXhosa Africa is presented and identified in public as an example of Afrofuturism because the characteristics broadly expressed by the brand align with Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism. As is evident in past collections such as SS20's *Siziikumnkani Neekumnkanikazi / We are Kings and Queens*, and AW19's *Amasiko Nezithethe / Customs and Traditions*, a more localised approach inspired these by incorporating African myths and philosophies such as Egyptology, *ubuntu*, and the views of the African philosopher Credo Mutwa on the royalty of African people (MaXhosa Africa 2022) (See Section 2.3.2). The standpoint of counter-memory is in action as the past of African people is presented as culturally and spiritually rich. MaXhosa Africa also draws inspiration from cultures across the African continent to appropriately represent Africa to the world (MaXhosa Africa 2022). In the SS22 collection under discussion, the designer appears to

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[79] Ben Okri delivered the 13th annual Steve Biko Memorial Lecture at the University of Cape Town on 12 September 2012 (University of Cape Town South Africa 2012). In this lecture titled "Biko and the Tough Alchemy of Africa", Okri addresses the kind of leadership, and future, Biko envisioned for South Africa and the rest of Africa (University of Cape Town South Africa 2012). Okri ends his speech with, "Thirty-five years ago, a visionary son of the soil who was going to become a doctor was slain. From his grave may a thousand dreams of freedom rise… Pass on the word that there are three Africas. The one that we see every day, the one that they write about, and the real, magical Africa that we don't see, unfolding through all the difficulties of our time like a quiet miracle. Infect the world with your light. Press forward the human genius. Our future is greater than our past…" (University of Cape Town South Africa 2012). What Ngxokolo refers to as an Afrikan Utopia is the third Africa Okri mentions, the Africa that is unfolding daily through difficulties, yet bearing so much possibility and opportunity (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 260). The Utopian element is that it is said not to be seen, to be magical, while the Africans above are seen and written about by the future's industry (Eshun 2003, 291). Through the designs of MaXhosa Africa, the word of spreading the genius of African tradition and culture is being passed on as per the calling of the poet Okri.



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adopt a broader and more inclusive African view as he focuses on the future. The SS22 collection rationale includes the following:

> We, the current generation, are meant to reach the pinnacle of our ancestors' sacrifices. We are the ones our ancestors have been waiting for centuries (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

MaXhosa Africa aims to "create an ideal world" and a "utopia" in which African culture is held to high value, conceiving of itself as a universal thought leader (MaXhosa Africa 2022). The brand's focus on the future-present is uplifting and hopeful and points to a productive view of Africa as a continent. The current vision statement of the brand reads:

> MaXhosa Africa is a luxury institution that seeks to showcase the Mother Continent for the greatness that is. The brand further seeks to reposition culture on the pedestal as a thought leader in society for the current and future universe (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

The infusion of technology in the brand's designs through production, marketing or styling to communicate the band's identity and ideals also points to an Afrofuturistic outlook. The models in Figure 25 are accessorised with 3D glasses[80] as the collection shared the evolution and future of the brand as an African luxury brand, shedding its former identity of a single-man vision – MaXhosa by Laduma (MaXhosa Africa n.d.). The symbolism of 3D technology can be read as an invitation by the brand for audiences to experience another dimension of the brand and its vision for the future. 3D glasses, normally worn by those who are observing images in magazines, cinema, and other screens, are worn by the observed models in this context. According to SSLA (n.d.), an environment is called augmented reality (AR) whenever 3D images are made dynamic so that the participants feel engaged with the setting. The choice to make the models wear 3D glasses can then be read as MaXhosa Africa beginning the process of creating the perfect world as early

[80] Three-dimensional (3D) technology in computer systems describes a picture that provides visual information (SSLA n.d.). PC Magazine (n.d.) describes 3D as a variety of technologies that make images and movies appear more lifelike in print, on the computer, in the cinema or on TV in order to create an illusion of depth. Augmented reality perceptions require plug-in readers and extra equipment such as 3D glasses (SSLA n.d.). The creation of 3D images is accomplished through the corresponding filters in the viewer's eyeglasses that direct the left image to the left eye and the right image to the right eye (PC Magazine n.d.). According to PC Magazine (n.d.), the most common glasses have a red left lens and cyan right lens, as seen on Figure 25.



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as A/W 2018.[81] The brand is now operating in AR. The consumer is encouraged to step in this augmented reality, which is accessible through engaging with the MaXhosa Africa brand. The summer shades worn in S/S 2022 (Figure 10 and 11) signify an expansion of the brand's accessories as well as a closer shift to the utopian ideal.

Figure 26: Models waiting backstage at the EVOLUTION OF MAXHOSA A/W18 show, 2018 (MaXhosa Africa n.d.).

#### *4.3.2 Cultural Significance*

Regarding social value, the brand symbolises South African and African patriotism and isiXhosa pride. It is an aspirational brand worn mainly by middle- to upper-class

[81] The "Evolution of MaXhosa" Autumn/Winter 2018 collection debuted in April 2018, in the year of pop culture Afrofuturism as *Black Panther* premiered in January 2018. MaXhosa Africa dressed some of the cast members to the premier, South African international actors John and Atandwa Kani (@maxhosa 2018). The brand captioned a selection of the images from the collection as "A tunnel vision in all matters color and pattern", "#AFROFUTURISM infused into #MAXHOSA EVOLUTION 2018 pattern game" and "A 3-D patterning effect imbedded in #MAXHOSA pattern power" (@maxhosa 2018). The brand owned Afrofuturism and the collection infused 3D patterning effects in stepping into a fresh identity and vision.



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clientele in South Africa. Now also worn as a part of traditional wear for formal events such as weddings and initiations, it also functions as traditional isiXhosa apparel. Ngxokolo shares the meanings and rationale of each collection in every season. Motifs include honouring ancestors, *ubuntu*, and passing on traditions while moving with the times. Figure 26 parallels the beaded wig a model wore in the SS22 video and the headgear with beads worn by Xhosa traditional healers in Figure 27. The choice to make the forehead fringe beads shorter can be read as *ubuntu* as it pays respect to the element of mystery due to a spiritual healer. In this design, the cattle skin headgear is also eliminated in favour of a knitted cap. While the headgear is prominent and elevated, the knitted cap is fitting and unobtrusive, yet still fashionable. The meaning of the cattle skin headgear cannot be fully known by the general public as traditional healers retain enigmatic elements. The diamond sign is present on the headgear headband (Figure 26) and neckpiece of the traditional healer in the middle in Figure 27. The MaXhosa Africa accessory wig also exchanges all the white beads on the traditional healer headgear (Figure 27) for blue beads with only a few white beads. The shorter veil, which only covers one's forehead and not one's eyes, is another alteration MaXhosa Africa applies. According to Van Wyk (2003, 18), the white beaded veil known as *amageza* (beads of madness) induces a trance when swaying before the eyes, and this is integral to divination. According to Long (2006, 61), white beads are normally preserved for traditional healers. White is the colour of lucidity and supernatural enlightenment, which are integral qualities of a traditional healer (Long 2006, 61; Van Wyk 2003). The blue beads are, however, still present in the beadwork of the traditional healers in Figure 32. The MaXhosa Africa wig design can be read as honouring both ancestors and traditional healers while maintaining a level of respectability. The swaying beads suit the modern wearer who favours wool in place of cattle skin. This proves to be one of the most Africanfuturistic designs of MaXhosa Africa as it fuses elements and techniques of the past through handmade beadwork strings and the future-present through a technologically designed and manufactured knitted cap. In other designs, MaXhosa Africa uses beads and beadwork as inspiration, but this accessory wig design incorporates beads.



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Figure 27: The Blk/Wht accessory wig, part of the MaXhosa Africa SS22 collection (MaXhosa Africa n.d.).

Figure 28: Matthew Zylstra, with permission from the Ruka family (2020). A ceremonial rite performed by isiXhosa traditional healers, *izangoma.*

The brand holds historical value through being inspired by isiXhosa culture, traditions, and people. The primary artefact used as inspiration is traditional beadwork



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from the past, adapted to suit a modern lifestyle and audience through fashion. With the name MaXhosa Africa, the brand is associated with the amaXhosa people of Southern Africa. It draws from the lifestyles and values of rural Xhosa communities, honours ancestors, and connects the past with a contemporary lifestyle.

Aesthetically, the brand is known for its recognisable geometric patterns and vibrant colours. The main shape is a diamond, which appears in most designs and collections. Inspired by traditional beadwork, the patterns seen on beadwork are replicated and modified on the clothing designs but are still traceable. The brand also uses cultural artefacts and symbols of African pride, such as beadwork, knobkerries, face painting, and so forth, for photoshoots and décor.

#### *4.3.3 Social Design*

Design theorist and philosopher Tony Fry (2017, 1) argues that current practices of design in the Global South are, to a large extent, influenced by the Global North and although the design for/by the South cannot be entirely free from that perspective, it still needs to challenge, oppose, and "adopt it consciously, critically and selectively" (Fry 2017, 1). South African fashion and pop culture critic Khensani Mohlatlole (2022) criticises the Western fashion design model, which idolises the designer as a conceptualist, artist, and philosopher at the expense of labourers such as seamstresses, textile farmers, craftsmen, embroiderers, garment factory workers, and salespeople. Using the case of MaXhosa Africa almost taking legal action against Spanish fast fashion brand Zara for plagiarising pattern designs on socks in 2018, Mohlatlole (2022) asserts that MaXhosa Africa has no right to claim ownership of the designs.[82] Most of the brand's designs and aesthetics would not be possible without the contribution of several uncredited craftsmen and women who collaboratively created Xhosa beadwork for several centuries (Mohlatlole

[82] According to MaXhosa Africa's April 2018 press release, Ngxokolo, being advised by the Intellectual Property law firm Moore Attorneys, sent a letter to Zara alerting them of the copyright infringement and demands (maxhosa.africa 2018). Zara was being accused of plagiarising MaXhosa Africa socks and patterns. Their sock range resembles the Khanyisa Cardigan, launched in March 2014 at the Mercedes-Benz Fashion Week Joburg (maxhosa.africa 2018). Zara's response was to immediately remove this item from both their online and retail stores (IOL 2018).



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2022). According to Rozani and Goduka (2017, 136), as part of their culture, Xhosa people constructed aesthetic designs of beadwork in networks/cooperatives called *amalima*, which is also a value very close to the amaXhosa way of life. Corporatives worked in sustainable sharing groups, which was the culture and vision Ngxokolo encourages at MaXhosa Africa headquarters (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 261–262; Rozani and Goduka 2017, 136). Ngxokolo chooses to use manufacturers and suppliers within South Africa and aims to create a community among the staff, which is diverse in culture and tribe; therefore, a holistically South African culture is encouraged as opposed to a rigidly Xhosa way of life (Careers Magazine 2020; Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 261–262). Xenophobic and tribalistic attitudes are confronted within the company, and everyone is encouraged to be proud of their culture (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 261–262). The choice to operate in South Africa means confronting social issues among South Africans and choosing one that unites them over one perceived as divisive.

Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 258–259) emphasises that MaXhosa Africa's designs do not carry an inherent symbolic meaning as the brand modifies the source material and wants to avoid being interpreted as the official authority of the culture. Removing meaning and symbols allows the brand to operate outside the obligation to carry culture. Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 258–259) also argues in favour of the ordinary Xhosa craftsmen and craftswomen in the rural areas still creating symbols and communicating with beadwork.

According to Mohlatlole (2022), African fashion brands and designers need to reject individualistic and capitalistic ideas of ownership and celebrity in favour of creating sustainable, ethical fashion that is community centred and is not driven by designers, creative directors, curators, photographers, and magazine editors (Mohlatlole 2020). While I concur with the view of decentring the fashion designer's name and the concept of designer labels in contemporary fashion, I put forward that through an Africanfuturistic lens, MaXhosa Africa is community centred by changing the original name of the brand in 2018 from MaXhosa by Laduma to MaXhosa Africa (Careers Magazine 2020). Ngxokolo evolved the company into a family-run enterprise, thus still relying on traditional amaXhosa values, holding familiar and communal relationships dear. In addition, through



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his designs and investment in Xhosa cultural practices and traditions, the designer aims to represent the continent as a legacy. Creating a brand that will outlast the founder into generations is one of the brand's aims (Careers Magazine 2020). MaXhosa was also expanding in vision and accepting the responsibility of impact by representing the African continent on the global stage of luxury fashion (Careers Magazine 2020). Through his creative work, the brand encourages consumers worldwide to engage with African traditions of thought, history, philosophy, and futurity. From an Afro-now-ism standpoint, the brand's designs inspire cultural imagination and effect transformation.

Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 256) states that MaXhosa Africa produces culturally significant work for a cosmopolitan audience. According to Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 256), culture is not confined to museums but can be used to ground the new generation in identity within a globalised culture. Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 258) argues that MaXhosa Africa's pieces should not be collector's items but everyday wear that fits within clients' technology, sophisticated lifestyles, and routines. The clothing should not only be for Heritage Month or traditional ceremonies (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 258). The SS22 collection was also shown in part at Rakuten Fashion Week in September 2021, where the brand collaborated with Japan's Tokyo Knit (Cadle 2022, 256).[83, 84] MaXhosa Africa's collaboration with Tokyo Knit points to an openness and adaptability to cultures and subcultures that current and potential clients are a part of without compromising the brand's essence. Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 258) references how clients submerged in hip-hop culture inspired the creation of balaclavas in the brand's collection as they styled pieces in ways the brand did not anticipate. This clientele inspired other pieces, such as

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[83] Hosted by the Japan Fashion Week Organization (JFW Organization), Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo is Japan's biggest fashion event held twice a year in March and August (Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo n.d.). Behind Paris, Milan, London, and New York, Tokyo is regarded as the next influential fashion city in which the trends for the next season are born from the latest collections (Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo n.d.). The town, known for its bold fashion culture and street style, hosts shows and exhibitions at Shibuya Hikarie and Omotesando Hills, as well as other locations in Tokyo (Rakuten Fashion Week Tokyo n.d.).

[84] Tokyo Knit is a platform for sharing new manufacturing techniques from knit fashion manufacturers in Tokyo to empower the next generation of fashion production (Tokyo Knit c2019). Tokyo Knit shares the vision of MaXhosa Africa in modernising traditional Japanese manufacturing techniques and creativity with modern technologies and ideas to suit the current market. Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 256) motivates his collaboration with the Tokyo Knit due to sharing the same sentimentalism towards culture in the modern world. The MaXhosa Africa capsule SS22 collection was shown at Rakuten Tokyo Fashion Week in September 2021 (Cadle 2022, 258).



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longer shorts and bucket hats. Known for his fashion style as much as his music, late South African hip-hop artist Riky Rick[85] set many fashion and pop culture trends. He was a significant patron, inspiration, and collaborator with the brand (MaXhosa Africa 2022). The balaclava popularised by the hip-hop artist was first worn by his protégé, Uncle Vinny, who was disguising himself before a big performance and reveal in 2020 (Cotton Fest 2021). Staying connected to urban culture is significant to the brand for inspiration and influencing influential people.

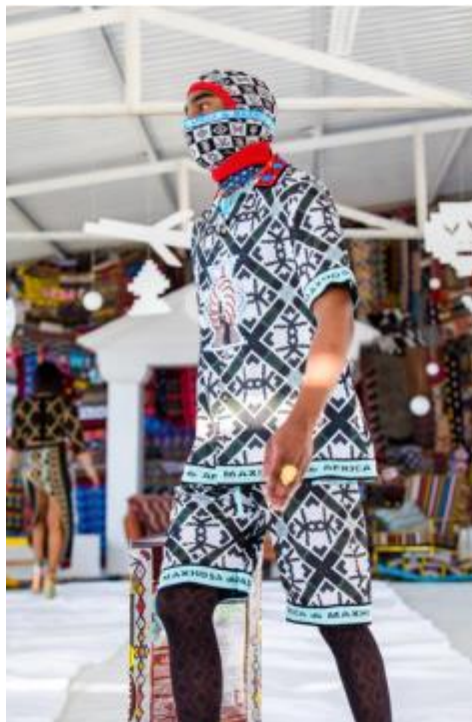

Figure 29: Late South African hip-hop artist Riky Rick walking at the MaXhosa Africa SS21 *"INGUMANGALISO IMISEBENZI KATHIXO" (God's work is miraculous)* show at New York Fashion Week (MaXhosa Africa 2022).

[85] MaXhosa Africa paid tribute to Riky Rick (1987–2022) with the AW/SS 22 *Alkebulan* collection: "The late Rikhado 'Riky Rick' Makhado takes centre stage as the muse of this collection, Laduma looked at Riky as a best true example of what an *Alkebulan* is. Laduma was inspired by Riky's fashion sense and ability to embrace great fashion brands worldwide. The show features a few selected MaXhosa looks that are inspired by Riky Rick as a special tribute for the selfless patriotism, love and dedication he had for the brand" (Maxhosa.africa 2022).



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Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 256) boldly claims that MaXhosa Africa is now a subculture, having been rooted in Xhosa culture and is potentially strong enough to outgrow the source material. He (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 256) continues that he no longer extracts from the sources for newer collections; instead, he modifies his existing designs for familiarity and consistency, which is highly prized in the luxury fashion market. Ngxokolo (in Cadle 2022, 256) argues that very few brands in the luxury market are founded on culture. Most French and Italian luxury brands are based on stylistic or historical influences and heritage (Cadle and Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 256). I concur with Ngxokolo's sentiments as European luxury brands such as Gucci, Louis Vuitton, Hermes, Dior, Balenciaga, and more, have creative and market commodities envisioned by head designers and art directors, which are influenced by contemporary culture, globalisation, and trends. French luxury brand Chanel, established in 1913, is founded on the disownment of traditional French dresses, which were layered and "restrictive" in the movement for women (Vogue France 2021). Chanel's primary design philosophy is simplicity, practicality, and elegance (Vogue France 2021). With collections emphasising clean lines, shades of black, white, or beige, Chanel matured to symbolise what is perceived as "French style" in contemporary culture (Vogue France 2021). Italian luxury brand Gucci emphasises both heritage and artisan craftsmanship as central to the brand's identity (Gucci n.d.). British luxury brand Burberry takes pride in its heritage and the values of its founder Thomas Burberry (Burberry n.d.). MaXhosa Africa's decision to be inspired by tradition is Africanfuturist as it encourages patrons around the world to partake in African ways of being, carries the responsibility of advancing that which is communal and has existed before the establishment of the brand with the goal of culture outliving the brand (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 256; Okorafor 2019). One can also motivate that MaXhosa Africa inspires up-and-coming African designers to use their traditions to create in the marketplace.

Mohlatlole's call for community centeredness in contemporary African fashion can be understood as part of the call for decolonisation. Decolonisation, according to Becker (2019, 4 – 5) is the emancipation and the positive release from cultural dominance. This



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implies that the prevailing globalised fashion design model should be adapted for the needs of Africa.

The South African fashion industry now seeks to participate in and lead conversations and practices about decolonisation and archiving in post-apartheid South Africa. Fashion curator and CoDirector of the African Fashion Research Institute, Dr Erica de Greef worked with a diverse team in selecting a pair of mblaselo[86] pants as an act of intentional representation and disruption at the 2019 South African fashion exhibition titled "21 YEARS: Making Histories with South African Fashion Week" at Zeitz MOCAA museum. Sibonelo Ndwalane's pair of mblaselo pants passed on by his father served as an object of historical, cultural and political significance at the exhibition (de Greef 2020, 918). The origins of mblaselo are from the men's hostels in Johannesburg which accommodated migrant labourers who worked in the mines during apartheid (Nettleton 2017, 30). Nettleton (2017, 26) argues that through tailoring his trousers to be worn specially during weekends off, Ndwalane's father crafted his unique sense of identity and belonging within the anonymity of migrant labour identity frameworks. It was essentially resisting the marginalising impact of the colonial and apartheid regime and made social commentary in an oppressive environment (Nettleton 2017, 26). It was in these hostels that various forms of art, dress, dance, music, and song still practiced today as tradition developed (de Greef 2020, 907).

Fry (2017, 3) claims that design in the Global South should be cautious so as not to replicate the defuturing[87] effects of the Global North. Modernity caused environmental and ethnocultural damage with consequences primarily evident in the Global South in the current times (Fry 2017, 3). Rovine (2015, 195) states that the South African fashion

[86] The mblaselo is a pair of patched workwear or khaki trousers designed by migrant labour in the mines during apartheid for weekend dances, now worn as part of traditional wear amongst Nguni and Sotho peoples (de Greef 2020, 907; Nettleton 2017, 26). The stitched patches are typically bright coloured triangular cloths with fringes (de Greef 2020, 907).
[87] Defuturing refers to unsustainable practices fuelled by globalised capitalism, which threaten ecological sustenance in the future (Fry 2017, 2). Unsustainable practices include overproduction, using harmful materials, deforestation, overconsumption, and unfair working conditions to name a few. According to Fry (2017, 2), as much as most of these unsustainable practices are motivated by building for the future, they simultaneously strip away resources from and for future generations.



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industry has experienced a sharp decline in domestic production and the contraction of the textile and clothing industries due to Chinese imports. Ngxokolo's approach to sustainability is creating quality items made of natural, durable materials sourced in South Africa (Cadle 2022, 261). Clothing is labelled with clear instructions of care and manufactured in South Africa. Ngxokolo emphasises his rejection of outsourcing production to other parts of the Global South, such as China and Bangladesh, as his sustainability model encompasses means of production, generational wealth, and ownership belonging to Africa and, more specifically, his family (Cadle 2022, 161). Manufacturing locally also positively impacts the brand's credibility, exclusivity, and ability to control copyright (Ngxokolo in Cadle 2022, 260).

#### *4.3.4 Transformative Power and Afro-now-ism*

The brand addresses the present and is actively "passing on the baton" of evolving traditions to suit modern times (MaXhosa Africa 2022). It has had a transformative influence on what is included as part of traditional clothing contemporarily in South Africa. The brand can then represent Afro-now-ism, a transformation in action with a future-biased focus.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In the process of re-intermediating beadwork to clothing patterns and prints, MaXhosa Africa embarks on transforming traditional aesthetic and visual messaging systems to complement contemporary values and styles. The SS22 collection is complemented by the usage of elements such as music and the shooting location to further communicate the ideals and values inspiring the collection and the vision of the brand. This chapter has thus evaluated the SS22 collection and campaign video through negotiated reading, to ascertain if it may be considered a social design able to shape cultural imagination and promote transformation based on Cadle's seven-step model. The brand is found to be culturally significant, with transformative power in the present.



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# CHAPTER FIVE

# CONCLUSION

Celnik (2019) declares “Afrofuturism doesn’t wedge wars in space: its fight is in the realm of the imagination.” The new frontier does not leave the earth as SF motifs often pointed towards, but rather encourages black communities to start imagining difference to effect change. The value of imagination and instigating was demonstrated by Lindelwa as she shaped the imagination of her children using education, crafts, and their culture, which is the foundation on which Ngxokolo has built the successful MaXhosa Africa brand. From a denotative level, MaXhosa Africa is a luxury brand that offers knitwear clothing and accessories. From a connotative level, it is a symbol of African culture and excellence able to stand as an equal with international luxury brands. Furthermore, it passes the baton through advancing a vision of a future where African ways of being are progressed and are the norm.

With the backdrop of traditional isiXhosa beadwork, the coming-of-age initiation process for isiXhosa young men (*ukwaluko*), isiXhosa anthropology books, and Ngxokolo, as the founder of the brand being raised by a knitwear designer, it is evident how the past shapes the present productions and values of the brand. In selecting this brand and its designs, with the main objective of exploring Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism in effect, it is found as affecting transformation in the present. Cadle (2020) refers to this phenomenon as Afro-now-ism and thus, as a secondary aim, this study has explored MaXhosa Africa as a social design based on Cadle’s seven-step model.

Chapter One introduced the study by outlining the research focus, aim, theoretical frameworks, and methods employed. The study was contextualised through an introductory discussion of Afrofuturism, and its parallel scopes Africanfuturism and Afro-now-ism. The manners in which MaXhosa Africa embraces digital technology were argued. A brief history of isiXhosa beadwork was outlined, as well as the brief history of the South African fashion industry and global fashion industry in which MaXhosa Africa is currently operating in.



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Chapter Two went into further detail in exploring the technocultural influence on Afrofuturism and Afrofuturism as a counter-memory as proposed by cultural theorist Kodwo Eshun. This study draws on the counterargument and countercultural perspective of Afrofuturism in rejecting futurisms and histories advanced by the SF industry for and about Africa and people of African descent. Africanfuturism was expounded upon as a perspective that is rooted in Africa and privileges African perspectives, as opposed to Afrofuturism which originates in America. Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are still recognised as sharing the same vision of advancing a counter-memory for black people and creating progressive cultural productions leading to a productive future. Afro-now-ism was then introduced as a perspective that privileges the now as opposed to Afrofuturism/Africanfuturism, which point to the future.

Chapter Three offered an in-depth discussion of Cadle's theorisation of Afro-now-ism and a detailed explanation of his model to evaluate what a social design is and the possibility of rethinking Africanity's effect in the future. Cadle is recognised as having the same aim to privilege Africa as Africanfuturism, and for a cultural production to be considered a social design, they firstly need to be considered as expressive of Afrofuturism. Recognising that MaXhosa Africa's designs have historical, aesthetic, and social value, and use an Africanfuturism idiom, it is in Chapter Four that a sample of the brand's social designs were discussed.

Chapter Four analysed MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection designs and campaign video in detail using the concept of negotiated reading as embedded in Cadle's Afro-now-ism model. With the historical and cultural context of isiXhosa beadwork, the localised and globalised fashion industry, and MaXhosa Africa as a brand, the visual material culture shown in the campaign video and the ideology of the collection were analysed. This chapter also offered an analysis of the collection to ascertain if MaXhosa Africa's SS22 collection may be considered a social design able to shape cultural imagination and promote transformation. Indeed, the brand's designs were concluded to be expressions of Afro-now-ism and social designs.



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The limitation worth noting is the reliance on knowledge of historical and cultural context of the brand to read the depicted visuals of the brand as I have limited technical knowledge of video and garment production processes. There is limited behind-the-scenes content that does not show elements such as the choreography process or how each model was assigned or selected an outfit. I used found materials in the entirety of this research process, which is also in alignment with the aims of the study. A further limitation is the reliance on secondary data, which aligns with my study design, but firsthand interviews with MaXhosa Africa brand representatives or Laduma Ngxokolo as primary data would have also resulted in rich data.

Pauwels (2020, 4) argues that often more effort is applied in renaming, relabelling, and imposing upon particular theoretical perspectives of existing frameworks rather than developing and adding towards these perspectives. Having confronted the phenomenon in this study through exploring concepts such a memory, African Futurism versus Africanfuturism and American Afro-now-ism, and the now-now expression, my future recommendation is the development of a more cumulative and integrative stance that builds upon existing perspectives.

Using MaXhosa Africa, this research explores Africanfuturist themes in black cultural production and/or social design and contributes new knowledge in the application of the new Afro-now-ism model proposed by Cadle, recognising MaXhosa Africa's visual materials beyond clothing as social designs. Further connections between the diaspora and Africa are drawn on in this study. Fashion is recognised as a major player in Africa's renaissance. And finally, I have engaged with African ways, philosophies, modes of being, and futures through the brand, which is the objective of Africanfuturism.



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