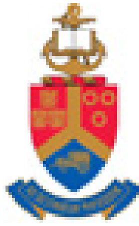

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We're Digging the Future: Afro-future Mining in Africa

by

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DR RORY DU PLESSIS

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DEDICATION

Yet who will fight for his life harder than the Wakandan Warrior…

Though his body is taken from him cell by cell,

His spirit yields no ground to the demons of darkness!

Thus, it was given by father to son from the first days of tribal unity.

For in this counsel, lay the seeds of eternity which are:

Courage beyond fear

Faith beyond doubt

Hope beyond despair

For, when the eyes fade, use the arm…

When the arm weakens, use the heart…

When the heart slows, use all three and snare the unexpected from its hiding place.

- King T'Challa (*Black Panther*, 1978)

"Kgomo mmo sella moreneng"

Robala ka kagiso, **Gabaiphiwe Solomon Kgongoane**, namane ea Tholo

Robala ka kagiso, Papa.

Forever in my heart.

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ABSTRACT AND KEY TERMS

Mining in Africa continues to be a relevant and important endeavour in building up the African economy, however, it is also a site that encapsulates the history, (re-)organisation, and on-going consequences of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and heteropatriarchy – a few of the key issues that continue to permeate Africa's socio-political and economic struggles. While Afrofuturism provides pathways towards future-orientated, often technological, solutions for present-day concerns, little attention is given to the ways that Afrofuturistic representations can act as critical, cultural, and political frameworks, as well as aesthetic counterpoints, to Euro-dominated conceptions of mining within African contexts. This study, therefore, engages with literature on Afrofuturism in light of Afrofuturistic visual texts such the films *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018) and *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022), as well as the artwork of African contemporary artist, Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, such texts are used to explore Afrofuturistic representations of mining and the miner – past, present, and future, in Africa. In doing so, the study hopes to demonstrate the relevance and power of Afrofuturism in working through and beyond issues of the black miner's exploitation, subjugation, and continued marginalisation; a positioning of the miner that aids and abets black living as an impossibility.

Additionally, this study seeks to establish that within African contexts that are increasingly technologised, there exists new ways to narrate the lives and identification of the black miner, new ways that are often free to emerge in Afrofuturistic representations. In critically analysing Afrofuturistic visual representations related to mining in Africa, this study further uncovers how Afrofuturism utilises the power of narrative through a strategic relation of images, that although contextualised in the future, are in constant dialogue with the past. Afrofuturism's deliberate oscillation between the past and future in the images of African mining under analysis, make the past alive to the present contexts of the living. Consequently, this re-awakening of the past for the presently living allows for a more urgent and critical re-assessment, re-investigation, and a re-imagination of new and liberating possibilities for the future that actively centre, and therefore value, the marginalised voices of the black oppressed – the black miner.

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Key terms: Afrofuturism; Africanfuturism; African mining; the black body; technology; digital technology; black software; *Black Panther* (2018); *Neptune Frost* (2022); Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga.

KAKGELO LE MAREO A A BOTLHOKWA

Meepo mo Aforika e tswelela go nna maiteko a a maleba le a botlhokwa mo go ageng ikonomi ya Aforika, mme gape ke lefelo le le tsenyeletsang hisetori, tsosoloso le ditlamorago tse di tsweletseng tsa bokoloniale, bokolone, bokapitalisi le go rena ga dithata ga bonna mo setšhabeng - dingwe tsa dintlha tsa botlhokwa tse di tswelelang go tsenelela mo dintweng tsa loago-polotiki le ikonomi tsa Aforika. Le fa Afrofuturism e tlamela ka ditsela tse di lebisang kwa ditharabololong tsa isago, gantsi tsa thekenoloji, tsa matshwenyego a segompieno, go neetswe kakanyo e nnye mo ditseleng tsa Afrofuturistic tse di ka dirang jaaka dithulaganyetso tse di botlhokwa, tsa setso le tsa sepolotiki, gammogo le dikganetsano tsa botaki, go dikakanyo tse di laolwang ke Yuropa tsa meepo mo mabakeng a Aforika. Ka jalo, thutopatlisiso eno e tsenyeletsa dibuka tse di buang ka Afrofuturism go batlisisa ka ga ditshwantshiso tsa Afrofuturistic tsa meepo le modiri wa kwa meepong - mo nakong e e fetileng, ya jaanong le ya isagwe, mo Aforika. Ka go dira jalo, thutopatlisiso e solofela go supa botlhokwa le maatla a Afrofuturism mo go direng le go feta dintlha tsa go dirisiwa botlhaswa, go gatelelwa le go tswelela go nna kwa thoko ga batho ba bantsho ba ba dirang mo meepong; maemo a batho ba ba dirang mo meepong a a thusang le go rotloetsa batho ba bantsho go tshela jaaka selo se se sa kgonegeng.

Thutopatlisiso gape e batla go thusa go tlhomamisa gore mo maemong a Aforika a a ntseng a dirisa thekenoloji thata, go na le ditsela tse dintšhwa tsa go tlhalosa matshelo le boitshupo jwa motho montsho yo o dirang mo moepong; ditsela tse dintšhwa tse gantsi di gololosegileng go tlhagelela mo ditshwantshong tsa Afrofuturistic. Thutopatlisiso e fitlhela gore fa go sekasekwa ka kelotlhoko ditshwantsho tsa Afrofuturistic tse di amanang le meepo mo Aforika, Afrofuturism e dirisa maatla a polelo ka kamano ya leano ya ditshwantsho tse le fa di le mo bokamosong, di buisanang ka metlha le tse di fetileng. Go fetofetoga ga Afrofuturism ka boomo magareng ga nako e e fetileng le isagwe mo ditshwantshong tsa meepo ya Aforika tse di sekasekiwang, e dira gore dilo tsa nako e e fetileng di tshele mo maemong a gompieno a botshelo. Go tsosolosa dilo tsa nako e e fetileng go thusa batho ba ba tshelang mo nakong ya

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jaanong go dira gore go nne le tshekatsheko e e potlakileng le e e masisi, go batlisisa gape le go akanya gape ka ditšhono tse di gololang tsa isagwe tse di dirang gore mantswe a bantsho ba ba gateletsweng a tseelwe kwa godimo, mme ka jalo a nne botlhokwa –mothomontsho yo o dirang mo moepong.

Mareo a a botlhokwa: Afrofuturism; Africanfuturism; Meepo ya Aforika; mmele wa mothomontsho; thekenoloji; thekenoloji ya dijithale; mananeo le tshedimosetso ya tiriso ya khomputara e e tlhamilweng ke bathobantsho; *Black Panther* (2018); *Neptune Frost* (2022); Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga.

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PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

Student Number: 11170523

I hereby declare that, *We're Digging the Future: Afro-future Mining in Africa*, is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

Obakeng Kgongoane

19 April 2024

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

The focus of this study rests on Afrofuturism as a crucial cultural and political aesthetic counterpoint to Euro-dominated ideas of the African past, present and future. Through an acknowledgement that new ways were required to narrate the lives and identification of Afrodiasporic Africans within an increasingly technologised world, Afrofuturistic literature and representations emerged. It was in 1994 that Afrofuturism was given a definitional language when Dery (1994:180) defined it as a "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture."[1] While the study acknowledges that Dery's founding definition strongly guides current understandings of Afrofuturism, it also is aware that it is a form of speculative fiction that specifically addresses the African-American community. The exclusive focus on African-American issues and experiences creates a regional boundary that excludes other Africans from other parts of the world.

Even with this, Dery, and many of the early creators of Afrofuturistic text, did not merely exclude other regions for the sake of exclusion. Afrofuturism carved its definition from the awareness that black speculative fictions are born out of the narratives and creative expressions of those Africans who suffered alienation, abduction and violence at the hands of the coloniser – an experience held more closely in intimacy by those in the Afrodiasporic community who share a traumatic and unique history of Euro-American slavery. There are those Africans who, like Bristow (2012, 2016) and Okorafor (2020), acknowledge the Afrodiasporic nature of Afrofuturism, and further justify it as being incompatible in telling African speculative stories in specifically African contexts and futures. Such hesitation might be informed by Dery's definition of Afrofuturism as an African-American cultural product, but it is also a response to manner in which Afrofuturistic representations and narratives have treated Africa as an empty backdrop to explore issues that might not directly speak back to Africans and their concerns.

[1] According to Oziewicz (2017:2-3), speculative fiction first emerged as a subgenre of science fiction whose thematic focus included the challenges faced by humanity and predictions of the future. It has since grown into a field of cultural production inclusive of a diverse range of genres and modalities that resist constructing worlds and scenarios that imitate reality. Such modes and genres include fantasy, horror, steampunk, and Afrofuturism, which are mostly birthed from a desire to subvert Western ideas of reality often exclusive of non-Western worldviews. Ultimately, speculative fiction can be related to as a pluralistic "mode of thought-experimenting that embraces an open-ended vision of the real".

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While there is a general respect and consideration for this fact, this study's primary focus on African Afrofuturistic texts wishes to address Afrofuturism's exclusion of Africa. By trying to establish thorough lines and connecting points in both regions, the study draws from the thoughts of Kenyan-born Afrofuturist artist Wangechi Mutu (Barber et al 2016:9) who expresses that even though the Afrofuturist focus on the Afrodiasporic slave narratives may not apply to many Africans, what remains common is the "forced creation story… that the colonialists *invented* us' [emphasis added]" when they named black-skinned Africans 'black'. This process of invention by the colonisers over the colonised has produced similar experiences of exile and alienation within Africans (Barber et al 2016) whom, even though for some, the colonisers chose to settle and not capture Africans out of their territories. Furthermore, writers such as Anderson (2015), Jones (2015), Eshun (1998; 2003) and even most recently herself, Okorafor (2019; 2020), have collectively petitioned for the inclusion of Africa within Afrofuturism's literature, representations and critical discourses.

Labelled *Africanfuturism*, a space for Africa, its people, cultures and perspectives are being carved within Afrofuturistic frameworks. Africanfuturism is growing its production of futuristic materials that either emerge from, or are situated in, Africa – of which a few examples will be used as evidence in the study. By critically engaging with Afrofuturism as self-consciously situated in Africa, this study works towards a broader understanding of Afrofuturism that exists outside of African-American contexts, that will further enter into the public imagination. As a result, when inclusive of Africanfuturism, Afrofuturism will therefore be considered a profoundly Pan-African product of culture and critique (Anderson 2016) that holds increasing relevance and applicability in African speculative storytelling of African themes, and issues within twenty first century technoculture.

Much of the Afrofuturistic visual material under critical analysis here circle back to an attempt at establishing the nature of the tenuous relationship between the black body and technology. Because Afrofuturism not only speculates about black futures, the study frequently oscillates between the past in relation to the challenges taking place in the present time. Afrofuturism's hope in making the past alive to the present contexts of the living (Benjamin 2009) through processes of re-investigation and re-imagination is done to open up new possibilities for the

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future that centralise the marginalised voices of the black oppressed. Part of Afrofuturism's efforts to value black lives, cultures and experiences is the deliberate act of contemplating their preservation (hence its specific focus on Afrocentric futures), the emphasis on black subjecthood (hence a concentration on the black 'everyday' as seen through black perspectives) and the securement of human liberation which especially includes those black bodies not considered to be fully human (Weheliye 2014). The latter is considered by the study to be Africa's greatest challenge in a world that continues to relegate the black body as a fungible property (Copeland 2015; 2013) and in this case, easily interchanged as a tool used to gain human ends – technology. Until the reduction of the black body (both male and female) as a fungible object is no longer deemed valuable only in so far as it serves white-capital interests, then liberation cannot be confidently secured.

The manner in which I explore the relationship between the black body and technology in Africa is through Afrofuturistic visual representations of mining situated in Africa. The visual representations I chose to use as my materials of analysis are also guided by this. Built on the vestiges of European colonialism and its white-dominated capitalist system, the oppression and exploitation of the black body within mining have been passed down almost unchanged from 'generation to generation' (Saul & Bond 2014; Crush 1992; Gaule 2017).[2] The introduction of mining, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, created a stark socio-political division that positioned the 'white' population as the powerful oppressor and exploiter of the weakened and disenfranchised 'black' population (Saul & Bond 2014:29). The deeper the extraction of underground resources moved, the more European-owned mining companies sought the use of cheap labour. In a political environment that was growing increasingly hostile towards Africans, Africans would be their choice. The labour of these Africans was not only inexpensive, but the work itself subjected them to poor and dehumanising conditions to further curb costs. In South African society at the time, the black miner was exploited which confirmed their status as "subaltern," an identification that added to the archetype of the miner as 'Other'.[3]

[2] As witnessed in the post-apartheid laments of mine workers during the devastating Marikana Massacre in 2012 (Saul & Bond 2014; Du Preez 2015).

[3] According to Lahiri-Dutt (2013:194) conventional geographers considered the work of mining as "the quintessential 'Other'". No less the miners who were considered the 'exploited proletariat' by a hegemonic urban middle-class.

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The pleasures of gain and profit acquired in mining "require the structural degradation of black bodies" (Aranke 2014). It is then of little surprise that even contemporaneously, the miner can be described as an "an intelligent worm crawling into the earth, eating rocks, going up to the surface, and shitting gold, cobalt, copper, nickel, and uranium" (Dalpe in Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:253). The deliberate relegation of the miner, unchanged from generation to generation, as being closer to non-human, indicates that even in postcoloniality there are spaces where colonial systems still limit black liberation through exploitation, exposure to dangerous work environments (witnessed especially in artisanal mining) and even cultures of masculinity that further reduce the body of black women not only as being closer to non-humanity, but also as the objects of often violent patriarchal domination.

Afrofuturistic representations of future mining in Africa therefore present rich opportunities to understand African mining's past in a present moment that still battles to secure the successful liberation of miners both in the formal and informal sector. Afrofuturistic representations of future mining in Africa also present to viewers alternatives that condition us to seriously consider "*that which will have **had to** happen* [emphasis in original]" for black individuals to be free individuals (Campt 2017:17) in the least liberated of spaces. Without neglecting the realities of the past and the present, Afrofuturism, especially within the visual field, opens up the viewer to a kind of reversibility of history that strategically reconstructs the past so that "counterintuitive and counterfactual futuristic alternative life-worlds" (Izzo in Baker 2023:105); possibilities such as those posited by the study that the mining underground in the future can be defined as a female workspace.

For this study, Afrofuturism is more than just an aesthetic practice that involves the creative placement of black individuals as central characters in high-tech future worlds holding fantastic gadgets. While this is not completely 'un-Afrofuturistic', such images are geared towards purposes much deeper. The opening of this chapter states that it is a *cultural* and *political* aesthetic counterpoint to Euro-dominated ideas of the past, present and future. It has also been alluded that Afrofuturism acts as a preserver, enabler and securer of black lives, cultures and experiences in pasts that are otherwise "white-washed" and futures where blackness (Eligon

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2020, Paris 2022)[4] melts into invisibility (van Veen 2015; Baker 2023). Above all, this study seeks to establish it as a strategy. Afrofuturistic texts are a manner in which one can find freedom from the representations of blackness that equate it to deficiency, a lack, a form of abandonment, or an impossibility (Baker 2023; Womack 2013; Nama 2011). Representations that are adamant on reiterating blackness as an impossibility remove it from the grammar of futurity (Campt 2017) by promoting what Baker defines as a "dynamic of Black death" (2023:101).

Black death is the ontological, epistemological, aesthetic and symbolic annihilation of black bodies, life and cultures that act as a justification for systems, through material practices, to institutionalise black bodily degradation and black (self-)hatred (Baker 2023). The institutionalisation of black inhumanity breeds a society wherein the "core epistemological assumptions and beliefs that undergird … ways of being, and modes of identification" (Baker 2023:101) make it almost impossible for blackness to live meaningfully; achieving independence from a "fundamental relation" to Western philosophical discourses that lock blackness as the emptied-out opposition to whiteness. As a result, Afrofuturism strategically builds representations through the effective use of narrative by telling 'another story' about blackness that resists representations that conform to, and thereby confirm, Black death.

This study itself goes on to illustrate the power of narrative in actively disassociating blackness from impossibility through a strategic relation of images (and narratives) of the past and the future that are directly related to present African issues. In doing so, this study commits itself to *performing* Afrofuturism by utilising its aesthetic to shift narrative focus. It treats Afrofuturism as a critical framework that orientates its modes of critique toward influencing material change. If, for example, renditions of the future of African mining are constituted by uses of technology that actively assert the humanity of black miners, then Afrofuturistic representations of technology grant a push toward the physical removal of any current

[4] Throughout the study, I use the terms "black" and "blackness". "Black" refers to a specific group of people who are assigned the identity 'black' often based on their physiognomic features and a shared political identity that is shaped by a history of Euro-American colonialism across regional boundaries (Eligon 2020). "Blackness", although aesthetically attached to black people, does not start as a sociological reality (Paris 2022). According to Paris (2022), blackness is an attempt at creating an essentialised hermeneutic that helps to interpret the ways/experiences of being black in the world which are translated through culture, political orientation, and values. While black and blackness hold no inherent relation, blackness "fundamentally shapes any core part of any black person's life… around the world" (Eligon 2020).

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limitations imposed on technology that do not consider, or fail to secure the interests of the miner.

The research interests presented here regarding the black body and technology in African mining within an Afrofuturistic framework begin with the blockbuster film *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018). In particular, the film fascinatingly applies the use of Afrocentric images that appropriate technology in what can be considered African ways. This depiction of African future worlds that circle around technology awakened a fascination with Afrofuturism in the public imagination. The film's Afrofuturistic images of Africa presented alternative geopolitical imageries of Africa that rejected populated Eurocentric images of Africa that define the continent as regressive 'decay'. In the film, Wakanda is represented as an African powerhouse: a technologically superior and affluent nation possessing the most expensive mineral resource in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), vibranium. Moreover, Wakanda has never been colonised and, at least in the beginning of the film, does not participate in globalisation and thereby is still able to maintain 'unchanged' African traditions, rituals, and dress codes. In summary, *Black Panther's* African super world is a fictional revision of what a liberated and truly uncolonised African geography would look like.

Furthermore, the film's representations of mining in Africa uniquely defies colonial, patriarchal and Euro-capitalist interests. This unique representation further lies in the total absence of mining, where the miner is replaced by an engineering scientist taking the form of an African woman, Shuri. For this reason, Shuri's presence in the African underground becomes pivotal in this study's discussion of the future of African mining as a female space free of bodily exploitation, harm and toxic masculinities. What also drew me closer to the film (and vice versa) was how the image of the underground in *Black Panther* dramatically contrasts those of apartheid photojournalists. To this end, this study analyses the work of South African photographer Ernest Cole and Euro-American female photographer Margaret Bourke-White, both of whom document the life and culture of the mines during the 1950's and 1960's in apartheid South Africa. The images of the African miners taken from the 'inside' and the 'outside' tell a similar story of the institutionalised dehumanisation of the black African and male miner under white supremacist rule. From different parts of the world, the African miner is affirmed to be subjugated and 'Othered' not only above the earth but also beneath it. Which

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brings the study to an important focus: how it wishes to remedy the gap in postcolonial focus that often takes for granted how postcolonialism ought to similarly manifest underground as much as it does above it (Squire & Dodds 2020).

As time progressed, so did the mass popularity of the initial *Black Panther* film while waiting on the sequel to debut. Consequently, the interests of this study expanded to other related Afrofuturistic texts. Theorising and studying more perspectives and possibilities of blackness and technology within the visual field, the focus on Afrofuturistic mining in Africa opened the research to even newer pathways. In using Afrofuturism as a primary critical framework, the research continued to follow suit in its "experimental attitude toward reality" (von Busch & Palmås 2006:19) thus shifting attention to other African Afrofuturistic texts related to mining that told its narratives using digital frameworks, languages and even aesthetics. Visual texts such as Anisia Uzeyman and Saul Williams's East African film *Neptune Frost* (2022) combine the digital, the technological and the futuristic within uniquely African spaces, thus highlighting the cultural significance of digital technologies within African technoculture. In *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022), the proletariat miner is not only the victim of dehumanising processes used to make digital technology, but is also the victor of struggle against African exploitation through a digital revolution that finds success through its African uses of (digital) technology. The complex relationship between the miner, race, gender, technology and the African underground deepens upon entering this digital arena, thus expanding Afrofuturism as a social and political aesthetic counterpoint not only in the realm of representations of technology, but now also within a digital culture that is situated in Africa.

It is here that I circle back to Dery's original definition of Afrofuturism in the hopes of elucidating the importance of digital and technoculture in Afrofuturism's aesthetic and critical focus. Afrofuturism treats its themes and concerns within the context of "twentieth century technoculture" (Dery 1994). The significance of such a context is made profound when one considers how in the same year that Afrofuturism is defined (1994), the internet was first made available for public usage. From about 1995, the internet was established as a massified cultural

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force holding within it textual and rising graphical[5] means of communication. However, as a by-product of an already-existing digital divide, access to the internet, info-science and other digital technologies were limited to only a privileged few: the assumed user who is considered to be primarily white and primarily male (Nakamura 2008). Despite the internet being a global cultural force, black users were hidden in plain sight thus producing arguments for the racialisation of digital technology as 'white' – the same characteristic used to define the racially embodied user (Brock 2020). 'White' in this sense refers to the manner in which the racially embodied users identified as a white individual allow offline racial ideologies to inevitably permeate quotidian digital practices and culture (Brock 2020); digital practices and cultures that do not always have the interests of black people in mind (McIlwain 2019).

Films like *Neptune Frost* (2020) illustrate how Afrofuturism becomes a key player in establishing the manner in which blacks have influenced technoculture, and vice versa, thereby resisting the default user and creator of digital technologies as Euro-American. In fact, what this study goes on to further address is not just the creative and cultural absence of African-American presence within mainstream technoculture, but how Africans use, relate to and construct digital technology in ways that make African presence visible within expanding definitions of technoculture. Without making African digital practices visible, the uses and cultural significance of digital technology within African communities give more space for digital networks, design and practices to 'Other' African users. Rather than to make efforts in integrating African culture and experiences into common technoculture, digital technology and practices defaulted as 'white' will continue to label African, and Afro-diasporic, uses of technology as deviant, resistant and/or worse, absent.

Overall, Afrofuturistic visual texts such as the first of the two *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018; Coogler 2022) films, *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022), and, the contemporary artwork of Congolese artist, Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga become the sites of meaning for the exploration of Afrofuturism's potent reflection of mining, the (raced and gendered) miner and (digital) technology in Africa – past, present and future. By beginning with the legacy of

[5] It was also around this time that *Netscape Navigator* would become the first widely popular graphic web browser moving the internet from a primarily textual medium in the form of forums to more visual forms in the form of digitised images (Nakamura 2008).

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injustices inherited in African mining, Africanfuturism will be the manner, approach and framework in which this study will talk directly to the historically oppressed status of the African miner as an objectified tool of extraction. This will be done in a manner that simultaneously acknowledges the painful experience of the reduction of the black body to technology, but also opens up the possibilities of the empowerment that can be afforded to African miners through (digital) technology; especially when that (digital) technology has, first and foremost, African interests in mind. Adamant on exploring African uses of (digital) technology, this study focuses on Africanfuturism's representational fascination with future-orientated and technological solutions to present-day concerns that ultimately attempt to rectify the past. In the process, black agency is better enabled, black lives are sustained and just societies are created, thus reminding one that such inquiry into the future cannot be done without also providing ways and possibilities for African (self-)identification to be reconfigured (Kniaź 2020). My choice in using *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018; Coogler 2022) films, *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022) and the works of Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga as well as references to apartheid photography of mining are predicated on the fact that they are related to mining in African contexts past, present and future. Furthermore, they cross visual genres thus showcasing the relevant, flexible and broad applicability of Afrofuturism in growing African visual culture/s, as well as in visualising digital culture in Africa.

This chapter will go on to provide a roadmap of the study by beginning with a clarification of the research problem the study aims to address, the aims and objectives, as well as providing a clear delineation of the study's scope. In the proceeding sections, attention will turn to the methodology, theoretical frameworks and the literature consulted in my attempt at building a substantial response to the study's research problem. Between these sections some examples of how the methodology, theoretical framework and literature may practically apply in critically analysing Africanfuturistic text will be given. The examples provided in this chapter are not the sum total of the material and application strategies to be used in the thesis, however, they do provide an adequate demonstration on how the study intends to apply the methods, frameworks and literature presented, therefore enhancing the study's accessibility to the reader. Finally, this chapter will give an outline of all the chapters in the thesis, as a matter of building anticipation for the journey ahead.

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1.1 The Research Problem

Mining in Africa continues to be a relevant and important endeavour in building up the African economy, but it is also a site which encapsulates the history, (re-)organisation and on-going consequences of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism and even heteropatriarchy – a few of the key issues that continue to permeate Africa's socio-political and economic struggles. While Afrofuturism provides pathways towards future-orientated, often technological, solutions for present-day concerns, little attention is given to the ways that Africanfuturisitc representations can act as crucial cultural, and political aesthetic counterpoints to Euro-dominated conceptions of mining in African contexts. This study therefore (re-)engages with existing literature on Afrofuturism as well as its branch-off, Africanfuturism, but under new contexts that focus both frameworks on representations of mining and the miner – past, present and future, in Africa. In doing so, this study hopes to expand on the growing body of knowledge concerning Afrofuturism's place and relevance in Africa in the form of Africanfuturism. Additionally, this study also wishes to illustrate how Africanfuturism's critical reassessment of the past, through its visual representations as related to African mining, can produce futures wherein technology does not only aid in the exploitation and subjugation of the black miner, but also aids in liberating her.

1.2 The Research Aims and Objectives

Ultimately, this study presents the idea that Africanfuturistic visual representations act as potent cultural and political aesthetic counterpoints to Euro-dominated ideas of the future. When placed within the specific context of mining in Africa, what is uncovered here is the manner in which Africanfuturism's representations of future-mining are in touch with African (pre-)colonial history, culture and socio-political realities. As such, Afrofuturistic representations of mining are a crucial site to not only engage with the future, but also to deliberate the ways that racism, white supremacy, sexism, xenophobia and Euro-American (cultural) imperialism continue to haunt and shape Africa, and the African diaspora at large, in the Afrofuturistic images analysed by the study.

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With mining remaining a source of neo-colonial and patriarchal injustice in Africa, this study takes an interest in Afrofuturistic representations of African mining by using Africanfuturism (without abandoning its foundation – Afrofuturism) as my primary theoretical framework; and Image Studies as my primary methodology. By analysing the Africanfuturistic visual texts *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018) and *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022), as well as engaging with contemporary art and apartheid photography, my study intends to:

- Examine the manner in which Africanfuturism acts a as a cultural and political aesthetic counterpoint to Euro-dominated ideas of the future in African contexts where mining is directly related back to African perspectives on African issues through visual representation.
- Seeing that Afrofuturism, as well as Africanfuturism, are time-sensitive[6] (Davoudi 2022), this study aims to analyse Africanfuturistic images by conducting a critical reassessment of the past being referenced. When placing this within the context of African mining, the study explores the prevalence of mining as a capitalistic, racialised and gendered territory, practise, and culture in (Southern) Africa by engaging its history.
- Visual representations of mining under apartheid will also be used to compare and contrast Africanfuturist representations of the miner situated in the Afro-future. The aim of comparing and contrasting these two 'time zones' will not only illustrate the collapse of history into issues of the present moment that are being addressed in representations of the future, but to also investigate the role of technology in exploiting the black miner and also in liberating them.
- Furthermore, in critically analysing and interpreting Africanfuturistic visual texts of the liberated African miner, the study aims to showcase the manners in which Africanfuturistic imagination fundamentally challenges and shifts racial and gender identity norms.

[6] According to Davoudi (2022), Afrofuturism is not only a literary genre, cultural aesthetic, and a political sensibility, it is also a philosophy of history that encourages the contemplation of the past as a non-linear mode through which to think about the present and future. In other words, Afrofuturism involves a collapsing of time wherein past, present and future are never independent of one another, but are constantly being referenced simultaneously. Hence Afrofuturistic texts constantly re-visit the past in constructing futures that always talk back to the present moment and its issues (Womack 2013).

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- Finally, in illustrating how Africanfuturistic texts challenge and shift racial and gender identity norm in mining, this study aims to further establish Africanfuturism's importance in enabling the reconfiguration of African (self-)identity; despite it being haunted and shaped by racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, and Euro-American (cultural) imperialism in a neo-colonial African setting.

1.3 Scope of the Study

With the study operating in the fields of visual and digital culture, the cultural dimensions of (digital) technology through representation will be the primary focus. The analyses presented will not focus solely on the materiality of technology (neither on the material forms of their representation), but on the metaphoric and narrative value of Africanfuturist (digital) technologies. For this reason, (digital) technology is something that is "constructed, maintained, preserved, and consumed" (Sayers 2018:2) within community and therefore is adequate in providing contact with the power dynamics that are at play within that particular society. When relating this to Africanfuturist sensibilities, the processes of imagining, designing, creating and even representing future (digital) technologies also gives viewers insight into a particular vision of society that is intended to be fulfilled (Felt et al. 2017).

Such views and insights will be dissected from Africanfuturist representations of (digital) technology that are grounded in black African culture; more specifically, to Africanfuturistic representations of (digital) technology that are imagined, constructed and consumed in mining environments, by the gendered black miner. Therefore, although Africanfuturism in many ways works to interrupt Eurocentric views of the world at large, the "tectonic change and paradigm-shifting"[7] (Corbin 2018:273) caused by Africanfuturism will limit its application to representations of mining, the black body/miner and (digital) technology in Africa. This is not to say that mining's impact on the past, present, and future natural environment are not important to discuss. Afrofuturism does concern itself with 'green' issues that directly affect black individuals and their natural (and/or city) environments in the future (Butler 2021), but such Africanfuturist predilections and speculative predictions fall out of the scope of this study.

[7] Corbin (2018) refers specifically to a tectonic change caused by Afrofuturism in the ways that black countries, cities, neighbourhoods, and spaces are depicted and understood.

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It is important for me to note here that in the subsequent sections, I have liberally employed the first film *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018) (*BP* henceforth) as a means for me to illustrate the relevance, value and suitability of using the following frameworks, methodology and literature in critically examining Africanfuturistic texts. As stated earlier, the hope is that in referring to a widely known text, the methods, concepts and general rationale employed throughout the study will be made more accessible to the reader – sooner rather than later. It is also important to note that this study takes the position of terms held by Kniaz (2020). Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism hold the same aims, outlooks and meanings, however, the strongest difference is in their situatedness. Afrofuturism orientates itself in addressing African-American and Afrodiasporic issues, whereas Africanfuturism holds a keen focus on addressing specifically African issues. This study therefore, as Kniaz (2020) puts forward, interchanges between both Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism without losing meaning as the principles, frameworks and aims are the same (this will be expanded on in coming sections). In other words, Africanfuturism is Afrofuturism but in Africa, therefore both terms are appropriate and applicable in my engagement with the representations, themes and frameworks used in the study.

1.4 Research Methodology and Theoretical Frameworks

1.4.1 *Image Studies*

Image Studies (IS) will the methodology practised by this research. IS considers two things in its methodological approach: the first consideration is the interdisciplinary nature of studying visual culture. As Manghani (2012) asserts in his book, *Image studies: Theory and practice*, an interdisciplinary approach to reading images is *necessary* as there is no singular way in which to do it. Being that this research is conducted within the broad realm of digital culture and media studies, my chosen interaction with Afrofuturistic images will be leaning on visual methodologies. The second consideration is based on the understanding that the image is a 'carrier' of information about the values, norms, and cultural practices in a society. These meanings are studied with the understanding that they cannot be adequately encapsulated by any other medium of communication, otherwise it would not be relevant to visual culture

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(Karlsson in Arthur 2012:94). Consequently, the image becomes a unique, rich and central site/sight of information for my research.

Visual representations, including Afrofuturistic ones, hold a plethora of meanings that hold "political, social and cultural ramifications" (Manghani 2012:xxvi). The image is therefore more than a mere object. It is often the outcome of relationships, social processes, and exchanges of power constructed by the society that produces it (Arthur 2012; Manghani 2012). Through analysing images, more can be known about the relationships that produce and surround them. This idea of "knowing through image" (Arthur 2012:95) will play a central part of my research methodology. It is by studying the visual image as a medium of communication that new epistemologies and insights surrounding society and its relations of power, gender, race, and identity can be produced. IS thus involves a crucial critical exploration of the complex link between the visual representation and meaning.

Although IS makes use of semiotics to explore this link, it also extends it. Semiotics, simply put, is the study of signs and symbols within a text in order to uncover meaning. Semioticians such as Ferdinand de Saussure (Aitken 2005) break down a sign into the signifier (the sound or image), and the signified (the associated concept). De Saussure makes the argument that the identification of meaning in a text is not as simple as viewing the image and thus grasping the intended concept. The relationship between the signifier and the concept is not inherent; it is learned. It is also not universal, but is informed by an individual's social class, geographic location, race, gender, and ethnicity (Aitken 2005:243). A semiotic analysis of text acknowledges that meanings received from a text are often a result of these processes thereby making its deciphering a layered process. Attention is given to visual, audio and written components of the text, but also the factors that impact its interpretation.

However, IS expresses dissatisfaction with this standard mode of semiotic analysis. IS argues that semiotics uses a set of analytical tools that help to dissect an image in order to see how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning (Manghani 2012:8; Rose 2022). Semiotics in this sense is only interacted with as the mere study of signs and symbols to uncover a text's meaning. In IS, however, semiotics must also involve a *creative engagement* with the image

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under analysis. Consequently, what Manghani (2012) means by using semiotics to inspire a "creative engagement" is the researcher's transformation of the image from 'teacherly' to *writerly,* thereby becoming a creative endeavour.

With this, Manghani (2012) distinguishes between two kinds of semiotics in IS, both of which my study will perform: the traditional teacherly approach to images which involves a strict reading of signification (as explained earlier), and the writerly approach which takes the image's signs and significations and their representational elements, myths and meanings to talk about related societal processes and issues in a metaphoric sense. In other words, like textual analysis, IS analyses a text as a metaphor for life. Borrowing from the work of Roland Barthes, IS understands that the information, values, and myths attached to a given image produce meanings that can be constantly (re-)made and shared beyond the confines of the author's original intention, and even the repeated popular associations with the image (Barthes 2001) while at the same time, the use of these is not prohibited.

Another important factor in IS is the image under study is understood as being both readerly and writerly. Since the image is both readerly and writerly, it will be informed by the reader's interpretation of the text. Hermeneutics therefore is as an important component of IS methodology as it takes the position that the meaning of a text is made up of several layers that make the meaning of a text dynamic. In hermeneutics, texts are treated as culturally mediated social products that are interacted with from a range of changing discourses and contexts (Aitken 2005:248). The possibility of ascertaining a single meaning for a text is therefore rejected as hermeneutical analysis considers the context of the text and the context of the reader in interpreting its signs and symbols. In other words, the operating frames of reference, therefore meaning is not determined by a single individual but is socially constructed thereby reflecting social processes, experiences, and ideologies. The context in which *BP* was screened, and my position as a researcher thus become part of the construction of its meaning and both of these layers are necessary to engage with.

As one can begin to tell, IS is a methodology that is composed of other traditionally independent methodologies: semiotics, textual analysis and hermeneutics. The incorporation of all three methodologies is not an indication of IS's lack of decisiveness or opaque nature but rather testifies to the complexities and interdisciplinary nature of visual culture. The different

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kinds of visualities and visual demands made within visual culture require that there always be various ways made available in which images in visual culture can be read. In critically analysing the visual culture found within this thesis (images that cut across different mediums), IS makes available to the reader semiotics, textual analysis and hermeneutics as methods of reading at any given time – all at once. IS's incorporation of semiotics, textual analysis and hermeneutics will be used in the study as means to liberate the reading of Afrofuturistic images thereby more closely dissecting Afrofuturistic images as carriers of information about history, society and its future. When one further considers how images take on new shapes as the contexts they are read under change, then it is important that the reading of images assumes adaptable approaches that are alive to the current change in time.

1.4.1.1 An example of Image Studies' application to Afrofuturistic text: The case of *Black Panther*

Built on audience identification with the film, *BP* is a text-as-a-metaphor-for-life. Texts as a metaphor for lived experience refers to the idea that texts inscribe meaning, values and behaviours (Aitken 2005:239) Analysis of texts such as films, landscapes, and even institutions provide interesting metaphors which makes the unfamiliar in lived experiences, familiar. For many, *BP* has illustrated the African experience of 'unhomeliness' through African-American character, Killmonger. Killmonger feels estranged from Wakandan people and their traditions even though he sits as King (Tallapessy et al. 2020:80-81). Raised in Oakland, California, Killmonger's African-American identity also marginalises him in Euro-America. Killmonger, although an African-American stereotype of a violent and hypermasculine male raised in the 'projects', represents the often-unrepresentable confusion of identity experienced by African-Americans who are unfamiliar with African culture, yet are ethnically African (Tallapessy et al. 2020). Therefore, the text becomes a metaphor for the postcolonial societal processes of identification, belonging, and identity as a construction, as well as for ideas of black embodiment that support it as a split identity constituting the coloniser and the colonised (Tallapessy et al. 2020).

Core to my research, however, is the discussion of Afrofuturistic images of mining and mining technology. Employing IS means that I will treat the image as the 'thing' under analysis

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through semiotics and I will use the image as a metaphoric *tool* to further examine issues of gendered mining discrimination in (South) Africa. *BP*'s destabilisation of mining as a potential space for female agency and leadership (as represented by Shuri's underground lab), for example, acts as a metaphor that stands against the lived anti-women systems currently operating in South African mines (Benya 2015; 2016). This method of reading the image as a metaphor for life grants this research an approach to reading images that does not veer off into long-winded abstract idealisms. As a result, by keeping my analysis of the image constantly connected to the material world and its concerns, my research can present ideas about the world that aim to improve it (Aitken 2005). The image then continues to be a primary means of better understanding social realities through inquiring, not only of their impact on shaping the world, but also its complexities.

1.4.1.2 The rise of the Black Panther

The Black Panther made his first public appearance in July 1966. As the first black comic superhero, writers Stan Lee and Jack Kirby introduced him into the world of the American superhero team, the *Fantastic Four*. Issue #52 and #53 introduce readers to Black Panther's world and origin story. Named T'Challa, the Black Panther is the king of a technologically, scientifically, and economically progressive fictional African country, Wakanda. Invited by King T'Challa to secretly test his fighting abilities and his high-tech weaponry, the Fantastic Four make a trip to visit him in his country. Coming from the strongest and most technologically advanced part of the world himself, Mr Fantastic (Reed Richards) is highly impressed and fascinated by the advanced transportation used to collect them, as well as the innovative telecommunications technology used by T'Challa's messenger. As issue #52 goes along, readers witness the surprise of Mr Fantastic, Invisible Woman (Susan Storm; the wife of Reed Richards), Human Torch (Johnny Storm; brother to Susan Storm), the Thing (Ben Grimm; long time best friend to Reed Richards) and accompanying friend, Wyatt Wingfoot.

For an African nation, independent of Euro-American economic, infrastructural, and political support, to produce world-leading scientific research, use model technologies, follow modern economic trends, and have a successful economy is a contradiction for the Fantastic Four who expect Wakanda to be marked by primitivity, simplicity, deficiency, lack, and hopeless

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struggle. Not only that, but upon meeting King T'Challa, the Fantastic Four learn that he is not only a worthy and skilled fighter, but he is also a regal monarch, has world-class education, the most expensive capitalist tastes, is surrounded by innovative super-technologies, and is the richest man in the world.[8] T'Challa is represented by Lee and Kirby as an intelligent, noble, and unprecedented African leader of a successful African nation thereby undoubtedly making him a sturdy equal to the Fantastic Four.

The Black Panther was introduced to the public during a time when globally, Africans and the African diaspora were fighting for their liberation and independence from Euro-American colonial powers. The fight for the equal rights of black men and women in the American Civil Rights movement during the 1960's took place alongside the independence of a number of African nations from colonial powers.[9] During these eras of radical change there was a rising shift in cultural and racial politics that previously associated 'black' with sub-humanity and inferiority to black being beautiful and powerful.[10] Additionally, Africa's anti-colonial movement birthed a possibility for the successful rise of Africa on its own terms.

Such changes in the racial and political dynamics informed the reading of Lee and Kirby's representation of T'Challa and Wakanda as powerful metaphors for a progressive racial system, anticolonialism and African capability (Nama 2011). Lee and Kirby's representation of T'Challa and Wakanda create a reimagination of Africa that is not based off of a history of anti-black racism, colonialism, and efforts to stagnate time for Africans who are trapped through representation as being primitive despite being part of a changing and modernising world. Rather, T'Challa is an incorruptible and successful leader of a technologically progressive African nation that has always been politically and economically independent. Thus, presenting a picture of Africa that places it as a geopolitical contender with the rest of

[8] King T'Challa has an estimated net worth of five hundred billion dollars making him the rich man in the Marvel Universe.
[9] During the 1960's seventeen African nations gained independence from European colonisers thereby initiating a process of African decolonization (Lund 2016).
[10] In 1966, black nationalist leader Stokely Carmichael (later renaming himself Kwame Ture) introduced the slogan "Black power" which would soon catch on as a rally cry for black protestors during the Civil Rights movement. Black power would be understood as a call for black individuals to collectively define their own identity, create their own organisations that would protect the interests of their own goals. The independent thoughts of black people would lead to systems and structures different to those instilled by Euro-American powers that disempowered black people, identity and culture (*Stokely Carmichael* 2019).

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the world, Lee and Kirby present a picture of black African excellence that defies the odds of Western philosophical and political discourses regarding 'black' as a marker of lack (Baker 2023), and Africa as a marker of decay (Mbembe 2017).

Coogler's opening *BP* (2018) film takes its inspiration from the breakthrough black representations of the Black Panther and Wakanda when Lee and Kirby first introduced them in the *Fantastic Four* issue #52 (1966). The film continues the same spirit of the celebration of blackness through continuing a set of representations that challenge Western stereotypes of blackness, although placing it in more current contexts. T'Challa (played by Chadwick Boseman) is still the regal King of the wealthy Wakandan nation. Steeped in high-tech gadgetry, modern structures, and impressive transportation and telecommunications technology, Coogler (2018) affirms Africa, and its people, to be the antithesis of "backward", "substandard", "chaotic" and in desperate need of Western aid (White 2018). Coogler reproduces an Afrocentric representational wonderland that affirms Africa's postcolonial potential at self-renewal, independent economic empowerment, global leadership, and being a model for scientific innovation worldwide (Lund 2016).

1.4.1.3 The context of reception

The Disney produced superhero film *BP* (Coogler 2018) caused a wave of celebration amongst (black) audiences not only in America, but across the globe bringing in $1.4 billion in its opening weekend. Half of these earnings came from international audiences[11] (Bhayroo 2019) thus testifying to the film's wide dissemination of ideas and representations, as well as its successful and widely popular reception. The film has been praised internationally for its inclusive production (making use of a predominately black cast constituting not just African-Americans), its 'revolutionary' representation of blackness placed in the centre of a technologically advanced world, its inclusive Pan-African costumes designs borrowing from various African cultures such as the Basotho and the Maasai, the use of 'Third World' dialect such as *isiXhosa*, as well as its representation of black women as strong (support) leaders of a nation. The film and its pro-black and pro-African aesthetic became important for young

[11] According to Bhayroo (2019), these are film audiences outside of the United States.

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African offspring across the world who could now glimpse a positive reflection of themselves on screen (Wynter, 2018). The positive images of blackness populated by the film provided relief from the negative stereotyping and the often-two-dimensional characterisation of black people put forward by hegemonic media (D'Agostino 2019:1). By showcasing 'black exceptionalism' in the film, Coogler pushes the boundaries of race representation in ways that had not been done before (Marco 2018).

Black exceptionalism was not only found on-screen. Audiences also participated in black exceptionalism through their buying power. According to Anthony D'Agostino (2019:1), for many filmgoers, buying a ticket to watch the film was a political act that wielded power against the myth that films presenting an all-black cast do not often do well and thus are a financial risk (Brooks et al. 2019); a position taken by Disney before the final production of *BP*.[12] Support of the film was also strongly influenced by the shifting American geopolitics wherein people of colour are the targets of hostility in America's political changes (Saunders 2019:139). The buyer's decision to support and participate in black exceptionalism was strengthened by the raising awareness of black sensibilities currently taking place in our global socio-political context (Marco 2018) with hashtags such as #OscarSoWhite and political movements such as #BlackLivesMatter which empower the black identity by revealing its insecurity in a white hegemony.

With further racist commentary made by President Trump calling African countries 'shithole countries' (*Trump's 'shithole' remarks spur international anger* 2018) supporting and celebrating the film became a pop cultural comeback against anti-black political rhetoric. Not to mention the film's global premiere taking place during America's Black History Month, the film awakened an onset of new and revived ideologies and imaginaries connected to Pan-Africanism, anti-imperialism, Black Power, and black liberation for the new millennium of Africans and the African diaspora (Marco 2018).

[12] Producing Black Panther into a blockbuster film was not easy. It took a few attempts and changes from director Ryan Coogler before Disney finally agreed to produce *Black Panther* (Saunders 2019).

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Equally, African filmgoers for the most part proudly celebrated the film for its 'revolutionary' representation of blackness, gender roles, and an empowered African geopolitical nation. Film reviewer for *Quartz Africa*, Dahir (2018:sp) comments upon discussion of the film: "This may sound very hyperbolic, but I have never been more proud of being black and African". Omanga and Mainye (2019:18) describe how in Kenya, the hashtag, #WakandaForever was a "site of many conversations around local imaginaries of black cosmopolitanism and a renewed sense of transnational."

In South Africa *BP* also impacted audiences. Makhubu (2019) states how *BP*, while presenting affirming and dignifying images of Africa, also uniquely represented South African frustration with Afrophobic violence and the neo-colonial domination of South Africa's mineral wealth. The film therefore, according to Makhubu (2019:9), stands as a lens through which to interrogate African politics while imagining future solutions. These statements reveal that the representations and narrative discussions found in *BP* affirm African heritage, tradition, black African identity, and pro-African political visions and ideologies.

The film's Afrocentric story world and identification fused together two simplified worlds of even more simplified variations of blackness through the characters T'Challa and Erik Killmonger – the African and diasporic African-American experience, their histories and their geographical origins – Wakanda and Oakland, California. According to Delice Williams (2018:27), by doing so the film provincialised African-American ideas of blackness by also inserting African ones. This served as a powerful reminder to mainstream cinema audiences across the globe "that African-Americans are part of something larger, and that they do not have exclusive purchase on what it means to be Black". In the film, Africans and African-Americans both have a stake on the meaning of blackness, thereby creating a collective identity across viewers who could identify with its representations – even if this relation and identification was superficially based on the similarity of skin colour (D'Agostino 2019).

With viewers across the world holding onto the idea that *BP* (2018) is an inclusive film made by black creatives who are more capable of creating "more legitimate representations of blackness" (D'Agostino 2019:1), identification with its representations amongst diverse black

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audiences was made easier. Furthermore, without reading too deeply into *BP* (2018), the film's positive Pan-African imagery of black identity results in a perceived kinship between Africans, African-Americans, and the general diasporic African audiences across the globe. By creating a world and a viewing experience in which 'all black people come from Africa', a statement Balogun (2018) uses to critique the film's constructed African landscape and accents, Disney is able to profit off of imaginaries of Black Power, the rising awareness of black selfhood, identity and consciousness, as well as black spending power (Saunders 2019).

1.4.1.4 The researcher's positionality

I loved this film. And like many viewers of the film, I used my spending power to celebrate the film for its revolutionary identification of blackness. My film ticket was a way for me to 'vote' for the images I preferred seeing in mainstream cinema while also reinforcing the pride in my black African identity through actively participating in what some might identify as a shared 'moment in black history' (White, 2018). Wakanda stood for many things in my world. It became the reimagination of an Africa that is decolonised (although Wakanda was never colonised), independent and wealthy. Wakanda has novel self-manufactured technological advancements, a precious resource that is mined and managed for themselves, by themselves, and in all of that, they have a balanced eco-system, too. Wakanda has (hidden) geopolitical power – an image of Africa that contravenes most mainstream cinematic images of Africa as wilderness, hunger, strife and even 'death'.

As a black African woman working with themes revolving the representation of black African identity, and gender in the Afrofuturistic film *BP* (Coogler 2018), identification with the film's representation of Africa and African identity is easy. Identification with the film is so easy it almost feels 'instinctual' and this presents a big temptation to select meanings within the film that are most convenient to my own narrative, experiences, idealisms and limited perceptions of African identity – even how others might view it. Not only that, I must also acknowledge that my black identity is heterogenous and different to others. I am privileged. I am from a lower, but nonetheless, middle-class background which afforded me a film ticket (and popcorn), space into a prestigious PhD programme at a historically white university, and the time and ability to write this thesis. I in no way stand in representation of other black people in

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as much as I contend with ideas of blackness. Furthermore, I do not represent the complete black experience as I move around quite comfortably in 'white' circles and spaces. I must therefore understand where I am situated, and every decision I make about my research is steeped in my politics (Flowerdew & Martin 2005).

Out of fear that critical engagement with *BP*'s representations of Africa may threaten the celebration of the film as wholly progressive and 'black' (information I may not be equipped to receive), I may prefer sitting comfortably within the film's idealisms than to attempt to theorise how power and identity operate within the text – the main point of any kind of textual analysis (Aitken 2005). With this, I am not denying that the film has progressive elements, but I must also accept that the film can equally, if not more so, bring up destabilising questions about (post/neo) colonialism, black identity, gender and geographical politics in Africa and the African diaspora at large. This will then challenge my fundamentalist, 'fixed' thinking – even about what 'progressive' in the film means.

Perhaps what will make this a difficult process is that I cannot claim to perform a completely objective analysis of the film that I closely identify with. I also cannot claim to make objective statements about themes such as black African identity if this is what I identify as. But knowledge of this puts me in a better position to critique it, as I can never claim to be above, or outside of the above in my reading of *BP*. As Spivak emphasises, in deconstructing a text it is better to "choose as an object of critique something which [I] love, or which [I] cannot not love or cannot not wish to inhabit, however much [I] wish to also change it" (Donna & MacLean 1996:16) if I wish to avoid essentialising meanings. In as much as I must also be aware of the self-centralisation that this research outlook may take, I must also readily be open to thinking about the possibilities necessarily offered by the personal that will lead me outside to the 'political'. One way I will be able to access the film more widely as a researcher is if I keep my learned assumptions and privilege in check and understand that holding onto my assumptions, especially those informed by my privilege, leads to a loss of another kind of knowledge; a knowledge necessary for me to understand and interpret Afrofuturistic texts to a deeper and much wider level. From the given example, hermeneutics thus becomes an appropriate aspect of the IS methodology in interpreting Afrofuturistic text.

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1.4.2 *Theoretical Framework*

1.4.2.1 Afrofuturism and BlackCrit Theory

There is no one single available definition for Afrofuturism. As it cuts across fields, media, cultures and time, Afrofuturism is at one end a Science Fictional (SF) aesthetic genre, a cultural phenomenon birthed from Afrodiasporic relationships with Western technology, and a mode of production focused on black futurity. Afrofuturism, while existing as all of the aforementioned things, is also a robust critical theory and methodology (Toliver 2023). Afrofuturism is a manner through which to read and critically analyse the "complex relations between science, technology, and race" that lay beneath SF themes of alienation, abduction and displacement (Lavender III 2019:1). Perhaps more revolutionary is the manner in which Afrofuturism's contemplation of black people and black futurity take place in environments wherein whiteness is not a barrier in fostering black (self-)identification, black liberation, and projecting black futures. Afrofuturism provides a freeing outlook on what the future for black individuals and communities can mean; especially futures that are free from the antiblack structures and sentiments that remain necessary for white supremacist capitalist heteropatriarchy to successfully operate (Toliver 2023).

While offering space for black optimism to be projected into the future, Afrofuturism is also emblematic of the anxieties that may wrap black individuals' imagination of the future (Toliver 2023). The anxiety that is present in Afrofuturistic texts is the result of historical and presently lived realities wherein the black body is placed opposingly to humanity and is therefore made an object in Western philosophical discourses that undergird the material practices and ways of being that eventually structure the world (Baker 2023). Afrofuturism therefore is not blind to the antiblack realities that continue to demarcate and reify the black body as devoid of humanity and therefore subject to social and structural degradation (Baker 2023:101). In conjunction with other theoretical frameworks like BlackCrit, Afrofuturism is able to be a 'mechanism for understanding the real-world situations of oppression in the contemporary world in the context of the ever-present past, while charting the future' (Hamilton in Toliver 2023:sp).

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According to Toliver (2023), BlackCrit is a framework that recognises the role of blackness in the social construction of white supremacy. White supremacy, as an ideology that holds white individuals, political sensibilities and worldviews to be superior and therefore centralised, builds material infrastructures in society which reinforce and position black bodies as antithetical to humanity; antithetical to the white male. White supremacist infrastructures that are built on antiblackness therefore create (and protect) space for racial inequality to be institutionalised, thereby imposing a dynamic of Black death in the world (Baker 2023:101).

BlackCrit therefore asserts that the dehumanisation of blackness is a reality that negatively impacts those assigned as black. Other authors like Baker (2023) would argue that dehumanisation of blackness is not only institutionalised but it is further narrativised through representations that continue to fix blackness with deficiency, lack, abandonment, and impossibility. Within the realities of antiblack structures and narrative storytelling, Afrofuturism provides a protocol with which researchers can interrogate the possibilities of being black in a world that, although intricately bound by covert white supremacy in the form of neo-liberalism, can be transformed. In other words, Afrofuturism is a theoretical and representational strategy that lends itself to the complete eradication of Black death by transforming the dynamics that lead to it such as black invisibility and dehumanisation (Baker 2023).

Much like Afrofuturism, BlackCrit also uses liberatory fantasy in its attempts to obstruct the operation of antiblackness. Black liberatory fantasy, according to Toliver (2023), is the process of imagining worlds where whiteness, as an oppressive construct, is shattered thus allowing for the building of new worlds wherein new ways of being black "where race and racism sometimes exist and sometimes do not" (Lavender III 2019:4) can be freely negotiated and navigated. And much like BlackCrit, Afrofuturism seeks to unlock the "liberatory potential of blacks" who find themselves in the realities of contemporary life as a black individual through world-building practices that humanise black people. In other words, as a mode of interpretation, the Afrofuturist framework wrestles as much with the legacy of "oppression, racism, prejudice, stereotypes, segregation, colo[u]rism and violence" in twenty-first century contexts as it does using the past as a strong inspiration in how to responsibly imagine black worlds and black identity differently (Lavender III 2019:7).

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Stated differently, while BlackCrit examines the ways in which black dehumanisation is a foundational experience in the contemporary and historical life of the black person, Afrofuturism considers such conditions of the past and present moment in its contemplation and creation of black futurity (Toliver 2023). Therefore, Afrofuturism enables the researcher to think freely about "identity, fugitivity, power and liberation in the past, present and future" through a specifically black cultural lens (Toliver 2023: sp) that is not positioned appositionally or below whiteness but has the freedom to move and be re-positioned, to re-engage, re-interpret, re-build, and re-negotiate alternative futures. The direct relevance and importance of Afrofuturism as a mode of critical inquiry for this study is further expanded upon in chapter two of this thesis.

1.4.2.2 Popular geopolitics

Dittmer and Bos (2019:10) explain that popular geopolitics involves the study of the everyday experience of geopolitics through popular culture. Geopolitics is not just a discourse about the 'way the world is' as executed and framed by politicians, policy-makers, or professional geographers. Critical geopolitics involves the examination of why people come to think and talk of certain parts of the world in particular ways. And these ideas of "valuation" (i.e. the way value is assigned to people and places in a way that determines whether they matter or not) are mediated through popular culture (Dittmer & Bos 2019: xix). Consequently, popular culture mediation of geopolitical discourse invites the participation of the everyday citizens who often use popular culture to shape their world and identity. What critical geographers interrogate is how individuals with greater cultural power shape the world and its geopolitical order, while at the same time emphasising that the world will look different when being viewed from different perspectives (Dittmer & Bos 2019:12).

Our ways of seeing the world are interrupted. Visual representation of landscape and geography are constituted by cultural codes that are shaped by dominant discourse, ideology and relationships of power. Our personal ways of seeing landscapes are also "geographically, historically, culturally and socially specific" (Aitken & Craine 2005:254). In other words, our understandings of the world are mediated by competing systems of meaning that reveal the

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social, political and economic circumstances that produce visual images of space and place (Aitken & Craine 2005). Critical geographers are therefore weary of the information disseminated by the media as it often 'imposes' ideas about the world drawn up by individuals who are in positions of cultural authority. This selection of facts about the world's geography and how it functions are not the 'truth', but are naturalised as thus to audiences often hidden behind ideas of 'national interest' (Dittmer & Bos, 2019).

How the world is constructed by the media ultimately serves the (national) identities of those with cultural power thus producing misinformation, 'fake news' and political bias. Quite different from *Neptune Frost* (2022) whose gross worldwide only amassed $209,934 (imbd.com), *BP* sold ticket sales worth over a billion dollars thus becoming a strong part of popular culture; the same popular culture that sells a particular geopolitical representation of Africa. *BP* has made a powerful contribution to the changing discourses about Africa and African identity, more especially within the public imagination. However, as we will read later, hidden behind these images of a 'progressive' Africa are also geopolitical ideologies that problematically serve the interests of American institutions of cultural authority such as Walt Disney. Critical analysis of Wakanda's geopolitics and visual representations uncover how, similar to hegemonic media, representations of Africa continue to serve 'white' interests (Saunders, 2019). Critical geopolitics functions therefore to not only embrace, but challenge Afrofuturistic depictions of a 'progressive' and 'emancipated' Africa and Afrodiaspora.

1.4.2.3 African geopolitics

Intellectuals like Mkandawire (2011) make the argument that Africa, within the global geopolitical sphere, is often characterised and positioned as a 'Late Comer'. According to this view, Africa is incapable of independently and effectively participating in the world's power dynamics let alone managing their own nation-states thereby justifying American interference in African politics (Dittmer & Bos, 2019). Mkandawire (2011) identifies that this Afro-pessimistic view, often pits Africa as a continent and a people that is destined to run and play "catch-up" with the rest of the world. Additionally, that African development cannot be executed independently as they have been represented as too incompetent, while Western

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political ideology, and its consequent global structures, present a vision of Africa as a place that cannot achieve progress, innovation, and possess promising futurity.

Such views of Africa having a catastrophic future are sustained by the 'futures' industry. According to Yaszek (2006), the 'futures' industry makes use of 'Big Science', 'Big Business' and Global Media to generate, support, and distribute data about the world. Science generates data about the past, present and future; business funds these scientific studies onto which big business decisions are made; and mainstream global media combines, constructs, and circulates these "facts" into biased coherent and popularised narratives across the globe (Yaszek 2006:48). Medical reports, for example, on Africa's HIV/AIDS rate, predictions of its economic decline and low life-expectancy, are often used to invent a geopolitical vision of Africa and its future as nothing more than a hopeless catastrophe.

These opinions of Africa without futurity are cliché (or at least must be considered so) and may not always (nor do they aim to) accurately represent the state of Africa – past, present, and future. This geographical *imagination* of Africa additionally keeps hidden the fact that African poverty is largely the result of modernity's European accumulation and global expansionism; a view of the world that is not in favour of European politics and identity. Critical geopolitics therefore interrogate the use of science, business, and the media to construct and naturalise a singular (bias) perspective of Africa. Visions of a 'catastrophic' Africa and future are, therefore, predicated on already existing imperialist ideologies maintained by a Eurocentric futures industry. The reproduction of imaginaries that pit Africa as powerless are also used to justify neo-imperial state interference by Western states. Additionally, they help maintain Euro-America's cultural and political authority to paint the world. The circulation of this Eurocentric vision ultimately maintains the underdevelopment of Africa as global structures and industries are encouraged to do the same (Steady 2005). It is this overpowering view of modern-day geography that makes the Afrofuturistic representations of Africa found in films like *BP* so 'revolutionary'.

Going back to my previous statement regarding the pop cultural power held by *BP's* introduction to the market, *BP* is an international box office success which reached $1.4 billion

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in its opening weekend – with half of these earnings coming from international audiences outside of America (Bhayroo 2019). The circulation of its ideas is therefore wide-reaching and popular, powerfully placing Africa within popular discourses of power and knowledge production; particularly of the African future (Chikafa-Chipiro 2019:17). *BP* therefore breaks into the discourses of African geopolitics made by 'big' industries of science, business, and global media that have controlled perceptions for so long (Chikafa-Chipiro, 2019). In doing so *BP* makes powerful provocations to the 'Futures' industry thereby challenging the West's monopoly over Africa's geopolitical imaginary by producing counter-mythologies

Wakanda is identified as an independent, wealthy, and tribal nation-state located in Africa.[13] Rich in the world's most lucrative natural resource, vibranium, Wakanda produces the most technologically advanced tele-communications, transportation and weaponry unknown even to the top scientific countries of the (Western) world. The film's exhibition of an economically rich African Afrofuturist world that combines continued practise of tradition, myth, and folklore in a technologically advanced environment presents to audiences what Afro-Modernity could look like. In revealing to audiences its notions of a future African modernity, *BP* also refers to the past, presenting another alternative view of modernity. While modernity was popularised as an exclusively European endeavour, it is in many ways (indirect and obvious) the contribution of Africa that unlocked the way for European innovation albeit through the conditions of African slavery.[14]

Overall, *BP* provides an alternative geopolitical vision of what black Africa *could* be (what it *was* and what it *is*) by producing African representation that is somewhat critical of hegemonic ideas. Film productions such as *BP* reveal how popular culture acts at a heightened level of self-awareness (Dittmer & Bos 2019; Dittmer & Gray 2010). Popular culture is aware of its role in mediating geopolitical discourses about who we are and what our position in the world is (largely through representing those who are 'different' to us) therefore becoming more critical of its involvement in processes of 'Othering' (Dittmer & Bos 2019:17,20). By

[13] According to Saunders (2019:144), mapping in the film suggests Wakanda is located somewhere in the north-east of Lake Victoria; culturally it draws most of its inspiration from West and Southern African cultures and religious references taken from Egypt.
[14] Modernity's system of slavery created a pathway for innovations in the areas of transportation, commerce, production, and insurance (Mbembe 2017).

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producing representations that are more critical of identity also due to the growing demand by audiences who are seeking more inclusivity (D'Agostino 2019), popular culture can equally distribute a vision of the world from a range of different perspectives and contexts. Knowledge of this illuminates some of the film's problematic 'one-sided' representational choices. *BP*, despite its veneers of a 'progressive' Pan-African Wakanda, presents colonial tropes found in its stereotypical representations of a monolithic 'African' identity where tech advanced fight scenes and border control take place on rural African landscapes (Makhubu 2019; Zeleza 2018; Tallapessy et al. 2020).

Why *BP* employs such regressive colonial stereotypes cannot just be found in analysing the image of place, but in analysing the site of production (Dittmer & Bos 2019:47). Bhayroo (2019) cautions that in our interaction with Afro-modern and Afrofuturistic cultural productions such as *BP*, we ought to consider *who* owns the means of producing, exhibiting, and distributing these Afrofuturist visions and fantasies. In the case of *BP*, the site of production is the mega Hollywood production house Walt Disney who own these visions. The one-sided vision of 'African' Wakanda are Disney's property and therefore construct a *particular* vision of Africa that supports and maintains their neo-liberal ideologies (Bhayroo 2019; Saunders 2019; Marco 2018).

Saunders (2019:142) argues that the film's focus on a simplistic Afrofuturist African lifeworld, and themes grappling with black African and diasporic identity profit Disney. In a world that is increasingly globalised with expanding market audiences, Hollywood producers and filmmakers are pressurised to incorporate themes of selfhood and identity in order to generate revenue (Saunders 2019:142). The superhero film has been used by Hollywood cater to this growing need by incorporating superheroes who represent diverse identities shot on diverse location with the aim of reaching a globalised distribution. *BP* is, therefore, a product of Marvel and Disney's transnational strategy that, in its attempts to reach out to audiences exhausted of "cinematic geographies imbued with racist, misogynist and hetero-nationalist over tones" (Saunders 2019:145), also problematically produce imperialist and neo-colonial fantasies of Africa. This process thereby produces new forms of 'Othering' covered beneath appearances of inclusivity and black power in order to serve a globalising neo-liberal economic system.

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1.5 Literature Review

1.5.1 *Afrofuturism*

My research interest in Afrofuturism is not just informed by current academic popularity. Afrofuturism uses the imagination and fantasy in order to produce alternative visions of Africa in science fictional and tech-driven future worlds. Although primarily related to as a sub-genre of science fiction, my study regards Afrofuturism as more than just this. Afrofuturism is a unique aesthetic form that carries powerfully transgressive representational and political value. Afrofuturistic literature and imagery powerfully place Africa within popular discourses of power and knowledge production in and of Africa, as well as the possibilities of the African future (Chikafa-Chipiro 2019:17). Afrofuturism's use of science fictional tropes and appeals are employed to specifically challenge persisting imperialist and colonial perceptions of Africa. In summary, Afrofuturism contests and critiques "ready-made futures and whitewashed pasts" of history that limit African potential and possibility (van Veen 2013:64) well into the future.

Afrofuturism creates an interesting interplay between the past and the future through a specifically 'black' cultural framework in order to redefine what it means to be black. Elia (2014:84) in *The languages of Afrofuturism* asserts that Afrofuturism's redefinition of black African identity intends to disrupt the idea of Africa as a "metaphor for dystopia and catastrophe" by rooting positive imagery of black culture and the black experience into memories of the past, and visions of the future. For instance, *BP*'s fictional fusion of the African past and technological future opens the opportunity for a redefinition of Africa's geopolitical identity. In the film, Wakanda only pretends to be an impoverished African nation to limit outside interference. Beneath this veil, Wakanda is a wealthy nation and a world leader of science and technology while not compromising African tradition to achieve this. *BP* showcases how Afrofuturistic representation subverts, disrupts, and redefines aspects of anti-black colonial histories, and even contests futures that are anti-black.

Ashcroft (2013:98) in his article *African Futures: The necessity of Utopias* states: the rewriting of certain African histories by European imperialists has 'erased' Africa's civilisation, spirituality, religion, and culture from modern history. This erasure of the African past in

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Afrodiasporic African identity causes what van Veen (2015) names the "void of origin". The 'void of origin' suggests that the African diaspora engage with the world without a 'history of their origins'. According to Van Veen (2016: 64-64), Atlantic slavery formed two ruptures within the African diaspora: the first being the elimination of hopes to return to a "normalized" past. What Van Veen (2016) means by this is that the abduction of Africans as slaves abruptly cut off Africans from their past, and without a record of existence, and only a history of their erasure, diasporic Africans will never return to their past in the same way again. As a result, in order to reaffirm an African past that is beyond modern history and the limited confines of its one-sided ideologies, the recollection of memory and the imagination have been an integral part in the past's reformulation (Ashcroft 2013: 98).

A powerful way of doing this has been through the creative use of science fictional tropes and motifs in literature and other forms of black cultural production. The traumatic experience of abduction, dehumanisation, oppression, and destruction ensued by slavery have often been reconceptualised under the science fictional tropes of alien abduction (Womack 2013; Anderson 2016). Which leads to the second rupture: alienation from the world and feelings of unhomeliness. Afrodiasporic feelings of unhomeliness are due to the placement of African slaves in worlds and contexts that reiterated their difference and isolation from 'the rest'. Both sources of rupture in the African-American experience are themes successfully played out in *BP* through the character Killmonger who battles feelings of alienation from both 'white' America, and Wakanda's traditions and peoples. Killmonger, however, is not the only black identity in the film. With the inclusion T'Challa in this Afrofuturist narrative, Africans now also have a stake in the redefinition of black identity (Williams 2018). Afrofuturism therefore must not just speak to the African-American experience but must also find applicability to the African context.

1.5.2 *Afrofuturism is Not for Africa*

The term *Afrofuturism* was developed by the American cultural critic Dery and he defines it as "speculative fiction that treats *African-American* themes and addresses *African-American* concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture (emphasis added)" (1994:180). As Dery's definition indicates, Afrofuturism is speculative fiction that addresses the African-

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American community. Afrofuturism is born out of the narratives and the creative expression of the alienation, abduction, and violence experienced in the Afrodiasporic community, particularly *their* history of slavery. The Afrofuturistic story worlds the study analyses, although also referring to the African American experience here and there, are primarily situated in Africa and not all Africans went through a history of slave abduction. For this reason, it might be difficult to talk about Africa and African experiences, particularly of the past, in Afrofuturistic ways. Furthermore, not all Africans are 'alien' to the land they are on. The aliens (Europeans), in the African case, have willingly come to us – not us to them and therefore highlights another distinction in how Africans and diasporic Africans can relate to the past. Therefore, the trope and narrative of the 'alien', even though a central theme in Afrofuturist speculative fiction, may not apply to all Africans (van Veen 2016:73) – especially in the same manner.

Another important difference to raise is that the processes of racialisation (the construction of black identity) historically and presently in Africa may not resemble how it took/takes place in the Americas and Europe. This means that even our meanings and understandings of blackness may differ across communities labelled as 'black'. If Afrofuturist scholar Womack (2013) defines Afrofuturism as a vision of the future that intersects science and technology, imagination, and liberation specifically through a black cultural and experiential lens, then different experiences of blackness could lead to different visions of the future. From this perspective Afrofuturism once again does not necessarily consider the African experience, therefore, as Bristow (2012) pointedly asserts, Afrofuturism has nothing to do with Africa. Accordingly, the use of Afrofuturism within the African context is redundant, and talking about an African Afro-future is not possible. Although valid points have been put forward about the irrelevance of Afrofuturism within the African context, the study finds it important to consider that the above-mentioned interpretation of Afrofuturism is only but *one* part of Afrofuturism. Therefore, closing it off from use in an African context also limits the expanding definitions of what Afrofuturism can mean.

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1.5.3 *Introducing Afrofuturism 2.0*

Anderson (2016) makes a convincing refutation of Bristow's position on the irrelevance of Afrofuturism in Africa. He brings to light a new and more holistic understanding of Afrofuturism in the expansion they name *Afrofuturism 2.0*. According to Anderson (2016), the African diaspora are institutionally recognised as the sixth zone of the African Union thereby making them a part of Africa (Anderson 2016). Afrofuturism, in this sense, is not a uniquely African-American project, but a profoundly Pan-African one and because of this, it is applicable for use in analysing and recreating *African* future worlds. Additionally, Africa and not just the African diaspora, make use of technology in Afrofuturistic ways. Both communities use technology to participate in a cultural exchange that connects identities, cultures, and histories thus displaying a foundational Afrofuturist inclination towards the *reparative* use of technology. Forming a relationship between both communities, technology is used to *unite* rather than divide; to *include* rather than to exclude; and is a commonly used way to *redefine* ideas of blackness.

Afrofuturism 2.0 furthermore acknowledges that there is no single way of being black. And in this sense, technology is used to validate the various black identities cultures and histories that make up blackness. As Kenyan-born Afrofuturist artist Wangechi Mutu expressed, although the Afrofuturist focus on slave narratives may not apply to many Africans, what remains common is our "'forced creation story… that the colonialists *invented* us' [emphasis added]" when they named us 'black' (Barber et al 2016:9). This process of invention by the colonisers over the colonised produces similar experiences of exile and alienation within both Africans and the Afro-Diasporic (Barber et al 2016). Afrofuturism is thus also a fitting way to tell *African* narratives of the past, present, and future, finding applicability to both African and Afrodiasporic story worlds.

Until recently, pop cultural renderings of the future, especially in science fiction films, have placed blacks either in the minority, or have excluded their existence all-together. Afrofuturism, as a result, makes a point to root black culture and experiences into science fiction by intersecting elements such as historical and speculative fiction, Afrocentrism, and fantasy in their representations in order to address issues of identity, technology, and the future

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(Elia 2014). Moreover, Afrofuturist scholars such as Womack (2013) in her book *Afrofuturism: The world of black sci-fi and fantasy culture*, have since sought to uncover the roles that black Africans have played in science and technology. Womack (2013) argues that the African body has been both a victim and product of Western science and technology.[15] This history with technology justifies not only the insertion, but also the location of African experiences in the history of science and technology as well as speculative futures. Essentially, modernity, science. and technology play an integral role in the social history of black identity formation in Afrofuturist thought. Afrofuturism therefore aims to insert Africa, Africans, and their experiences within a technologically and scientifically advanced future. In these worlds, blacks are not only the users, but the innovative producers of science and technology (Nama 2009, 2011).

1.5.4 *Afrofuturist feminism*

Zeleza (2018:sp) argues that the representation of women in films such as *BP,* although strong and brave, ultimately use their skills in a support role for the males who battle for the throne (T'Challa and Killmonger) in an African society that is already patriarchal, to which I agree for the most part. The female leads in the film, Queen Ramonda, Nakia, General Okoye and Princess Shuri are indeed represented as independent, intelligent, skilled, and brave 'African' women, but also as women who risk their lives to help the male heir T'Challa to the throne. The women's prominent features in the film are during T'Challa's mission to find Klaue, at a later stage to rescue his life, and eventually when defending the male reserved Wakandan throne. Their support of male power, in effect, threatens gender equality (Zeleza 2018), and although the women in the film hold a measure of independence and leadership, this compromises the viewers ability to describe the film as being 'wholly' feminist. While such a reading of gender in Afrofuturism may be true, my attempt at a feminist reading of gender further complicates the Afrofuturist role and representation of African women. This will be done through a critical reading that places African feminism within Afrofuturism; what Susana Morris (2012) identifies as *Afrofuturist feminism*.

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[15] Reference is made to the use of scientific racism in defining 'black' as well as illegal medical experimentation implemented on the black body (Dubow1995 & Washington 2006).

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Put simply, Afrofuturist feminism is the combination of Afrofuturism and black feminism. Black feminism within Afrofuturism interrogates black histories and visions of the future wherein the experiences of black women are positioned at the centre (Morris 2012:155). Morris argues that Afrofuturism and black feminist thought are in alignment as they share common concerns about race, gender, sexuality and ability, and their relationship with power. Afrofuturism and black feminism reject dominant white supremacist, patriarchal, and heteronormative social norms that often deny blacks creative agency and liberation by placing particularly black women, at the centre (Morris 2012:155). Afrofuturist feminism insists on the importance of black individuals' experiences, knowledge, and culture in constructing an equal society, or in imagining the future of human society (Morris 2012:153) as is done below.

Feminism is principally concerned with the liberation of women across the globe, however, writers like Oyewùmí (2003) caution the use of global feminist readings within the African context. Oyewùmí (2003:3) argues that global feminism is dominated by Western thinking and assumptions about women – including African women. This thinking is in line with other prolific feminist thinkers such as Mohanty (1984) who in her seminal text, *Under Western eyes: Feminist scholarship and colonial discourses***,** argues that global feminism was often reserved for the experiences and concerns of white middle-class women. Feminism thus excluded women who did not subscribe to the above identity (usually Third World women). Within feminism itself, these women were related to as 'Other' and often represented as impoverished, helpless victims of patriarchy, and therefore still seen "Under Western Eyes". Instead of challenging colonial imperial attitudes, feminism contributed to sustaining it through reproducing it in their representation of non-European worlds, and women.

African feminists were therefore made wary of universalised feminism as it, according to Oyewùmí (2003), considers the experience of white womanhood as the prototypic experience of all womanhood. In the process, feminism projects Western cultures and ideas of sex, gender, and hierarchy onto all other cultures that do not necessarily conform to Western realities (Steady 2005). Feminism is therefore read as a "distinctly European phenomenon" that ultimately produces a "culture of African misrepresentation" by producing homogenising images of all African women as equally powerless, equally helpless, equally oppressed, and forced into prostitution with very little to no agency (Oyewùmí 2003).

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With the rise of decolonisation, feminist practice was challenged to similarly decolonise, which meant accommodating intersectionality (Mohanty 2003) in which feminism must consider gender, class, race, culture, and the position of women in the world and in its orientation. By position in the world, Mohanty (2003) means how "the global economic and political systems and processes" may disadvantage some women, while also advantaging others. These factors are just as powerful in the construction of feminist identities, and the meanings of feminist struggles. There must also be a recognition that non-Western women fought (patriarchal) domination in numerous ways and therefore also possess self-determination and agency.

Steady (Oyewùmí 2003) asserts this by arguing that Africa is the *original* home of women's self-determination – a basic feminist principle; therefore, not making it an exclusively European phenomenon. The agency of African women has been undermined by macro-historical processes such a colonisation that introduced the prominence of male-dominated political, economic, and religious institutions into African societies in the first place (Steady, 2005). Images of African women as being self-determined, according to (Oyewùmí 2003) have not been popularised, including by feminist scholarship, because of the threat it poses against the need for 'white' feminist saviours to deliver victimised African women from dire patriarchal environments.

Not only that, but as Steady (2005) argues, African women's movements do not focus on gender (inequality) alone. As the title of Ifi Amadiume's book *Male daughters; female husbands* (2015) points to, in African tradition, gender does not necessarily determine one's relation to oppression and power (Amadiume 2015).[16] The African history of women in positions of agency, power, and leadership, as well as their representations, are not as novel as *BP*'s 'revolutionary' appeal has framed it. In fact, the images of Nakia, General Okoye and Princess Shuri praised for being the symbol of a rising (to some, introduction of) African culture of gender equality is not the full extent of the power given to women in African societies in the past.

[16] Amadiume (2015) refers to the Igbo women of South Eastern Nigeria

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According to Amadiume's (2015) ethnographic study on the Igbo women of South-Eastern Nigeria, before their colonisation these women held prominent political positions alongside men. It was only during colonialism that missionaries who found existing Igbo systems to be "detestable" introduced the increasing domestication of women (Amadiume 2015:i). Igbo women were described as being different from European women as they were industrious, ambitious, independent, collective, and were "bound to play a leading part in their country" (Amadiume 2015). Igbo women's aggression and militancy displayed during the Women's War[17] were a threat to the British who labelled them "masculine". The labelling of their masculinity was only "as a result of the imposition of [rigid Victorian] gender norms [onto] Igbo culture" which tried to render women as invisible (Amadiume 2015:sp). The British did not understand that women in Igbo culture, despite their biological sex as female, could also be regarded as "husbands"[18] and "sons"[19] without wanting to be men. The gender fluidity in Igbo culture allowed women to hold prominent political positions that British gender ideologies would not, hence their revolt against the British.

Furthermore, in Igbo culture, there is a matriarchal focus, as the female gender has the most prominent roles in myths and religions.[20] Additionally, the most highly praised person was the hardworking woman whose labour in subsistence farming brought in wealth for families, while also determining her prestige and power (Amadiume 2015:sp). It was not abnormal for a successful woman to lead, even dominating her husband without being stigmatised for it (Amadiume 2015:sp). It is in this example that African feminist scholarship can emphasise the agency of African women possessed *before* the feminist movement. By using African feminism and African feminist history as a frame of reference, an interesting reading of African women is provided. Therefore, instances in Afrofuturistic texts where African women are depicted as independent and self-willed are not completely novel. Characters such as General Okoye in

[17] The Women's War of 1929 saw tens of thousands of Igbo women (five other South-Eastern Nigerian ethnic groups were also involved) protesting the Warrant Chiefs appointed by the British government who were restricting the role of women in government (Van Allen 1975 & Abaraonye 1998).
[18] Wives could buy another woman as their *igba ohu* – slave, who then holds customary rights as wife in relation to her owner – her now, husband who has same rights as a man over his wife. The more 'wives' a woman had, the wealthier she became as more crops and livestock could be produced (Amadiume 2015:sp)
[19] Women were regarded as 'male daughters' (sons) when given full status as male in the absence of a son in order to protect their father's *obi* – aristocratic title as elder/chief and the property associated with it. Also, the central building of the Igbo homestead symbolic the most important part, or 'heart' of the place (Amadiume 2015).
[20] The main religion of the Nnobi region is of the goddess Idemili.

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BP, or Neptune in *Neptune Frost* (2022)[21] who hold unrivalled wisdom and strength, and are necessary to secure liberation and peace, are in fact typical of women in African traditional societies.

Consequently, these images are only 'revolutionary' because they have been related to in terms of Eurocentric racist and patriarchal imagination of African femininity in African traditional societies as perpetually oppressed victims of patriarchal domination. I would also argue that Afrofuturistic representations of gender such those as in *BP*, when read in light of the history of Igbo women, do not serve as *all*-empowering of African women. In as much as they are progressive, they maintain aspects of patriarchy hidden behind an idea of African custom and tradition that assumes an inherent patriarchy. In the film, General Okoye, for example, uses violence to defend the throne of an either conservative, or militant king as opposed to dominating the throne herself – or if this thought is considered too extreme, at least then handing power over to the royal heiress, Princess Shuri. This indicates the superficial engagement within which these women, who are characterised in relation to T'Challa, are sibjected to. As Marco (2018) also points out, audiences of the film do not *truly* know the women of Wakanda. We are never too sure, for instance, why the Dora Mijale constitute women only, or why Shuri holds all knowledge of vibranium and Wakandan innovative practise – information that could only reinforce their power and individuality.

Furthermore, the roles that women play in African family life as mothers, wives, and daughters do in fact have political influence and significance in African society (Steady 2005). However, this aspect is often undermined due to their Eurocentric incorporation into the sphere of the powerless "private" (Steady 2005; Oyewùmí 2003). Nevertheless, it remains the work of African feminism to defend against Eurocentric assumptions of Africa and African women by inserting African cultures and perspectives of sex, gender relations, and power into global anti-colonial feminist discourse and practise.

[21] Neptune is the female lead character in Afrofuturistic film, *Neptune Frost* (2022). Neptune is seen as 'The Motherboard' who connects all the necessary parts for the digital revolution against autocratic governance, surveillance, resource exploitation and the subjugation of coltan miners to take place. Neptune is the key to freedom.

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1.5.5 *Mining, the Miner and Technology in Africa*

This study takes a postcolonial interest in the Afrofuturistic representations of the African mining 'underground'. Postcolonial writers such as Scott (2008) in *Colonialism, Landscape and the Subterranean* argues for a stronger postcolonial theorisation of the subterranean. Within postcolonial writing, attention is often given to the operation of European imperialism and colonial expansion on the land's surface. However, Scott (2008) asserts that the European domination of land and culture digs deeper. It was during high imperialism that Europe discovered Southern Africa's possession of rich underground natural resources, therefore, for Europeans, possessing this land, and the underground, would mean the advancement of European wealth. As a result, these undergrounds were systematically exploited thus shaping the European colonisation of Southern African societies around subterranean wealth as opposed to only the land's surface (Scott 2008:1854). These mining practices therefore prove that verticality is just as central as horizontality when discussing colonial imperial adventure in postcolonialism (Scott 2008:1853). The underground within postcolonial criticism becomes a powerful metaphor for how colonial structures and beliefs persist in a supposedly postcolonial world where changes begin and mostly end on the surface.

According to Paquette and Lacassagne (2013), the individuals with power and privilege in the mining industry have been responsible for the subaltern emergence of those submerged in the mine's underground, (i.e. the mine worker). Mining still contributes to the organisation of lives, and the construction of identities regarded as subaltern by society. This aspect of mining especially applies to (South) Africa wherein the black mineworker was (and still is) considered the "subterranean subaltern" – a term used by Paquette and Lacassagne (2013) to identify the mine worker. In South Africa, the mine worker as 'Other' was an identity introduced by the British who initially wanted to colonise mineral-rich sites, while later, this identification would be formalised by apartheid systems of bureaucracy and legislature which also benefitted from the exploitation of land and labour.

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1.5.6 *Mining in Southern Africa*

Mining in South(ern) Africa has been a major contributor to the establishment of our white-dominated capitalist system, the oppression and exploitation of the black body, and systems of cheap migrant labour that have been passed down almost unchanged from "generation to generation"[22] (Saul & Bond 2014; Crush 1992; Gaule 2017). Texts such as Saul and Bond's book, *South Africa – The present as history: From Mrs Ples to Mandela & Marikana* (2014), further illustrate how conversely South Africa's economic disparity seems to be worsening in the postcolonial, post-apartheid state. The mining of natural resources continues to harm our economy and ecology, more than it profits us.

Of course, there are more factors at play when considering the causes of South Africa's economic disparity than just the mismanagement of its resource extraction sector. Nevertheless, as Saul and Bond (2014:28-29) highlight, mining has played a central role in the shaping of South Africa's socio-political and economic development since the discovery of diamonds in the late 19th century to the present. Thus, making mining historically significant to South Africa (and the SADC[23] region as a whole)[24] and a relevant area to research. As stated earlier, the impact of mining extends it being the origin of South Africa's economic revolution, as mining also had a severe socio-political impact by designing an infrastructure that would set the African population at a perpetual socio-economic disadvantage.

The introduction of mining in South Africa created a stark socio-political division that positioned the 'white' population as the powerful oppressor and exploiter of the weakened and disenfranchised 'black' population (Saul & Bond 2014:29). The deeper the extraction of underground resources moved, the higher the capital European-owned mining companies required. European-owned mining companies thus sought the use of cheap labour, and in a political environment that was growing increasingly hostile towards Africans, Africans would

[22] As witnessed in the post-apartheid laments of mine workers during the devastating Marikana Massacre in 2012 (Saul & Bond 2014; du Preez 2015).

[23] Southern African Development Community (SADC) is made up of sixteen-member states: Angola, Botswana, Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Eswatini, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Seychelles, South Africa, United Republic Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe

[24] Mining during Apartheid also employed migrant workers from outside the Southern African region – Lesotho, Swaziland, Mozambique (Benya 2017:510).

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be their choice. The labour of these Africans was not only inexpensive, but the work itself subjected them to poor and dehumanising conditions to further curb costs. As a result, in South African society at the time, the black miner faced exploitation that confirmed their status as "subaltern"; an identification that added to the archetype of the miner as 'Other'.[25]

Paquette and Lacassagne (2013:245) define the subaltern as a "population in a state of economic, social and political domination". The photography of anti-apartheid photographer Ernest Cole in his photographic book, *House of Bondage* (1968) lucidates the domination the black miner experienced in the mines. In the book, Cole's images bear resonance to colonial ideas of how the 'black' body is held in closeness to animality. The invention of Race (and inextricably 'blackness') was a European invention that began as a metric of animality. Race was a modern technology used by Europeans to measure how 'animalistic' a 'human' body is thus implementing a distinction between human and animal (de Robillard, 2018:5). Race shaped what de Robillard (2018) in *In/On the Bones: Species meanings and the racialising discourse of animality in the Homo naledi controversy*, identifies as "taxonomical borders". These "scientific" borders of categorisation then erroneously racialised species according to a hierarchy. However, the hierarchisation of species established by race belonged to animals and was exclusionary of Whites who deemed themselves human, and therefore the assumed "top" of the hierarchy (de Robillard 2018; Mbembe 2017; Lindfors, 1996). Unfortunately, in attempts to legitimise white supremacy, race continues to be an important tool.

Crush (1992:828) in his article *Power and surveillance on the South African gold mine*, states: "from the moment a worker puts his name to a mine contract… he was caught in a web of bureaucratic and physical controls over his movements, his behaviours, and his body." Figure 1 illustrates the control over the movement of the black body as miners were herded, instructed, arranged, and later transported to the mining reserves (Gaule 2017). It would seem, through a more in-depth analysis of Cole's work, that as articulated by Paquette and Lacassagne, his photography displays the "capacity for art to reflect the aesthetic realities of a situation that is in many ways, ugly and oppressive" (2013:247). In other words, Cole, through the power of

[25] According to Lahiri-Dutt conventional geographers considered the work of mining as "the quintessential 'Other'" (2013:194). No less the miners who were considered the 'exploited proletariat' by a hegemonic urban middle-class.

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photographic image, represents what is unrepresentable about the organisation of mining: the miner's subjugation. Cole's photography thus reveals to audiences the mining industry's organisation of the black body as a tool to be exploited, dominated and controlled; a dominated object of extraction (to extract and be extracted from). In analysing Cole's mining photography, the life of an African miner, as described by French-Canadian artist Jean-Marc Dalpe (in Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:253), is reduced to that of being "an *intelligent worm* crawling into the earth, eating rocks, going up to the surface, and shitting gold, cobalt, copper, nickel, and uranium [emphasis added]." The underground miner is under the gaze and spatial control of the industry's management and surveillance, a process that harkens back to the European colonisation of land, and the body that is made subaltern.

Sadly, many European-owned mining companies in South Africa currently continue to "build on the vestiges, and even on the spatial practices (space-making), of colonial practices – making these firms neo-colonial in nature" (Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:257). Current processes of resource extraction offer little resistance to the colonial treatment of wealth, the African miner and labour with Crush (1992:828) also pointing out that "the social and political apparatus which delivers cheap black labour to the major South African gold mines has remained remarkably stable since its inception in the late 19th century." As observed by Saul and Bond (2014) (also in du Preez (2015)), mining is an enduring system of exploitation that led up to the Marikana Massacre which took place August 2012.

The exploitative nature of mining thus far seems only to be taking place within Large Scale Industrial Mining (LSM), however, this is not the only kind of mining prevalent in once-colonised countries. Mining as a dehumanising labour process occurs at a worse rate in centuries-old Artisanal / Small-scale Mining (ASM) which is described as the "low tech, labour intensive mineral extraction and processing found across the developing world" by Jenkins (2014) in *Women, mining and development*. ASM is often an informal sector that is not frequently monitored and supported by legal mining professionals and councils. Because the ASM largely remains an informal sector, it is unregulated and can therefore be performed using unfair and unsafe labour practices. According to Jenkins (2014), ASM is often performed in hazardous environments which expose ASM miners, who have little safety awareness, to health risk dangers. The processing of minerals is the most hazardous part, and involves the crushing,

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culling, grinding and sorting of rock and the remains are later processed manually using toxic material such as mercury to wash out the sand that hide the small rocks of gold (Jenkins 2014:4).

According to Jenkins (2014:3), one third of the ASM sector is comprised of women from impoverished rural communities who, although are not permitted to work underground, are mainly responsible for the labour-intensive processing of resources. These women are paid little yet they are given the most hazardous and laborious tasks (*Stories of Women in DRC's Mining Sector Spark National Action Plan* 2017), are given little control over their mining activities, rarely own the mines or the equipment nor are they involved in mineral dealing; these are roles often reserved for men (Jenkins 2014). Women miners within this sector of the developing world are more vulnerable to mining dangers and are disempowered (Jenkins 2014:5-7). Evidently, within mining, it is not just the African male body that is objectified and 'Othered', but also the African *female* body. In areas like Burkina Faso, Mali, and Sierra Leone, 90% of the individuals involved in artisanal processing of materials are women (Jenkins 2014:4-5) and these over-worked and over-burdened women can only be given access to land via men who also often control their income.[26] The subaltern exploitation and oppression experienced by women in the ASM is clearly intersectional: it comes not only in the form of neo-colonialism, but also patriarchal domination.

1.5.7 *Illustrating Future Mining in Africa: The Case of Wakanda*

In analysing *BP*, the representations of mining in Africa present a different vision and insight. Wakanda's mining underground, unlike the images of mining presented in Cole's photography, cannot be identified as a 'colonial subterranean' (Scott 2008). In *BP*, the underground is set up as an African space of technological innovation, knowledge generation, and accumulation, alongside a space of freedom to imagine alternative futures (Squire & Dodds 2020:8, 29). It is herein that Wakanda finds its (re)source of independence from economic impoverishment, and wherein subjects are empowered to challenge and free themselves from confinement, alienation

[26] In Kenya, female ASM miners are only given access to mining pits through men. Also, because small-scale mining is often framed as a family endeavour, the men within the household receive and control all payments (even those earned by the women) (Jenkins 2014).

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and oppression. The mining space in Wakanda is therefore a "deterretorialised" space (Paquette & Lacassagne 2013), and it is also a postcolonial space.

Wakanda's subterranean is postcolonial because it produces counter-mythologies and representations to an African underground ridden with colonial debris. The 'postcolonial subterranean' resists the perpetuation of colonialism's own myths of power (Scott 2008) by presenting images of the subterranean that are not associated with exploitation and oppressive power relations. Whereas Cole's images emphasise the centrality of the miner's body in exploitative mining processes, the presence of the miner in *BP* seems to be all-together absent, meaning there is no body to exploit; the body is further replaced by the use of technology. The film's robust visualisation of mining therefore undermines myths of European colonialism. According to *BP*, colonialism in Africa is not all-pervasive and all-powerful; it is not powerful enough to spread a kind of domination that penetrates even beneath the surface (Scott 2008:1865). Wakanda's underground therefore creates a powerful narrative of postcolonial resistance.

Essentially, this study intends to draw contrasts between images of South African mining compounds taken by Cole, the informal mining sector in Africa, and the Afrofuturistic representations of the mining industry in *BP* (Coogler 2018). Up until now the subterranean has been strongly associated with the subaltern but this association is not inherent, as *BP* highlights how this is a constructed identity that can be just as much deconstructed. Mining in *BP* is argued to liberate and empower the black body and identity from subaltern exploitation through the employment of technology.

1.5.8 ***"Afro-future" Mining: Vibranium in Black Panther (2018)***

The inclusion of African mining in the Afrofuture discourses opened by *BP* is not entirely anomalous. Mining has indeed played a significant role in the subjugation and proletarianisation of the African population across Southern Africa (Saul & Bond 2014:32-33), but it has also had local and global economic significance. Although not to the same level as Wakanda, the mining of precious resources in South Africa does gain them geopolitical worth.

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Although according to the website, *Brand South Africa* (2014) mining only contributed only 4,9% to the country's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2013, in 2015, Benya (2017) in *Going underground in South African platinum mines to explore women miners' experiences* states that the mining of gold, platinum, and diamonds contributed R286 billion to the GDP; incrementally growing to 7,1% of the GDP in 2017. However, while the mining industry is shown to increase its contribution to the South African economy, these numbers remain relatively low. Except, when one considers that the South African mining industry is the significant employer of over 457 698 mining employees (statistics provided by the *Chamber of Mines South Africa*[27] in Benya (2017:510)), and produces "10% of the world's gold and 40% of the world's known resources" (*Brand South Africa*, 2014), the value of mining in South Africa is therefore seen to bear great relevance.

In the MCU and Marvel comic books, vibranium is not just the most expensive underground mineral resource in the world, it is also Wakanda's most valuable natural resource. Vibranium's mineral value lies in its ability to absorb energy from impact. Its absorption of kinetic energy makes its technology stronger by building up energy until it is later released at an even more powerful rate (Andrews 2018). In the film, vibranium is powerful enough to run the nation's transportation systems, operate the mechanics that conceal Wakanda's technological landscape from the rest of the world, heal C.I.A. agent Ross from a severe bullet wound, and make up the Black Panther's versatile and indestructible suit. Since it is also so highly rich in value, vibranium runs Wakanda's economy, making it one of the wealthiest nations in the MCU.

In the comic book, as well as in the film, vibranium is also central to T'Challa's ancestral heritage, and his current seat of power as the head of the Black Panther cult, and King of Wakanda. In issue #9 of the *Black Panther* comic book series, *Black Panther: Doom is the song of Drums* (Kirby & Royer 1978), Black Panther makes it clear to accomplice, Mister Little, that "Wakanda history is the history of vibranium." Black Panther begins his history lesson by describing the origin of the Black Panther Cult, as the history of the Cult's current ruling power over Wakanda began with the occurrence of the vibranium mound which is

[27] The Chamber of Mines of South Africa has since been renamed Minerals Council South Africa.

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estimated to hold ten thousand tons of raw vibranium (*Marvel Database* 2021).[28] This vibranium mound was the result of a "flashing star" that fell upon the land (Kirby & Royle 1978:10); something that the 2018 film later clarifies as the mineral result of a meteorite that impacted Wakanda ten thousand years ago, thus making vibranium an extra-terrestrial metal and incredibly rare (Coogler 2018).

T'Challa continues stating that once the mound had cooled down, Wakandans began to mine the vibranium, but the process soon proved to be a dangerous one as the effect of the meteoritic landing makes the vibranium site powerfully radioactive. Any person who enters the mound would then transform into an infectious 'demon spirit' thus causing the deadly transformation of many Wakandans. T'Challa's ancestor, Bashenga, successfully closed the mound thereby guarding against the spread of the "alien infection", and against any intruders – local and foreign who might want to take the vibranium (Kirby & Royle 1978:10). Bashenga's victory spurred him to begin the Black Panther Cult which, although reigning as the ruling tribe in Wakanda, continued to dedicate itself to this cause. In both the comic book and the film's recount of Wakanda's history, Wakanda dedicates its focus to protecting vibranium from the rest of the world thus increasing its rarity and increasing its value. Although the manner in which Wakandan's gain access to vibranium is not made clear in the film, its use in Wakandan technology indicates that it is also somehow mined from beneath the earth. What is shown however, is where these technologies are designed and manufactured – in the underground.

Wakanda's underground research laboratory is a hidden world of advanced scientific and technological discovery, innovation, and possibility. It is headed and run by Shuri (played by Letitia Wright) – King T'Challa's younger sister, and heiress to the Wakandan throne. She is an intelligent innovator, leading the advanced engineering of Wakandan technology with a specialised knowledge of the uses and properties of vibranium. Shuri's lab is represented in the film as a uniquely innovative African underworld of sophisticated gadgets, impressive experiments, progressive communication technologies, and weaponry. The products of

[28] In *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), it is not so much the occurrence of vibranium caused by the crash landing of a meteorite that began its history, but of five tribes of men waging war over the land and collectively named Wakanda. It was when the Black Panther goddess, Bast appeared to a shaman warrior leading him the heart-shaped herb that would give him superhuman strength and wisdom, that the first Black Panther would become King.

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technology coming out of Wakandan scientific research rival that of the most advanced technologies produced by the West; understood geopolitically as the most progressive part of the world. Shuri's lab thus stands as a powerful metaphor for technology, science and engineering in the Afro-future, also showcasing the possibilities of mining.

1.5.9 *"Afro-future" Mining and the Fourth Industrial Revolution*

Although unconventional, the ambitious attempt made by this study to connect the mine as an African technological 'future' space is not entirely fortuitous. According to Williams (2008b) in her book, *Notes on the underground: An essay on technology, society and the imagination,* mines have been a metaphor for modern technology since early industrialisation. For many, mines were a peculiar space that combined verticality and enclosure; a combination not seen in agricultural fields or city spaces (Williams 2008b:4-5). What made mines unique in early industrialisation is that they were *manufactured* environments made to suit man, and not the other way around. Mines required the inputting of artificial light fixtures and ventilation, therefore, these environments were not organic but technological. From this, mines were given a powerful mythical image standing for 'progress,' and in Western culture, literature, and science, mines were a space of advanced scientific and technological discovery that entailed a digging up of 'hidden' knowledge, innovation, and possibility (Williams 2008b:5,8, 11). With the discovery of diamonds in 1867, and later the discovery of gold in 1886, mining in South Africa introduced modern industrialisation (Potenza, 2019) henceforth increasing fascination with the African underground that exceeded the European accumulation of wealth (Scott 2008).

Since then, mining has undergone numerous technological changes. In the article *Future mining: Workers' skills, identity and gender when meeting changing technology*, Abrahamsson and Johansson (2008) list the prominent changes that have taken place in mining over the last fifty years. Old underground mining has switched from man's close relation to the earth, to a modern underground mining where miners operate underground mining machines via remote control from a nearby building. With this advancement of technology, the kind of mining characterised by a miner's performance of difficult physical labour under dangerous environments is reducing in prominence. Mining now increasingly moves from hard physical labour and danger, to knowledge of new, often remotely operated, high-tech mining equipment

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thus requiring new competencies and skills (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008:213, 216). In most developing worlds, the close contact between miner and rock remains intact, but with the introduction of machines (albeit slow) a new relation forms: the miner, *machine,* and rock.

In the case of *BP*, a similarly interesting reversion of the relationship between miner, mining, and mining technologies is made. The Wakandan underground is a man-made and technologically driven modern mining environment, however, this has already been established as nothing new to mining. Instead, what appears to be new about this underground, and is of particular interest to my reading of Afro-future mining in the film, is the manner in which technologies are produced and used. Firstly, there is a complete reliance on technology for the underground's full functionality. There also seems to be no close contact between the miner and the hard rock, with Shuri singularly commanding knowledge, designing, leading, designating, and inventing the uses of vibranium. The presence of a human body thought to be necessary in mining processes therefore is almost obsolete in this story world. Shuri needs only knowledge and machinery to operate the underground and not the difficult bodily labour thought only to be capable of by men (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008; Jenkins 2014; Lahiri-Dutt 2012). Furthermore, this advanced form of mining is not only located on a 'developing' continent but is also led and managed by an African woman.

1.5.10 *Mining, Gender, and Technology in Africa*

Literature discussing the relationship between mining, the economy, domination, the exploitation of the black body often leaves out an important aspect: the problematic identification of mining as an exclusively male domain. Feminist theorists like Lahiri-Dutt (2012:194) critique how "mining has … become heavily attributed with masculinity" leaving little to no room for ideas of mining as a [female] work space." The idea of mining as a masculine endeavour has become naturalised over the centuries asserting the idea that only men can be industrial workers. The use of 'intimidating' technological machinery such as bulldozers and caterpillars, even processes of extraction such as blasting and excavating, further add to this idea as they are associated with male characteristics, "and inscribes gendered meanings on to the bodies of individuals performing the tasks" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012). Representations of mining often suggest that the deeper one is in the subterranean, the more

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masculinity can be performed and is 'developed' thereby marking the underground as a uniquely masculine territory and experience (Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:254).

However, representations of mining such as those in *BP* (2018) challenge these notions of mining and masculinity, as well as the subterranean and the subaltern, by revealing that "mining work is one of the areas where women's 'agency' can be located" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:196). It is in the underground where Shuri is most empowered as she is shown to play an integral and leading role in Wakanda's production, use, and circulation of vibranium. It is also underground where she manufactures advanced technologies and she is best able to help T'Challa accomplish his missions, and eventually save Wakanda and the world from Killmonger's violent recolonisation of the world. Characters like Shuri, operating similar to a miner, therefore reveal that the image of the "male miner is socially constructed" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:197).

Feminist critiques of mining offered by academics such as Lahiri-Dutt (2012) along with Afrofuturism's interrogation of normative ideologies and practices, help to deconstruct the cultural and ideological construction of the miner that assume a masculine representation, and a representation for the proletariat struggle. Such feminist perspectives help build an understanding of women as "legitimate social, economic and political actors in this important economic space" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:194) as powerfully displayed by Shuri through the Afrofuturist use of technology. In this sense, the film appears to frame technology as way to envision an equitable society. Technology in *BP* is used to remove dehumanising mining practices and to empower subaltern miners, particularly women miners. This mobilisation of technology appears to be aligned with Afrofuturist feminist thought, and the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

In 2015, executive chairman of the World Economic Foruusem, Klaus Schwab identified the current era of rapid and pervasive technological advancement the beginning of the "Fourth Industrial Revolution" (4IR). According to Schwab (2017), the speed of technological advancement, the shifts in thinking shaped by technology, and the changing of world systems caused by technology affect all sectors of society. These rapid changes also impact the way in

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which technology and society can co-exist and technology can be used by society in a manner that is more beneficial to them than harmful. For this reason, primarily, the 4IR must be shaped and channelled in such a way that growing technologies and discoveries are human-centred and therefore empowering (Schwab 2017:9). The use of technology for this means, in a rapidly advancing technological nation like Wakanda, will be used to unpack what mining in Africa could possibly look like in the 4IR. Although Shuri's underground world is only a fictional account of mining in Africa, my research would like to further investigate how the subterranean in this Afrofuturistic vision, can be regarded as a modern, feminised, and postcolonial space, that through the aid of technology, can be free from sexist and racist exploitation.

1.6 Chapter Outline

Chapter One has just provided the reader with a broad overview of this study's topic(s), themes, evidence, frameworks, and literature. By providing a blueprint, the chapter has hopefully ushered readers into a consideration of Afrofuturism as a strong and crucial cultural and aesthetic framework in creating countering viewpoints to Euro-dominated ideas of the future. However, it is not just the future that is under Afrofuturism's critical and creative eye. An examination of the past, and a keen awareness of the present times are also important in building up those black futures. When placing Afrofuturism within African contexts, this study shows how African Afrofuturistic representations are in touch with (pre-)colonial African history and culture, thus helping us to understand the current socio-political and economic realities so as to enable visions of a different outcome. Afrofuturistic representations of mining are, as argued by this study, a crucial site for not only engaging with the future, but also in deliberating the ways that racism, white supremacy, sexism, xenophobia, and Euro-American (cultural) imperialism continue to haunt and shape Africa, as well as the African diaspora at large.

Chapter Two provides an in-depth overview of Afrofuturism and its precise relevance in exploring, dissecting, and discussing Afrodiasporic, as well as African, issues. Afrofuturism combines science fiction and fantasy[29] to re-examine how the future is currently being imagined (Brooks 2018). The futures it ultimately constructs offer a deeper insight into the

[29] Science fiction draws from what is known of reality of science in creating scientific fiction. Fantasy creates what has not been seen or experienced before.

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black experience and the many ingenuous ways that blacks throughout recorded / real history have had to navigate already-existing worlds that have systemised their dehumanisation, organised their exclusion, and have produced their alienation. Afrofuturism, in other words, is born out of the cruelty (Brooks 2018) imposed against black bodies, culture, and belonging, with the same cruelty and pain being the condition under which radical imaginations of almost impossible futures could be performed. In this sense, Afrofuturism becomes a tactical product of faith that not only encouraged, but also assured black individuals of their survival into the future.

In the same chapter, I delve into the meaning and potency of Afrofuturism on a more intellectual note by unpacking its importance in the fields of visual and digital culture. Both fields of study offer a space in which Afrofuturism can be given enunciation and therefore articulation and expression within the academy. The introduction of Afrofuturism within the academy assists in introducing decolonial agency in film, art, digital networking, technoculture, and black epistemologies. Moreover, Afrofuturism is argued to be a good fit in not only critically engaging with larger Afrodiasporic issues, but also in examining specifically African issues. For this study, the source and 'sight' of black pain, and the issue that must be faced, is the mining industry in Africa.

Chapter Three explores how, in technology, black women have profound opportunities to attain a deeper sense of humanity in mining. This idea might sound paradoxical as the use of technology often entails that there must be a suspension of humanness. Mining in Southern Africa has contributed to the creation of systems that subjugate, exploit, and 'Other' African labour primarily through their bodies. This chapter makes the argument that in the subjugation of the black miner, primarily through the body, technology's ability to suspend humanness might not be detrimental considering that a strong part of the human experience is navigating the hierarchical structures that surround factors such race, gender, and ability (Weheliye 2014). Through intensive organisation, control, and image-making practices, individuals with power and privilege in the mining industry have been responsible for the subaltern emergence of those who mine underground (i.e. the mine worker). Additionally, it is not just the African male body that has been/is objectified and 'Othered' by mining, but the African female body, too.

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The chapter continues to highlight how the masculinisation of mining is a centuries-long notion that is now deeply entrenched. Such exclusive representations make it difficult for one to be female and mine. Women, in this regard, are often framed as being incompatible to the demands of mining because of their assumed biological fragility, when it is simply a matter of conditioning. It is for this reason that the alternate representations of mining offered by the Afrofuturistic film *BP* (Coogler 2018) remain pertinent to the chapter's discussion as the representations of mining in the film challenge notions of mining and masculinity, and the subterranean and the subaltern by revealing that the African underground does not have to be a site of exploitation. Furthermore, proving that "mining work is one of the areas where women's 'agency' can be located" (Lihiri-Dutt 2012:196). The chapter makes the final argument that perhaps in using technology to totally replace the need for a body to mine, then issues such as the 'Othering' and objectification that directly impact the miner would also be suspended.

Chapter Four further explores the stratified relationship between the African miner, the body and technology, but this time in closer relation to digital technology. In the chapter, the black body is related to as the embodiment of digital software and technology that eventually secures the liberation of those bodies subjugated under neo-colonial and capitalist regimes of power. The chapter specifically explores the preceding ideas by critically analysing the Africanfuturism musical African film, *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams, 2022). Mining in this chapter is not necessarily digitalised, or turned into a space of technological liberation, but the power of the miner takes on the chapter's focus. In the film, the miner is identified as "everything" digging up coltan so that mobile, computer, and other related devices are powered up. The miner is the one who holds the tech industry in the literal palm of his hands – even though they are not respected as such. While holding the ability to power and fire up search engines like Google, the coltan miner is disempowered under systems that make the mine a death zone. It is only when the miner leaves the mine, changes their location, and reconfigures the same software systems and devices that coltan is vital in creating, can they leverage their true power back.

In Chapter Five, Afrofuturism is used as an aesthetic locus through the work of Congolese artist, Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga. Ilunga skilfully uses the visual to cue a discussion on the link

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between economic exploitation and (inner) conflict in Africa. By covering the black figures in his artwork with networking wiring resembling that of microchips typically found in mobile hardware devices, Ilunga brings his critique closer to home. Ilunga uses black human figures in his work to express the exploitative nature of coltan mining in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In using the body, coltan is shown to be an external resource that ultimately holds internal human consequences. The chapter further goes on to discuss how the mining of coltan is necessarily performed by the black bodies of men and women miners who are made vulnerable to the tremulous shifts in the "economic, political and social identity of the DRC" since the onset of their colonisation (Bahadur 2020).

I make the argument that Ilunga's images create a clear connection between the DRC, colonial history, global modernity, as well as the afflictions of unrestrained capitalism upon the bodies and identities of the Congolese. By enmeshing the black human body in computer and mobile device wiring, Ilunga creates a futuristic scene wherein technology and Africa, as well as Africans, cannot be alienated from one another. In fact, as the black-bodied figures are strewn with microchip wiring in his paintings, so do they become one in the same. Therefore, Ilunga posits in the minds of the viewers the possibility of an inherent inseparability.

In Chapter Six, I conclude the thesis by providing a closing reflection of the study's findings. In highlighting and summarising the study's key findings and contributions made to the field of Afrofuturism, digital, culture and media studies, the hope is that a more precise level of its value is clear. It is within this critical spirit that I turn the chapter's reflection towards a discussion of the study's limitations which often leave behind them opportunities at getting things right in the future. It is also with the keen sense that the study has created an arena of gathering in which further research, greater discussion, and a further expansion of ideas can take place; the study turns to this when listing recommendations for further studies. Finally, the chapter will conclude with a few closing thoughts on the matter that cement what this critical study has hoped to assemble.

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CHAPTER TWO: GET UNREALISTIC – THE IMPORTANCE OF AFROFUTURISM AS A SITE FOR THE EXPRESSION AND REDEMPTION OF BLACK PAIN

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides an in-depth overview of Afrofuturism and its precise relevance in exploring, dissecting and discussing Afrodiasporic issues. Afrofuturism makes use of science fiction and fantasy to conduct an examination into how the future is currently being imagined – with close attention to who is being excluded from it (Brooks 2018). The futures Afrofuturism ultimately constructs makes sure to offer a deeper insight into the black experience and the many ingenuous ways that black people throughout history have had to navigate already-existing worlds that have systemised their dehumanisation, organised their exclusion, and have produced their alienation. More directly, Afrofuturism is simultaneously a product of the cruelty (Brooks, 2018) imposed against black bodies, their culture, and the stripping of their belonging, as well as their need to imagine radical, almost impossible, futures different to the present realities that did not guarantee their survival. Consequently, Afrofuturism ensured black survival through a radical activation faith: "[t]he assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1).

As an evolved manifestation of ancestral faith, Afrofuturism preserves the faith of our ancestors who "dreamt against the end of the world" (Indigenous Action 2020) and the end of their people, especially in modernising contexts. Therefore, the ability for our African ancestors (a concept and belief in African cosmology that I will explain in greater detail later in the chapter), especially those held captive by the torturous conditions of slavery and colonisation, to imagine a different tomorrow is argued to be the inheritance and bedrock of Afrofuturism and its pursuits. To further explore how Afrofuturism can be considered a willed manifestation of a people long before us, I draw from my personal experiences. During the research process I found myself facing a cruel circumstance in which faith in an alternative outcome was the only thing that gave me a sustained spirit of survival. What began for me as an intellectual exploration of Afrofuturism, became a deeply personal and spiritual one as I developed strategies to navigate the emotional intensity of life and death.

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Even with this, I do not simply disregard the intellectual value of Afrofuturism. While the personal indeed helped me to better understand the political, later in this chapter, I delve into the meaning and potency of Afrofuturism by unpacking it as an important part of visual and digital culture. Both fields of study offer a space in which Afrofuturism can be given enunciation, and therefore possess articulation and expression within the academy. The introduction of Afrofuturism within the academy assists in dismantling Western philosophies that prevent the spread of decolonial agency film, art, digital networking, technoculture, and black epistemologies, limiting Western philosophies such as normalising a construction of the white identity that is necessarily built on the negation of black identity (Dyer 2017).

Afrofuturism is a good fit in not only critically engaging with larger Afrodiasporic issues, but also in examining specifically African issues. For the study, the African issue that requires our critical attention, are the conditions of the mining industry in Africa. Both LSM and ASM hold within them exploitative systems of operating that are founded on the reduction of the black body as an object and tool of extraction – this situation is worse for African women who face the compounding objectification of their bodies as sexual objects for male use (this is explored in greater depth in chapter three). In the attempt to prove how Afrofuturism is relevant in building critique for African issues, I turn to Afrofuturism's sub-category, Africanfuturism as an alternative to the framing of history, knowledges, and reconstruction of new societies built on African justice, African empowerment, and African liberation.

Finally, I present this chapter to the reader, as an orientation of the Afrofuturist ideas, intentions and motives that shape the arguments made in the pages of this thesis. My hope is that in outlining the connections I will make in future chapters from the start, greater clarity will be offered. Above all, I hope that greater respect will be garnered towards Afrofuturism as something more than a superficial fad, as something misapprehended as form over substance, or worse, as form **devoid** of substance. When really, good Afrofuturistic texts are the result of what manifests when black creative practitioners move from the centre to the circumference, and not the other way around.

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2.2 Afrofuturism: The Thrill to Survive

As a pop cultural phenomenon, Afrofuturistic creative texts are seen as self-explanatory. It is for this reason that many people tend to relegate Afrofuturism as a superficial fad not totally worthy of deep and life-long intellectual pursuit. According to Davoudi (2022), such attitudes towards Afrofuturism are apathetic and are indicative of how impervious society has become to black pain. Afrofuturistic texts are born out of cruelty; science fiction in general is modelled after the cruelty of anti-black histories. Science fictional tropes surrounding abduction, alienation, colonisation, and the use of foreign technologies to transport an individual from one world to another, mimic the cruel abduction of African slaves onto slave ships travelling across the Atlantic thus forcing them to worlds where they become an othered "alien nation" (van Veen 2015). For this reason, Afrofuturism can be referred to as a site for the expression of black pain. It is also for this reason that dismissing Afrofuturism is considered a deliberate act of ignoring black pain. Ignoring that black individuals can be in pain, or are still in pain, further cements gross assumptions that black bodies inherently have a higher pain threshold. It is this kind of thinking that has contributed to the general apathy and desensitisation towards the act of recording and consuming images of pain being inflicted onto dehumanised black bodies. By further disregarding Afrofuturism, we give Sylvia Wynter (Bogues 2006) a possible answer to the question, "how do systems of knowledge … protect themselves"? Here, I make the assertion that it is through minimising those spaces that offer us alternative ways of knowing, seeing, and believing like Afrofuturism, that harmful systems of knowledge are protected.

If we are to dismantle the master's house, Afrofuturism can be one of the most powerful tools at our disposal as it is both an expression of black pain and an articulation of the ways that black people can come to heal because even black people know that "conditions of despair are temporary" (Kelley 2022). Its relentless search for alternative futures devises a unique language, produces its own unique images, and re-builds forgotten and unique knowledge sets that can aid us to adequately respond to the inherited pains from unresolved, incomprehensible, and aching histories. Afrofuturism is the lens through which we learn to experience and interpret the present moment. In addition, Afrofuturism strengthens the power of ancestral faith: the force of encouragement held by our ancestors to continue going guided by a deep belief that we would make it to this time, right here and right now.

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2.3 Afrofuturism, the Ancestors, and I

In many ways this became real for me too. On March 12 2021 my father was diagnosed with an aggressive form of oesophageal and stomach cancer, and that was the pain that launched me into understanding Afrofuturism on a more visceral level. I spent that year so consumed with thinking up alternatives to my reality; I dreamed, I remembered, and I would often escape when reality got too hard to accept. However, it was only through my faith in tomorrow that I was able to wake up and stand up to the present moment. It felt like time had escaped me. Days began feeling like months, and months began feeling like centuries; sometimes minutes felt like seconds and seconds felt like nothing. I could tell time only through my father who would become the clock that would determine when the sun rose for us, and when it would set. He also became the calendar marking how far ahead we were moving, or how far behind we were lagging. His illness removed the universal promise of linearity because at once, we were at the beginning of something new and always approaching the end. The violent feelings of catastrophe and the looming fear of change to the world as I knew it (the things marked in many Science Fictional texts) were my day-to-day experience.

When we received that phone call on 23 February 2022 at 02:15 we had reached what would feel like the end of the world. What marked our journey thereafter would be collective and individual moments of displacement, strangeness, (self-)othering and feigning belief that perhaps our father was living on in an alternate reality which our Christian religion would name "Heaven". It was then that I realised, perhaps in the most profound way, that Afrofuturism is not so out-of-touch after all – a thought I was deeply insecure about during my research journey. But it took my personal experience of pain to teach me just how vital and functional Afrofuturism is, if not necessary. In the microcosm of my personal pain, I learned to join the macrocosmic pain that birthed Afrofuturism in the first place. As a creative response to the painful and lived realities of African enslavement and its living legacy, I also joined in Afrofuturism's hope that this – relegation, pain, erasure, and death – too shall pass.

Indeed, it did, but much like the enslaved Africans, I had to navigate my way through a whole new landscape and geography. So much had changed around me and within me. With his passing, many questions, and memories arose as I battled to accept the conditions of my present

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reality. Papa was no more. I was filled with confusion, regret, and anger with myself, the team of doctor and with God; all of which led me to the strongest feelings of defeat at death. Yet as time moved on, and days turned to weeks, and weeks turned to months, I began to realise that every part of that journey was perfectly orchestrated and perfectly timed. I was guided, even though I lacked understanding. I remembered a dream I had just a week before my father died. My parent's bedroom where Papa would spend most of his time towards the end was no longer in its usual place. As I walked into the room to check up on him in the dream, the location had changed to the farmlands that *Nkgono-Gogo* (my father's mother, Boitumelo Kgongoane) grew up in; an area named Boons located in the North-West Province. Papa stood up from the bed and without even noticing me, he walked across the room into what had turned into a porch, without looking back.

As I looked over to see where he was going, there was an elderly woman who began to gracefully approach me. Draped over her shoulders was the traditional blanket-shawl that married Batswana women typically wear, *mogogolwane,* while wearing the most pristine diamond earrings. Behind her was what looked like a river stream, accompanied by the most peaceful sounds of its moving waters. When she arrived, she calmly smiled at me and began crossfading into an elderly man. Again, dressed in the traditional manner that respected Batswana men would dress, he was wearing a *baki ka hutse a tshwere le thobane.*[30] In unison, they began saying to me "Isn't funny how one day things are fine, and the next…"[31] – that is when the dream cut.

It was only after the funeral when I realised that the dream was a direct visit to me from my deceased predecessors – specifically my grandmother and my grandfather; my father's mother and father. They had come to tell me that they would soon take my father back home with them, but they would not leave me without. They would leave me with the memory of the peace that filled that dream to keep my heart at rest with a knowing that indeed, my father is in safe hands; he's in a better place. That was not the only spiritual mystery that occurred in the weeks leading to his death. My father's cancer worsened and so did the pain. We found ourselves

[30] He was wearing a blazer and a trilby hat while holding a knobkerrie.
[31] This part is still bizarre for me as I heard this spoken to me in isiXhosa. When I asked elder family members if we perhaps had Xhosa lineage in our ancestry, no one could confirm this.

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frequenting the hospital more, but this particular visit was different. Due to the COVID-19 restrictions that were still in place at the time, only one person could either enter therapy with him or visit him. The preference was always given to my mother, and so I waited for her in the car. As I lay, tired, across the back seat of the car completely exhausted from holding onto my prayer book to find another saint to pray to, I looked up and noticed a bird lodged on the sideview mirror staring directly at me. I do not usually take notice of such, usually brushing them off as coincidences, but this time it was almost as though my soul instructed by body to take notice. I tried to wave at the bird to scare it away, but it wouldn't move. The bird stayed there with me for some time before it left. It strangely brought me comfort, and it seemed to know something that I just did not know yet, but, it also assured me of something that I sensed I needed to know. This incident occurred before the dream I had of my grandparents.

Such spiritual mysteries would take place alongside Western means to fight against Papa's cancer: consultation with the oncologists, visits to radiation, IV drip sessions, researching the various and modern ways to mediate cancer, and helping my father administer his litany of medicines. Even though I was asleep to it then, African philosophy[32] and religion permeated every aspect of life, including his illness and the treatment thereof (Mbiti 1990). My father, and many others surrounding him, refused to fully rely on, and believe that Western medical technologies alone would bring an end to the attack against his health. For treatment to be truly effective, technology had to be used in strict measurement to African belief systems that were more concerned about the root and the source of the cancer rather than its cure. For Africans, modern medical machinery does not signal medical advancement (Afrika 2009). Machines alone are not adequate in diagnosing and curing the human person who is comprised of "past, present, future, ancestors, physical, mental, [and] spiritual" properties that must harmonise in order to sustain good health (Afrika 2009:xxxvii). Bad health or dis-ease, signals an imbalance between these properties that can only be cured using a healer's knowledge and wisdom of touch, sight, sound, and hearing to detect the root cause that lay invisible to the eyes, especially of Western doctors.

[32] According to John S. Mbiti, African philosophy is the "understanding, attitude of mind, logic and perception behind the manner in which African peoples think, act or speak in different situations in life" (1990:2).

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In African cosmology, illness is not merely naturalistic but is it also 'personalistic' meaning that the physical manifestation of being unwell is situated and framed within social and cultural contexts that define and influence ill health (Westerlund 2006). Following the Ubuntu imperative that guides African views, man finds his being in relationship to the people, ecology, and spiritual entities surrounding him. He must be at peace with each of these if he is to attain good health therefore ill health was indicative of conflict, unrest, and disharmony between man and his natural and cultural environment. At the news of his diagnosis, although I have no confirmation of this, my father went to visit his late father and mother (at least). I know this because this was his orientation. Much like in the African worldview, my father did not believe that the deceased were in fact gone. Yes, in their physicality they are no longer, but in spirit they were still very much alive.

Death is a natural part of the life cycle that does not destroy the essence of a human person, but simply transitions it to the next realm; what Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) describe as the ancestral realm where the spirits of those who once lived remain. Throughout his journey, my father kept a spiritual connectedness to his ancestors[33] whom he believed still held a dynamic influence in his day-to-day lived existence. When he prayed for good health, he did not forget to invoke the clan of family names that made up his genealogy of the living-dead[34]: *Badimo ba Kgongoane, ba Lebethe, ba Sebogoe le ba Tabane, ke e kopela bophelo…*[35] He believed his ancestors to be his intermediaries to God who could offer him guidance, protection, strength, and the satisfaction of his material needs like getting cured from this cancer.

As Mbiti (1990) explains, the ancestors are still "people" who still hold the same roles they held when alive. My father's journey to find spiritual and psychological relief in turning to his own deceased parents, grandparents, and other elder figures for help and a restoration of

[33] Mbiti (1990:107, 110) makes a distinction between the term ancestors and the living-dead. Ancestors refers to the deceased who were once predecessors to the living person, and the living-dead as **all** spirits who were once alive that were not necessarily predecessors like children, brothers, sisters, barren wives, and others. He does also explain that often Africans will casually use both terms interchangeably to mean the spirits of deceased family members of up to five generations.
[34] Please see previous note.
[35] Directly translated: the ancestors of the Kgongoane, Lebethe, Sebogoe, and Tabane homestead, I am asking for health.

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harmony in his life, matched African conceptions of a "continuous and unbreakable communication and connectedness between the living and the living dead" (Baloyi & Makobe-Rabothata 2014:235). I experienced the same inseparability between the living and the ancestors in the dream I relayed earlier. On the basis of the African belief that *legodimo le mo lefatsheng,*[36] I did not speak to figments of my subconscious imagination. I spoke to the still-alive essence of *Nkgono-Gogo le Ntate Mogolo*[37] who are in the here and now.

While at one end there was a respect for Western medical treatments like chemotherapy, there was also a deep inner knowing that machines can only help the healer diagnose the dis-ease. The machine itself could not come to an accurate diagnosis, and could not offer a cure that secured harmonious health (Afrika 2009) primarily because it did not involve the guidance of our Maker. My father agreed to undergo chemotherapy and radiation on the condition that we all understood this, even if we did not all agree. Afrofuturism's relationship with technology, albeit futuristic, similarly understands that for black individuals, technology is most effective when it aligns itself with African philosophy, religion, and cosmologies. Within Afrofuturistic frameworks that are centred around African worldviews, science and technology must maintain a pro-life attitude ensuring the protection and preservation of all forms of life (Mbessa 2020); follow and support the concept of Ubuntu by helping all persons to live more rewarding and fulfilling lives by building humanity's capacity to demonstrate other-regarding behaviours (Ewuoso & Fayemi 2021); and support holistic approaches to well-being that include harmony and unbreakable chains of communication with the living-dead who also have a vested interest in the manner in which we live our lives (Mbiti 1990).

2.4 Afrofuturism and the Temporality of Black Pain

Afrofuturism insists on the temporality of black pain, and demonstrates that blackness is not a full and final identity, but is in a constant process of becoming (St Louis 2009). However, Afrofuturism's positive assertion that blackness will continue to unfold its full nature,

[36] Directly translated, it means heaven is here on earth. Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014) explain that this saying in Setswana is an emphasis of the "interconnectedness and interdependence" of both the living and the dead. They continue to explain that perceptions of heaven as a remote place from earth is a misperception. Heaven is right here, right now.

[37] Ntate Mogolo is grandfather in Setswana. In hindsight, the transfigured male in my dream was my grandfather, Rra Motlhoiwa Kgongoane

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capacities, and definitions well into the future does not deny of historical pain that birthed blackness in the first place; but it wishes to emphasise how blackness can be redeemed. What lies at the very heart of Afrofuturistic discussions are the many ways that technology and science have been used not only to navigate pain and trauma, but also to secure ancestral faith and healing in safe and optimistic environments where black culture can be captured, redefined, contested, and ultimately transformed.

Additionally, Afrofuturism's futuristic use of techno-science is not seen as the end-point of blackness, but is rather regarded as an opening to ever-evolving possibilities. Afrofuturism simply becomes one of the growing frameworks one can use to unearth and explore the ways techno-science has always been used to (re)shape, rather than just harm, the lives of the ethnic minority (Kim 2017). If focus is only given to the manners in which technology has harmed ethnic minorities, then the exclusion of the presence of black lives in technological development and digital history will continue to be ignored. Clings to mythic claims of a universal experience of technology increase the strength of the image of the white, male, middle-class tech user (Brock Jr 2020). Afrofuturism refutes this singular image by establishing that black individuals and communities have always been in proximity to technology, especially to the Western technology of modernity.

Authors like Philip K Butler (2019) reveal to us that black people's perceived resistance to technology is an anomaly. The closeness between technology and blackness becomes incredibly intimate when analysing the concept of race itself. Race was a technology produced from modernity that was used to measure how 'animalistic' a 'human' body was considered to be. Within white modernist imagination, 'black' came to represent a distinct humanity whose physiognomy, traditions, perspectives, and ways of being in the world were perceived and constructed as separate and apart; whose difference proved them to still have a bestial presence within, and were therefore considered to be completely devoid of any humanity (Mbembe 2017:12). It is from this that Butler (2019) argues that the on-going efforts made for black people to be considered 'human' is a futile endeavour. 'Human' is a weaponised category in the first place, and has been cruelly used to justify global anti-black structures, behaviours, and society. As a concept, 'human' is an exclusive term which regulates and disciplines hierarchical structures. In other words, humanity limits black identity by emphasising what blackness is

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only in relation to human beingness; which is closer to non-human and therefore either object or animal.

On the other hand, technology within spheres of blackness releases limitless possibilities and opportunities to produce new and alternative reflections on what blackness is and can be (Talabi 2020). According to Butler (2019) and Weheliye (2014) it is better for black identity and culture to move into black *trans*humanism and/or *pos*thumanism to experience true liberation from Eurocentric disciplining and hierarchising structures surrounding humanity itself. Unlike in the current state of the world, in Afrofuturistic worlds as technology progresses, so does the understanding of humanity as a construct that ought to be open to scrutiny, de-hierarchisation and redefinition – especially when considering those marginalised because of it.

Afrofuturism's mainstream appeal is really not a reason for it to be undermined. On a larger scale, Afrofuturism redeems the power of marginalisation not as a deficit, but as an opportunity through which important issues concerning black humanity and livelihood can be stated and asserted into the public sphere, and more importantly, into public deliberation. It encourages meditative and critical approaches to the present moment through bringing to mind that "any serious motion toward freedom must begin in the mind" (Kelley 2022). Imagination within Afrofuturism does not necessarily lead to fabrication – the body cannot go where the mind has not been. Additionally, Afrofuturistic imagination produces a space wherein deeper interactions with history can be had in order to build more responsible futures. Such interactions with history include overcoming the common fear of looking back into its archives only to witness and imagine the stories of the "lives that have been degraded and dishonoured" (Hartman 2008:8).

Looking over the archives also reminds the readers and viewers that a large pain of black is, as Hartman (2008) argues, the loss of our stories that cause a strong stirring to create closure where sadly, there really is none given (Hartman 2008:8). However, Afrofuturism's effort to "fill in the gaps" creates a space wherein loss can be sensitively and safely articulated (Henriette & Kara 2019); a space for mourning where it is otherwise prohibited (Hartman

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2008:8); and a space wherein a history marked by "injury, stigma and violence" (N'yongo 2018:61) is retrospectively redressed. In this sense, Afrofuturism can be seen as an avenue powerful enough to contribute to the healing of historical traumas through the creation of alternative pasts and futures.

This creation of alternatives begins with the critical questioning of the events and contents of the past. In questioning the arrangement of the past rises an opportunity to give voice to those whose voices were silenced, and life to those whose deaths were "not much noticed" by the archive (Hartman 2008:8). The creation of alternative stories demands that what is being fabricated in the process remain crucially critical sceptical of history by "throwing it into crisis" (Hartman 2008). Throwing it into crisis means deliberately pulling history apart and dissolving the legitimation of voices and figures authorised as the only sources of truth when they were the only voices and narratives whose recordings were made to survive the test of time. As N'yongo (2018:61) notes, "[e]very attempt at getting closer to the historical truth by way of its archival remains leads to more dead ends and diversions" that expose how the archive is not separate from the play of power that can deaden some while enlivening others. As a result, Afrofuturism, as a form of critical fabulation, surpasses and bargains with such limits of the archive (Hartman 2008:11) in order to explore what is impossible for us to imagine today, but was wholly possible to have taken place. Afrofuturism, like critical fabulation and imagination, toils to "paint a full a picture" from reordered, contested and deviating perspectives to, as explained by Hartman (2008:11), enable the possibilities of what (else) could have happened; what could (not) have been said; and what (re)action might have taken place. Reaching towards fuller pictures ultimately leads Afrofuturism to become an arena within which "a future that hasn't yet happened but must" can be performed (Campt 2017: 17).

The notion of Afrofuturism as this grandiose and elaborate black science fiction genre is due to how it has been popularised, more recently with the big-budget and high-grossing Hollywood production *BP* (Coogler 2018). Although the film did Afrofuturism an excellent service by bringing it into Afrodiasporic and public discourse and debate therefore illuminating its socio-political relevancy, *BP* (2018) is not the sum total of what Afrofuturism is. Afrofuturism is about securing black futurity – including within its ambitious undertakings, black feminist futurity. Campt (2017:17) argues that black futurity is a grammar of possibility

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that is not always "loud and demanding", but is more often subtle and unassuming yet is impressively strategic, opportunistic and disruptive. What comes to mind here, for me, is the manner in which Afrofuturism manifested itself in my own personal life as a strategy to survive my painful reality in hopes for the better that is to come; but also, how Afrofuturist notions of futurity have been a key feature in the rhyme, rhetoric, and reasoning of Black political resistance.

On 9 May 1867, Soujourner Truth (in MacArthur 1996:437) expressed in a speech made to the National Convention of American Equal Rights Association, "I have been forty years a slave and forty years free, and would be here forty years more to have equal rights for all." In 1896 Booker T. Washington (in MacArthur 1996:379) gave his famous speech, *The sacrifice was not in vain*, where he stated "we both races in the South *shall soon* throw off the shackles of racial and sectional prejudices and rise… above the clouds of ignorance, narrowness, and selfishness, into that atmosphere… where it *will* be our highest ambition to serve man, our brother, regardless of race of previous condition [emphasis added]." Further, in 1963, before thousands of individuals gathered at Washington Monument, Dr. Martin Luther King Jnr. delivered the most famous speech of the century (MacArthur 1996:487), *I have a dream*. The following year in South Africa, *uTata* Nelson Mandela standing before court during the Rivonia Trial, made the speech that would gain the support of the world stating, "I have cherished the ideal of democracy and a free society in which all persons live together in harmony with equal opportunities. It is *an ideal which I hope to live for, and to see realized*, But[,] my lord, if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die [emphasis added]" (MacArthur 1996:494).

What at first glance appears to be random strings of iconic political speeches is really a pattern that reveals how integral the grammar of futurity has been in the fight to obtain, and secure, black liberation. Campt (2017:17) reveals the depth of the term as being more than just references to a future-tense grammar suggesting "*what will be in the future* [emphasis in original]". The grammar of futurity is fundamentally a tense of opportunity that emphasises "*that which will have **had to** happen* [emphasis in original]" for black individuals to be free individuals. In other words, imagining for the sake of imagining is not enough. Black futurity is the deliberate and strategic envisioning of a future that not only includes that which is lacking

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in the current moment, but that which **must** be; that which **must** come to happen. The speeches given by the likes of Sojourner Truth and Nelson Mandela painted a picture with their words and with their lives of what **must** be; what **must** take place, under circumstances of impossibility.

Avenues that breed and support black imagination like Afrofuturism do much of the same. Similar to how Dr Martin Luther King Jnr offered a new mode of thinking and created a new paradigm for the possibility of tomorrow, Afrofuturism is not a thoughtless leisure of fiction or a light shout of complaint; it is imperative. It offers the necessary tools and exercises to help those who are victimised by injustice to think of another way and to begin living it – right here and right now, as a matter of urgency. Afrofuturism plays outside hegemonic normativity that secures current power relations by intelligently encoding within its images "subaltern common senses" (Keeling 2007:7). Subaltern common senses are the many forms of subjugated knowledge that carry within them instruction, warnings, and the unofficial rules of successful escape; essentially, knowledges that counter what the hegemony would consider 'common'. More than just an aesthetic locus, Afrofuturism displays how the visual field is made up of a complex entanglement of the "social, discursive, and historical conditions" that had to have taken place for it to come to be (Copeland 2015:214). Reading Afrofuturistic visuality therefore requires a different approach, methodology, and epistemology; a manner of understanding that, to borrow from Copeland, centres "the imbrication of blackness and the visual, the material and the discursive, the aesthetic and the ideological, the work and the world" (2015:214).

2.5 Afrofuturism: A lesson in black aesthetic practise

It is important that I backtrack to an expression I made earlier where I positioned Afrofuturism as more than just an aesthetic locus. While this is certainly true, it does not overshadow the significance of Afrofuturism's aesthetic practise in carving out, creating and establishing black epistemologies. I use the word practise to indicate that Afrofuturism's lenience on 'outer space', planetary and technological tropes are not coincidental, but are intentional in the manner they are constructed and performed. Through its aesthetic, Afrofuturism gives its themes animating power. Afrofuturism's emphasis on black alienation

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in Eurocentric and white supremacist worlds can be found in its proclivity towards visualising black extraterrestriality.

Reed (2014) explains that Afrofuturist aesthetics of black extraterrestriality often render black bodies an "extra-humanness" which targets the very question of the "human" as problematically defined by European Enlightenment, Western modernity and ideas of Reason; all of these excluding the black individual man and woman from its understandings. The bizarre representations of black extraterrestriality play on the notions of exclusion from humanity, but also encode blackness's hyper-humanity thus getting audiences to consider it even more bizarre that black bodies were barred from humanity in the first place. The often times strange performance of the black body and being as something outside of human, or "extra-human", breaks with a tightly woven inherited tradition of thinking about humanity in Western terms. In doing so, Afrofuturism performs a "disorganisation of signs" (Reed 2014:352) that brings about a powerful ability to recontextualise past, present and future conditions of black lives.

Achille Mbembe (2016:95) extends the notion of the practise and performance of Afrofuturist depictions by highlighting the power of the arts in Africa as objects that ultimately push audiences to dematerialise the art object before them. Dematerialisation moves audiences into the realm of ideas and events. The form of an object within the African arts is not definitive and therefore secured in time and space. Form in African and Afro-diasporic arts, according to Mbembe (2016:95), is "ephemeral, evanescent, and fugitive". In others, forms are always on the move ready to assemble, re-assemble and disassemble. Like Afrofuturistic aesthetics, the aim of form is not to be captured or permanently arrested by one's gaze. The point of Afrofuturist aesthetic is to move and reconfigure you, the viewer, allowing you to move from one world to another; one frame of reference to another; one state of being to another.

To break from a tradition requires the viewer to be aware of the porous nature the borders; borders that are said to police such tradition and set it in place. The disruption from normality as brought on by the aesthetic forms of Afrofuturism expose the vulnerable nature of Reason by allowing a spirit of movement on part of the viewer. A spirit of movement gives the viewer permission to see those borders for what they are: forms that can similarly be assembled, reassembled and disassembled. The hardened forms imposed on the world by

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Western modernity are not always true and do not have to be permanent; especially as one thinks on futurity.

The various performances of the Afrofuturistic aesthetic that will be shown in the coming chapters take on a range of forms. From moving images (film) to still ones (artworks), the Afrofuturistic forms are not made to stay in a single place at any particular time. As one moves through the forms in the coming pages, one learns that they are dematerialised always on the move revealing "black space" as a parody: there is no space in our current context in which black individuals are safe enough to take up. Also, whenever spaces are delineated as "black", they characteristically unsafe (Reed 2014: 353) and are therefore a problem often fixed by the erasing measures of gentrification. It therefore becomes imperative in the mind of the viewer that new spaces that operate outside of anti-black regimes of power are actively imagined. The Afrofuturistic forms included here not only cut across space, but they also appropriate time by rapidly shifting viewers between past, present and future (Reed 2014:355). As a result, the illusion of a collapsing of time through form helps the viewers reach an emotional and spiritual truth: the deeply connected relationship between tomorrow, yesterday and today. Such knowledge as conjured by Afrofuturistic aesthetic forms are integral in Afrofuturism's attempt to liberate the possibilities for blackness to be reformed and reconfigured.

2.6 Africanfuturism: Afrofuturism Meets Africa

From an African perspective, criticism is often levelled against Afrofuturism for its predominant focus on the Afrodiaspora, and not enough on Africa. As previously argued, the term Afrofuturism is "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth century technoculture." This definition emphasises Afrofuturism as an African-American speculative fiction that addresses issues and technoculture that are specifically African-American. Such contextual and cultural limitations placed on Afrofuturism's definition make it difficult to talk about Africa and African experiences, particularly of the past, in Afrofuturistic ways. It is from this perspective that critics of Afrofuturism's relevance in Africa do not consider Afrofuturism as an appropriate means to explore and narrate the African experience (Bristow 2012). Nevertheless, while this

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position on Afrofuturism's irrelevancy brings some critical considerations, it is not necessarily the full truth. Euro-American definitions and interpretations of Afrofuturism are only one part of Afrofuturism, so to close Afrofuturism off from use in an African context only places a limitation on Afrofuturism that tries to fix it into a definitive meaning when Afrofuturism is an ever-evolving idea of possibilities that can take place in any place, any time.

A few African science fictional artists and writers such as Okorafor (2020) have tried to expand Afrofuturism's definition by outrightly positioning themselves as Africanfuturists. As stated earlier, Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism (re)presents future-orientated, often technological, solutions for present-day concerns that always begins with a critical reassessment of the past. However, as opposed to Afrofuturism, Africa in Africanfuturism is not treated as a vacant mythical continent upon which any unrealised fantasies can be played out. Rather, Africanfuturist imagination uses technology to improve the "economic and political shape of Africa's tomorrow" (Kniaź 2020:54). In other words, rather than to contemplate African-American issues, Africanfuturism is the direct result of a focus on African cultural (not mythical) heritage, and localised experiences. Despite the acknowledged differences in foci, Kniaz (2020) explains that the boundaries between Africanfuturism and Afrofuturism are blurred, and this is primarily because Africa stands as the genesis for both perspectives. Therefore, Kniaź (2020) argues, Africanfuturism should not be regarded as something that exists outside of Afrofuturism. It ought to be acknowledged that like Afrofuturism, Africanfuturism is preoccupied with transformed futures albeit centred on African perspectives. Also using science fictional storytelling, Africanfuturism uses techno-science to engage with African experiences, value systems, spiritualities, knowledge, hopes and fears. Ultimately, Africanfuturism is a specific manifestation of Afrofuturism; a manifestation that only expands black speculative perspectives of the past, present, and future into new territories.

It is important for me to reiterate that although I will be analysing various visual images, Afrofuturism is not reduced to a trendy aesthetic that glorifies technology contextualised by black bodies, traditions, and identity that find belonging only in the future. Having established that Afrofuturism is not enclosed by geographic or political boundaries, Afrofuturism therefore operates as a critical framework as well as a cultural and political aesthetic counterpoint (Henriette & Kara 2019) in my study. The various Afrofuturistic imagery of African mining

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between these pages carry within them potent critical perspectives that create spaces wherein vigilance can be practiced. Through their visual representations of Africa and the African people, a critical reflection of the self and of the continent, particularly those that question issues related to post-, neo- and decoloniality, are undertaken. And such critical reflection can only begin when one contemplates one of Africanfuturism's main goals: to help reconfigure the self on a continent that is haunted and shaped by racism, white supremacy, xenophobia, and Euro-American (cultural) imperialism (Kniaź 2020).

Africanfuturism is an equally potent critical and aesthetic practice that proves how Afrofuturism can dissolve all regional boundaries. While Afrofuturism is still relevant in raising questions about the African past, present, and (speculative) future, Africanfuturist imagination uses technology to improve the "economic and political shape of Africa's tomorrow" (Kniaź 2020:54). Through the futuristic reimagination of a familiar world that emphasises African perspectives, Africanfuturist representations ultimately participate in the necessary disruption of dominant Eurocentric patterns of thinking, culture, knowledge production, and processes of gendered racialisation that are currently at play in the world. Africanfuturist fascination with future-orientated, and often technological, solutions for present-day concerns are not only in touch with African history, culture, and socio-political realities, but they are also representational visions of Africa-as-future. Africanfuturism is therefore a powerful way to stake black African presence in the past and to assert it in the future by "offering an aesthetic form through which to project the possibility of radical black futures" (Wofford 2017:634) but this time specific to Africa.

As a manifestation of Afrofuturism (Kniaz 2020:53), Africanfuturism does not abandon Afrofuturistic aesthetic and frameworks. Rather, Africanfuturism brings African applicability and specificity to Afrofuturism's overall aim to produce aesthetic and socio-political resistance to Euroecentric systems of thought and knowing that are anti-black. In other words, Afrofuturism's resistance to the replay of past dynamics between the coloniser and the colonised are made relevant to current African contexts of neo-colonial and exploitative attitudes and realities. Throughout this study, I will be employing the term Africanfuturism in analysing Afrofuturistic images of Africa, by Africans and/or of Africans. Doing so does not

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erase the meanings of Afrofuturism thus far established in the study, but rather embraces and shows its versatility and apt applicability within African contexts and those within my study.

2.7 Africanfuturism: A Visual Culture from the Margins

My research reads Africanfuturistic images that have either been produced in, or have placed their story, worlds within the global south. The positioning of Africanfuturistic images from this part of the world extends mere geographic location and material settings. Visual forms are more than mere objects of viewing pleasure, but are often the outcome of relationships, social processes, and exchanges of power constructed by the society that produces them (Arthur 2012; Manghani 2012) and Africanfuturism is no different. Being a visuality that hails from the global south, Afrofuturism is differentiated due to the kinds of knowledge/s that are birthed from it. To adequately engage with Africanfuturistic visuality, therefore, approaches that assist in delinking readers from defaulting into treating Eurocentrism as the only way of thinking, doing, being, and becoming in the world must be administered (Mignolo 2014). Such an approach can be in the form of "de-Westernisation": a process and mode of critical reflection, according to Herdin et al. (2020:11), that begins by questioning Western-led and defined ideas of "universality" and "objectivity" (Nikhila & Viswanath, 2021).

Within the context of visuality, de-Westernisation is the acknowledgement that, as a carrier of information, the visual image contains a plethora of meanings that then fosters a plurality of understandings. Furthermore, as asserted by Manghani (2012), de-Westernisation leads to an awareness that there is no one single way in which to read images. In addition to that, as an important mode of knowing[38] images also produce a plethora of more knowledges thereby rejecting what is described as "chauvinistic rationalism"[39] (Herdin et al. 2020:8). At its core, Afrofuturistic images de-centre totalitarian Western concepts of time, epistemology, aesthetic standards, and ways of being and doing. They also affirm the validity of representations produced from "those located on the outside of society as [equally] intellectually powerfully as those created from the inside" (Connell 2020). Connell (2020) further makes a distinction

[38] According to Hebel and Wagner (2011), visuality is an important mode of knowing: knowing who is included, who is excluded; who is located at the centre and who is placed at the periphery; knowing which parts are left out of frame and from whose perspective the knowledge is shaped.
[39] Chauvinistic rationalism is the assumption that Europeans have the right to define what and how to approach reality. In other words, only Western thought can claim access to reality and objectivity

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between the inside and outside in much the same way as Iton (2010) does. According to Iton (2010:4), dominant representations, especially those found within popular culture, are deliberately exclusive of some individual in society. Those representations which dominate the visual field are made from the 'inside' and function to secure the interests of the hegemony. Those excluded from sight/site and forced to stand on the 'outside' (being made invisible) are often those that the hegemony must marginalise if it is to secure power.

Africanfuturism disturbs such power by pulling the outside back inside thereby foregrounding how in reality, the outside is impossible to de-centre. Representations framed as being located on the 'outside', are, and have always been, part of the 'inside'. As Dyer (2017) analyses, the nature, boundaries, and textures that mark dominant identity (White) are shaped by the representations of the marginalised (Black) (Dyer 2017). In other words, the 'Othered' outsider is a crucial part in constructing dominant identity, therefore whether visible or not, expressed or suppressed, Black images and representations are always "bound to appear" (Copeland 2015). Therefore, Black representations like those of Africanfuturism, cannot be "bordered … structured [and] ordered" under the discipline of hegemonic political and ideological interests (Iton 2015:11). Africanfuturism, openly and subliminally, disturbs and troubles Eurocentric approaches to knowledge and visuality by strategically de-Westernising the visual field that in a world of plurality and particularity, could never totally be Western in the first place.

2.8 Africanfuturism: A Digital Culture from the Margins

What also lays at the heart of Africanfuturist focus in this study is not the technical composition of technologies, nor the scientific prowess and skills required to make them. Africanfuturism is a scholarly and aesthetic means of exploring the interesting interplay between race and technology. It is from this angle that I focus Africanfuturism towards the cultural significance of (digital) technology at broader regional levels, like technology's relationship with Africa and the African diaspora at large. I also focus on the cultural significance of (digital) technology in more particular community spaces. Africanfuturism offers an excellent avenue for individuals (academic, creative, and lay) to begin contemplating how black artistic composition, politics, community, aesthetics, and culture engage with the digital and technological. Africanfuturism therefore assists various disciplines such as visual culture, media studies, digital humanities, as well as technoculture to "[move] beyond the deficits of

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the so-called 'digital divide'" (Rambsy II 2018:345) that have created (pseudo-)barriers barring blacks from full participation in digital and technological practice.

This is not to say that how technology is made itself has no impact or value but, the cultural dimensions of technologies enable a more crystalised awareness that digital technology has never really been "divided". Sayers (2018) reiterates this position by reminding viewers that all kinds of technology, including new media, are contingent upon their histories and settings and are informed by the motivation behind their composition and uses. Africanfuturism, for instance, is a product of black African history, and therefore its technologies are no different. Beyond their composition, (digital) technologies "morph … into a matrix of technology and culture" (Sayers 2018:3). From an Afrofuturistic point of view, creating technology is not enough; for technology to have any sort of meaning it must be interacted with by people who ultimately shape its relevance. Africanfuturistic technology, even in the digital arena, is consequently a site of entanglements between the "social and material, carrier and content, form and substance, portal and edge, ephemeral and permanent, you and other". (Sayers 2018:3). In summary, Africanfuturistic technologies require critical engagement that exceeds literal and utilitarian approaches. Technology, and the digital, within Afrofuturistic frameworks, are treated according to their "extra-functional significance" (Marino 2018:472). In other words, Africafuturism's digital and technological outputs, representations, and uses become a *cultural* text that serves as a crucial entryway for the exploration of tech-human interaction, specifically exploring the ways technology has been encoded into black history and culture, and vice versa.

Africanfuturism's imaginations of the development of science and technology is not apolitical and value-neutral. Africanfuturism directly places the scientific, digital, and technological in conversation with black African and Afrodiasporic histories (Rambsy II 2018:345). Accordingly, as stated by Konrad, van Lente, Groves, and Selin (2017:468), Africanfuturistic scientific and technological imagination will reflect the various forms of social life and social orders that are envisioned by the African diasporic societies designing them. Within Africanfuturism, it is the African diaspora who imagines, envisions and designs the digital and technological, and so how they use technology will indicate the values, ideologies, interests; the hopes, expectations, and fears of the African diaspora (McNeil et al 2017). For

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Africanfuturism, the hope is that its representations of future technologies will begin to shape society's vision and expectations of the future *en masse*. Such socio-technical imaginaries are created with the intention of showcasing a kind of a material commitment, to a particular vision of society intended to be fulfilled. For Africanfuturism, the technology's material commitment is towards establishing a world wherein decolonisation, economic empowerment, gender equality, environmental harmony, and black life is attained, sustained and secured.

Part of Africanfuturism's 'tech entanglement' shows a resistance to Western ideologies that dominate the tech and digital arena. As mentioned in my introduction, even within modern consciousness, the mention of an African future often evokes development discourses that do not match the interests of African development. Adopting Western ideologies that emphasise themselves to be the encapsulation of progress, innovation and futurity, development discourses set out to paint an appositional picture of Africa as a socio-political and economic death zone; a continent of disparity, decay, even death, and therefore a place without a future. What is not often confronted is how ideas of a catastrophic African future moves to a lived reality. According to Yaszek (2006), the answer lies in science itself as ideas of a catastrophic African future, or an Africa without a future, are further supported by the 'objectivity' offered by science.

Determined by estimates made by the 'futures' industry,[40] Africa is perpetually locked in time and space as the "desiccation of life" (Mbembe 2017:53).[41] Working together to make Africa the antithesis of technological innovation and futurity, science generates data about the past, present, and future; business funds these so-called purely scientific studies for results (with which eventual big business decisions are made); and global media combines, constructs, and disseminates these "facts" into coherent and popularised narratives that are then made mainstream across the globe (Yaszek 2006:48). The manner in which the Futures Industry is shown to operate further proves how science and technology must not stop being interpreted at the functional level of physical composition, data, and output. Conventional wisdoms that

[40] The Futures industry is comprised of 'Big Science', 'Big Business', and Global Media (Yaszek 2006)

[41] In discourses of the past and the future, Africa moves from being a material fact to metaphor and signifier, often of things and states that are framed as life-barring and therefore futureless. Ideas of Africa as the futureless continent of difference, dissention, and impotence arise, as Ashcroft (2013) points out, from the word "Africa" itself. Africa does not merely exist as a geographic fact. It is a hodgepodge of historically fixed and yet currently still elusive meanings, associations, and ideas.

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affirm that science and technology "is what it does" (Marino 2018:474) do not always acknowledge how they can also be ideologically inflected and therefore become capable of producing fissures between so-called "fact" and reality.

Medical reports, for example, on Africa's HIV/AIDS rate, predictions of its economic decline and low life-expectancy, are often used as evidence to foreshadow Africa's future as nothing more than a hopeless catastrophe. Afrofuturism crucially tests the validity of such claims and predictions by questioning who runs such industries, *whose* interests do they serve and to whom is the future implicitly being made to belong to? In questioning it is made clear that visions of a catastrophic African future are predicated on anti-African ideas established by Euro-America imperialism – to serve Euro-American interests – thereby encouraging the underdevelopment of Africa (Steady 2005). In offering alternative futures, Africanfuturism interrogates black African individuals' own ability develop futuristic technologies, and define their own participation in the digital arena. Technological development and digital participation are marked by the stern intention to ensure a future that does not replicate the same historical hierarchies of the past. Furthermore, futuristic technology necessarily resists Eurocentric domination thereby rewriting the trauma of black oppression by showing how (digital) technology can be used to highlight and support black people's historic resiliency, and to re-position "the less powerful as heroic, emotionally strong, and intellectually savvy" (Spencer 2020:9).

In the digital arena, digital practices are increasingly decentring whiteness as the default user and identity, especially the internet. According to Andre Brock (2020), Black Cyberculture is the manner in which black internet users understand and use digital artefacts and practices as a material and virtual expression of black culture and identity, and is getting growing attention within the politics and representation of technoculture. Far from being race-neutral, technology and its consequent technocultures filter its uses through the cultural and racial identity of the user (Brock 2020:2). Brock (2020) continues to assert that the so-called "neutrality" of digital technology is really an enactment of whiteness which believes itself to be invisible, the normative, and universally applicable. Because of this, Western forms of technoculture have become the blueprint onto which the user experience of many online environments are built (Brock 2020:7).

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Digital technology's re-enactment of whiteness also problematically creates 'Othering' where digital practices, environments, and software itself do not have the interests of black individuals in mind thereby foregoing digital inclusivity (McIlwain 2019). However, techno and digital cultures are reflective of the offline identities that build them therefore making both products of cultural particularity rather than the products of assumed whiteness. Within technoculture and digital culture, blackness is given equal opportunity to manifest itself whether it be through practices that create safety, leisure, and joy (Brock 2022:16), or through software practices that innovatively engage with black histories, black presences/presents, and black futures.

Having been historically put at the circumference, blackness can make its way back to the centre of digital and technological discourses; especially as the visibility of blackness in digital technologies becomes increasingly apparent and increasingly influential in technoculture (for example, through online community networks such as *Black Twitter*). Definitions and representations of technoculture have consequently expanded as more software and digital design is being made, or co-opted, to serve the interests of black life – the various online and offline structures of support that enable black people to *live* and belong without limits. The cultural and racial significance of digital technology explores how focus on the digital and the technological ought to exceed functionality. Within the digital arena, Afrofuturism helps to neatly square up the digital and technological as cultural texts that carry the varied expressions, interactions, responses, imaginative actions, and interventions made by the African diaspora in pursuit of freedom. Thus Afrofuturism, as a sub-set of black digital culture and (aesthetic) practice, reflects how the significance of technology arises from its "history, circulation and reception" (Marino 2018:437) within Afrodiasporic communities.

2.9 Africanfuturism and Mining in Africa: Technology as the Cure and the Poison

As I have tried to establish, Africanfuturism orients all of its efforts towards future-orientated, often technological, solutions for present-day concerns that must begin with a critical reassessment of the past. My study seizes the opportunity to explore the future of mining in Africa through Afrofuturistic representations. Mining in Africa continues to be a relevant and important endeavour in building up the African economy, but also as a site which encapsulates

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the history, (re-)organisation and on-going consequences of colonialism, capitalism, and even patriarchy – issues that target Africa's socio-political economy. Having the largest reserves of platinum group metals in the world,[42] South Africa is currently ranked fifth internationally in terms of mining contribution to GDP[43] (*The South African Mining Sector* 2023).

The introduction of mining in South Africa created a stark socio-political division that positioned the 'white' population as the powerful oppressor and exploiter of the weakened and disenfranchised 'black' population (Saul & Bond 2014:29). Mining's contribution to the division of race and class has not left South Africa's conscience especially as recently as 2022 marked ten years since 16 August 2012's Marikana Massacre[44] where miners lost their lives at the hands of the South African police in the intense bid to negotiate better wages and better work conditions. Ten years later, traumatised and pained miners and families have still not been compensated for the losses initiated by the Massacre (Nicolson 2022). Such happenings continue to prove the subjugated status of the lives of miners who after many years can still express, "So much blood was spilled and for what? Nothing, as you can see that we still live in shacks, we don't have access to decent houses, don't even have showers. Nothing in our lives shows the important work that we do at the mine… We are still poor." (Njilo 2022).

The desperation and violence brought on by poverty continues to be a prominent theme in the recent exposure of illegal mining structures in Johannesburg, South Africa. Labelled as a "scourge" (Maromo 2023) hundreds of illegal miners flooding from several parts of Southern Africa are found unearthing precious metals in abandoned mining sites. Some of these miners are heavily armed thus causing violent terror and gang violence in communities located on Johannesburg's gold belt. In Riverlea, South of Johannesburg, five bodies were found dead at a nearby abandoned mining site causing police to suspect the deaths were as a result of a shoot-out between two rival illegal miner gangs[45] (Mkhwanazi 2023). Even within the artisanal

[42] In terms of the production of platinum group metals, South Africa is ranked in the top three internationally (*The South African Mining Sector* 2023)
[43] According to the Minerals Council South Africa, in 2018 the mining sector contributed R351 billion towards the South Africa's GDP further employing 456 438 individuals (each with a reported number of nine indirect dependants).
[44] The South African police shot at 112 miners at Lonmin mines in Marikana, North West; 34 miners were shot dead (De Waal 2012).
[45] According to Siyabonga Mkhwanazi (2023) the five bodies found shot dead in Riverlea were a result of turf wars.

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mining sector, the bodies of would-be miners are made vulnerable to violence, exploitation and conditions that have very little regard for the preservation of life. The lives of miners being made futile by the exploitative nature of mining is not only affecting Southern Africa, but other parts of Africa such as the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) where the coltan mining industry is powered by "modern-day slavery" (Gross 2023).

The DRC is the highest producer of coltan globally. Coltan is a form of rare metal used in the construction of highly used technologies such as mobile phone batteries, laptops, pacemakers and digital cameras. Even with coltan being the bedrock of a global multi-trillion-dollar industry[46] such as the tech industry, the supply chain of coltan cannot be categorised as "clean" and dignifying of its workers (Gross 2023). Coltan is largely mined in an artisanal manner and this unmonitored and unstructured nature of the artisanal mining industry makes it a cradle for the oppression of labourers. Using archaic means of intensive manual labour,[47] artisanal miners in the DRC work under tremendously hazardous conditions for very little pay.[48] Men, women and children involved in the feeding of coltan to the formal supply chain touch and inhale coltan's toxic residues, and are also exposed to dust, grit, and contaminated water. Moreover, many communities have been illegally dispossessed due to the enlargement of mining territories leaving many families destitute. The level of exploitation and degradation found in the mining of coltan sets it on par with "old-world slavery" (Gross 2023).

An industry that is typically associated with, or at least helps create, high-tech industrialism, productivity and capital wealth is marred by the contradictions of gross human and ecological poverty and exploitation. The underground within postcolonial criticism proves itself to be a powerful metaphor for just how deeply rooted colonial structures and beliefs lie in the, supposedly, postcolonial. In a world where changes begin and mostly end on the surface, mining in Africa sadly continues to bring colonial themes of African violation into contemporaneity. Moreover, with rising concerns regarding the future of the ecology, extractive industries like mining are receiving urgent global attention not only from a

[46] In 2022, the global tech industry was estimated as being valued at $8.51 trillion. In 2026, it is estimated to be valued at 11.47 trillion dollars. (*The Global Tech Market Is Bigger Than You Think*, 2023)
[47] According to Kara (in Gross 2023), artisanal miners in the DRC make use of "pickaxes, shovels, stretches of rebar to hack and scrounge at the earth in trenches and pits and tunnels to gather cobalt and feed it up the formal supply chain"
[48] Artisanal miners of coltan get paid less than one dollar per day (Sutherland 2011).

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humanitarian front, but also from a rising awareness of an overburdened environment. Such inquiries are made more potent when they are brought in direct relation to Africa thereby removing the continent and its own perspectives from perpetual peripherality. African perspectives and critiques, such as those displayed by Africanfuturism, make valuable contributions as a deliberate movement is made from deconstructive approaches toward more generative and constructive ones. Within the mining sector, Africanfuturism brings forth representations and insights that produce a different vision; one wherein the underground is a space of empowered subjects who are free from the bitter fruits of colonialism's roots: confinement, alienation, oppression, and the devaluation of minoritised lives.

Africanfuturism's insistence that innovative future technology can be used to substantially improve the lives of Africans does not begin without a critical assessment of how technology was used oppressively in the past. This kind of inquiry into technology's harm against Africa, and Africans, is not made clearer than in mining. Reflecting on the idea of it being a modern form of old-world slavery brings a sobering realisation that the African slave is the first instance of technological harm. By this I mean, the African slave was made devoid of his humanity – ideologically, physically, and systemically – by systems that enslaved him. Being disregarded as human, the slave was then reduced to a tool used to fulfil the commands of the slave master, and never to be heard. It is also in this sense that those who point out 'Afro' and/or 'African' as an oxymoronic positioning next to 'futurism' could not be more wrong. Not only were black people involved in the making and creating of modern technology (Mbembe 2017) but as I mentioned in sentences before, they were treated as technology themselves. There is no relationship closer than that of black Africans and technology. And, if technology is symbolic of "the future", it should be incomprehensible to conceive of a future without black people in it. Thus, in light of the historic relationship between black individuals, technology, and slavery, Africanfuturism regards technology as the *pharmakon*: the remedy **and** the poison within the African diaspora.

The miner is wounded by processes that begin with the objectification of their bodies thus reducing the miner to a mere technology for extraction. On the other hand, Afrofuturism also insists that despite the reality of technology's potential to harm minority lives, minority lives' use of technology can bring about a different outcome. For Afrofuturism technology itself is

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not bad thing, but what is bad are the many ways it is used against *life*. Afrofuturism holds fast to the idea that within the diaspora, technology can be redeemed as an aid to the improvement of life – not as a substitution for life or its obliteration. When using an Africanfuturist framework to view mining in Africa, technology ought to serve and aid the body and the body is not to be objectified as a technological tool or an experiment of technology. For this reason, Africanfuturist focus on mining would be to point out the atrocities committed against black life, but also to point out the possibility for alternatives – alternatives that always involve, first and foremost, the eradication of African objectification and the instilment of African empowerment.

Africanfuturism and its representations of mining can therefore be regarded as the aesthetic locus wherein the social, discursive, and historical conditions of mining can be placed within a greater discourse of the relationship between race and technology, historically and potentially. If the past of African slavery and colonialism's forced acquisition of land and resources cannot be changed, then its consequences in the present moment in Africa cannot either. However, what Africanfuturism ignites into possibility is the exception: depending on how the past is viewed and thought about, its meaning for the present moment can be changed. With changed/changing meanings of the past comes clarity of focus in the present moment as to what kind of future we need to urgently work towards. Within mining, this kind of future can include the diminishing of exploitative extractive practices, employing systems that dignify and protect the human body, as well as the fair and equal involvement of women.

Another way that the meaning of the past can bring clarity of focus in the present moment is in creative engagement with the past. For Africanfuturism this could mean uncovering hidden pasts or the construction of alternative histories. Yet, it must be strongly noted that in as much as Africanfuturism creatively imagines alternative histories, it remains just that: an *alternative* – one of many possibilities that could have taken place in a 'his'tory that prefers to be the product of a singular voice rather than the product of a clash of voices (disappeared voices from the archive that sadly cannot be recovered; a disconcerting thought) (Hartman 2008). Ironically, Africanfuturism finds it necessary to "embody aspirations that are wildly utopian, derelict to capitalism, and antithetical" (Hartman 2008:12) to history's 'common' senses so as to open us up to the possibility of a different reality; one that operates using different systems,

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different structures, produces a different society and holds a different future. In one of the subsequent chapters, the ways in which women participated in ancient metallurgical mining in Africa is uncovered. The uncovering of the ancient participation of African women in mining brings an awareness of the arbitrary relationship between mining and masculinity, particularly in Africa's LSM, today. Perhaps knowledge of such would enable possibilities where mining can be executed without the presence of the human body, similar to representations of mining in the blockbuster Afrofuturistic film, *BP* (Coogler 2018).

2.10 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an in-depth overview of Afrofuturism and its precise relevance in exploring, dissecting, and discussing Afrodiasporic issues. More specific to this context, Afrofuturism has been used to engage with African issues pertaining to mining and its historical exploitation of black bodies. By presenting Africanfuturism as an intellectual, theoretical, and even a personal/social pursuit, Africanfuturism is identified to be an important, albeit emerging, contributor towards the much-needed creation of alternative pathways. The desire and need for alterity make themselves known even within disciplines and arenas concerned with the visual and digital; disciplines and arenas that have for so long (even though done tacitly) silenced or marginalised 'black' creative work, imagination, and voices as being ancillary to "the kinds of rigorous inquiry that … hallmark the most innovative scholarship in the field" (Copeland 2015:211). This chapter has outlined how Africanfuturism is a key site of interrogation that is of worthy intellectual pursuit and contemplation by not only the primary disciplines of study listed, but also by giant capitalist industries such as mining.

Africanfuturism advocates for creating responsible futures that are careful not to be neglectful of the past and present realities and mining is part of such a reality as many Africans are dependent on mining for sustenance. Even so, how mining operates is related to, understood, and approached can always be changed into something more sustainable; a preserve rather than an abandon of human dignity, and finally; an area where technology bridges the divides between human differences in the body and mind that are weaponised as grounds for the perpetuation of discrimination and exploitation. In other words, futuristic representations of mining present rich aesthetic and socio-political opportunities to ponder the ways that black

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Africans can be redeemed from a history marred by their gross exploitation, and diminishment into objects rather than subjects.

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CHAPTER THREE: DIGGING INTO THE FUTURE OF AFRICAN MINING

3.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how, in technology, black women have profound opportunities at attaining a deeper sense of humanity in mining. This idea may sound quite paradoxical as the use of technology often entails a suspension of humanness, thus exposing humanity's inherent limitations. Yet, this chapter makes the argument that in some way, this is the point: the hierarchical structures that lie at the foundation of being human produce boundaries and barriers that would be best if only suspended. The synonymous association of 'human' with the Western male has led to the weaponisation of its conceptualisation, ultimately splitting the meaning of being 'human' as the outcome of hierarchies that often classify the black body as a non-human being (Butler 2019; de Robillard 2018; Weheliye 2014). The black body's position at the bottom of (non-) humanity is based on problematic (yet still-thriving) essentialising notions that are built appositionally to a more socially valued genre of humanness: whiteness and maleness. It is within this purview that I analyse the relationship between the (non-)human body, gender, technology, and mining in apartheid photography, as well as in more contemporary representations of mining in the future, namely in the Afrofuturistic film *BP* (Coogler 2018).

Mining in Southern Africa has contributed to the creation of systems that subjugate, exploit and 'Other' African labour. Through intensive organisation, control, and image-making practices, individuals with power and privilege in the mining industry have been responsible for the subaltern emergence of those who mine underground (i.e., the mine worker). The construction of African identity in mining compounds began with a focus on the African miner's body as a tool of extraction which was justified by ideologies that placed blackness in proximity to animality (non-humanness), deviance, and violence. The feelings of powerlessness that emanated from experiences on the colonial-apartheid mining compounds impacted the identity of miners on another level: not just being black but also being male. The representations of mining in the apartheid era of photography captured by famous photojournalists Ernest Cole and Margaret Bourke-White, display the tenuous relationship between biology, ideology, the construction of black masculine identity, and power.

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Nevertheless, this chapter boldly emphasises that within mining, it is not just the African male body that has been/is objectified and 'othered', but the African *female* body, too.

The masculinisation of mining is a centuries-long notion that is now deeply entrenched. The miner has for a long time been represented as the heroic image of the hard working and courageous *man* risking his life in the underground. The image of mining as a deep and dangerous task further builds up the image of the miner as one who has enduring and heroic physical strength (Lahiri-Dutt 2011b:336a). This image of mining, coupled with ideas of the destruction and penetration of the earth, masculinise mining work. In this way, the association of mining with masculinity has become naturalised and is initiated and sustained by popular representation of mining. Such exclusive representations make it difficult for one to be female, and mine, framing women as fragile in an essentially biological manner and therefore incapable of mining. In contrast, boys in our society are conditioned from childhood to participate in activities that develop muscle, and are instructed on how to use their bodies with authority. Therefore, men are raised to be more physically effective than women (Cockburn 1981:44).

More than the physical demands of mining work, mining culture is responsible for the widespread normalisation of sexist, anti-women treatment towards women in the mining industry. Representation, myth, discourse, and practices that constitute the culture of mining often support such damaging sexist mining practices. It is for this reason that the alternate representations of mining offered by the Afrofuturistic film *BP* (2018) remain pertinent to the chapter's discussion. It appears that in *BP* (2018) the African underground is not a site of exploitation and European imperial accumulation of wealth. Wakanda is imagined to be a "mineral rich, technically superior and invisible" African nation that did not experience European colonialism and imperialism (Washington 2019:5). The manner of extraction, valuation and trading of their mineral resource vibranium is owned, operated and dictated by Wakandan leadership. Therefore, the mining industry as shown in *BP* (2018), presents the viewer with a vision of what an independent, decolonial African nation would look like as "a powerful player in the current geo-political landscape" (Nama 2009; Washington 2019). Not only that, but representations of mining in *BP* (2018) challenge notions of mining and masculinity, and the subterranean and the subaltern by revealing that "mining work is one of the areas where women's 'agency' can be located" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:196).

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In the film, technology plays a vital function in making present challenges with human differentiation in mining anachronistic. Shuri's female body is not a deterrent in her ability to accomplish great achievements in Wakandan science and technology, and in her access to and usage of vibranium. With the rising introduction of digitalisation, automation, and improved Artificial Intelligence (AI) in mining, mining is beginning to make a shift from an emphasis on hard physical labour under dangerous conditions to the knowledge of new, often remotely operated, high-tech mining equipment (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008:213, 216). According to the Africanfuturist visuals in *BP* (2018), the Afro-future miner will not need to come into contact with the rock and will work remotely. More directly, between herself and the rock will be the *machine*, illustrating how the use of improved technologies in mining can eliminate the physical limitations traditionally placed against women that devalue their contribution as miners, therefore making more literal and apparent that the idea of mining as masculine work is socially constructed.

In summary, the chapter moves in line with the thinking of Wynter (in McKittrick 2015) as the images of mining dealt with reveal that humanness (and being human) is made up of *bios* (a biological organism) and *mythios* (a living conceptualisation based off of the stories collectively told about it) meaning that the black body (male and female) is not merely the sum of its parts. The black body is constitutive of the embodied stories told about it and thereby visualises the ideological narratives concerning race and patriarchy. However, with the mindful incorporation of technology, the black female body is no longer as susceptible to systems and forms of storytelling that encourage the disabling of their abilities, and capabilities, as women and as miners. Technology, in this sense, can be articulated as the great equaliser in being able to tell a different story.

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3.2 Mining in Southern Africa: The Miner as the Subterranean Subaltern

My fascination with the mining underground is informed by a centuries-long image of mining as a signifier of advanced scientific and technology discovery, innovation and possibility (Williams 2008:5,8,11). Since the outset of industrialisation, mining has undergone numerous technological changes that have helped unearth the world's most valuable mineral resources. One of the most significant of those changes is the change in relationship between the miner and the earth. The kind of mining that has, for so long, been characterised by a miner's performance of difficult physical labour is now reducing in prominence. With the advancement of technology, new, often remotely operated, high-tech mining equipment is being introduced that increasingly require new competencies and skills (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008:213, 216). However, the supposed 'progress' synonymous with mining's technological innovation is questionable, especially when one considers the historical role of mining, and its harsh treatment of the black body in Africa.

Mining in South Africa has not become redundant. It continues to remain an important social, political and economic activity. It holds a key influence in the country's formation[49] and has been a major contributor to the establishment of our white-dominated capitalist system. The methods and processes of mining used in the South African mining underground did not inspire the awe of technological advancement and innovation that signified 'progress'. Instead, the mining of natural resources seems to harm our economy and ecology causing greater disparity well into the post-apartheid state[50] (Saul & Bond 2014).

The harm caused by mining extends further into the severe socio-political impact it would have on the African population who were systematically set to be socially and economically bankrupt. The changing social dynamics brought on by early modernisation and

[49] Mining in South Africa began the evolution of trade unionism and thus the configuration of political parties and political discourses (Netshitenzhe 2018)

[50] Of course, there are more factors at play when considering the causes of South Africa's economic disparity than just the mismanagement of its resource extraction sector. Nevertheless, as Saul and Bond (2014:28-29) highlight, mining has played a central role in the shaping of South Africa's socio-political and economic development since the discovery of diamonds in the late 19th century to the present.

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industrialisation rid African men of their responsibilities[51] and therefore they had the time and opportunity to pursue income on collieries. In South Africa, especially, men were the focus of legislative laws that required them to pay high taxes while at the same time having to reserve two-thirds of their agricultural produce to white settlers, thus limiting the monies that could be made from the farming of crops. With increased pressure to pay taxes, men were forced to take mining jobs in the urban industrialised city centres and leaving the women behind to perform subsistence labour (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997; Alexander 2007a). South African mine production was furthermore strongly supported by the state and were given access to long distance workers from Mozambique, and indentured labour from India and, even China.[52]

The introduction of mining in South Africa created a stark socio-political division that positioned the 'white' population as the powerful oppressor and exploiter of the weakened and disenfranchised 'black' population (Saul & Bond 2014:29). Those individuals with power and privilege[53] in the mining industry were responsible for the subaltern emergence of the submerged miner through the brutal organisation of lives and racially constructed identities. At this point it can be said that colonial and apartheid mining's most pervasive technology was race. Race was used as the ideological tool that informed the material reality of life at the mines and also justified the gross hierarchisation and objectification of the black body. Race in other words, can be considered a piece of modern technology that was used by Europeans to measure how "animalistic" or how "human" a body can be regarded (de Robillard 2018:5). Seeing that the black body was closer to that of an animal, the black miner was reduced to his parts (as in a piece of technology itself) and was exploited for what his body could do to the benefit of capital.

[51] In agricultural areas such as Natal, gendered division of labour was already entrenched in rural living. African women were largely responsible for agricultural food production. While young men who were responsible for activities such as hunting, and raiding were made obsolete by the end of the nineteenth century (Alexander 2007).
[52] After the end of the South African war in 1902, more than 50 000 Chinese labourers were imported to work on goldmines, but were repatriated in 1910 after numerous protests against the living and working conditions on mines (Gier & Mercier 2006).
[53] In South Africa, the mine worker as 'Other' was an identity introduced by the British who initially wanted to colonise mineral rich sites. Later, this identification would be formalised by apartheid systems of bureaucracy and legislature who also benefitted from the exploitation of black land and black labour (Vosloo 2020).

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3.3 In "Ernest": A Photographic Conversation About Mining, Technology and Apartheid Constructions of Black Masculinities

The photography of anti-apartheid photographer Ernest Cole in his photographic book, *House of Bondage* (1968) elucidates the domination of the black miner's body experienced in South African mines during Apartheid. Through Cole's penetrating photography, what is revealed is the "capacity for art to reflect the aesthetic realities of a situation that is in many ways, ugly and oppressive" (Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:247). In other words, Cole's photography represents what would otherwise be unrepresentable about the organisation of mining: the miner's subjugation and the demeaning ways that the mining industry has constructed black masculine identity during apartheid.

Figure 1: Ernest Cole, *During group medical examination the nude men are herded through a string of doctors' offices*, 1967.
(Gaule, 2017)

In Figure 1, Cole photographs the medical examination of young black men applying for work as miners. The lined-up men are stripped of their clothing, standing naked beside each other in tight succession. Without the revelation of their faces, the viewer is cut off from any connection

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to their humanity. Because they are not established as individual identities, the lack of differentiation from each other reduces them to the collective feature shared across them: the spectral display of their black-skinnedness, their nakedness and their male form. What is further highlighted in these images is the bold appearance of the animality of the lined bodies as Cole's choice to use the word "herded" in the image's caption supports this connection. The caption reads: "During group medical examination the nude men are *herded* through a string of doctors' offices [emphasis added]" (Cole & Flaherty 1968). Their naked, outstretched bodies are 'herded' together and are thus likened to the gathering of cattle, and like cattle to the slaughter, Gaule (2017:392) points out how the lining up of these healthy, strong, and young black bodies also creates a chilling foreshadowing of the misfortune of mining accidents, degrading conditions, and the slew of mining-related illnesses that await them on the other side.

It must be noted that the organisation of life within the compounds reflected the macro-politics of life in South Africa under colonial and apartheid rule. The black miner had very little control over his own body, his own image, and ultimately his own identity. The separation of the African miner from his rural homestead and family into single-sex compounds that were often separated according to ethnicity left the miner vulnerable to the logic of control that became a primary feature of life within the mines. Control not only took the form of the spatial organisation of compounds and pass papers which severely limited privacy and movement, but also through reproductive control. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2011) identify reproductive control as the interventions made by the mining companies into their reproductive affairs such as forcefully placing miners in single-sex compounds, monitoring the interaction between husbands and their wives who were given limited access and time in the compounds, their hygiene, as well as what they could consume. Under these conditions, the focus of control was over their bodies which were seen as means to the ends of capital gain. Under the apartheid system wherein individual identities were always already marked by the differences in body, the black miner was further reduced to his class, gender, and what his body could do. The controls put in place inhumanely (and arrogantly) believed that black miners could be controlled and more powerfully, ideologically were worthy of control.

In Figure 2, viewers are let into a seemingly 'everyday' moment in the compounds as we see miners in and out of returning from their shifts into their dwelling. What is striking about the

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photograph's composition is the linearity of the buildings that are made up of compounded rooms leading the eye further into the distance. The compact, yet neatly arranged, housing stands in contrast to the dishevelled arrangement of men who take up the path way. Many of the men stand sporadically in solitary arrangements of individuals and small groups. The image presents a few jarring contradictions: that even within the linearity and order imposed by the structures of the compounds, the men cannot be contained; that even though grouped under homogenising labels like race, sex and possibly ethnicity, they still stand apart as individuals in the loom of common exploitation. The black miner in this image is in a state of negotiation. While wearing the drabs of cloth represented as the miner's uniform, parts of uncovered body still pierces through. While most wear the shirts, trousers and blazers that signify the European present, others choose to wear a piece of their migrant history. The Basotho hat worn by the gentleman on the extreme right of the frame indicates the reality of a heterogenous African identity and masculinity within mines.

Figure 2: Ernest Cole, *Section of Rand Leases mine compound, outside Johannesburg, where African miners live while on contract. No families or women are allowed*, 1967 (Ernest Cole 2022:44).

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What strikes Cole (as seen by his caption to the above photograph) is the blatant absence of families and women in this setting. The separation of families had "devastating consequences for the social fabric of the black mineworkers and their communities" (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu 2011:237-238). One of those consequences being the problematic symbolic representations that define African masculinity as dangerous, primitive, savagery, immoral, and diseased (Moolman 2013). The masculinity of miners was denied to them under processes of colonisation that reduced black men to children (frequently referring to them as boys) or animals (framing the black body in proximity to animality) (Moolman 2013:96). With the absence of women, African masculinities were often put in question by European gender ideals that built masculinity in opposition to femininity. Without the presence of women, mining companies were better able to subordinate the identities of African men beneath that of the European, and specifically European masculinity.

Figure 3: Margaret Bourke-White, Miner's barrack at the Robinson deep mines provides concrete bunks for many as 40 men in a single room. Barracks like this are usually kept clean and orderly. But penning men together away from families is a system that breeds homosexuality, *Life Magazine*, 18 September 1950.
Screenshot by author.

Figure 3 is one such example of how the absence of women in the image did not strengthen the masculine identity of the African men. Rather than to focus on the paltry and overcrowded living conditions of the miners who were without their families, the photographer and editors of *Life* magazine chose to focus on the 'danger' that the gathering of black men posed to heteronormative sexual identity. By using words like "penning" and "breeding", the black miner is associated with animality. Additionally, by indicating how life on the compounds breeds

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homosexuality,[54] the photographed men became a symbolic representation of black male deviance which, in this case, further feminises African male identity. Furthermore, the African miner who wears what appears to be traditional clothing and their mining uniform is identified as both "native" and "worker". Although a participant of the modern industrial era, the miner remains primitive and incapable of becoming a modernised worker.

To give context, Figure 3 is an image taken from *Life Magazine*'s 18 September 1950 issue. It was one of many photographs captured by famous American photojournalist, Margaret Bourke-White. Bourke-White was tasked by *Life* to cover a special issue on South Africa headlined "South Africa and its Problem". Over the course many weeks, Bourke-White took a series of images that chronicled the racial and economic disparity prevalent in apartheid South Africa. The images that made this particular issue took a primary focus on mining wherein it is implied that the greatest atrocities against human liberation took place. In her sympathetic analysis of the plight of Africans under the oppressive Apartheid system, Bourke-White often framed the African subjects in her photo essay under two distinct categories "native" and "worker" (Mason 2012). As carriers of information, Bourke-White's photography presented the black miner as the embodiment of both identities while also being inescapably locked in as the passive object of black inferiority.

Such normative control over the miner's body and image targeted the dignity of workers and their families. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2011:246) highlight that miners did in fact respond to this in a variety of ways which included, but were not limited to, political mass action, and protest.[55] The undignified manner in which mining compounds treated black workers also created coping strategies that especially helped re-assert the masculinity of black miners – *ubudoda babo*. Black mineworkers furthermore created unwritten rules that put certain limits

[54]This statement made by Bourke-White, although arbitrary to the image itself, is not completely untrue. There are recorded instances in mining compounds where younger miners were proposed to by older miners to act as "wives" in exchange for substantial amounts of money, gifts and favours. Such 'mining marriages' included a pseudo-household division of labour such as the young wife/boy washing the dishes and the performance sexual activities, but these hardly involved anal-penetrative sex. The 'husbands' would most often only satisfy his desires between the 'wife's' thighs (Moodie, Ndatshe & Sibuye, 1988).
[55]On 12 August 1946 African mine workers of the Witwatersrand went on strike in support of a demand for higher wages - 10 shillings a day. They continued the strike for a week in the face of the most savage police terror, in which officially 1,248 workers were wounded and a very large number - officially only 9 - were killed. Lawless police and army violence smashed the strike. The resources of the racist State were mobilised, almost on a war footing, against the unarmed workmen (O'Meara 1975).

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on the racial abuse they experienced at the hands of white mineworkers called *imtheto* (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu 2011). If white mineworkers were seen to violate *imthetho*, black mineworkers gathered in attack against the white guilty party which produced “contending racializing masculinities” (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu 2011). The assertion of their masculinities not only protected black mineworkers against racist abuse, but it was also harmful to the miners themselves who would compete against ethnic lines to secure limited resources. Furthermore, as part of their leisure, mining companies organised and supervised weekly fighting matches between miners.

Figure 4: Margaret Bourke-White, ‘Amalaita’ fights are policed free-for-alls (*amalaita* means gangster) held every Sunday afternoon at Pretoria so recreation starved Natives, mainly house servants, may ‘work off their animal spirits.” Man at right is a police sergeant. Embarrassed officials try to restrict audiences to blacks’ *Life Magazine*, 18 September 1950.
Screenshot by author

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Figure 4 showcases an image of one the "free-for-all" fights hosted for the "recreation-starved native" who could "work off their animal spirits" (Margaret Bourke-White 1950:124). Although this image does not appear to have taken place on a mining compound, African miners similarly participated in boxing matches on mines as a form of regulated entertainment (Seda 2022). Once again, Bourke-White's interesting choice of words in her caption chooses to emphasise the savagery, animality, and violence that constituted black masculinity in the colonial imagination. This is however a 'flat' take on the expression of masculinity by black workers. The forms of entertainment, especially on mines, were limited and harshly controlled. For instance, miners were given permission to indulge in liquor but only consuming the liquor provided for by the mines, and allowing only a limited intake.[56] Traditional dancing was performed during weekends on mines, but this exoticised performance was primarily for the viewing pleasure of white mineworkers and guests on the premises (Margaret Bourke-White 1950). Additionally, alongside the restricted visits made by wives and children to the mines, some mines denied miners the opportunity to visit nearby townships (Moodie, Ndatshe & Sibuye 1988). Consequently, the construction of miners' identity was built around the frustration of constraint, control, and an intense focus on the body which brought about feelings of powerlessness.

In their own ways, Cole and Bourke-White's photography powerfully unveil to audiences the otherwise bureaucratic and therefore hidden organisation and identification of the black body in the mining industry as a tool to be exploited, dominated, and controlled; a dominated object of extraction (to extract and be extracted from). In analysing Cole and Bourke-White's photography, the life of an African miner, despite the value of his work, is dehumanised when under the gaze and spatial control of the industry's management and surveillance. This process aptly reflects European colonisation of land, mineral wealth, and the colonisation of the black body that through capital has even further been made subaltern. What gives this revelation greater intensity is when one considers how the photographs, while capturing a moment in time, are able to freeze that time forever (Serote 2022: 8) such that they can act as reflective pieces for the present moment and for future times.

[56]The mining police, who were Africans themselves, enforced regulations that prohibited drunkenness (Bezuidenhout & Buhlungu 2011)

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While, according to Campt (2012:5-6), the photographic images of the miners are able to document and record the history, culture, and plight of poor black miners under the apartheid system, they are also able to bring to the present moment those traces of history that cannot be put into words. That unspoken trace of history, as argued by Campt (2012:6) is not necessarily the photograph's ability to show us how things were, but the resounding awareness that it exists as a record of choices – a choice made amongst other alternatives. While Cole and Bourke's photography show viewers the lived horrors of the subjects whose lives and bodies were vulnerable to legislated nonhumanity, they also make viewers aware that there was another option to allow black miners the "freedom and love for life [so] innate to the human spirit." (Serote 2022:7). In producing an awareness of another choice that was not taken, Cole and Bourke produce an alternative worldview and vision of apartheid that condemns and rejects the black miner's unworthiness of freedom and incapability to love, let alone the ability to possess a love for their own lives. In this sense, their photography becomes an articulation that things could have been seen, done, and therefore turned out differently.

In raising up an awareness that the worlds we witness in the photographs and their accompanying captions could have been, Cole and Bourke enact Africanfuturism not as praxis but as consciousness. Before the material image came a desire, and that desire, as explained by Batchen (2000:16), is not the result of an individual genius but of a merging of self and surrounding cultural forces. Cole and Bourke were part of a confluence of ideas, philosophies, circumstances, and conditions that wished to "reject the state of affairs" (Serote 2022:8). Prior to the photography, there was a desire to expose the contradiction of the current world that believed that freedom was only for a few, and motion toward the possibility of a new world where "it is inhuman not to be free" (Serote 2022:8). Africanfuturist material outcomes are the result of similar desire for a different world wherein Africans (in the future) are fully liberated, empowered, enhanced, and perhaps most fundamentally, more fully alive. However, it all begins with choice.

Cole and Bourke, although documenting the past, bring to the present mind a call to contemplate what choices are being rejected, ignored, or denied. In much the same manner as in Africanfuturism, Cole and Bourke's photography make the past alive by prompting viewers in the present moment to question the ways in which "abusive systems of power make themselves known and their impacts felt in everyday life, especially when they are supposedly over and done with" (Gordon 2008:xvii). With the reappearance of history comes a realisation

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that perhaps by way of our blind spots or by way of willed ignorance, a new choice has not been made, yet it is a choice that must be made if we seek to exist in a totally different future. While bound up by forces that do not promote black African people's human right to freedom and the love of life and living, Africanfuturism begins by producing a desire, a framework, and an awareness that there is another possibility. The awareness of a different possibility then pushes individuals to find or create another set of choices that will lead to a different set of outcomes for the African future.

As a photographer who managed to change his identity from Mopedi to mixed race,[57] Cole lived out the possibility of escape from one identity that handed you a certain set of severely limited circumstances to another. As a man who managed to escape the consequences of being classified as black during apartheid, Cole would have been in a better position to imagine a different world and a different life because he would have been given more choices. I imagine that the ability to camouflage, move about, and enter into spaces that others could not were some of the influences that instilled a desire to capture a reality that would ultimately push others to either imagine a different way, or to acknowledge that their lives as so radically different, and perhaps radically better, than the world they are witnessing in the photograph. The unspoken traces in his work would then transcend history, intervening into the present moment with an awareness that there was, there is and always will be a choice. The deeper viewers allow the frozen bodies of the miners to articulate the unspoken, the more our material actions and efforts will match our ability to choose something else; to consider that is possible to exist a world that does not perpetuate and profit off of black humiliation, exploitation, subjugation, objectification, and (modern forms of) slavery. The ability to choose something else can also be applied to the troubling ways that the mining industry, and culture perpetuate and protect problematic notions of (African) masculinity that deny women their freedom and love of life.

[57] Serote (2022:9) explains that in order to survive under apartheid's harsh treatment of black African individuals, Cole gave up his Mopedi identity thus changing his surname from Kole to the English Cole. Passing as mixed race, enabled Cole to access areas and places where black men were barred from entering (freely). Cole was therefore able to conduct his underground photography work photographing the horrors and impact of the apartheid system.

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3.4 Gendered mining: A Case Study of South Africa

3.4.1 *Mining and Masculinity: Making Men on the Mines*

In response to the feelings of powerlessness experienced on the mines, black miners have crafted their masculinity around the body, which plays an integral role in the shaping, behaviour, and survival of miners above ground, as well as beneath it. Campbell (1997) further highlights the importance of the notion of masculinity for miners. Underground mining is dangerous and risky business as miners are expected to work under high temperatures, stale air, noisy, and unpredictable conditions for up to eight hours. The threat to life, injury, and other such shocking incidents are a daily reality for underground miners. Therefore, miners use masculinity as a coping mechanism to overcome the fear, anxiety, and exhaustion that characterise the life of a miner. An instance of this, recorded by Campbell (1997:sp), is that when young miners enter the lift cage for the first time, they are frequently reminded by more senior miners that they are 'men'. According to Campbell (1997:sp), miners defined being a 'man' as "someone who had the responsibility of supporting his family and hence had no choice but to put up with the risks and stresses of working underground. A man was someone who was brave enough to withstand the rigours of the job." Thus, masculinity for miners represents "bravery, fearlessness and persistence in the face of the demands of underground work" and in the miner's acceptance of death (Campbell 1997:sp). As a result, the masculine image of the heroic underground miner as a hardworking and courageous man risking his life in the underground has become naturalised over the centuries.

The image of mining as a deep and dangerous task further builds up the image of the miner as one who has enduring and heroic physical strength (Lahiri-Dutt, 2011a). This image of mining, coupled with ideas of the destruction and penetration of the earth, masculinise mining work through the use of 'intimidating' technological machinery such as bulldozers and caterpillars and even processes of extraction such as blasting and excavating. Such machinery and processes are associated with male characteristics, "and inscribes gendered meanings on to the bodies of individuals performing the tasks" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012). In a nutshell, the movement

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made to the underground, for most miners, signals the necessary transition from boys to men.[58] Such beliefs indeed suggest that the deeper one is in the subterranean, the more masculinity can be performed and is 'developed'. In this sense, the underground is marked as a uniquely masculine territory and experience (Paquette & Lacassagne 2013:254). Consequently, it is very important to consider, as Cockburn (1981) exposes, the ways in which the physical compliment the ideological through how the physical aspects of mining continue to manifest and support male power.

Cockburn (1981) argues that male power is seen in the capability, dexterity, and strength of a man, as well as in his tools and technology. Over centuries, mines have been a metaphor for modern technology since early industrialisation and, in the Western world, were given a powerful mythical image which stood for "progress" and "productivity" (Williams 2008). Problematically, mining technology processes and its symbolism have been modelled after, and influenced by, gender construction "in which men took the initiative in constituting themselves and women in a relation of… hierarchy" (Cockburn 1981:46). The naturalised association of mining, progress, and productivity with masculinity, initiated and sustained by the representation of mining, make it difficult for one to be female, or feminine, and mine. Women, in this regard, are framed as being incompatible to the demands of mining and modernity, and have thus been historically undervalued and used sub optimally (Ndebele 2018:269).

3.4.2 *It's a Man's World: The Exclusion of Women in Mining*

The androcentric nature of the mining industry, labour, and culture are based on a knowledge of mining that gains strength from appearing to be objective and universal. However, this knowledge of mining as masculine is a myth based on the exclusive experiences and narratives of male workers (Lahiri-Dutt 2011b:333). From the early industrial era, mining was seen as "undertaking dangerous, dirty and risky work" thereby bestowing mining labour with attributes of masculinity (Lahiri-Dutt 2011b:335). This can explain why women working on Rustenburg

[58] Campbell (1997:sp) quotes one miner stating in an interview that, "[y]ou show your manhood by going underground, working in difficult conditions - this shows that you are man enough to accept that if you die you are just dead. Once you go underground you are a man and no longer a child."

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platinum mines in South Africa, according to Benya (2017:514-515), were often asked to either "watch and learn" as men participated in the practical sessions, or to participate at the level of "assistants". According to most male workers, women recruits were treated as "assistants" because of the fragility and weakness of their biology and not necessarily because of their gender (Benya 2017;2013; 2016). According to them, 'real' miners are men because of their stronger physique and their ability to be brave and meet the physical difficulties of mining. Such reasoning continues to justify the general discrimination against women from belonging to the category, 'miner'. The justification of discrimination against women from participating in underground mining is made palatable behind such veneers of protectionist, but masculinist, discourses. However, the true motivation behind the exclusion of women in mining is not to protect them, but to remove the threat posed against mining's 'masculine' occupation, culture, and gender regimes with the introduction of women. In summary, the exclusion of women ultimately secures male employment in the mines (Benya 2017).

In South Africa, it was only in 1996 when women were permitted[59] work underground, however, it was only in 2003 that changes to the Mining Charter charged mining companies to directly redress the historically maintained exclusion of women in the mining underground. To do this, the Mining Charter enforced policy that aimed for all mining companies to reach a 10% increase in the female mining workforce by the end of 2009. Since then, the target has been reached with the Minerals Council South Africa (MCSA) boasting an 11,5% increase in the female mining workforce by the end of 2015 (Benya 2017). Even with the enforcement of such positive changes, the growth in the inclusion of women in mining has been minimal.[60] The stubborn and slow growth in increasing the number of female workers on mines further reveals that even though the introduction of women in mining was met with enthusiasm in policy, it is still often met with hostility in practice. Further heightening the minority position of women miners are the daily practices, policies, and discourses around mining that are still shaped by patriarchal ideas of securing masculinity (Benya 2017:512).

[59] Since 1935, the International Labour Organisation officially prohibited the employment of women in underground mining. Of course, the prohibition of women had been happening for some time before then.
[60] Five years later (2020), of the 454 861 (four hundred and fifty-four thousand, eight hundred and sixty-one) individuals employed by the mining industry, women only represent 12% (Minerals Council South Africa 2020).

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The assumptions of the biology of women as weak and fragile used to justify their prohibition from certain mining tasks are based on the myths and representation of the miner and mining previously mentioned. The sexist division of mining labour does not necessarily consider the physical fitness of each woman recruit in the allocation of roles. During the training sessions recorded by Benya (2017), there were men present who had smaller frames than the women but were still not given the role of "assistant" as most of the women were. The fragility of women is therefore revealed to be a homogenising and mythical statement. In overlooking the physical fitness of women exercised by such mines ignores the actual physical capabilities of women. Irrational beliefs of mining as a uniquely 'masculine' operation continue to maintain sexist stereotypes of women as inept for the hard work involved in mining (Currier 2009; Benya 2017).

Part of the argued ineptness of women in underground mining is the impact of tasks such as rock drilling has on the wombs of women. This concern for women, although valid,[61] can still have non-reasonable sexist and exclusionary consequences. The so-called protection of wombs fixes the bodies of women as foremostly 'feminine' reproductive houses whose importance is most relegated to their wombs. Additionally, by extension, the protection of the wombs of women by men, protects the social roles that associate women with domestic living.

In the process, a woman's autonomy over her own body, her reproductive role and personal desires are ignored. Regardless of their position, men patronisingly place women closer to domesticity and further away from mining – an unchanging pattern in mining labour history. It becomes obvious that the discouragement of female participation in the mining industry is deliberate. The protection of women is not an act of care in this regard, it is paternalistic, therefore, the soft deterrence of women from joining mines as mine workers minimises the threat women miners pose against male miners. By 'protecting' women, the self-interest of men who want to reserve higher paying underground functions such as being rockdrill miners are protected for themselves (Benya 2017:517). Evidently, protectionist discourse, although

[61] Women have suffered miscarriages due to the deep vibrations experienced by the body when rock drilling (Benya 2017).

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seemingly so, does not protect women in as much as it works to protect the livelihoods and position of men in mining (Currier 2009:287).

Mining's general hostility towards women miners operates at levels more than just the gendered division of labour. Mining practices that categorise female bodies as not only different from men (and therefore weaker), also mark women as readily available to men. The sexual harassment of women on mines is treated as an 'expected' part of life on the mines, and is framed, albeit arbitrarily, as a natural consequence of being a woman in a male domain. Instances of male ejaculation on the backs of women miners during shaft sinking, the groping, rape, and murder of women taking place on the surface and underground by male workers all work to further dominate and objectify female workers. The reduction of women to their (sexual) body parts is once again further entrenched.

It is crucial to be aware of the fact that the role biology plays in the exclusion of women from mining only gains its effect primarily from representations, myths, ideologies, and discourses that precede it. Representation, myth, ideology, and discourse constitute the *culture* of mining that supports its sexist practices. It is more than the demands of mining work that are the bed rock of women's minority status in mining. Benya (2017:520) concludes that because of mining culture, mining remains "stubbornly masculine and unaccommodating to women or female bodies" thereby reiterating women as "second-class" workers in a supposedly "rightfully" androcentric mining environment. In other words, it is mining culture that is responsible for the widespread normalisation of sexist, anti-women treatment towards women in the mining industry. This same mining culture also dismisses (sexual) harassment against women as something unharmful and therefore not to be taken seriously (Benya 2017).

A recurring theme in the treatment against women in underground mining is the naturalisation of mining as a 'male thing' through the myths, discourses, and images the heroic and physically strong male miner, as well as the use of "intimidating" technological machinery[62] that "inscribe gendered meanings onto the bodies of individuals performing the tasks" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012).

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[62] Machinery such as bulldozers and caterpillars, even processes of resources extraction such as blasting and excavating

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The obvious result from this is the frequent objection towards (and objectification of) the female *body* that is at once biological and a product of culture. Being both nature and nurture, innovative usage of technology that is beyond the sex-biased designs of patriarchal machinery, can play an integral role in dismantling the patriarchal and heteronormative beliefs that govern anti-women mining cultures and therefore, practices.

3.5 African Women are Digging the Future: Afro-future Feminist Mining in *Black Panther* (2018)

Squire and Dodds (2020) argue that postcolonial and geo-political representational readings often attend to what takes place above the ground even though their central areas of focus – the impact of colonialism, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy – penetrate far deeper than that (Scott 2008; Squire & Dodds 2020). These problematic structures have been seen throughout history and presently not just above ground, but below ground too. Mining in South Africa, for instance, has been a major contributor to the establishment of our current white-dominated capitalist system, the oppression and exploitation of the black body, as well as systems of cheap migrant labour that have been passed down almost unchanged from across generations into the present milieu (Crush 1992; Gaule 2017; Saul & Bond 2014). Spanning back to the growth of new economic centres in the 1850's when the need arose for cheap labour, the South African mining industry has organised the black body into a cheap tool to be exploited, dominated, and controlled for economic gain. The subjugation and exploitative treatment of the black body within mining is not only applicable to black men, but as already indicated, also to black women.

BP (Coogler 2018) presents an empowering view of an African future where technology is central in creating just societies thus introducing the 4IR into the public imagination. The film reminds viewers of Afrofuturism's immediate relevance and use in the present times by emphasising it as something more than just a genre. Afrofuturism is in fact a tool of resistance, it a site of struggle in which one can critique and wrestle against the "ready-made futures [that often exclude blacks and therefore relegate 'black' issues as either having no impact on the construction of the future or something that belongs in the past] and whitewashed pasts [the purposefully erase the participation of black individuals in the history of modernity]" (Van Veen 2015:64). Put differently, the film reveals Afrofuturism's use of imagination and fantasy to produce alternative visions of Africa, African society and its history, present and future.

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Afrofuturism does this by "offering an aesthetic form through which to project the possibility of radical black futures" (Wofford 2017:634).

The urgency to begin contemplating and deliberating the future uses of technology and its potentiality began most profoundly and entered public and intellectual discourses in 2015. 2015 marked the beginning of the Fourth Industrial Revolution by the World Economic Fourm. This era of rapid and pervasive technological advancement is causing fast changes to world systems that impact all sectors of society. These fast changes also affect the relationship between technology and society in such a way that technology can be more beneficial to society than harmful. Therefore, under the 4IR, growing technologies and discoveries are geared towards more human-centred and therefore empowering approaches (Schwab 2017:9).

It is to this point that I use *BP* (Coogler 2018) as a contemporary example of the many ways in which technology can be used to enhance black liberation in the future. Using the feminist critiques against mining offered by scholars such as Lahiri-Dutt (2012) and Benya (2017) and leaning on Afrofuturism's interrogation of normative ideological practices such as white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity, I investigate how the cultural and ideological construction of the miner as firstly a male, and masculine, have been challenged by the film. My decision to use *BP* as a main visual referent is informed by the manner in which its Afrofuturistic, and science fictional appeals position the film as a challenge to persisting imperialist and colonial perceptions of Africa. The film's technological innovation, scientific exploration, and economic liberation among other things, mark the continent as rich in its potential to be affluent, socio-economically, and technologically powerful. The film's innovative practices are also geared towards creating centred spaces for the otherwise marginalised, especially black women.

However, in order to explore these themes more in-depth, I begin by implementing a framework that places Afrofuturism and black feminism in conversation with one another in what is termed Afrofuturistic feminism, which further enables me to conduct a feminist reading of mining in *BP* (Coogler 2018). Furthermore, I will use Image Studies as a methodology to critically examine the film and the representation of Shuri as a female miner to further access the narrative unfolding of mining in the African future.

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Afrofuturist feminism interrogates black histories and visions of the future wherein the experiences of black women are positioned at the centre through the rejection of white supremacy, patriarchy, and heteronormativity that deny black creative agency (Morris 2012:155). This framework interrogates questions of race, gender, sexuality, ability/able-bodiedness by examining their relationship to discourse and power in order imagine and ultimately reconstruct a future world that achieve equality in society (Morris 2012:153). Using this framework, especially considering what has just been shared about mining's relationship with colonialism, eurocentrism, and patriarchy, representations of the underground and Shuri's role therein in *BP* (Coogler 2018) are exceptional, and are more powerfully transgressive.

Unlike other Afrofuturistic visuals, *BP's* postcolonial and feminist representational power can be richly read beneath the surface. The film's Afrofuturistic representation of the future of mining brings forth another interesting turn: that African post-coloniality and Afro-feminism can also be found and effectively implemented *under*ground. In the film, the image of the miner as a heroic, hardworking and courageous man risking his life in the underground is destabilised. In Wakanda's underground, imperialism, eurocentrism and patriarchy are maybe not completely, but most effectively dismantled, specifically when engaging with representations of King T'Challa's younger genius sister, Shuri and her underground laboratory.

Viewers meet Princess Shuri in the film (Coogler 2018 00:13:13) as the young, witty, and playful sibling to King T'Challa. It is quickly learned that the technology used by the Black Panther has been designed and developed by Shuri who "knows more than" her elder brother and the respected King of Wakanda. Shuri is characterised by her super intelligence and innovative mind as she masters and leads the advanced engineering of Wakandan technology with a specialised knowledge of its uses and properties. At 00:00:36:00, the camera swiftly descends from a purview of Wakanda's land into the supersonic underground accompanied by the hype beats of South Africa's self-professed *Gqom* Queen, Babes Wodumo.[63] Shuri's lab is represented in the film as a uniquely innovative and female African underworld filled with sophisticated gadgets, impressive experiments, progressive communication technologies, and weaponry (Coogler 2018 00:00:36:00).

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[63]The song that opens viewers into the lab is from *Gqom* artist Babes Wodumo featuring the late Mamphintsha, *Wololo* (2016). *Gqom* is a genre of electronic dance music that originates from Durban, South Africa. In isiZulu, *Gqom* mimicks the sound a drum makes when being hit (Eaby-Lomas 2021).

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Figure 5: Shuri shows T'Challa the new improvements made to Wakanda's communications technology, *Black Panther*, 2018.
Screenshot by author.

In contrast to the previous figures, Figure 5 presents a unique image of mining unlike current and past forms of industrial mining in Africa. For instance, mining in South Africa is largely modelled by colonial and apartheid patriarchal values and practices that not only protected the supremacy of whiteness, but also protected male supremacy. While husbands in the homelands faced enormous pressure to work on the city mines,[64] colonial industries hardly employed women believing that African tradition 'forbade' women from leaving their homelands.[65] The film's Afrofuturistic depictions of the African underground firstly define it as a black space not dominated by white rule and order. Secondly, it is representative of a black female space run by African women. The patriarchal and racist views of black women that believed them to not have the intellectual capacity and education to understand and operate modern objects (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997:129) are immediately overturned when audiences see Shuri working alongside other African women scientists in producing technology that rivals that of

[64]In South Africa, black men were also the focus of legislative laws that required them to pay high taxes while at the same time having to reserve two-thirds of their agricultural produce to white settlers thus limiting the monies that could be made from the farming of crops. With increased pressure to pay taxes, men were forced to take mining jobs in the urban industrialised city centres thus leaving the women behind to perform subsistence labour (Alexander 2007; Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997).
[65] The financial autonomy of women who migrated to the city was usually ill-accepted by men who linked independence with 'immoral' (sexual) behaviours; the movement of women to the city was therefore heavily discouraged (Coquery-Vidrovitch 1997:129).

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the most advanced technologies of the West, which is geopolitically understood as the most progressive part of the world.

Figure 6: Shuri unveils T'Challa's improved Black Panther suit. She demonstrates to him the kinetic power the suit withholds; the same power that makes the Black Panther's abilities unique in the Marvel Universe and comic books, *Black Panther*, 2018.
Screenshot by author.

As audiences move further into Shuri's lab, they are made more aware of how Shuri's representation in the film as a master and mega-mind of science and technology resists any further reconstructions made by the film of an "authentic Africa" as simplistically patriarchal (du Toit & Coetzee 2017). Furthermore, as audiences get broader insight into her role as chief scientist, we discover how her knowledge and expertise in science and tele-communications allow her to build the Black Panther's energy-absorbent suit. In addition to that, despite T'Challa receiving the best and highest education in the world (Lee 1966), he is aware of his sister's much more superior intelligence and he meekly follows her instruction and lead. Without intimidation or harassment, Shuri's gender does not come in the way of her ability to design and operate Wakanda's underground machinery as we witness in her driving T'Challa's car during his mission in Busan, South Korea (Figure 7).

The placement of Shuri within a futuristic underground and high-tech laboratory produces an alternative cultural imagination for the future possibilities of science and technology, as well as mining. In Figure 5 and 6, audiences witness Shuri and other female colleagues clothed in pristinely white regalia representing an alternative take on the traditional box-type science lab coat. This alternative take on scientific dress code, while seemingly trivial, adds value to the

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larger metaphoric significance of visualising liberated black women underground. Shuri's white dress hugs her figure, not in a way that objectifies her, but in a manner that does not deny her female shape. Her ability to choose and wear protective equipment that is not conscious of the comfort and counters of her body is vastly different to the experience of female miners whose curvature is often forced to fit into male-specific uniforms (Benya 2013; 2017). Any temptation to discard the importance of having the interests of women in mind when designing protective equipment only adds to the micro-aggressions that affirm mining as man's work. Shuri's reclamation of her gendered body by way of wearing what is both functional and suitable to her reveals the productive power of freedom that Afrofuturistic feminism provides (Aghoro 2018).

In Figure 7, Shuri is seen driving a holographic version of Black Panther's car during his chase scene with Klaue. While attempting to stop Klaue from escaping with illegal arms made from stolen vibranium, T'Challa relies on Shuri to take control of the car as they use high-tech telecommunication and transport technologies. What audiences witness is the manner in which technology has enhanced Shuri's power and ability to not only control the car that is kilometres away from her, but also to protect and secure her brother and the goals of the mission. Msila and Netshitangani (2016) argue that the role of women in African society is integral as women are in the forefront of security, transformation, nourishment, and improvement to all around them - a leadership paradigm called "midwifing". The African vision of women in their society is given a renewal in Africanfuturistic depictions of Shuri as she uses technology to generate her own power. The technological enhancement of her abilities does not replace midwifing, it only increases its reach. Furthermore, when placed in an Africanfuturist setting, it confirms that is a value given to African women that should never be erased.

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Figure 7: Shuri uses advanced technology to drive T'Challa's car from her underground lab, *Black Panther*, 2018.
Screenshot by author

Shuri's embodiment as an African woman is not a barrier to coming in contact with, learning about and applying the uses of what lies hidden beneath Wakanda's earth – vibranium – a lucrative mineral resource. In the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and Marvel comic books, vibranium is the most expensive underground mineral resource in the world and it establishes the nation.[66] Vibranium in *BP* (2018) is powerful enough to run the nation's elaborate transportation systems, operate the mechanics that conceal Wakanda's technological landscape from the rest of the world, run Wakanda's economy making it one of the wealthiest nations in the MCU, and produce some of the most advanced armaments.[67] Vibranium is thus emphasised as a resource that secures the socio-economic liberation of Wakandans *en masse*.

Although the way Wakandan's gain access to vibranium is not made clear in the film, its use in Wakandan technologies above the ground indicates that it somehow must have been mined from beneath the earth. We are also made aware in the film that mining is a part of Wakanda's societal organisation and leadership as we are introduced to an elder figure in the King's council of leaders who represents the mining tribe (Coogler 2018). Even so, the absence of

[66] Vibranium is more than just Wakanda's most valuable natural resource. It is central to T'Challa's ancestral heritage, and his current seat of power as the head of the Black Panther cult, and King of Wakanda. In issue #9 of the Black Panther comic book series, *Black Panther: Doom is the song of Drums* (Kirby & Royer 1978), Black Panther makes it clear to accomplice, Mister Little, that "Wakanda history is the history of vibranium".
[67] An example being Black Panther's versatile and indestructible suit and the use of advanced projectionist technologies that hide the nation's true identity

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mining in the film leads viewers to assume, or imagine, that in the African future, the kind of mining characterised by a miner's performance of difficult physical labour under dangerous environments is altogether absent.

It is in the underground where audiences witness the empowerment of black women as Shuri is most empowered underground. She plays an integral and leading role in Wakanda's production, use, and circulation of vibranium, and it is underground where she manufactures advanced technologies. It is also from underground where she is best able to help T'Challa accomplish his missions, and eventually save Wakanda and the world from Killmonger's violent recolonisation of the world. Shuri therefore reveals that ideas of the miner as 'rightfully' male is a socially constructed truth that can be just as easily resisted (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:197). This idea is more especially circumvented when mining in the film uses Afrofuturist technology – which leads me back to the absence of mining processes in the film mentioned in previous paragraphs.

We do not see Shuri (or any other character) in close proximity to the rock – a "dangerous, dirty and risky task" (Lahiri-Dutt 2012) performed by underground miners. These old relationships have been almost invariably replaced by various networks of technologies thus making normative a fairly new relationship where between the miner and the rock is the machine (Abrahamson & Johansson 2008). The absence of mining processes such as hard, physical labour, extraction, and deep penetration also functions to further divorce mining from exclusive masculinity. In this sense, the use of Afro-futurist technologies limits, if not completely eradicates, discrimination against women's participation in underground mining, especially on grounds of their 'weaker' biology. Shuri shows that she only needs knowledge and machinery to operate the African underground remotely and she does not need to perform the hard-physical labour thought only to be capable of men (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008; Jenkins 2014; Lahiri-Dutt 2012).

Wakanda's representation of underground mining stresses a future wherein new competencies and skills that place knowledge of remotely operated high-tech equipment over the miner's physical attributes are a standard requirement to mine (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008:213, 216). Furthermore, this positions Shuri's participation underground as not necessarily that of a miner. Shuri is instead further empowered and is positioned as an *engineer*, making her more exceptional in industries such as mining and engineering that are considered a historically white

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and male preserve[68] (Maree 2017:33). Shuri's representation of mining therefore overturns the historic colonial and patriarchal associations with mining as Wakanda's most advanced form of mining is not only located and successfully run by a 'developing' continent but is most importantly free from the exploitative use of black bodies – particularly those of black women.

BP's Afrofuturistic representations of mining in the future bring to mind the possibility that at some point in the future, the miner will no longer need to come into contact with the rock as per tradition. In the future, especially in Africa, the miner will begin to work remotely, and what once limited women from being underground miners (the physical strength, the need to go physically underground) will be the obsolete qualities of a miner. Between herself and the rock will now be the machine and the use of improved technologies in mining will no longer require a person to be physically strong to conduct their work. Furthermore the miner will be characterised by their fine motor skills, dexterity, and problem-solving abilities (SA 2020:3), while removing the requirement to be underground to mine will protect women from the sexual violence inflicted upon them when working below. In summary, the limitations traditionally used to discriminate against women and to reduce their value to their body parts will become irrelevant.

This possibility is further supported by the introduction of digitalisation, automation and improved AI in mining. Mining is beginning to make a shift from emphasis on hard physical labour under dangerous conditions to a knowledge of new, often remotely operated, high-tech mining equipment (Abrahamsson & Johansson 2008:213 & 216). New mining technologies such as "smart surveying and mapping visualisation systems, smart climate control systems and energy savings, smart rock engineering systems, smart data processing and smart mine design, and mining planning and decision-making" (Netshitenzhe 2019) are replacing old methods of mining that require the miner to come into close and dangerous contact with the rock. With such enhanced opportunities to work remotely, women who were once limited from being underground miners due to their biological "weakness" and the fear of harassment from

[68] Besides the banning of women from working underground the mines, the Mines and Works Act of 1911 also enacted the 'Colour Bar Acts' which meant that "certificates and competency in any occupations likewise specified" could only be given to Europeans, Cape Coloureds and Mauritius Creoles (cited in Cruise 2011:217). The 'Colour Bar Act' excluded black Africans who, although they provided labour on the mines, were not allowed to pursue further certifications of competency. The Act therefore made sure that Black mineworkers remained labourers while Europeans were able to pursue degree level education in engineering. Further education in mining engineering meant that Europeans would hold management position on the mines. For over a century, mining engineering graduates, and industry professionals were all white, and all male.

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male miners, will be given equal opportunity in the workplace. Yet, even with the advancements in mining technology holding greater potential to create gender-neutral sites, the introduction of these remains slow.

BP further impresses and illustrates **how** opportunities to mine remotely ultimately help to prevent the exploitation of black men and women. Making this shift is urgent if it means that greater opportunities for black women to enter into mining operations with less fear of being dominated through exploitation, violation, sexist beliefs, and practices can exist. In essence, the film teaches viewers that technology will play a major role in disrupting masculine representations and mining cultures, and technology can truly become an inclusive feminised space. With mining's increasing modernisation the miner need not to be a man but must be a talented engineer, which increases the possibility of inclusion of women. In other words, in the future world of African mining, it is knowledge, and not physical strength, that is power.

3.6 Digging Deeper: African Mining Before the Future

3.6.1 *Before the Future: Understanding Gender in African Mining as a European Construct*

According to Peter Alexander (2007b) from the onset of industrial mining, there was no definitive reason as to why women were legally banned from working underground South African mines.[69] The reason could not be because the task of mining was too arduous for women because in other contexts, women were permitted to undertake heavy industrial labour even in that time (Alexander 2007:214). Alexander (2007) concludes that what is most likely to have introduced more hardened gendered division of labour is not African tradition, but the arrival of European private mining companies in Africa.

With industrial mining, also came European transformation of the middle-class men and women into "gentlemen" and "ladies",[70] a transformation that ushered the way for gender behavioural ideals to be imposed onto men and women therefore establishing the introduction

[69] The Union of South Africa's Mines and Works Act No. 12 states "No person shall employ underground on any mine a boy apparently under the age of sixteen years or any female." This law ruled the mines of the Transvaal (Alexander 2007:214).
[70] This is more specific to British influence on mining in Southern Africa.

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of gender roles. Private mining companies[71] were given the authority to organise the colonisation of African countries on behalf of the European empires. Therefore, it was through mining that British allocation of gender roles crept their way into how African societies would be organised.

The domesticity and maternity of women was central to the ideologies of marriage and family life strongly promoted by the industry. One such translation of gender ideologies was the British assertion that the man is the breadwinner, and the woman is the dependent primary caretaker. Such patriarchal outlooks were beneficial to mining companies that preferred that women remain in their domestic and reproductive roles. In upholding the importance of marriage and family, mining companies would experience decrease in strikes, maintain social order, stability, and therefore increase the productivity of male miners (Gier & Mercier 2006:91). It would also secure the role of European engineers who were often men (Alexander 2007:214).

Evidently the lack of women's labour at African mines was not because of the supposed 'fragility' of women's physical bodies framed as too weak for the laborious demands of mining. The decision to ban women from participating in mines was a patriarchal one therefore revealing the strength that ideology holds in informing knowledge, discourse, and practice. In this way, male power and domination in the mining industry could be protected by establishing this as the 'natural order'. This reinforcement of stereotypes reiterating the female body as being too fragile for the 'toughness' of mining consequently made domestic ideology the norm and therefore made it more desirable to men and women. Therefore, in Africa, mining as a uniquely male endeavour is not a natural occurrence but a constructed one.

3.6.2 *Past-futures: African Mining, Ancient Metallurgy & its Hidden Legacies*

In light of the above, it is important then, to highlight, that the future vision of mining presented in *BP* (2018) wherein the mining underground is a female workspace is not necessarily unique, nor is the effective introduction of technology and mining processes necessarily European. As

[71] Rio Tinto-Zinc, De Beers, Consolidated Gold Fields, and the British South African Company (BSA) were the first industrialised mining companies in (Southern) Africa.

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one, in classic Afrofuturistic fashion, unearths the African past these alternate visions of the future are birthed. Knowledge of the techniques of extraction, beneficiation, and trading of high value minerals have been largely presented as European models. However, mining and metallurgy have been performed and organised by African economies centuries preceding industrial mining. The oldest mine in the world, recorded at over forty-five thousand years old, is a hematite[72] mine located in Bomvu Ridge, Swaziland. For centuries, minerals such as copper, iron, tin, lead, gold, and diamonds were mined by local inhabitants for various purposes.[73] The first practitioners of African metallurgy even date back as far as 5 000 BC during the Copper Age in the Northern regions of Africa. By the end of the first millennium BC, growing connections between the West and North of Africa allowed for the establishment of metallurgical and mining practices across diverse regions of Africa.

Through mining history, African ingenuity and innovation can be seen even though written and oral records of indigenous mining are difficult to trace (Chirikure 2018). Africans have produced efficient work systems, built, and used mining and extractive technologies such as furnaces and crucibles, and have also used innovative smelting and fabrication techniques. Furthermore, the trade of precious metals across regions was central to the growth and organisation of African mining (Chirikure 2018). Hundreds of kilograms of gold circulated from parts of Africa across the Indian Ocean from 750 AD – 1500 AD have been recorded in gold mining history, while the mining of gold and salt in the empires of Mali, Shongai, and especially Ghana,[74] generated mass wealth for these kingdoms which involved trading with the Middle-East and North Africa (Nalule 2020). Additionally, these empires were developed and organised civilisations made up of impressive complex urban societies[75] (Nalule 2020:12).

Current practices of open and underground mining were also performed by indigenous miners in search of metal ores, while others also used ancient techniques to blast difficult host rock underground (Chirikure 2018:7) – a technique similarly used in modern day mining. Although

[72] Iron ore
[73] The great African empires of Ghana, Mali, and Ancient Egypt mined and used gold to ornament and make artefacts; while in other parts of southern Africa iron metallurgy was incredibly developed using iron in funeral ceremonies and to make cosmetics (Gier & Mercier 2006; Nalule 2020:11-14)
[74] Arab writers of the ancient world described the empire of ancient Ghana as "the richest gold mines on earth"
[75] In the ninth century, Arab writer AI Yaqubi identified ancient Ghana as "one of the three most organized states in the region" (Gier & Mercier 2006).

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these mining techniques were adopted in different time periods across various African regions, from the North to the South of Africa, underground mining was common practice.[76] The fabrication of the metals using techniques of heat, hammering, and lost wax casting across North and West Africa were also recorded as producing spectacular artefacts (Chirikure 2018:11). Indeed, Africa is proven to have a longer, substantial mining tradition that predates the arrival of, and colonisation by, major European powers.

Not only that, but African mining tradition is shown to have produced technologies, techniques, and final products that contradict notions of pre-colonial primitivity. In fact, this rich mining history indicates a few things about the capability of African mining back then, and even presently. Firstly, Africans had the ability to develop their own mining methods and technologies of extraction without the need of colonial interference; the mining of natural resources and the resulting development of infrastructure are not uniquely colonial endeavours; and that African countries were capable of amassing successful economies using their own systems of management over mineral wealth.[77] Furthermore, precolonial metallurgy and mining is a socially embedded practice and organisation that reveals an interestingly subversive interaction between gender, mining practices, and technology.

A return to precolonial mining in Africa uncovers how the gendered division of mining labour was more ambiguous than what is assumed to have been a solely male occupation. Iron working, for instance, has had the most extensive, diverse and longest tradition in Sub-Saharan Africa dating no less than twenty-five thousand years ago (Mtetwa et al. 2017). Iron was popularly used for utilitarian, symbolic, and ritualistic purposes which meant an increase in the scale of iron production throughout the continent, and an increase in labour force (Mtetwa et al. 2017:300). Women are likely to have played significant roles in iron metallurgy and mining

[76] According to Chirikure (2018:7), the earliest record of this practice is the Egyptians who mined for gold. There is also evidence of the underground mining of copper performed as early as the 15th century in Mpumalanga, South Africa.
[77] Presently, most resource-rich African countries such as South Sudan, Mali, and the Congo have experienced decades of mineral extraction but with little economic return. This is due to a myriad of factors including the colonial exploitation of these minerals, lack of proper infrastructure, and the political instability of these countries (Nalule 2020).

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even though this part of history does not seem make a strong feature in written records about Africa metallurgy.[78]

The silence on the contribution women (and children) have made to African invention and innovation, according to Mtetwa et al. (2017) is arguably "to a greater extent, an artefact manufactured by anthropologists" of the early 19th century who most likely shared Victorian ideals of gender roles,[79] or were simply not interested in the participation of women in iron working activities. This leaves the oral accounts of wives often smelting iron alongside their husbands and the introduction of iron working among the Hausa (West Africa), Rwanda and Chokwe (central and Southern Africa) by women which are often dismissed as ahistorical facts (Mtetwa et al. 2017). The dismissal of such history and possibility, however, needs reconsideration as it does not give a fair anthropological and archaeological account of the vast, diverse, and dynamic history of securing iron provisioning as ambiguity is placed beneath certitude (Gero 2007).

The *Njanja* of Zimbabwe were known for their well-organised and specialist iron industry during the 19th century and were the main suppliers of iron to Zimbabwe and Mozambique. Their large-scale iron production was inclusive of women who were not only included in all parts of the iron metallurgy process, but also possessed and offered technical know-how (Mtetwa et al. 2017:308). In Shona culture, men and women working alongside one another was a central feature of daily life and this did not exclude the iron metallurgy process. Specialist knowledge and skills were not reserved for men, but both men and women were given equal opportunity to perform well (Mtetwa et al. 2017:310). Men and women, according to (Mtetwa et al. 2017), were co-workers who ensured the successful production of iron. Therefore, tasks were not necessarily divided along gender lines (gender was also considered a fluid concept) at the expense of successful production or iron.

[78] Mtetwa et al. (2017:297) make note that accounts of iron metallurgy by missionaries often overshadow the numerous instances where women are attested to have been at the forefront of metal working. Instances were women are recorded to have taken part, are viewed as exceptions.
[79] The erasure of women from metallurgy is furthermore argued by Mtetwa et al. (2017:306) to be the influence the colonial period might have had in changing gender attitudes to certain tasks and rituals; iron work was the domain of powerful men whereas women were reserved for domestic roles such as cooking.

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Mtetwa et al. (2017:312) point out that iron working was about knowledge and expertise which could be possessed by anyone. This meant that there was no biological or cultural barrier that prevented women from possessing these within iron working African communities. Even references to myths and taboos that excluded women from participation in metallurgy have been "wildly exaggerated" (Mtetwa et al. 2017),[80] Iron working tasks were not allocated according to rigid gender roles that positioned women in the periphery. Rather, iron working tasks were allocated according to *talent*, and thinking of it any differently could be more misleading than closer to accuracy.

The mass erasure of ancient African metallurgy and mining, however, began only in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – the same time European venture capitalists were interested in extracting African mineral wealth.[81] It was only during the British colonial era that hard-rock industrial mining practices were established (Thornton 2014:129), and the introduction of industrial mining, the miner, and the closeness to the rock also meant the arbitrary erasure of African women from mining.

3.7 Conclusion

In analysing *BP's* story world, we are reminded how equally important verticality (underground) is to horizontality (above ground) when discussing colonialism and Afrofuturistic feminism in post and decolonial settings (Scott 2008:1853). In *BP* (Coogler 2018), the underground is set up as an African space of technological innovation, knowledge generation, and accumulation while also existing as a space of freedom to imagine alternative African futures for black individuals, especially for black women. It is underground that Wakanda finds its (re)source of independence from the confinement, alienation, hard labour, oppression, and gender discrimination known to be a deep part of African mining culture and experiences.

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[80] Not all mining cultures in Africa believed women were bad luck. There are instances recorded where women, even in their reproductive prime, participated in iron work in Tanzania.

[81] Although the arrival of the Portuguese in the Wassa Fiase (Western region of the Gold Coast) in 1471 introduced the global commodification of gold in the Gold Coast, the gold rush attracted *both* African and European business alike. It was only with the formalisation of British colonial rule in the late nineteenth century that the British government sought full control over gold fields (Gier & Mercer 2006:42).

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By placing Shuri at the centre of Wakanda's underground, the underground space can be defined by Scott (2008) as a site of resistance, one that resists the perpetuation of colonialism's own myths of patriarchy and power by presenting images of the subterranean that are not associated with exploitation and oppressive power relations. *BP* creatively challenges notions of mining, masculinity, and gender equality by revealing the possibility that mining can be empowering of women. Future mining in Africa, as represented by the film, is not a reminder of colonialism and patriarchy's looming presence but it is interpreted as an Afro-feminist space that liberates everyone. In other words, *BP's* representation of the underground acts a powerful metaphoric statement against the myths of colonialism and patriarchy's irremovable and irreversible depth of power by presenting an alternative vision of women digging the future.

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CHAPTER FOUR: THE AFRICAN AFRO-FUTURE MINER AS MARTYR, LOSER & KING IN *NEPTUNE FROST* (2022)

> *During my field work in Africa I never met a divination priest who would hesitate to engage the artificial, to express a love for the synthetic circuits of information and energy that carry our noisy signals through time and space, from one human heart to the next*. – Ron Eglash

4.1 Introduction

This chapter explores the stratified relationship between the African miner, the body, and technology, but in closer relation to digital technology. In the chapter, the black body is related to as the *embodiment* of digital software and technology that eventually secures the liberation of those bodies subjugated under neo-colonial and capitalist regimes of power. This chapter specifically explores the preceding ideas by critically analysing the Africanfuturism musical African film, *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams 2022). The film is set on the open cast mining pits of Rwanda where audiences meet the subjugated bodies of miners who are under the control and exploitation of The Authority – the military group used by a corrupted neo-colonial government to secure global wealth through coltan mining. Later, the film moves to a mysterious digital hilltop where those same bodies gather to challenge, dismantle, and overturn those same regimes of power through a digital revolution of networked system of shared awareness.

Mining in this chapter is not necessarily digitalised, or turned into a space of liberation, but the power of the miner takes the focus. In the film, the miner is "everything," digging up coltan so that mobile, computer and other related devices are powered up. The miner holds the tech industry in the literal palm of their hands even though they are not respected as such. Paradoxically, it is only when the miner leaves the mining site that true disruption can take place. The same coltan that exploits their bodies and labour, helps to leverage their true power back when the miners manage to change their location and reconfigure system.

The manner in which the characters in *Neptune Frost* (2022) design and use the internet and other digital technologies widen the digital arena as a space that is not exclusively Eurocentric,

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but one that is pluriversal holding within it an array of outcomes, uses, and possibilities that are inclusive of African culture and African interests. Using Africanfuturist[82] sensibilities, *Neptune Frost* (2022) explores the cultural significance of digital technologies within African contexts. Using African epistemologies and cosmologies, digital technology is given new meaning and new uses. Such uses are an example of Black software: the ways that black users and generators use digital and software technology to secure specifically the interests of black people.

4.2 Synopsis of the Film

Neptune Frost (Uzeyman & Williams 2022) is an Afrofuturist musical film shot in Rwanda but set in Burundi. Using an Afrofuturist aesthetic, Uzeyman and Williams tell a story about the navigation of trauma in the lives of those entangled in (neo-) colonial consequences. Their use of Afrofuturism is at one level aesthetic, and political on another level, yet it is also affirmed as an arena in which one can creatively deal with, and express individual and collective pain. Brooks (2018) argues that as a genre, aesthetic, and political sensibility, Afrofuturism is a form of black storytelling that is essentially born out of cruelty and the crisis of abrupt change. As a sub-genre of Science Fiction which bases its tropes on the blueprint of Transatlantic slavery,[83] Afrofuturism is therefore birthed as a coded response to the resilient violence and trauma of slavery, colonisation, and white supremacy in the African diaspora.

[82] A reminder that according to Kniaz (2020), Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism have the same interests (please refer to chapter two), and so they can be used interchangeably without losing complete meaning.

[83] Africans were transported on foreign technologies in the form of ships, exposed to foreign territories and languages that all created a much different worldview. Being alien and alienated, Africans were pulled into the realisation that they were already at the end of the world; what van Veen (2015) names "the Armageddon effect". From this, it is clear that Science Fictional tropes are metaphoric of the story of African slavery.

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Figure 8: Neptune at his mother's funeral, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author

Through the voice-over of a woman, we learn that twenty-two years have passed since the outbreak of the war – a phase in time the film refers to as the "after life" – another dimension where the worst has already happened. Akin to Africanfuturism, the film begins its measure of time at the point of pain and painful change. To further crystalise this, the film's opening scenes are at the burial of the protagonist, Neptune's (played by Elvis Ngabo) mother (Figure 8). The evening of the funeral, the priest visits Neptune in his home to express condolences to the bereaving Neptune and moments later, the real agenda behind the priest's visit is revealed when he sexually harasses Neptune. Neptune reacts to this by killing the priest, and then hurryingly fleeing from home in fear of being caught by the community members who hold strong affection and loyalty toward the priest. While scurrying to get his things together, Neptune takes with him a backpack with only two single items that seem to be of immense sentimental value: a piercing red dress and an old pair of black heels. It is at this point that the film embarks on a journey following Neptune's search of "fourth dimensional libations" (*Neptune Frost* 2022), while simultaneously navigating a period of mass rioting against The Authority – a militant police force used by the state to control its people and its minerals – in the city centre. The fight against The Authority is due to their control over information and the internet, and

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worse over, their unconscionable use of militant force, especially against the proletariat bodies of the black miners who dig day and night to unearth coltan.[84]

The film then brings audiences to the open mine pit where the coltan is being extracted (Figure 9). Here audiences meet frustrated and overworked miners who use the earth, their bodies, and voices to express their anger at a system that cares very little about its resources – inanimate (coltan) and animate (the miner). As miners continue to dig, chaos in the city centre's *Capitol* and rural peripheries continue to ensue as more and more individuals are plugged into their online telecommunications devices to join the cries and riots of exasperated individuals who stand up against The Authority. Beginning with the miners, many join in the repeated chant, *A-he, A-he, A-ho, These Motherfuckers don't want to back down* (*Neptune Frost* 2022 00:08:58). Once again, as a painful event pushes the closing of a chapter in the death of Neptune's mother and his leaving home, it also begins a new one as we meet the film's next primary figure, Matalusa (played by Bertrand Ninteretse), whose arch begins with the killing of his brother Tekno (played by Robert Ninteretse) at the hands of The Authority.

Figure 9: Miners mining coltan in open cast mining reserve, *Neptune Forest*, 2022. Screenshot by author.

[84] Due to its unique electrical properties, coltan is the primary mineral resource used in the production of almost all digital technologies in the film as well as in the real world. Coltan is found richly in Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of Congo which produces 80% of the world's coltan, where it is mostly still mined by hand (Feick SA:sp).

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Figure 10: Tekno holding the coltan rock he finds as he unearths the ground, *Neptune Frost*, 2022. Screenshot by author.

While mining on site, Tekno extracts a piece of earth which contains rich jewels of coltan (Figure 10). In an instantaneous state of hypnosis, Tekno places the amassed coltan near his forehead as if forming a transcendental bond. The intensity of Tekno's connection to the rock causes him to pause to the force before him and therefore stop mining, however, under the watchful eye of The Authority, a member of the police who guards the miners immediately strikes Tekno against his head causing his immediate death.

Figure 11: Matalusa holds his now dead brother, Tekno, in deep grief, *Neptune Frost*, 2022. Screenshot by author.

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Holding his brother in deep grief (Figure 11), Matalusa and the other miners are enraged by his unfair death at the hands of powers that exert, without conscience, violence and excessive control thus conditioning the people through a fear of death. Matalusa is then pushed to run away from the mining compound which has become a death zone in search for ultimate freedom from The Authority, who come to stand as a metonym for the problematic global attitudes towards Africa and African life. While both make their journey through the forest, a parallel story line is established between Neptune and Matalusa who are both in search for freedom from bodily control and exploitation; the former from perverse religious control and social conditioning and the latter from a state run by neo-colonial and industrial-capitalist values that easily kill. Both instances of death mark, to audiences, how the personal can be wholeheartedly political.

Figure 12: Matalusa entering lucid dream where he meets Potolo who instructs him to "**Hack!**", *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author

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While taking a break from walking, Neptune falls asleep beneath a tree where he enters a lucid dream. Neptune is met by the mysterious figure of Potolo the Avatar (played by Eric Ngangare) (Figure 12) who calls out to Neptune a command to "**Hack!**" referring to hacking into the history of present world-systems. Hacking into the history of slavery, Potolo makes apparent its nefarious relationship to current-day business models that keep black Africans exploited and deprived in order to gain large profits. Later in the same dream, Neptune, Matalusa, and a

Figure 13: Neptune meets the same unnamed woman met by Matalusa in the dream; they engage in an intense moment of mutual curiosity, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author.

woman meet in a digitized and cosmic space (Figure 13). Neon lights are strewn across the scene circling the technological pieces creating an Afrofuturistic phantasmagoria. The

Figure 14: Matalusa and an unnamed woman meet in an unknown cosmic space where they meet Potolo, *Neptune Frost*, 2022
Screenshot by author.

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refraction of light onto their bodies enriches their skins which are made more visible against the white regalia under neon lights. With his wheels spinning and his baritone voice vibrating, Potolo sings what seems to be the oral history of the first meeting between man and woman – the binary stars. As Potolo slips between spoken-word poetry and song enunciated through French, English and Kirundi verses, Matalusa forms a connection with the unknown woman as she simultaneously engages with Neptune in intense curiosity (Figure 13). This scene sets the precedent for the unfolding relationships that will play out in the film, and when all three finally meet, there is a powerful reverberation between them that creates a strong sense that they have already met in a distant place and time.

Figure 15: Binya fetches Neptune from the fatal accident scene to attend to him, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author.

Neptune arrives on the river bank where he takes a boat to the other side. While on the boat, Neptune changes his shoes into the heels and clutches the folds of the red dress he packed while taking a moment to inhale the smell of the dress. In a state of ecstasy, Neptune leaves the boat and continues his walk on gravel roads made dark by the night and shockingly gets hit by a motor cycle. In the flash of lights, and blurry faces of bystanders, Neptune is picked up by a woman identified as Binya (played by Natasha Muziramakenga) and is taken back to her home (Figure 14). While unconscious, the woman calls out above, making intercession to God and

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the ancestors to help heal Neptune's bleeding body. While working on Neptune's body through song and prayers, Binya and Potolo transform him into a woman – the same woman Neptune met earlier in his dream, his binary star (Figure 16).

Figure 16: Once prayers are offered up by Binya, Neptune emerges as an intersex woman, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author.

Although unclear to audiences as to their new function, Neptune (now played by Cheryl Isheja) is hailed as *The Motherboard*; an identity they now embody. As they continue their journey, Neptune's presence somehow disrupts the flow of digital transmissions that surround them. It is only later when they meet Matalusa that their static emits becomes a great force of revelation that leads to a mass digital revolution.

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Figure 17: Matalusa is met by Elohel and Memory who have already settled on the camp, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author.

In a separate plot, Matalusa enters a camp site where he meets Elohel (played by Rebecca Mucyo) and Memory (played by Eliane Umuhire) (Figure 17). Like Matalusa, they have all had a dream of Potolo directing them to this place, a digital hilltop in an isolated and abandoned site located in the hidden hilltops of Rwanda's forests. There are various technological gadgets and units that Elohel cannot operate due to the lack of power supply and access to the internet. While on the hilltop, they are cut off from the rest of the world but as more victims of the violence inflicted by The Authority arrive, a growing consciousness begins to arise. Soon after, we meet student activist, Psychology (played by Trésor Niyongabo), who is also hunted down by the state and runs to the hilltop, too.

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Figure 18: Miners rush to embrace Matalusa as they enter the digital hilltop, *Neptune Frost*, 2022. Screenshot by author.

Psychology recounts how The Authority progressively grew intolerant by cutting access to the radio and television first, then ceasing access to the internet and jailing opposition in Capitol. As time goes by, other miners join Matalusa after sharing a dream of Tekno instructing them to leave the compound in search for freedom with Matalusa (Figure 18). For the miners, including Matalusa, Tekno becomes the guiding figure who teaches them about the true power of coltan and about their own power as miners who have always been the main conduits through which the system as a whole can be powered. The miners gather empowered by the reality that the "miner is everything…the miner is the power source" (*Neptune Frost* 2022 00:54:43).

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Figure 19: Neptune enters into the digital hilltop bringing with her electrical currents that power up the camp and access to the internet, *Neptune Frost*, 2022.
Screenshot by author.

Neptune finally arrives at the digital hilltop (Figure 19) and upon seeing Matalusa, Neptune feels the course of power flowing through them, creating electronic shockwaves of currents and static that radically change the interface of the camp site when it brings the power back on. Together with Matalusa, The Motherboard becomes the connectivity point through which all the components and external peripherals of the revolt against The Authority meet. The miners aware of the silent (and silenced) role they have played in powering technology, join Matalusa and The Motherboard in leading what was once a human revolution into a digital one. More and more followers across the globe join the digital wave caused by Matalusa and the revolt miners as they increasingly hack into digital world systems – one of them being the world's largest search engine, *Google*. No longer a digital hilltop, all have now arrived at Matalusa Kingdom where *MartyrLoserKing* becomes the hack that questions all things, overturns every establishment, and understands technology as the defence and the channel of guidance provided by the lives sacrificed to make it.

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4.3 Digital disruptions: Digital technology as black embodiment in *Neptune Frost* (2022)

Neptune Frost (2022) reveals the manner in which the digital and electrical can have cultural and metaphoric significance within black cultures. Figures in the film are given names such as Memory, while characters like Neptune, while embodied as a black woman, function as the revolution's Motherboard, and Matalusa as an African man becomes the corrupting virus that hacks into and changes the world's established order. The manner in which digital technology is represented as black embodiment in the film extends any aesthetic function that helps orientate viewers into understanding the film's setting as simply an Afrofuturistic one. The film's choice to embody technology as black-bodied figures opens up deeper critical questions concerning digital technology and its contentious history and relationship to race.

In 1994 the internet was first made available for public usage and became a massified cultural force holding within it textual and rising graphical means of communication. As a by-product of an already-existing digital divide, access to the internet, info-science, and other digital technologies was limited and was therefore initially only reserved for the privileged. While it would seem unfair to say that there is a 'white' technology versus a 'black' technology, it would also be too trusting to say that digital technology as a whole is race neutral. Although it presented itself, and its distribution, as something neutral, the arena of digital technology was from its onset racialised (Brock Jr 2020; Nakamura 2007). For instance, the default internet user at that point in time was assumed to be white and male and this assumed white user then positioned blackness at the periphery of such global technological changes. In this sense, the marginalisation of black identity, as the users and consumers of the internet and digital technology, emulates the social realities that accompanied its introduction to society thus reproducing black users as the non-existent minority. In other words, digital technology and its uses as determined by the embodied user, only mimic the offline ideologies that centre the same patriarchy and whiteness that eventually permeates all digital practices. It is in this light that authors such as Andre Brock (2021) reach the conclusion that technology leaves its material neutrality when it is utilised by human users who are at once embodied and, in the context of this discussion, are raced.

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The more digital technology is thought of as neutral, universal, and therefore harmless; we are in effect supporting its impersonation of whiteness which also assumes its own universality, normalcy, and widespread applicability (Dyer 2017). The term "whiteness" does not target white users per say, but it speaks to ideologies and practices that put their experiences, narratives and culture at the centre. The more we allow digital technology and digital practice to continue to be conflated with whiteness as normative, the more digital networks, digital design, and digital practices are allowed to similarly 'Other' non-white users and to label their use of digital technology and the internet as deviant, resistant, and/or absent. Despite this, digital technologies and networks are increasingly no longer marked by an absence of blackness (Brock 2022). The growing efforts of black users and black online communities in trying to decode their visible and active digital presence,[85] decentre white universalism and neutrality in the various spheres of digital technology. Black uses of digital technology, especially information technology, have now become more visible and have now tapped into mainstream technoculture.

Neptune Frost (2022) similarly frustrates such outdated conflations between whiteness and technology through locating the presence of African culture within digital culture. The marriage between technology, African folklore, and the presence of black lives in such worlds is characteristic of Afrofuturism. However what stands out as more fascinating is the manner in which Uzeyman and Williams embody technology through black bodies thus creating an intense closeness between technology and the black body as well as black culture. Additionally, while the film still questions the role digital technology and the internet have played in the neo-liberal and neo-colonial oppression of Africans, the characters in the film who gather in Matalusa Kingdom build programs and computer designs that serve the social, economic, and political interests of African lives – a manner of technological use that Charlton D. McIlwain (2019) terms "Black software".

Basically, Black Software encourages users and generators to not only question the arbitrary idea that the digital arena is a uniquely Eurocentric one, but it also exhibits how technology,

[85] Social justice movements like *Black Lives Matter* (2013 –) and *Fees Must Fall* (2015 – 2016) used digital technologies to mobilise their cause and have opened up a larger interest in the many ways that computer technologies, digital networks, and online communities have been used by marginalised groups to further their own interests

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not initially made with the interests of black people in mind, can be innovatively used to engage with black histories, black presences/presents and black futures. It also opens up a pathway for the realisation that there is a much longer and more long-lasting relationship between black people, the internet, and computing technology. But, because of the treatment of digital technologies as so-called 'white' entities, the ways in which techno-science shaped the lives of ethnic minorities, and vice versa (Myungsung 2017:3), have been historically denied.

Many thoughts on technological innovation rarely address ideas of an African modernity, with literature only recently experiencing a growth in studies on how modern technologies shape the lives of the minority (Myungsung 2017). For instance, the historical closeness between technology and the black body can be traced as far back as colonial processes that divorced the black body from humanity during African slavery, meaning that slaves were regarded as machines and household appliances. Even authors like Hampton (2015) posit that futuristic figures of the robot in popular literature and film which are seemingly the products of and "untouched" imagination, are merely futuristic reimaginations of the black slave. Similar to the slave, the robot oscillates between being regarded as near human and tool. Furthermore, through modernity's system of slavery, Africa, helped unlock the way for European innovation and created a pathway for lasting inventions in the areas of transportation, commerce, production, and insurance (Mbembe 2017). Therefore, it must be taken seriously that the first technology of modernity was the body of black African slave "made into machines" in the plantation economy (Walcott 2019:161) and the extraordinary production value their bodies as tool offered various colonies. Copying from models of African slavery, the mining industry similarly organises the black body as tool to be exploited, dominated, and controlled; a dominated technological tool of extraction.

The representation of mining in *Neptune Frost* (2022) is largely found in the beginning of the film. Even though the process of mining is not the main focus of the film, it is worth exploring in depth in order to further analyse how the miner is considered a dehumanised tool and slave. The miners in the film participate in open-cast mining and although seemingly state-funded, the mine uses traditional labour-intensive forms of extraction that include the use of shovel and pick to access the land's coltan. Furthermore, the miners are without protective gear while working in dangerous and unprotected environments. It is quite ironic of the film, but not

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accidental, that there are instances of advanced technologies being used (such as the video messenger device used to record, upload, and share acts of dissent against The Authority) alongside scenes of mining that are unenterprising. The decision to present such outdated modes of mining in the film opens up a pathway to discuss how the unjust conditions of the miner not only take place in LSM industries in Africa (as explored in my previous chapter), but also in ASM.

ASM is defined as a "low-tech, labour intensive [method of] mineral extraction and processing" (Jenkins 2014:14) which requires the body to be in proximity with the rock being excavated. Despite using outdated manual processes of mining, the ASM sector is a *global* producer of high-value minerals such as gold, diamonds, and sapphire, with sapphire totalling 80% of global supply (Fritz et al. 2017). Up to 40.5 million people directly participate in the ASM industry globally (Fritz et al. 2017) with African countries making up significant portion of ASM miners (Nalule 2020). Furthermore, in Tanzania, 1.5 million miners were recorded as directly employed by the ASM sector; in Ghana 1.1 million; 500 000 in Zimbabwe; and 200 000 in South Africa in the same year (Nalule 2020:53). The estimated number of dependents on African ASM miners is also important in noting its contribution to the African economy, reaching up to an estimated 4.4 million people, with Ghana holding the highest recorded number in Africa. What is also noteworthy about ASM is that it is not only responsible for the significant employment of miners from the developing world, but it should *also* be a means for the creation of global economic wealth at a local level (Hilson et al. 2018).

In the film, however, the local level does not receive a fair portion of the wealth that is accumulated globally. As traced in the previous chapter, this comes as little surprise to audiences who are aware that mining in Africa has been a major contributor to the establishment of our white-dominated capitalist system. White-dominated capitalist systems of mining have made systemic the continued oppression and exploitation of the black body that forms part of the structures of cheap migrant labour that have been passed down[86] (Crush 1992; Gaule 2017; Saul & Bond, 2014; du Preez 2015). The film further supports this sad fact by showcasing how the dehumanisation of the African miner is the first and most necessary part

[86] As demonstrated by the post-apartheid laments of mine workers during the devastating Marikana Massacre in 2012 (Saul & Bond 2014; du Preez 2015).

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in positioning them as a piece of technology that is regarded as valuable in so far as they are able to physically extract more and more wealth.

While focusing on the continued subjugation of the African miner in relation to technology, the film also explores this historical nearness between the black body and technology as something *revolutionary*. As the film develops, digital technology is revealed to hold revolutionary potential in best securing the social, economic, and political interests of African lives rather than to harm and reduce them. In *Neptune Frost* (2022), the search into such revolutionary potential/s are explored through the proletariat figure of the miner. By placing Tekno, Matalusa and the rest of the recalcitrant miners as the centre of an Afrofuturistic African world, Afrofuturism becomes a tactical mode through which to contest the "ready-made futures and whitewashed pasts" that problematically essentialise (im)possible relationships between the human, technology, and nature that have often diminished and excluded black individuals and culture (Myungsung 2017; van Veen 2015).

As additionally specified by Myungsung (2017), Afrofuturism does this by making sure to locate the presence of black culture within contemporary techno-scientific worlds. The location of black presence extends further in the manner in which digital technology and its practices are used by black individuals. Given the interpretive flexibility of digital technologies as explored by its ideological conflation with whiteness[87] (Brock 2020:21), technology in the film can also be considered "black" (McIlwain 2019). Digital technology in the film is used and designed according to black culture, history, and epistemology; it is also used to serve the social, economic, and political interests of the black working-class individuals who are under the oppression of The Authority's neo-colonial and neo-slave systems depicted in its representation of mining in Africa.

[87] According to Brock (2020:21), technology is a site of interpretive flexibility due to its assumed neutrality. Its assumed neutrality makes it difficult for one to easily accuse digital technology of serving specifically the interests of whites because of ingrained ideas that the internet is a site of disembodiment; where offline identities are no longer relevant in determining online identities. Technology's interpretive flexibility also makes it possible to deny that it can also serve the interests of blacks. However, Brock continues to emphasise the idea that the embodied user (both black and white) determines digital technology's use. Technology's neutrality allows it to be racialised according to the racialised user.

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4.4 The Death of Tekno

In *Neptune Frost* (2022), Afrofuturism allows for the articulation of a topic not commonly spoken about, but pensively explored by the death of a miner, Tekno. Tekno's death explores the manner in which the introduction of industrial capital mining and its Western value systems caused a significant shift in the ways that Africans related to the land and its natural resources. The question of land and mining in the film points to the notion of territorial integrity. In African traditional systems, land is considered a communal property that belongs to both the living and the dead (Omari 1990; Claassens & Cousins 2008). Land not only sustains the life of the community by providing and securing water and food, but it also holds a sacred dimension. According to mythologies that mark land as a divine gift, such spiritual approaches to land are what Tarimo (2014:1) identifies as part of the "territorial integrity" of land. Territorial integrity is the deep awareness that land holds religious and cultural meanings that are foundational to claims of identity, belonging, and community.

The land on which Tekno mines and dies is the land on which his family originated, but because of the war, Tekno, Matalusa and his family escaped from their homeland for safety. Following the end of the war, they return home only to find the land had been bought by purveyors who intend to acquire the land to mine its coltan. With the option to either leave or to work for the mine being built, Matalusa decides for them to stay upon hearing that they will be mining "technology"; a clear sign for Matalusa to remain because of the origin of Tekno's name. Tekno was named after his father first hears the word "technology" from a trader who promised that the quality of his product would never fail due to its "technology". Knowledge of this further explains the connection Tekno and Matalusa have to the land viewers see them dig. The land on which Matalusa and Tekno mine is the same land that constructs and informs Tekno's identity, his family history, his belonging, and his conscious connection to the land. As Tekno mines, the coltan beneath the earth re-named "technology" provides a way for Tekno to engage with the spiritual realm that becomes a prominent feature in the film. While holding a rock amassed with coltan, Tekno is put into a trance-like state by a powerful force that causes him to abandon his mining work leading to him being struck to death by the mine's law enforcement.

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For Tekno, the deeper he digs the deeper his connection to the spiritual realm becomes, therefore laying claim to the land as an immense source of power and guidance that eventually leads to the freedom of the miners in the film. Each miner dreams of Tekno after his death instructing them to leave the mine and gather together in a place where the digital revolution takes flight; a revolution not possible without the technologies that are built from coltan. Moving beyond the narrative of the control imposed upon his body by The Authority, Tekno's conscious connection to the land highlights African tradition's rejection of the land as being principally the site of profit and accumulation. Rather, Tekno reminds viewers that the (neo-)colonial exploitation of land also violates its sacredness; a land in which ancestors, spirits, deities, and guides are embodied. Much like that moment of pause experienced by Tekno as he raises the amassed coltan, land for Africans is also a site onto which "prayers, ritual and sacrifices are offered up" (Tarimo 2014:3-4) with the ultimate sacrifice being that of the death of a miner's body.

As a result, Tekno's death becomes a significant metaphor for the value land might have held for many African miners who were otherwise forced to exploit the earth at the expense of the spiritual and cultural dimensions hallowed onto it. Tekno's unique relationship with the land in a neo-colonial setting ruled by capitalistic interests is made more poignant when one considers how Burundi's historic civil unrest was closely related to land issues as well as that war's resultant migration and land dispossession (Tarimo 2014); and when considering Rwanda's genocide wherein territory also helped trace tribal identity. Due to the film being set in Rwanda while using the Kirundi dialect, audiences openly reckon with the many bodies laid and sacrificed on the ground for Burundi and Rwanda to secure relative peace and freedom; the things that the characters in *Neptune Frost* (2022) still struggle for. Perhaps this could be the meaning of Neptune's repeated hymn and search for "fourth dimensional libations" in the beginning of the film. The mining pit, and the blood of the miners spilled onto it, serve as a connection point in the film between spirit, land, its people, and technology. In the face of harsh environmental, economic, and ethical bankruptcy that plagues the film's story world, the death of the miner whose "heart was in the stone" (*Neptune Frost* 2022) begins a Revolution.

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4.5 Blackness, Technology and *Spirit*

Despite being amidst the buzz of advanced technologies, *Neptune Frost* (2022) makes clear that the manner in which African individuals relate to digital technology would be different from what is viewed as the normative way in which it is engaged with (Steinskog & Steinskog 2018). Given the history of Africans, their role in modernity and their cosmologies, African technoculture will be different from that of a Western one. *Neptune Frost* illustrates this by not only placing technology and blackness (including black-bodiedness, culture, and identity) within proximity thus exposing the existence of black technoculture, but also placing both in close relation to spirit. For Africans, ways of knowing and being in the world include the acknowledgment of things that exist outside normative standards of reason. According to Baloyi and Makobe-Rabothata (2014), within the African worldview, the spirit and the spiritual make up its cosmology and epistemologies. It is within this understanding that Africans are guided to use, even technology, in such a way that it serves African cosmological and epistemological interests. In Africa, technology therefore gains adequate relevance when it incorporates the guidance and acknowledgment of the spirit realm. In other words, African technoculture comprises of African identity, culture, technology, and *spirit*.

It therefore comes as no surprise that even with the film's high-tech advancement of communication technologies, the communication and spirit presence of Tekno, Potolo, and The Avatar play the most important guiding figures that push Matalusa, Neptune, and the miners who follow them towards their full and final destination. Tekno's death sparks a new relationship to coltan that repositions the miner into understanding that it is by their blood and sweat that the world is able to communicate to each other and it is corporations such as *Google* who stand as the main entry point of knowledge[88] that cloak them in anonymity, especially their exploitation as a means to cut costs (*Neptune Frost* 2022). In death, Tekno is neither cut off from the world of the living nor is he dead to the uses of technology. Tekno simply transitions into the spiritual realm and becomes a living ancestor who imparts the necessary guidance and knowledge to the living miners whose circumstances have not changed. It is through the dreams of Matalusa and the revolt miners that the now ancestral Tekno continues

[88] As of March 2023, *Google* has 85.53% market share making it the most frequently used search engine worldwide (Bunchi 2023).

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to have a dynamic influence in the world of the living, including Matalusa's use of digital technology when he finally meets and connects with The Motherboard.

The mysterious figure of Potolo is another spirit presence in the world of the living. Potolo appears in the electronic dreams of Matalusa and Neptune dressed in cosmic yet African traditional clothing, and having attached to himself wire wheels that appear in neon and white colours. Often appearing in decontextualised yet digitised settings, Potolo is not witnessed to transition from the physical realm to the spirit realm but he is recognised as a spirit being nonetheless. He is a griot whose stories and poetry holds ancient knowledge that seem to come from deep time.[89] For instance, in a dream experienced by Neptune while journeying to the digital hilltop, he meets Potolo who sings of the origin of human kind – the predestined love between man and woman. In the dream, Neptune meets himself, his female manifestation, and Matalusa before his transition into a woman and even meets Matalusa in the physical world. While remaining largely cryptic, Potolo sets open a path that Matalusa and Neptune are to follow. Also appearing to Matalusa in a dream, Potolo encourages Matalusa to inquire about the history of colonial injustices against Africans by giving him a key commanding: hack. Matalusa is tasked to hack the various ways that the global economy is still modelled after the system of African slavery, and it is Africans that continue to suffer the worst of its consequences; especially the African miner. Not knowing the specifics, Potolo guides him towards what he will later be able to achieve with The Motherboard.

In this world of digital technology, the past is emphasised to be the key to holistically understanding the present times. Walter Benjamin developed a philosophy of the importance of history and remembrance. Firstly, he shatters the notion that history culminates into a linear progression focused more on what is to be rather than what was. For Benjamin, this understanding of history justifies the injustices afflicted against the oppressed as a "natural part of progress to a better and more enlightened future (Beiner 1984:425). For Benjamin, it is integral that we keep faith with the past and do not turn our backs to it if we seek to change it (Handelman 1991). Holding a curious belief in changing oppressive history, Benjamin breaks

[89] In the African concept of time, time does not mark events but events mark time. According to Mbiti, deep time or macro-time is referred to as the Swahili term, *zamani*: time in terms of the past, present, and future events in one; it is the final storehouse of all events that cannot be known by the living (Mbiti 1990).

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from tradition and declares that history is made up of fragmented events that only begin to make sense when we redeem it through constantly relating it to the present times. The more obvious reason for this is that history can never be fully historicised as it is through history that we interpret the present times, and it is also through the present that we give history meaning (Khatib 2017). Another powerful breakthrough that potentially happens when we keep faith with the past is that history can begin to be retold from the voices of those oppressed who were left out of it (Khatib 2017). When we do this, we can know what is the most appropriate action that can be taken in the present moment that can change the *meaning* of the past (Handelman 1991). Even though the oppressed deceased cannot literally be vindicated, the living who continue to face the consequences of the past can re-think, re-shape, add, and transform its meanings over time.

For Benjamin, it is the Last Angel of History[90] who has the mammoth task of safeguarding remembrance in order to gather history's fragments into a whole. With his gaze directed towards the past,[91] the Last Angel of History prefers to "tarry at the ruins of the past in order to 'awaken the dead' to make whole what has been shattered" (Beiner 1984:424). I argue that Tekno and Potolo (to a greater extent), who both give voice to historical consciousness in the film, play the role of the Last Angel of History. Potolo's face is directed towards the past when he instructs Matalusa to hack into history. In doing so, Potolo gathers the fragments of colonial history to form a cohesive picture of the present-day injustices that are faced by the local miners. Taking the form of an ancestral spirit, Tekno appears in the dreams of the miners and also encourages them to think outside of colonial purviews that censor the elevational ways that coltan can be used by miners whose hearts are also in the stone. In other words, while they are all situated in a supposed post-colonial period and setting, the subjugation, exploitation, and oppression of the African miners, as systemized by The Authority, indicates that history did not in fact progress. History simply re-presents itself using new mutations: neo-slavery

[90]Handelman writes, Walter Benjamin "prefaces his description of the angel of history with an excerpt from a poem that his friend Gershom Scholem had written as a birthday present for Benjamin in 1921, entitled *Greetings from Angelus*. The poem was about a Paul Klee painting, *Angelus Novus*, that Benjamin had purchased" (1991:344).
[91] "A Klee painting named "Angelus Novus" shows an angel looking as though he is about to move away from something he is fixedly contemplating. His eyes are staring, his mouth is open, his wings are spread. This is how one pictures the angel of history. His face is turned toward the past. Where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet. The angel would like to stay, awaken the dead, and make whole what has been smashed" (Benjamin in Handelman 1991:344)

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through the miner and neo-colonialism through the corrupt state's socio-political and economic structures that mimic capitalist systems.

Unlike Africafuturism, Benjamin does not give much credence to the future in his philosophy, but what stands in common is a shared emphasis on the importance of the past. For Afrofuturism, unearthing and dissecting the pre-colonial African past, as told by Africans, will enable its re-envisioning thereby giving voice to the historically oppressed. However, for Afrofuturism, it does not end there as Africans are also given the flexibility to project their own stories and self-representations into the future (Womack 2013:13). Rather than to repeat oppression, Afrofuturism with the assistance of technology, uses the imagination to create worlds where blackness in particular is not associated with the fatalism, powerlessness, or even the absence expected of those under oppressive systems. Afrofuturism also uses imagination to resist black victimisation at the hands of technology and scientific experimentation (Womack 2013) by making black individuals the creators, conductors, and conduits through which technology can liberate the continuation of oppressive histories. *Neptune Frost* (2022) highlights how the past and its guardian angels, alongside future (digital) technologies, can generate befitting socio-political critiques.

4.6 Frost Byte: Reaching the Digital Mountain Top

Potolo's appearance before Matalusa meets him at a point of crisis. Varvarousis (2019:494) defines crisis as a period of aberration that disrupts the linearity and rationality of progress; in other words, the disruption of expectation. The disruption of reason and expectation produces a powerful turning point, or a critical phase, under which an irrevocable decision must be made. The death of Tekno produces a disruption in Matalusa's world that pushes him towards a turning point, and the irrevocable decision made by Matalusa is to escape from the mine. Crisis grows into a state of productivity for Matalusa as Potolo easily ushers him into to the next part of his journey – to hack. With this instruction, Matalusa continues on what feels like another lengthy journey, finally arriving at an isolated and strange site – a digital hilltop.

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The vacant camp, at first, seems to be set in a space isolated from linear time. The hilltop is strewn with rusted and incomplete futuristic technologies that are made up of dated and familiar technologies like the 'hunchback' personal computers made popular in the 1980's. The simultaneity of the past, present, and future is further confirmed when one of the characters who seems to have been there a while longer, Memory, refers to the function of the bird she holds and strokes. In the film, Frost is seen to fly between the various story worlds and times adding to which, Frost is also able to fly through portals where "pain is the only passport"; leading audiences to the beginning of the film where Neptune explains how the pains of the war had forced them into what feels like another dimension "where the worst had already happened" (a post-apocalyptic phase referred to in Science Fictional terms as the "Armageddon Affect").[92] Dressed in African and futuristic regalia, Memory is not alone in the camp. Audiences meet Elohel – a tech genius and inventor. Elohel is a composite of flesh and prosthesis as the hand dismembered during the war is replaced with pieces of scrap copper metal held together by an intricate arrangement of wires that she seemingly made herself. Elohel explains to Matalusa that her technological inventions cannot function well because the camp lacks electricity and connection to the internet (named *i-fi* in the film) software which The Authority has eliminated access to, even in the city centre.

While seemingly occurring in the present, with stagnated elements of the past, and expectations for the return of *i-fi* in the future, the digital hilltop is an ambiguous space where Matalusa, Elohel, Memory and Frost are "neither here nor there" (Wels et al. 2011:1). Additionally, Elohel's presence in the camp causes a further disruption of expectations as the technology that extends her hand further removes her from the rational confines and expectations of what it looks like to be 'fully' human. Marked as a liminal space due to its ambiguity and contradiction, the digital hilltop exists on physical, mental, and social dimensions (Arvanitis et al. 2019:136). The digital hilltop is a physical camp made up of material things, and it is also conceptual space as upon entering its physical structure the hilltop enables the inconceivable, unknown, and never-before-experienced to emerge. Finally, on the social dimension, it is a lived space where audiences witness the day-to-day living and relationships of those settled on the camp. Most

[92] Being alien and alienated, during the Transatlantic slave trade Africans were pulled from a familiar world into a new world with foreign systems, thinking, and worldviews. Kidnapped Africans were therefore already at the end of the world (as they knew it); what van Veen (2015) names "the Armageddon effect".

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importantly, the digital hilltop is a liminal space because transition takes place (Wels et al. 2011).

Those who enter the camp begin by receiving an instruction by the mystical figure Potolo, or from knowledge passed down from the deceased Tekno. After making a lengthy journey to the hilltop, upon their arrival they must first cross an invisible yet physical, as well as mental, threshold. Those who cross the threshold not only enter a new territory, but they also reach a distinctive point where the past is no longer, the present is 'not yet' and the future is indeterminable. Once the miners and Neptune cross through the invisible threshold they are all metamorphosised anew. Neptune who was once positioned as an oddity due to their intersex nature emerges as the central unit through which all other components can connect and gain energy – The Motherboard. Tekno, Matalusa, and the other revolt miners who were once the perpetual victims of an unjust neo-colonial system, are now the romantic heroes whose sacrifice and proletariat power lead and mobilise the digital revolution that is about to ensue on the hilltop. Crossing the threshold inserts them into a space where ambiguity and contradiction can mutually co-exist; where "mutation, reflection, translation, and negotiation" can occur. The transitory space that is entered when Matalusa, Memory, Elohel, Neptune, and the miners cross into the digital hilltop can therefore be characterised as a productive space because "new possibilities and new forms of cultural meaning" and representations are produced (Arvanitis, Yelland, & Kiprianosa 2018: 135). In the digital hilltop, neo-colonial indebtedness to colonial borderlines that continue to define normativity, rationalism, hierarchy, and capitalism are blurred, twisted, reversed, and are ultimately challenged.

4.7 Matalusa Kingdom

The arrival of the other revolt miners on the digital hilltop reunites Matalusa with the brothers he left behind. The remaining miners who were moved by Tekno's death followed Matalusa in escaping the mine after dreaming of Tekno guiding them to Matalusa's location. Now all together, they celebrate Tekno for his superior "tekno-colour" and "tekno-vision" (*Neptune Frost* 2022 00:54:03) that built up deep insight into the rock they were mining. It was Tekno's teachings that validated not only the importance of coltan, but also the importance of the miner; a message that electrified the miners to power. Electrified himself, Matalusa breaks out in a

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powerful shout of pride and song: "THE MINER IS EVERYTHING…THE MINER IS THE POWER SOURCE… ALONE BUT NOT ALONE… MINING IS MUSIC!" (*Neptune Frost* 2022 00:54:43) while the other miners join him in repeated shouts timed between each statement: "**DIG**!". The movements made by the miners as they mimic the act of shovelling the ground into the air while also stomping their feet, creates a kinetic force field of energy that has everyone on the hilltop powered up. Matalusa becomes the rising revolution's ultimate leader further marking the evolution of the hilltop into what Elohel renames *Matalusa Kingdom*.

Running away from an attempted rape, Neptune makes their way to the digital hilltop. Meeting the invisible threshold, Neptune reaches out their hand and moves their body through the invisible barrier. Immediately, Neptune's attire and appeal changes as they begin to glimmer with metallic shine and patterned wiring. Neptune now embodies the name given to them by Binya during Neptune's transition from male to an intersex female – *The Motherboard*. The Motherboard's presence causes immediate shockwaves of electric currents that power Matalusa Kingdom and its various digital and technological circuitries including access to the *i-fi*. The Motherboard is literally the missing source of power that revives the once deadened pieces of futuristic technologies to come to life, and is also the missing connection point for Matalusa whose heart is now fully immersed in the digital revolution.

With almost immediate effect, The Motherboard and Matalusa form a cosmic love-connection that causes an "influx of information code, streams of light, [and] virtual lanes of traffic [to become] more legible data" (*Neptune Frost* 2022 01:01:24) to course through Motherboard's body thus bringing them both to a higher consciousness. In this moment, the meeting of their human flesh embodies the beginning of a global digital insurrection that had to begin with love. Now unstripped, The Motherboard's connective force is perceptive to Matalusa's true identity. Matalusa's decoded name is made up of the three most important words that will form the combination that hacks into the state authority's, as well as the multifarious global systems', 'metallic' injustice: *Martyr – Loser – King*. While connected to The Motherboard, Matalusa is powerful enough to break every encrypted device, data, and code that continues to support global systems that are "oppressive, intrusive, unjust, designed to impede communication" and limit freedom (Lievrouw 2018; Meikle 2018). The Motherboard connects the malicious

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software, *Martyr-Loser-King*, to the global network in order to retrieve freedom to access information, freedom from repressive social norms, and resistance against corporate and economic injustice (Lievrouw 2018:67); in other words, to *hack*.

Matalusa fulfils the purpose given to him by Potolo. Like a hacker, Matalusa uses digital technology as a means to dissent, resist, and critique society's status quo. *Matryr-Loser-King* is the result of manipulating and exploiting system features and flaws to deliberately commit internet disobedience with the sole purpose of serving the common good (Lievrouw 2018). *Martyr-Loser-King* breaches, attacks, and divulges by leaking caches of data containing highly classified information; doxing the private information of those whose nefarious activities have been protected by digital anonymity; and flooding servers with internet traffic causing common online services such as internet banking and online consumer sites to crash (a phenomenon called Distributed Denial-of-Service). Labelled as a virus by those whose private interests are being attacked, *Matryr-Loser-King* becomes criminalised by the Western media as an ominous digital presence that works against the global economy and above all, global security. However, to those who are being impeded by global systems and state authorities, *Martyr-Loser-King* is a necessary intervention using computing tools and techniques to target otherwise normalised political and social issues (Kavada 2018:109)

Martyr-Loser-King breaks the internet by collecting billions of followers who actively watch and follow the strategies deployed in Matalusa Kingdom against global authorities. In this sense, *Martyr-Loser-King* is a "repertoire of contention" as it ingeniously produces digital tactics and strategies that connect people across the world to a movement of resistance (Tilly in Meikle 2018:3). Using digital connecting lines, Matalusa Kingdom gathers collective intelligence, generates alternative knowledges and creates connective action (Kavada 2018:110) by galvanising networked online crowds to "move a limb or lift a middle finger" (*Neptune Frost* 2021 01:18:28) to society's onerous status quo. Such "systems of shared awareness" (Dolata & Shrape in Kavada 2018:111), empower users, decentralise control, and exceed the limitations imposed by a lack of transparency and denial of access to technology (Von Busch & Palmås 2006). The shared awareness created by *Matyr-Loser-King* also takes a stance against the exploitation and suppression of truth committed by digital conglomerates such as *Google*. In one of the film's musical sets, *Fuck Mr Google* (*Neptune Frost* 2022

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01:17:07 – 01:19:03), Matalusa critiques *Google*'s liberal appearance as the vanguard of open and free knowledge by going beyond superficial copy and paste commands. By hacking, Matalusa exposes how search engines such as *Google* disseminate "incivility, racism, xenophobia, misogyny, and violence in the name of "protecting" the freedom of speech and property rights" (Brock 2020:7). Additionally, they also serve the interests of global capital hence how in the film, The Authority is allowed to dehumanise miners without the world knowing. Through *Martyr-Loser-King*, Matalusa manages to break into the flows of the internet's channels, but not to block them, as he also uses its digital forms of communication to create a system of shared awareness. Rather, what Matalusa does is *reconnect* the highways in order to *break control* from default internet settings; to ultimately reconfigure the alternate interests the internet can serve.

In the end, *Martyr-Loser-King* hacks to bring to the surface the hidden realities of global digital superpowers like *Google*; how in order for *Google* to produce its own technologies and to sustain other technologies that it has monopolised, even as the source of "free" information, *Google* further hides stories of its own exploitation. Conglomerates like *Google* exploit East African coltan miners for cheap labour and they also mindlessly dump unwanted computer parts in marginalised areas of East Africa therefore producing toxic e-waste dumping sites (Scott 2022). Perhaps, before its ingenious recreation into Matalusa Kingdom, the digital hilltop itself was such an example of an e-waste dumping site.

4.8 The Miner as Martyr, Loser & King

Initially denying himself as King when hailed by Elohel, Matalusa re-asserts himself as the socially, economically, and politically marginalised and overlooked "miner of coltan" (*Neptune Frost* 2022 01:00:40). Ultimately in the film, Matalusa is positioned as both; both Loser and King. Director, Saul Williams, describes the origin of Matalusa's name, as well as the name of hacker virus *Matyr-Loser-King*, to be the French pronunciation of historic Civil Rights leader Dr Martin Luther King Jnr. Like King Jnr, the proletariat miner's dream of liberation and purpose to pursue it push him to hack into normative, but oppressive, ways of thinking and living. Hacking itself is a manner in which back doors are sought out and created thus piercing through systems and main pathways that would otherwise deny access of entry

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(Lievrouw 2018:70). However, with the help of ancestral guidance and knowledge given to him by Tekno and Potolo, Matalusa *is* the alternative pathway that corrupts the powerful in order to entitle the powerless. Matalusa's symbolic mutation into *Martyr-Loser-King* upon his connection to The Motherboard, steers the African miners (and all others suffering the consequences of neo-colonial governance and control) to find belonging that exists outside the oppressive confines and expectations of life.

The death of Tekno, on the other hand, represents the idea of the miner as *martyr*. Although mining for coltan, Tekno rejected the changed relationship to the land brought about by industrial capital mining. As a result, Tekno suffered death for his spiritual beliefs surrounding the true spiritual power of coltan in a setting where power was being enforced as *capital*. The fall of Tekno's body onto the coltan-filled ground that he revered turned his unconscionable killing by The Authority into an important sacrifice for the digital revolution to take flight. Russel Viljoen (1997:65-66) notes that in African slaughtering there is a difference between killing an animal and sacrificing it. Killing an animal is associated with violence and aggression, whereas sacrifice more aptly applies to African religion's intentions to offer a gift to the ancestors thereby honouring them. Upon offering such a sacrifice, allowance is granted by those sacrificing to the ancestors who can now open up more intimate lines of communication, therefore enlivening worldly interaction with the spiritual world.

Although the preceding definition and processes of sacrifice are not to be understood as being complimentary to the sacrificing of a human person, the spillage of Tekno's blood and his death still honours those that go before him – whose spiritual practices he himself preserved. Tekno's death also opens the lines of communication between the material world and the spiritual realm. Matalusa, Neptune and the other individuals who gather at Matalusa Kingdom dream of Tekno, Potolo or Binya – the guardian figures of the spiritual realm who guide them to the Kingdom. Tekno and Matalusa may have begun as the losers of the game of life (to the extent that American digital houses like *Apple* can name their country a "bad deal" (*Neptune Frost* 2022, 01:18:16)), but as both learn to escape (the one through biological death and the other through digital and psychological liberation), the miners move from loser to the martyr, and the eventual Kings.

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4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a case for the cultural significance of digital technology within African contexts by analysing the embodiment of technology and software as 'black'. The film *Neptune Frost* (2022) allows audiences to traverse assumptions about the digital arena that make it an exclusively Eurocentric one. The Africanfuturist detailing in the film places African landscapes, issues, and spirituality at the centre of African interaction with the digital thus affirming that digital software and technology can, and in fact *must*, be created with the interests of Africans in mind. It is when technology is inconsiderate of black individuals as users and generators of technology that gross exploitation against the humanity of Africans is easily committed. *Neptune Frost* (2022) directly targets digital tech conglomerates like *Apple* and *Google* for abusing the mining of coltan in countries such as Rwanda and DRC by stripping the land of its resources without rehabilitating the environment, devaluing the miner by encouraging practices of slavery, and co-opting a neo-colonial government that is defenceless against capitalist greed.

The miners and other subjugated figures in *Neptune Frost* (2022) are led by Matalusa and Neptune to cause a digital revolution in the form of a rogue and dissenting virus named *Martyr-Loser-King*. Martyr-Loser-King becomes the example of how digital software can be used to serve the interests of Africans in mind by fighting against capitalist systems that continue to reduce their lives to naught. The formulation of *Martyr-Loser-King* itself is also a form of digital disruption as African epistemology, African ancestral spirituality, and African aesthetics and storytelling, albeit futuristic, were used intentionally in deciphering what Black software would, or should, be inclusive of. As the embodiment of a virus, the African miner through Tekno and Matalusa is also identified as a martyr – a person who loses their life for their beliefs (as exhibited by Tekno); a loser – as identified by the subjugated position of the miner in a postcolonial, modern world; and king – the eventual victor in the fight against global exploitation of every kind.

The introduction of Neptune as The Motherboard also functions to disrupt the many forms of binary thinking that plague the universalised notions of 'normative'. Such ideas regarding normative are used to discipline the body, creating arbitrary, but nonetheless exercised,

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boundaries that evaluate bodies and sexualities as ‘normal’ and ‘abnormal’. The fact that the key to breaking down capitalist systems globally is through the body of a black intersex female changes the game of expectations. Firstly, the user and generator of digital software and technologies is not the so-called privileged ‘white male user’, but a victim of digital technology itself. Secondly, the user and generator fit enough to hack the system can only be a victim of the system itself as the most marginalised in our societies are the ones who know its imperfections the best (Mohanty 2003).

Neptune therefore is fittingly The Motherboard who is able to connect all parts of the system that may not make sense apart; fitting enough to carry and disseminate codes of information that are hidden in plain sight and difficult to decipher under Western hardware, software, and eyes. Neptune in this sense, can also be considered a hack into normativity by directly playing against it. Using an Africanfuturist aesthetic and socio-political awareness, *Neptune Frost* (2022) delves deeper into the relationship between the African miner, technology, and this time the digital, in figuring out alternative pathways to liberation that do not necessarily escape reality in as much as to broaden it. Through hacking the normative put forward by colonial capitalism and neo-liberalism, not only in the digital sense, one can move from “no longer accepting the things I cannot change [but]… changing the things [one] cannot accept” (Davis in Hattenstone 2022).

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CHAPTER FIVE: UNDER MINED BODIES – MINING, BLACKNESS & DIGITAL OPPRESSIONS IN THE ART WORK OF EDDY KAMUANGA ILUNGA

5.1 Introduction

Using Afrofuturism as an aesthetic locus, Congolese artist, Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, uses the visual to cue a discussion on the link between economic exploitation and (inner) conflict in Africa. By covering the black figures in his artwork with networking wiring resembling that of microchips typically found in computer hard drives, Ilunga brings his critique closer to home. Ilunga uses the bodies of black human figures in his work to express the exploitative nature of coltan mining in the DRC. The bodies of the black figures found in Ilunga's work reveal that manner in which coltan is an external resource that ultimately holds internal human consequences.

This chapter discusses how the mining of coltan is necessarily performed by the black bodies of men and women miners who are made vulnerable to the tremulous shifts in the "economic, political and social identity of the DRC" since the onset of their colonialism (Bahadur 2020). I argue that Ilunga's images create a clear connection between the DRC, colonial history, global modernity as well as the afflictions of unrestrained capitalism upon the bodies and identities of the Congolese. By enmeshing the black human body in computer and mobile device wiring, Ilunga creates a futuristic scene wherein technology and Africa, as well as Africans, are not alienated from one another. In fact, as the black-bodied figures are strewn with wiring that resembles that of a microchip, they become one in the same therefore positing the possibility of an inherent inseparability.

In examining Ilunga's work, the ASM industry in Africa is placed under the scope as an industry that perpetuates modern forms of African slavery adversely affecting black men, women, and children. Within global capitalism, ASM suffers the gross exploitation of its miners and mining environments through exposure to harsh working conditions, paltry payment, systems of hierarchy and control that reward the oppression of workers (women being the most oppressed), as well the pillaging of natural and home environments surrounding the mines. Such practices are not new to African countries that have been colonised. The DRC

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itself has a deep history of hidden exploitation by the Belgian colony who seized the country for its resources further enslaving many Congolese who were treated as disposable objects. This chapter elaborates on this history with the aim to illustrate how Ilunga's direct relation between the black body and technology is rooted in a history where the black body was a tool – a piece of technology – used to reach human ends (the European colony).

Lastly, the discussion between the black body, technology, and its history are placed within speculative contexts where Ilunga's works become an interlocutor with black speculative thinkers who postulate how the black body is an inherently trans/posthuman entity. The idea of the black body being a trans/posthuman body is derived from African slave history. The DRC's slave history, much like other African countries, was justified due to a damning perception of Africans' inherent lack of humanity. Sadly, there are instances where black communities across the world are still fighting to be recognised as human (a case in point being the recent uprising in defiance of police brutality committed against black bodies in the *#BlackLivesMatter* Movement) under white supremacist systems. If this is the case, black liberation from the negativity bias that leads to racial discrimination and lack of opportunity would be most effectively secured once the body is abandoned. Ilunga's work may not directly talk back to this, but it does not need to for this discussion to be relevant. The powerful ability of the digitised bodies in Ilunga's work to act as surrogates for contemplating the real captive bodies create a space wherein "compassionate resuscitation" (Copeland 2013) of the past can occur. Such resuscitations have the ability to push us toward seriously considering what must take place now for the black body and black identity not to be effaced, and to secure belonging well in the future.

5.2 Undermined: The Work of Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga and Coltan Mining in Africa

Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga is a Belgium-based, emerging Congolese contemporary artist whose large-scale paintings fuse together technology, the human body, materials and objects that speak back to Congolese history and ritual. When he was younger, Ilunga held a fascination for technology particularly those technologies used in the everyday like radio, television, the internet, and video games. Additionally, being exposed to his sister's fashion accessories and colourful fabrics, Ilunga's penchant for design and painting created an aesthetic expression that

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would fuse all of his childhood influences. Continuing into his adult career as an artist, Ilunga's paintings include a signature repetition of bodies made up of circuit wiring as flesh. His incorporation of networked bodies took place after an incident which caused his iPhone to break open, piquing an interest in the phone's circuit composition which led Ilunga to discover the origins of its materials. Upon discovering that coltan and tantalum, the core elements that made up his device, are mostly produced in the DRC, Ilunga felt further emboldened to trace the network of wires onto the bodies of his black figures.

As a highly valuable and sought-after precious metal, coltan (extracted from tantalum and niobium) is a rare metal found in contemporary and widely used high performing technology such as laptops, digital cameras, and mobile phones (Sutherland 2011; Moran et al. 2015). Coltan is also used in the manufacturing of vital medical devices such as pacemakers, hearing aids, and prosthetics; it is the conduit of navigational systems such as Global Positioning Systems (GPS) and; it is a vital element in the creation of aerospace engines. Due to its high versality and malleability, coltan is globally a highly desirable metal.[93] However, with little strong governmental regulation and intervention in the DRC, coltan mining has been appropriated and controlled by a variety of competing armies, militia, and war lords who in turn produce civil unrest by forcefully removing locals from territories and exploiting local men, women, and children to work on the mines under gross working conditions for pitiful pay[94] (Sutherland 2011:5). Coltan mining has been responsible for many of the DRC's social ills, violent bouts over mining ownership, child-labour practices and environmental degradation[95] (Moran et al. 2014:358).

Since 2009 the Great Lakes region, which includes the DRC and Rwanda, have been the largest producer of coltan[96] (Schütte & Naher 2020:1). However, most coltan mining is done using

[93] The European Union and the United States classify tantalum as a critical raw material due to its technological relevance and the risks at hand if supply disruptions are to take place (Schütte & Naher 2020:1).
[94] Interestingly, in the year 2000 the demand for coltan rose by tenfold rising from \$30 per pound to a \$300 price in value. However, coltan miners in the DRC got paid less than the legal minimum wage of \$4.20/day for their labour – illegal waging that still continues presently (Sutherland 2011; Moran *et al* 2014: 358; Schütte & Naher 2020:8).
[95] Moran et al (2014:358) state that UN reports have identified the killing of thousands of natural habitats such as elephants and gorillas used as bush meat for mining camps.
[96] Specifically, from 2013 to 2018, production in the region accounted for about half of global tantalum mine output (Schütte & Naher 2020)

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hazardous means of extraction. As explained in the previous chapter, coltan is mined artisanally, and because it is largely an informal sector, the ASM remains an unregulated practice. The ASM industry therefore problematically gets away with employing unfair and unsafe labour practices that expose men, women, and children to precarious conditions. According to Jenkins (2014), ASM is often performed in hazardous environments which expose ASM miners, who have little safety awareness, to health risk dangers.

Unfortunately, women are the most adversely affected. The subaltern status, exploitation, and oppression experienced by women in the mining is intersectional: oppression not only comes in the form of neo-colonial practices and ways of thinking, but also in the form of patriarchal domination. As previously discussed, these harmful ideologies almost always play themselves out on aspects associated with humanness, which in this case are race and gender. Race and gender are weaponised to create systems of hierarchisation that position the bodies of black women as the worthy sites of male violence, exclusion, and weakening. The body has proved to be a more harmful thing for black women miners who are reduced to their parts when dividing labour, and when navigating a sexist and misogynist mining work culture. Technology, not matter how low-end, has also not done much to help women miners. Due to patriarchal mining cultures, black women are driven even further away from accessing and using mining technology framed to be too "intimidating" for women to master (Lahiri-Dutt 2011b). Mining, and its technology, has become "heavily attributed with masculinity" thereby leaving little to no room for the potentiality of mining to be conceived as a female workspace, especially when we look at the participation of African women in the ASM[97] (Lahiri-Dutt 2012:194).

Furthermore, women rarely own the land on which they mine, rarely own the equipment, and are rarely involved in mineral dealing where there are opportunities to receive higher wages; these are roles are still mostly reserved for men (Jenkins 2014). In the ASM, women are also

[97] Pertinent to note about the ASM is the number of women who participate in the extraction process of precious minerals. The participation of South African women in the LSM industry places them in the minority making up about 12% of the total workforce. The ASM industry, on the other hand, employs a significantly higher number of women making up about one-third of the ASM industry globally (Jenkins 2014:3). In some parts of the developing world, the participation of women in the ASM sector is equal to, if not greater than, that of men. For example, in Papua New Guinea, women make up 75% of the sector while in African countries like Mali and Zimbabwe, women make up about 50%. Also see van Dyke, & Dallmann (2013).

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vulnerable to the unfair treatment and violence inflicted by men involved in the ASM as well as their community environments.[98] The men, who are usually husbands or brothers, control all the monies generated by the women and children thus leaving them economically dependent.[99] Male violation can even go as far as forcing women into having unprotected sex as well as denying women land access and their rights to land ownership (Perks 2011; Jenkins 2014; Lahiri-Dutt 2011a). At a far worse rate than men, women do not recognise the importance of their own involvement in the ASM and are thus more susceptible to the disempowering choices made by men who associate their masculinity with power and physical strength rather than with protection and provision. In addition to being disempowered based on their gender, women miners in the developing world are more vulnerable to mining dangers such as exposure to dangerous processing chemicals and occupational health diseases.[100]

However, as stated by Lahiri-Dutt (2011a:4), "gender is often nowhere, when it is believed to be everywhere". While gender has become a mainstream topic, it is only so in theory. Where it truly matters, gender equality is not effectively being institutionalised through a strict adherence to gender-sensitive practices and norms that can be found in official policy structures, processes, and environments. Sadly, manual forms of mineral processing performed by women are still marked by their low levels of protection, environmental, health, and safety awareness. Furthermore, it is not only the LSM, but also the ASM that falls short of disrupting the cultures, structures, and practices that protect toxic masculinity thus keeping women vulnerable, insecure, unsafe, and in the minority. Therefore, mining underground continues to be a difficult experience for women who are not given the structural and environmental support required to perform tasks without being defenceless (MCSA 2020)

[98] According to Sutherland (2011:10), the UN has reported human rights abuses inflicted by military and rebel groups in coltan mines located in the DRC. Coltan miners and civilians who have tried to resist the theft of their natural resources, or who "did not collaborate with those in power, were subjected to attacks. Entire villages were displaced to make way for mineral or timber exploitation and armed groups engaged in massacres, sexual violence and cruel and inhuman treatment in the process. They also attacked and burned villages in order to seize coltan that had been mined artisanally by the residents."
[99] Often involved in ASM by way of family labour, men who work underground use the employment of wives, youth and children to manually process the underground minerals, and to transport needed items such tools and water (Jenkins 2014).
[100] Coltan is a toxic mineral and has been shown to be a potential carcinogen. Moreover, exposure to dust during mining processes has also been proved to be a strong determinant of decreased lung function as well as the respiratory malfunctions exhibited in coltan miners (Leon-Kabamba et al. 2018)

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With this in mind, Ilunga's work takes on a deeper meaning as he uses Africanfuturism to critique the current state of affairs. His work acts as social commentary on the crucial issues of mineral abuse by Western and rising Eastern high-tech industries who exploit the African poor and natural environments without fear of sanction. Ilunga further highlights in his painting how the exploitative relationship to Africa, specifically the DRC, is historical. In making vibrant use of traditional Congolese materials to clothe and cover the figures in his paintings, the viewer is better able to understand how the past cannot be erased. By acting as a mantle to contemporary, if not futuristic bodies and settings, the past is not vulnerable to the passing and fading of time and memory. When placed together with objects that trace back to DRC's colonial routes/roots, the past is something that is materialised, worn, and is therefore made alive to the present moment. The past is also up for contemplation of the future. As Ilunga creates an aesthetic interplay between past, present, and future, he also navigates the material traces of colonial history have the power to no longer just clothe, but hold the black figures in his paintings, captive. The dehumanising conditions of miners in the ASM match the dehumanising conditions of slaves under the Congo Free State.

5.3 Bodies Devoid of Humanity: The Case of Congo

In addition to its aesthetic focus, Africanfuturism embeds within its critical and theoretical framework an awareness that modernity, science, and technology, too, have played an integral role in shaping modern-day African identities in as much as they have shaped social, political, and economic history in the Global North. Although there is little information provided about the direct contributions made by Africans to technological invention, as mentioned in previous chapters, one of the most vital technologies of modernity was the body of the enslaved African.[101] Given that the black body was itself treated as a tool to achieve human ends (technology), then according to Africanfuturism, the exposition of Africa within the arenas of science and technology has in fact, always been befitting – more so than placing the black body under the category of 'human'. The term and categorisation of 'human' has historically been used to mark differentiation and establish hierarchy. During the Enlightenment, Western

[101] It has been uncovered that much of the technology produced during the eighteenth and nineteenth century was done from the labour of the enslaved. According to Gumstead (2006:376), slaves were involved in previously unknown phases of the southern economy of the USA: they didn't just pick the cotton but also built the machines that processed the staple.

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ontological thinking weaponised the term 'human' against African bodies whom were not considered to be 'human'. The weaponisation of human against the black body came about during the invention of race when it was initially used as a metric of how much closer a human body is to animality.

Scientific racism then erroneously racialised the human species according to a hierarchy of physical differences. Africans, therefore, were considered to be completely devoid of any humanity[102] and this was comparatively placed to the Western white-skinned male who considered himself to be the centre of humanity; the top of the hierarchy and therefore the very definition of 'Human' (Hartigan Jr 1997:495-496). In the DRC, colonialism practiced similar ideologies and rhetoric. In 1885, the United States and European powers would acknowledge the Kingdom of Kongo as King Leopold II's personal colony renaming it *État Indépendant du Congo* (Congo Free State); this following a few years of exploration by Leopold's commissioned explorer Henry Morton Stanley.[103] While advertising the Congo to be an example of European humanitarianism,[104] the arrival of the Belgians built an economic system that was shaped by extractive and monopolistic capitalism as well as ruthless violence (Frankema & Buelens 2013:24). King Leopold II sought to extract the largest possible amount of resources at the lowest possible cost thus leading to the gross exploitation of "human, animal and plant life in Congo" (Stanard 2011:30). Under Leopold's regime, racism became one of the ways in which to justify and legalise the savage exploitation of the Congolese.

Building a pro-colonial agenda, Leopold II exhibited the Congolese at the World Fairs that he would host and for the 1894 *Wereldtentoonstelling*, Leopold II reconstructed a Congolese

[102] Today, scientific racism against non-white bodies has been debunked as an ideologically biased pseudo-science. Firstly, as de Robillard (2018) argues, the link between 'animal' and 'black' has no essence. Rather, it was a work of "co-production" meaning the more ideas circulated about animality, the more these influenced ideas about blackness and vice-versa. Blackness could not substitute animality – they are not the one in the same. They are both based on fallacious ideas that were used to further constructed the other. Secondly, in order for slave owners to be entitled to the full and unreserved access to the free and continuous labour of their slaves, African slaves had to be reduced as the property and merchandise of their White Masters. Black animality is what vindicated the removal of slaves' human rights as they would then have no right to be human (Mbembe 2017).
[103] In 1878 when Leopold commissioned Henry Morton Stanley to "explore" the Congolese hinterland and to arrange "treaties" with the locals (Frankema & Buelens 2013:24).
[104] According to Timothy Stapleton (2017), King Leopold II created the International African Association as a front to secure a personal conquest of the vast Congo River basin. Although his goal was to further scientific study, educate, free the natives from slavery, and to create an area of free trade, "his regime in the Congo became one of colonial Africa's most brutal as it ruthlessly extracted rubber and ivory for profit" at the expense of the Congolese.

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village. Bringing with him a few African soldiers, one hundred and forty-four Congolese, cows, mules, and building materials from Congo, Europeans were shown the 'day-to-day' life of the natives in Congo. Put on display and tasked to perform "their normal occupations" (Stanard 2011: 37), the Congolese were further photographed, measured, and judged for the sake of science. Comparatives were also drawn between primitive Congolese as well as civilised Congolese when placing *villages nègres* (negro villages) and *village civilisé* (civilised village) next to one another. The intention to distinguish between the so-called primitive African and civilised was to promote European, specifically Belgian, colonialism as a good thing for Africans and the necessity of its continuance a source of pride and not shame for Europeans who were wary of the conditions of Belgian colonialism in the Congo. Even with this attempt to represent Belgium as a benevolent nation, the Congolese being housed[105] and displayed like animals did not help to create a sense of equality between the African and the European. Early and late Belgian colonialism did not change the belief that the Congolese were considered to be inferior to the European thereby legalising anti-African racism in the colony's governance and policies.

The local Congolese were at the disposal of colonial officers who took liberal action against the Congolese "without restraint in their realms" (Frankema & Buelens 2013:25). Liberally using the coerced labour of the locals, the Congolese would not get paid for twenty-four days of a full month's worth of work that held a high production requirement. Being a resource-rich state, Congo provided the Western hemisphere with copious amounts of rubber, ivory, and copal which in turn provided Belgium with handsome profits as Belgian companies were granted concessions by the King to take over parts of the hinterland,[106] as well as its people, in exchange for paying trade taxes to the King. Additionally, the Congolese laboured through arduous tasks and under difficult conditions, carrying pieces of a steamboat or constructing railway from Matadi to Malebo Pool near the Atlantic coast some four hundred kilometres

[105] At one of King Leopold II's colonial exhibitions located outside the *Palais des Colonies*, seven Congolese died as a result of poor housing and living conditions, although the deaths of individuals brought to Europe for ethnographic exhibits were not unusual at the time (Stanard 2011:38).

[106] King Leopold II gave himself the power to possess any property in the Congo which also meant that land was being appropriated. Furthermore, he made claim of the land's produce which included its valuable resources. The state also did not permit the local population to trade in these goods for their own gain (Frankema & Buelens 2013:25).

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apart (Stapleton 2017); further evidence of the close involvement of Africans in building up the technologies of modernity.

The system of threat grew greater when Leopold II granted permission for Congo to make use of a domestic military force named the *Force Publique*. The *Force Publique* consisted of European officers and nineteen thousand forced African soldiers who were equipped with arms. As an instrument of state terror, the *Force Publique* was at the service and command of colonial officers and intermediaries and together, quickly became known for their brutality, pillaging and unruly behaviour (Frankema & Buelens 2013:26 & Stapleton 2017). If the demanded amount of taxes was not met, the *Force Publique* would be sent to flog, mutilate, kidnap, and execute labourers. In other instances, livestock would be captured, and villages and crops would be burned down all in efforts to threaten labourers to produce at a higher and faster rate, even if this demand was beyond human capacity. As summarised by Stapleton (2017), "the colonial regime's intention… seems to have been focused on extremely ruthless resource extraction" thus resulting in the unscrupulous murder of millions of Congolese.[107]

5.4 Haunted Futures and Ghosts of the Past: Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga and the Oppression of Black Digital Figures

In addition to its aesthetic focus, Africanfuturism embeds within its critical and theoretical framework an awareness that modernity, science, and technology, too, have played an integral role in shaping modern-day African identities. Given that the black body was itself treated as a tool to achieve human ends (technology), then according to Africanfuturism, the exposition of Africa within the arenas of science and technology has in fact, always been befitting – more so than placing the black body under the category of 'human' (as explored in-depth in the previous section). The mining of coltan in this context is necessarily performed by the dehumanised black bodies of men and women miners who are made vulnerable to the tremulous shifts in the "economic, political and social identity of the DRC" since the onset of colonialism (Bahadur 2020).

[107] According to Stapleton (2017), the impact of Leopold's state on parts of Congo may have caused more loss of life than other incidents throughout Africa's colonial history. Although there was no census conducted in the Congo until 1924, some historians have claimed that the death toll amounted to between five and ten million people. The causes of death included violence, hunger, disease, and displacement.

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Ilunga's artwork repeatedly enmeshes the black human body in computer and mobile device wiring. In digitising his figures, the artist creates a futuristic scene wherein technology and Africa, as well as African bodies, are not alienated from one another. Ilunga does this by freely oscillating between the themes of science, (digital) technology, African humanity, and African identity while keeping them visually inseparable. In doing so, Ilunga emphasises how one cannot be contemplated without the other as his speculative renderings of the black body as a digitised robot-like figure are therefore not random outcomes of creativity. Essentially, Ilunga's African-centred images create a clear connection between the DRC, colonial history, global modernity, and the afflictions of unrestrained capitalism upon the bodies and identities of the Congolese.

In addition to this, as audiences meditate upon the black-bodied figures strewn with wiring, a reminder of the cruel conditions that connect these bodies to the computer hardware that they mimic is more likely to occur. Disconcertingly, the more audiences are exposed to Ilunga's repeating figures, the more the African coltan miner and the hardware coltan produces become one in the same. Ilunga therefore makes a strong suggestion: the black body and technology are, and have always been, inherently inseparable – an idea that comfortably fits in with Africanfuturist purviews.

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5.4.1 *Haunted Futures / Ghosts of the Past*

Figure 20: Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, *Repli sur soi*, 2022.
Acrylic and oil on canvas, 200 x 200cm.
(Sotheby's)

Ilunga brings the intertwined reality of past and present to visual consciousness in his artwork. The black figures are often placed between and amongst material objects that are reflective of Congolese history within present-day contexts. In the painting *Repli sur soi* (2022)[108] (Figure 20), Ilunga seats a young girl dressed in Western clothing on an intricately hand-carved wooden and thatch chair; she is stiff and composed. The rush chair in which she is seated, is reminiscent

[108] Directly translated to English as withdrawal; or inward-looking

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of African wooden-carved colonial furnishing. Beside the chair, on the floor, is a single chain brass censer typically used by Catholic churches to heat and disperse a burning blend of frankincense and myrrh. On the left third of the painting is a wooden table covered by a draping of cutwork embroidered white table cloth; a technique that originated in Italy between the fourteenth and sixteenth century and once the Catholic Church expanded, so did the fashion of cutwork embroidery, finding different replications across Europe and Asia.

Placed on the table is a wooden sculptural piece resembling morphed human features; faces melded together with kneeling legs and arms laced with yellow strip material. The sculpture is representative of African animism[109] which, under colonialism, was seen as evidence of the native's underdevelopment, but recent literature has experienced the revival of animism as an esteemed African epistemology that centralises the importance of respecting the environment and the ecology in world views (Garuba 2012). Close behind the seated young girl is a stack of neatly arranged hole-patterned bricks, creating a perforated sectioning. According to O'Toole (2018), often overshadowed by wood carving, brick-making is one of the oldest technologies produced in Africa.[110] Brick-making in Africa is also one of the ancient and most vital forms of material expression used by the Egyptians, and mastered by the Bakongo of the Kongo Kingdom[111] who developed a reputation for being accomplished brick-makers (O'Toole 2018).

Ilunga puts together all these parts of history into one frame to display the intricate network of events, institutions, tradition, and religion that have come to mark the identity of the DRC and its people. The Catholic Church endorsed the colonialism of Congo by King Leopold II and it still remains a strong religious presence, with Pope John II even making the DRC one of his stops on his *Apostolic Journey to Africa* in May 1980 (*The Holy See* 2023). The inclusion of African animism in the form of the human-figured wooden sculpture not only shows the famous wood carving skills possessed by the people of Africa, but perhaps speaks more directly

[109] African animism is the African belief that some or every object and/or natural phenomena contains a spirit or a soul therefore objects have life and carry a dynamic influence on the environment thus guiding the manner in which Africans interact with the material and natural world (Afolabi 2019).
[110] Sun-dried mudbricks were introduced as a building material for some Egyptian tombs as early as 3400 BCE alongside inscriptions of scenes depicting early brick-making processes of the Egyptians (O'Toole 2018).
[111] The Kongo Kingdom was established along the coastal regions of present-day Angola and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) (O'Toole 2018).

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to the human-form sculptures made by the Mangbetu tribe who hail from the DRC. Placing such animism in relation to Catholicism, Ilunga expresses the ever-present co-existence of Western and African religion that also made up the colonial experience. Ilunga also references the wood and brick work done traditionally by the Congolese via the chair and brick sectioning.

As mentioned earlier, both skills were mastered by the Congolese but they were also employed in the creation of Western forms of furnishing such as the design of the chair and table seen in the painting. The so-called 'African' aesthetic was appropriated in European designs and would later be used by Congolese natives themselves as part of their day-to-day home living. Ilunga reveals the perpetual trap of past, present and, through the electronic composition of the young girl, future. The trap being how the past, present, and future are blurred; the same manner in which the cultural and religious boundaries of the West and Africa cannot be neatly delineated.

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Figure 21: Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, *Contrecarrer, 1897*, 2021.
Archival giclée print (HDX ink) on 100% cotton 300gms archival paper, 42 x 42 cm.
(Sotheby's)

In *Contrecarrer 1897*[112] (Figure 21), audiences are exposed to a similar setting except there are more black-bodied figures that fill the canvas. Resembling a family set up, the father is seated on a rush chair surrounded by his girl- and boy-children. The figure of a woman, who is assumed to be his wife, stands closely behind him. Dressed in Western and traditional clothing, Ilunga brings together two material cultures that share a historical relationship. The colourful

[112] *Contrecarrer* is translated as the action of thwarting someone or thwarting their plans; preventing them from doing or getting what they want.

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material is representative of *Liputa*: a modern style of dress in present-day DRC made up of vibrant and colourful materials. However, the manner in which the material is worn, gathering at the waist or draped over the shoulder, is reminiscent of the traditional manner of dressing worn by the Mangbetu people of Congo (*Brkcloth panel: The Mangbetu People,* 2023). Moreover, the father wears a fedora, accompanied by a formal blazer, both symbolising respect and a man to be respected; a leader at least within his own family. All gathered around the father, the faces of the figures are either hidden, or refuse to stare back at the audiences. Either looking towards the future (looking onward), or staring back at the past (looking downward), each figure does not take the risk of confronting the present moment (which might include looking back at audiences who lock them in the present moment of looking). Also choosing not to look at the other, each figure is burdened with sediments of colonial trauma that causes them an insatiable desire to be somewhere else; to be something different. Ilunga draws audiences closer to this reading by referencing the year 1897 – the year of their thwarting.

Under Leopold II's regime, Congo was deliberately separated from their Belgian colony. Although presenting the colonisation of the Congo as a humanitarian effort to offer the Congolese people freedom from enslavement and a better life, the practice of bringing the Congolese to Belgium to be educated officially ended the year 1897 (Stanard 2011:31). The Congolese who were not permitted to trade their local resources were now severely restricted from traveling to Belgium for a better life. By referencing this year, Ilunga communicates how this past continues to pervade the present, even down to the family unit, therefore highlighting the personal consequences of politics. Unable to face the present realities of an economically and socially thwarted postcolonial situation, the family finds themselves either ruminating in the unfulfilled past or drifting towards a future for which they may not be prepared. Marred by a history dominated by "predatory" colonial and postcolonial states that have "focused on the extraction of valuable resources for personal profit and ignored the welfare and aspirations of the people" (Stapleton 2017), moving forward seems impossible when colonialism has literally materialised into the present situation. The family, it would appear, is haunted by ghosts of the past that still bring struggle and strife in the present moment.

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Figure 22: Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, *Fragile 7*, 2018. Acrylic and oil on canvas, 186 × 197 cm. (Artsy.net)

With the rising exposure of human rights abuses executed under the artisanal mining of coltan in postcolonial DRC, history repeats. The gross exploitation of human, animal, and plant life in the process of extracting precious metals has expanded the control imposed by Belgium and has now moved to other nation-states who house leading tech production companies: the United States of America (USA), Japan and South Korea[113] (Sutherland 2011:8). Securing maximum profits, non-ethical means to keep production costs as low as possible are employed. Even though now participating in the trading of their own resources, global capitalist pursuits that are marked by power and greed, still foster the ill-treatment of Congolese men, women, and children within artisanal mining. The resultant feelings of defeat, helplessness, and exhaustion

[113] Leading tech companies located in the United States are *Kemet* and *Vishay*; *Kyocera Group* in Japan; *Samsung* in South Korea (Sutherland 2011:8)

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are captured in the expressions of the bodies in Ilunga's paintings. Most figures, similar to the painting *Fragile 7* (2018) (Figure 22), are unable to face each other and the audiences, and/or are either bent over or caught in an 'everyday' moment mimicking the colonial human exhibitions of 'Congolese living' constructed by Leopold II.

This aspect of exhibitionism is made more apparent in *Repli sur soi* (Figure 20) where object and subject have very little distinguishing as what is meant to be background, middle ground, and foreground are closely stacked onto one another creating a collage-effect of objects. Ilunga's futuristic tech-enhanced figures are surrounded by material objects that instantly relocate the scene to a colonial past; objects similar to ones put on display alongside the Congolese themselves in Leopold II's *villages nègres* (negro villages) and *village civilisé* (civilised village). The young mechanised girl is caught between the past, the present moment, and a symbolic future as her body takes on a futuristic form. In doing so, Ilunga's work focuses the attention of audiences on present questions, informed by an inhumane past, that surround the (im)possibility of African human existence in the future.

Shedding moderate light on the matter, Ilunga drives a further point home: the Congolese, denied their humanity and subjecthood, became part of colonial material culture and were not considered apart from that. Therefore, Ilunga's artwork purposefully denies the faces of the painted bodies any unique features and expressions to highlight how colonialism continues to "inform the production of black bodies as fungible properties" (Copeland 2015:208). The flat and hollow representation of the human African body in Ilunga's artwork empty it out of its humanity by mechanising its appearance and making one body replaceable for another and therefore, much like the other objects in the frame, objectified as product or commodity. Being aware that the DRC is one of the main producers of coltan globally, when such bodies are surrounded by colonial artefacts, they easily become "surrogates for the captive bodies" of the enslaved artisanal miner. Remembering that the body of miner, man, and woman is "literally and figuratively woven into the texture of everyday life and consumption within capitalist culture" (Copeland 2015:208).

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Ilunga's direct connection between the role of technology in Africa (and vice versa) is created through black figures strewn with digital network wiring, but is always burdened by the knowing that the African body has a legacy of difficulty – even within contemporary environments where technology has seen remarkable advancements. The difficulty that is expressed in Ilunga's work is the difficulty in establishing a solid relation between the African with the term 'human'. In creating hollow and flat representations of the African body covered in network wiring, Ilunga not only connects technology and the black body that helps produce it as inseparable entities, but he also presents a substantive critique against humanity that historically did not include Africans. Ilunga therefore sets viewers up to meditate on the *trans*human nature and capacity of the black African body.

5.5 Devoid of Humanity: Afro-posthumanism & the Black Body

Afrofuturist critical thinker Butler (2019:27) makes the controversial assertion that "black [people] are not human; we have never been", a statement that Ilunga also poses in his work. The human figures, as mentioned earlier, are strewn and laced with electronic wiring and components producing a network of digital patterns. The electronic patterning can be viewed as the skin of the figures, or even a revelation of what is beneath their skin, either way the African body is devoid of its humanity by taking on mechanical dimensions. The wired bodies act as symbols and surrogates of the permanent effects of the exploitation of natural resources and the black body in Congolese history. At one level, Ilunga speaks directly to the exploitation of coltan and the manner in which Congolese miners are still enslaved to disempowering mechanisms of capitalism – the same capitalist pursuits that promulgated the death of millions of Congolese men, women, and children under the cruel regime of Leopold II. On another level, by not strictly depicting miners, Ilunga depicts the communities that surround artisanal mining. By focusing especially on women and children, Ilunga begins the story of the dehumanisation of the DRC from the most affected and the most marginalised. Women, who also participate in the artisanal mining of coltan, are exposed to deeper forms of dehumanisation as they are further reduced to being objects of patriarchal domination and sexual exploitation. The black body is, therefore, no different from the technology produced from the coltan they mine except in shape. Sharing a history of exhuming resources, they have become one themselves; in exhuming coltan, they become it.

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Perhaps similar to Butler (2019), Ilunga wishes to free the black body by not presenting them as human in the first place. After all, the term 'human' has created exclusionary boundaries that have negated black individuals and black identity thus constricting the constructive potential of what being human and African can be (Butler 2019:28-30). Therefore, for Butler (2018), attempts at fighting to fit into the category human is futile for Africans who are striving for liberation from white supremacy and its contemporary latent expressions. Once Africans can navigate themselves outside of the bounds of 'human', there will be new and burgeoning possibilities for black identity. Self-navigation however will require the intentional dislocation of Africans from the strictures brought about by humanness and this will mean welcoming ideas that help Africans supersede it, like black trans- and posthumanism (Hill et al. 2019; Weheliye 2014; Eshun 2003; Fayemi 2018; Kim 2017).

Transhumanism is a speculative philosophy that explores the potential of human existence into the future (Butler 2019). The goal of transhumanism is to see the human body enhanced and eventually superseded; and/or to have its essence weakened into what is called a posthuman being. In both trans- and posthumanism, it is science and technology that motions forward the human evolutionary process thereby exploring other avenues of becoming for the human being, and all its related limitations, to be overcome. The quest for humanity, and its violent processes of hierarchisation, have for so long left especially the black body denigrated as the devalued object other to whiteness but in trans- and posthumanism racialising hierarchies are disrupted. From a black critical lens, posthumanism can undermine these distinctions in humanity that include some bodies, while excluding others from being considered fully human.

The black body within this realm of possibilities, can trace out alternative positions of being that obfuscate any and all hierarchisation embedded within definitions of humanness. Under posthumanism new identities for black individuals that lie outside of race, history, space, and time can begin to emerge. Blackness within posthumanism not only focuses its goals on achieving de-humanisation through technology, but it also wishes to remove all embodied and ideological anti-black experiences that come to limit and hold back black men and women in settings wherein racial identity holds a pre-determined definition (Hill et al. 2019). Under such thinking, the definition of humanity is exposed as a construct thereby opening more

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opportunities for the term to be constantly re-visited, re-defined, and ultimately decolonised as the primacy given to the figure of the Western male as the essence of humanity begins to shift and hopefully, completely fall away. Within black critical thought, posthumanism is not just a possibility but an ethical imperative; a powerful disruptor of anti-black racism, but only provided that the proto-normative imagination of a trans/posthuman is **not** assumed to be white (Hill et al. 2019).

Ilunga's figures can be seen as devoid of humanity, but not necessarily in the manner of depicting Africans as sincere victims of an anti-African history (as explored in previous sections). Reading his work under the new light of black trans- and posthumanism also leads audiences to the realm of possibilities; ideas not thought of before. Ilunga does not necessarily paint a picture of where and who Africans and the Congolese will be in the future, and I believe that this is because, like most of us who have not yet made sense of history, he simply cannot know. However, by reminding Africans of how they got 'here' Ilunga creates a moment of necessary pause and contemplation in hopes to jog our own power and agency to get us 'there'. What can be known for sure in his representation is that Africans, especially the Congolese, will be in the future and they are a part of it.

Insisting on the presence of Africans in the future is seen in the futuristic representation of the bodies that take centre stage in his artwork. Furthermore, Ilunga's work speaks directly to the socio-political and economic challenges faced by the DRC, thereby making his work Africanfuturist not only in aesthetics, but also in is framework and aims. Africanfuturism seeks to defy the odds, bend the rules, and break the limits. Within the context of Ilunga's work Africanfuturism explodes the barriers that prevent the full exploration of humanity outside of any of its phenotypic boundaries, and outside of its racialising histories. To achieve liberation from humanity's boundaries, Africanfuturism leans on certain thematic devices such as transhuman anamorphosis, cyberspace, and digital souls (Kim 2017:5). Similar to Ilunga's work, the digitalised black body is actively used to overturn mythical beliefs about the nature of blackness, techno-science, and even the future of blackness; not to mention how these three things can relate.

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According to Myunsung (2017:7), Afrofuturistic scenes centralise the minority's usage of technology as a means to confuse marginalising hierarchies. Minority groups produce, transform, consume, and appropriate technologies to create worlds that encourage their economic mobility, socio-political liberation, and to build up their communities. In other words, Africanfuturism also uses representations of technology to produce meaningful counter-hegemonic discourses that reject monolithic ideas that there can only be *one* experience of technology, and only *one* kind of usage; and such experience and usage can only be white at the expense of non-white bodies. Under Africanfuturism modern technology, and its aesthetic, is a social and a political means with which to disarm the weaponised uses of 'human' and the Eurocentric dictates of technology that have either commodified black bodies or excluded them in the process of invention.

Africanfuturism, however, undoes posthumanist views of a raceless future that tend to relegate race (and by extension the lived experiences racialisation) as a problem belonging to human biodiversity and is therefore not a part of posthumanist ideals (Butler 2019). Trans- and posthumanism views race as inconsequential; something that will disappear as the human body and its essence evolves with the help of techno-science. Transhumanism seemingly paints the stratifications caused by race as primitive choosing rather than believe that the enhancement and replacement of the body via technology also means the transformation of social attitudes that began race in the first place, while posthumanism denies that there is any value in having a body to begin with. However, simply removing 'human' from the equation is not enough to remove hierarchisation on any level as race is not purely biological.

According to Weheliye (2014:3), race and racial identity are maintained *socio-political systems* circulated by institutions that aim to regulate and discipline humanity. The regulation of humanity is constituted by a process onto which intricate and everchanging socio-political concepts of differentiation and hierarchisation are projected onto the biological human body thereby adopting a *visual* translation (Weheliye 2014:3-5). Much like humanity is a categorical construction built on a system of hierarchy, so is race. Beyond biology, race is a part of a system of differentiation like nationality, gender, and sexuality used to protect and secure one group of individuals over another; and at this point in history the beneficiaries are projected as being white (Weheliye 2014). Africanfuturism however functions in letting people know that the

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visual translation of the group in which differentiation aims to protect and secure (white) might change tomorrow.

There will always be a so-called 'black' categorisation within the hierarchisation of humanity even if those placed under such a category might not be phenotypically black. It is for this reason that Africanfuturism does not erase the human body in its depictions of the future, nor does it ignore race and gender – because those are not the problem. Hierarchy and differentiation sit at the realm of ideas and not biology. This is the position that is also pointed out in Ilunga's work. Ilunga takes no issue with the body, hence its visible presence albeit futuristic. Instead, Ilunga engages with and critiques the legacy of meanings that hierarchisation has continued to reproduce, as well as creating critical commentary on the impact of those meanings on the lived realities of all humanity. For Ilunga, without defeating hierarchy as well as its accompanying ideologies and meaning-making, erasing the human body would be futile. It is also for this reason that Africanfuturism insistently inserts colour into otherwise raceless doctrines of the future.

By inserting race, Africanfuturism consequently produces a different alternative of humanity's future; what Myungsung (2017: 22) identifies as *Afro-posthumanism*. Afro-posthumanism is a counter-hegemonic discourse that understands the important role technology can play in the reformation of race and gender; not its expunction. In using imagination, Africanfuturism constructs futures rather than to subtract from them by involving and not removing black culture and identity in rising techno-scientific futures. However, what remains integral in that project is a changing of meanings, especially as it pertains to the black body and identity. Africanfuturism creates a space wherein the positioning of black as "deviant spectacles, culturally and mentally impoverished" (Brock Jr 2020) lie outside of any and all futuristic frameworks. The production of new meanings is given aesthetic, social, and cultural significance in Africanfuturism through the innovative use of technology and science that is intentionally geared towards enhancing and improving the lives and experiences of African, and African diasporic communities.

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5.6 Conclusion

This chapter has focused on the work of Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga whose work grants an aesthetic to the deeper relationship between the black body and technology; more specifically within the context of ASM in the Democratic Republic of Congo. Ilunga's work puts forward the idea of the inseparability between the technology that coltan produces and the coltan miners who mine it. The case of inseparability between the black African body and technology is a historical issue as the African slave was the most essential tool or piece of technology needed to build and progress modernity. ASM was presented as an area where modern day African slavery continues to be promulgated, fixing in place, especially, the dehumanisation of black bodies male, female, and children. As a result, Ilunga's work pays special attention to black-bodied figures of all ages, gender, and setting – often placing them within domestic spheres.

The DRC's history of colonisation continues to impact not only the economy but also community: where bodies gather. Belgian colonisation, and its bureaucratic instance that black bodies are fungible and disposable properties only as useful as their production rate, continues to mark Congolese identity. No matter how far ahead the bodies in the works of art seem to be in more modernised settings, the past continues to haunt them through material signs of a history that cannot be recalled and yet cannot be erased. Ilunga brings this past into the present through a figuration of future digitalised black bodies, and this constant interplay between past, present and future so alive in his work is reflective of Africanfuturism's insistence on the simultaneity of all phases of time and the pluraversality of experiences collapsed in a single moment, or in this case, into a single frame.

Of course, Ilunga's work would not be considered Africanfuturist without the strong presence of possibility. Ilunga provides a speculation of what the people of Congo might become through digitising the human body, while also providing us with the opportunity to speculate on the many manifestations the black body might take. Trans/posthumanism is one of the manifestations that I offer up for contemplation. Drawing on the work of black speculative thinkers such as Butler and Weheliye, the black body is showing signs of being a trans/posthuman body as it was never really considered fully human in the first place. Consequently, the idea of "Afro-posthumanism" should not inspire the fear of the effacement

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of blackness but rather should present a way in which to secure it. By abandoning the body, black individuals are allowed to escape oppressions and injustices that are based off of the makeup of their bodily features. In this sense, what could be needed to achieve black liberation is to liberate blackness from humanity – totally.

Ilunga's black figures also seem to be burdened down not only by the weight of their history, but by the weight of their body – more specifically its stubborn signification as object even though it is situated in a postcolonial moment. By painting his bodies in a solid black colour, without dimension and character, Ilunga further adds to the inescapability of their skins – no matter the time, and no matter the place. Ilunga further illustrates how Africanfuturism allows for compassionate moments where viewers can cast their eyes, their minds, and their attention onto the hidden but present traumas experienced in the African diaspora. Perhaps when one begins from the place of confronting pain, a strong desire to be free can yield to imaging a possibility where black bodies, identity, and culture can transcend the past while not completely denying it. The hope, of course, is that mining practices in Africa can do the same, too.

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CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a closing reflection of the study's final findings. In highlighting and summarising the study's key findings and contributions made to the field of Afrofuturism, digital culture, and media studies, the hope is that its value will be evident on a more precise level. It is within this critical spirit that I turn the chapter's reflection towards a discussion of the study's limitations, present a list of recommendation of further studies, and conclude with a reiteration of the intentions this critical study hoped to make clear.

To close the thesis, I will be following once more, Afrofuturism's "experimental attitude toward reality" (von Busch & Palmås 2006:19). Here, I take the opportunity, as an expansion of the study, to consider what one can glean from Africanfuturist representations that are *above*ground in the form of a coda. Quite different to the study's focus on mining and Africanfuturism, I take a moment to consider the Africanfuturist city – what I call the *Afro-future City*. Additionally, I add one other branch of interest that although different, still sprouts from the main themes of the study. Although not detailed here to the same depth as the Afro-future City, black sonic fiction still remains a strong area of Africanfuturist potentiality.

6.2 Key Findings and the Value of the Study

Indeed, this study has showed how Afrofuturism, and Africanfuturism, operate successfully as a cultural and political aesthetic counterpoint to Eurocentric ideas of the future – primarily through representation. The Africanfuturist representations of mining found in *Black Panther* (Coogler, 2018), *Neptune Frost* (Uzeyman & Williams, 2022) as well as the work of artist, Eddy Kamuanga Ilunga, have centralised the experiences of Africans in the diaspora in navigating exploitative practices in mining. The exploitative practices focused on in this study are those committed against the black body, the black *female* body, and Africa's natural resources. Although the representations under discussion are placed in future worlds, they are still reflective of the reality that such exploitation has a long history in Africa. Mining, and its tendency to subjugate the body of black miners founds itself upon white, patriarchal, and

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colonial capitalist systems of power that have yet to be erased. It is for this reason that Africanfuturism, while conjuring up alternative futures that differ from present realities, continues to emphasise the past. On one hand Africanfuturism uses the past to help us measure in the present moment just how far we have (not) come, just how deep black liberation (does not) runs and how much the black body has (not) been released from being an objectified, fungible property in Africa. On the other hand, the past in Africanfuturism reveals how "people are trapped in history and history is trapped in them (Baldwin in hooks 1992:343). Yet, being trapped in history is not necessarily a bad thing, especially for the oppressed, as from this perspective futures that are sensitive to the voice of the oppressed can be created. Within this context, the study's focus on the historically oppressive, anti-black, and anti-women structures in mining can lead to futures where the most marginalised are centralised thus truly securing justice for *all*.

The black body has historically been treated as a piece of technology and the work of Hampton (2015) has been fundamental in this study to draw this out. According to Hampton (2015) the African slave was regarded as a body that could meet the mechanical demands of labour in the fields, and even in the homes of slave masters. Furthermore, slaves were figures that were seen and not heard, often times being instructed not to make eye contact with slave owners thus removing the subjectivity that comes with recognition (hooks 1992). In other words, the slave could be what, in futuristic and science-fictional terms, is considered to be a robot: a mechanical configuration, devoid of humanity, created to be a tool at the assistance of human beings. The black slave as technology was further backed by the racist ideas that Africans are in proximity to bestiality (de Robillard 2018) and are therefore inherently devoid of humanity. Furthermore, the study has argued how the African miner is likened to a modern-day slave and therefore a repeated image of the robot – that dwells beneath the ground. Ilunga visualises this connection more emphatically in his artwork as the bodies in his paintings are literally laced with microchip wiring. In doing so, Ilunga intelligently references the poor working conditions suffered by artisanal miners on coltan mine fields in the DRC. The black-bodied figures in his painting seem unable to face audiences, or even to directly face one another, as if overcast by a shadow of shame and defeatism. Additionally, the figures are often depicted shrugged down by some sort of unarticulated weight.

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When one considers the DRC's history under Belgian colonialism, it becomes clear what these figures are being weighed down by: the relentless manner in which European (and even Asian) powers have profited off of making them powerless. Coltan miners get paid less than one dollar per day, yet multi-billion-dollar tech giants such as *Google* and *Samsung* need coltan to fire up their devices. Such damning contradictions leave the figures that Ilunga paints defeated under the weight of a colonial past that haunts their present reality. The manifestation of colonial objects that fill the everyday scenes within which his figures are painted, only strengthens the realisation of how stubborn the erasure of the past is and will be. The ongoing objectification of the artisanal miners whose bodies are at still at risk could perhaps be the greatest reminder of this. The objectification of the African miner is worsened when African women miners are sexualised; another severe form of how black humanity is stripped. Africanfuturism acknowledges the painful relationship between the black body and technology, as outlines above, but in the spirit of protecting potentiality, it also offers technology as a means of redemption.

Those who remark that the black body has always been averse to technology have not paid close enough attention to the history of modernity (Butler, 2019). Africans have been responsible for the creation of railway systems, assembling steamboats, and for the high productive rate that has built strong Euro-American economies (Mbembe 2017). Not only is there a proximity between technological progression and the black experience, but Africanfuturism creates representations wherein black men and women hold mastery over systems, software, and other (digital) technology. Audiences witness this in *B*P (Coogler 2018) when Shuri, as a female African, is witnessed to be the undisputed master technician and engineer of the advanced technologies produced in Wakanda. Notable is how her laboratory is located underground, again indicating the myriad of outcomes in the future of mining. A strong one being that of the absence of the body in mining – a factor that women miners have suffered gross exclusion and subjugated for because they are presumed to be biologically weaker and reproductively available for the deposits of men. Another strong proposition put forward by Africanfuturism in repositioning technology as an aid in eradicating Afrodiasporic oppression, is the manner in which technology is created to purposefully serve the interests of black individuals.

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Africanfuturist films like *Neptune Frost* (2022) garner the possibilities of creating digital systems and software, not initially made with the interests of black users in mind (McIlwain 2019), to produce shared systems of awareness that fight against the on-going oppression of African artisanal miners. The film displays how such efforts are often 'radicalised' as digital terror and a threat to global security when, much like other efforts at articulating blackness, they are "constantly challenged and subverted by conservative voices reluctant to move from fixed locations" (hooks 1992:342). Africanfuturism, therefore, upsets the location from which the digital arena often speaks – the privileged, white, and male user (Brock Jr 2020) by demonstrating how digital technology has the ability to bend and mutate to specifically African uses. In *Neptune Frost* (2022), (digital) technology does not challenge or run against African spirituality. In fact, technology is most relevant when considering African epistemology and world views. One such example is how one of the main characters in the film, Matalusa, builds a software that is based off of the instruction of an Avatar, Potolo, to **hack** into recurring systems like slavery. The spiritual realm informs the make-up and uses of technology thus honouring African belief system that have confidence in the dynamic influence ancestors and spiritual guides hold upon the material world. Africanfuturism therefore adds another dimension to the relationship between technology and the black body – the *spirit*. These three factors are inseparable within African contexts, and will most certainly follow through into the future, too.

It is important to note that Africanfuturism offers the critic an opportunity to build substantial critique without necessarily waging war in a world that is already overwhelmed by polarity and divisiveness. Through its call to imagine alternatives, history, past, and present, Africanfuturism permits debunking that is not abhorrent of the importance of assembling; allows for the harsh removal of naivety without dismissing the opportunity for all persons and all voices to be given a seat at the table; and promotes the knowledge that "if something is constructed, then it means it is fragile and thus in great need of care and caution" (Latour 2004). Especially when considering that the history of Afrofuturism is a result of black pain; pained, enslaved and colonised men and women whose faith in a different outcome shaped in them a strong will to survive under circumstances that tried to destroy this – practicing sensitivity and vigilance in building any kind of critique that involves the historically oppressed becomes paramount (hooks 2000; 2014). In addition to this, in spaces where there is increasing hostility towards "those who happen to believe in thinking (thinking as art, thinking as thought, thinking

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as living), to those who trust the necessary opaqueness and complexity of life" (Lepecki 2016), imagination of what can be made different – what must necessarily change – can be a threat. Essentially, Africanfuturism safeguards the ability to imagine by constantly earmarking it as an important endeavour; a space which allows uninterrupted streams of possibilities geared towards sustaining, improving, and prolonging black life which can be freely imagined.

6.3 Limitations of the Study

6.3.1 *The Delimitations of the Study's Foci*

Due to this study's specific focus on the Africanfuturistic visual representations of mining, the material analysed by the study had stricter limitations. The study, for example, did not engage with online digital mediums such as internet usage and culture and/or social media. For this reason, there was little to no engagement with the practical uses of how African, and African diasporic communities actively use digital technologies and the interactions within such online communities. Further informed by my usage of IS, I relied solely on the manner in which the selected visual representations brought meaning to Africanfuturist aesthetic and frameworks, thereby eliminating other potentially solid means of exploration.

Furthermore, the selection of the visual materials used as evidence in my study was further limited. I did not explore the follow-up sequence to the film *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018) – *Black Panther: Wakanda Fore*ver (Coogler 2022). I also did not fully engage with other, possibly enriching, visual representations such as the anthology of *Black Panther* comic books, news media images of African miners in the respective regions under focus in the study, as well as further expanding my collection of apartheid photographic images in my critical analyses. In addition to that, I did not include other more recent examples within art and media which play more colourfully with racially varied pasts such as *Bridgerton* (Tom Verica 2020), South African artist Dineo Sheshee Bopape as well as Kenyan artist Osborne Macharia. Placing such re/sources in conversation with my current data set would have helped in further exploring and broadening the range within which Africanfuturist discourses can take place. For this reason, the generality of the study cannot be secured.

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Moreover, my choice in using one primary methodology, IS, did not engage with other ways the study could have been conducted. While there are sections where I relay my own personal perspectives and horizons of Africanfuturism's applicability and relevance, I do not so this consistently. Therefore, methodologies such as hermeneutics, while alluded to in my approach, are not fully engaged and applied throughout the study. Furthermore, while IS is a "cousin" to Semiotics (and both are employed by Barthes in his reading of images), the study does not equally rely on both as a point of method. IS as a methodology decidedly reads its texts outside of formalistic frameworks therefore the attention of analysis is not on the quality and nature of the text itself, but on the manner in which the text can be appropriated to tell other stories. Stated differently, the text opens itself up to the horizon of the author's position and perspectives on the matter at hand. In my case, the text is appropriated to dialogue with present-day articulations of the challenges found in African mining as per Afrofuturistic and Africanfuturistic frameworks and imagination of the future and its possibilities.

6.4 Suggestions for Further Research

When conducting IS, the act of writing becomes praxis and is therefore to some extent different to semiotics.[114] For instance, IS does not simplistically use a "box of analytical tools for taking an image apart and tracing how it works in relation to broader systems of meaning" (Manghani 2012:8). IS insists that semiotics must also involve a *creative engagement* with the image under analysis – a practice of making and sharing meaning through a sort of "image- (re)making". Manghani's (2012) understanding of image-(re)making does not necessarily entail the material (re-)making of image products, but to use semiotics as an inspirational starting point for the researcher to transform the image from 'teacherly' (telling viewers what meanings are found as the aim of deciphering) to *writerly*. The writerly approach to researching the image takes the image's signs and significations as well as their representational elements, myths, and meanings to *talk about* related societal processes and issues in a metaphoric sense. In other

[114] Semiotics, simply put, is the study of signs and symbols within a text in order to uncover meaning. Semioticians such as Ferdinand de Saussure (Aitken 2005) break down a sign (various are found in the text) into the signifier (the sound or image), and the signified (the associated concept). A semiotic analysis of text acknowledges that meanings received from a text are often a result of these processes thereby making its deciphering a layered process.

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words, like textual analysis, IS analyses a text as a metaphor for life thereby moving beyond the confines of the author's original intention, and even common, repeated popular associations attached the image (Barthes 2001). The researcher therefore actively adds to the meanings, associations, and narratives built around images in original and creative ways.

While the work of the creative artists enfolded between the pages of this thesis may have not always obviously directed their outputs down the pathways of my analyses, IS emphasises how the act of writing to them and about them is a work of collaborative creativity. Further, while my analysis of Africanfuturist films and artworks have been used to discuss and contemplate African (and Afrodiasporic) issues and present realities, Africanfuturism grants greater credence to the creation of things not existing before. It is not to say that my writing has lacked any originality, but it was restricted by what was in front of me: what others were brave enough to create, what other scholars might have thought, and the necessary compliance to the strictures and discipline of writing an academic thesis in fulfilment of a degree.

Although it was not impossible to do in the duration of this study, I believe that a further opportunity to construct a Africanfuturist visual will amplify IS's creative pursuits. It is in the creation process where the conditions to envision and imagine something anew – with less restraint – are often best met. Furthermore, it is in the process of constructing something where there are greater spaces for collaboration with other skilled and informed members of a 'futures' community thus broadening up my own creative skillsets and further challenging my assumptions. This study, and its devotion to Africanfuturism, therefore allows for further opportunities to experiment with futuristic visuals, sounds, and (digital) technologies that directly talk back to lived issues, unfulfilled pasts, and black futures.

Another opportunity of further study and research is revisiting my analysis of *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018), but this time in conducting a comparative analysis with *Black Panther: Wakanada Forever* (Coogler 2022). In the second film, Shuri is given a leading role and is made heir of the Wakandan throne, as a result, Afro-future feminist readings of both films, especially when put together in conversation, would have furthered the discussion on the

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futuristic possibilities of more liberated roles given to African women within science and technology.

6.5 Concluding Thoughts: Beginning With the End in Mind

Many of the topics in this thesis have demonstrated how Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism are not only kinds of black speculative fiction, but also windows into the reality of black lives whose historic marginal status have been characterised, until now, by loss and disappearance; the loss of untold stories that can now only be imagined, and the disappearance of uncaptured voices subsumed by the voice who arranged the story of history (Hartman 2008). However, this loss and disappearance only fuels the hunger for more stories that attempt to fill in the gaps where closure is otherwise not given (Hartman 2008:8). It is for this reason that Africanfuturism can be seen as a generator of space wherein expression and creativity geared towards the preservation of (African) life is not simply overlooked, and cannot be easily overrode. Creating space does not neglect the fact that Africanfuturism also takes up space. A case in point being the black creative works analysed by this study, but also the written form of the study itself.

The issue of taking up space is something that historically and presently, Africans also part of the Afrodiaspora have fought for; and have also been fought against. Space is an Africanfuturist notion that deeply embeds its visions of the future as not only black, but also as profoundly in *this* world. There is no other place that black persons would love to occupy more than *this* world; hence the fight for the recognition of black humanity (even in the Africanfuturist trans/post-human possibilities) talks back to, and takes place in this world. Rather than changing the world, Africanfuturism hopes only to rearrange it; rather than to replace it, Africanfuturist pursuits only hope for the world to remain better. The intention of Africanfuturism is not to escape the world, but to eradicate the barriers that seem too inescapable to creater alternative possibilities; possibilities of producing sustainably just societies.

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Within Africanfurist paradigms, black expressions of the future are worthy of deep contemplation not simply for the imaginative solutions to challenges they carry, but because of the embedded lives and histories that push us to give space to "a future in which the afterlife of slavery has ended" (Hartman 2008:13). As a real possibility, many Africanfuturist manifestations see this task as an important one. The importance of building up a belief and confidence in the arrival of freedom is made more urgent as there is a growing consciousness that the afterlife of African slavery, despite the 'progress' of time, has not yet arrived. As further demonstrated by the work of Uzeyman and Williams in *Neptune Frost* (2022), as well as Ilunga, black liberation is still being compromised in this world, and it is for this reason that Africanfuturism is a socio-political and economic necessity. The power of Africanfuturism lies in its profound ability to animate a desire and possibility for a liberated future that overwhelmingly at times, appears to be too inconceivable to be visualised and just too impossible to be put into words.

The hope, therefore, is that this study has been able to use concepts and paradigms already alive in Africanfuturism in a manner that has encouraged alternative ways of knowing and thinking that have contributed to a vision and articulation of its own. Not necessarily of its own kind, but of its own beat and rhythm, adding yet another layer of sound to an on-going symphony of futures. The string of ideas, inspirations, arguments, and perspectives contained herein are far from their end, but only mark a beginning (of possibly a new end). Similar to Africanfuturism, this study has made its attempts at critically engaging with (re-)written histories and (re)constructed (rather than destructed) futures by beginning with the end in mind. Perhaps, it is when one profoundly begins with a liberated end that the past and the future, as well as its technologies, can be read and geared towards securing the bests interests of the living – in *this* world – through an awakening of the possibilities of the *now*.

6.6 But Before You Go: A Coda to the Study

I close off this thesis with a broader view of Africanfuturist sensibilities. This coda is marked by a set of interesting propositions that move Africanfuturist readings from the underground to *above*ground. The first point of "aboveground" is consideration of how Africanfuturist readings and perspectives have informed futurist understandings and critiques of the African

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city. While researching mining, the human Anthropocene as well as the damaging impact that human activity is having on the environment peaked my research interests. Here, I explore the futurist works of Nigerian artist Olalekan Jeyifous and Angolan artist Kiluanji Kia Henda as points of engagement with the African city in forms of what I identify as the *Afro-future City*.

Another consideration moves readers from the city to sonic fiction. It is here where my growing interests and ideas surrounding a desire to further understand and articulate a direct relationship between blackness and technology. Moving a little further from the relationship between the black body and technology in mining, I move to blackness and technology in music (videos). For this part of the research journey, it was really in my practice as an educator where exposure to African and Afrodiasporic Afrofuturistic audio-visual material inspired a deeper fascination. Lecturing postcolonial studies, I was able to experiment with, and grow deeply enthused by, students who engaged with Afrofuturistic music videos produced by (mostly) women artists and musicians of the Afrodiaspora.

I found that issues of visibility, racism, and sexuality, faced particularly by black women living in hetero-patriarchal and white supremacist settings, found colourful visibility and expression in Afrofuturistic sights and sounds. It is with this knowledge that I discuss the various Africanfuturistic artists, themes, and their creative work which I found to be rich in potential and something that could add to illustrating the complexity, versatility, and relevance of Afrofuturism, in particular, Africanfuturism for a wide range of contexts and for further expansion.

6.6.1 *The Afro-future City*

I turned to the city and discovered that Africanfuturistic representations of the city also presented thrilling conversations on the manner in which our present is quite literally built on the past, considering African urban infrastructures are still largely built on past colonial architectures. Not ending at the material level of influence, African urbanity is still largely related to on colonial terms, and although different to the focus of my study, there is still an opening for a new pathway. Africanfuturistic artworks can surely aid in stimulating and

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building stronger articulation/s on the space of Africa, and its perspectives, particularly in the arena of urban city planning.

As has been established by the study, Africanfuturism is not merely a trendy aesthetic that exalts technology contextualised by black bodies, traditions, and identity. The Afrofuturistic images of African urbanity that I unpack in the next sections carry within them potent critical perspectives that create spaces wherein vigilance can be practiced. Using the artworks of African artist, Jeyifous, an illustration of how visual representations of the African city point to a critical reflection of the self and of the continent, particularly those that question issues related to post- and neo-coloniality. One can truly reflect on Jeyifous's work upon contemplation of the ways that Africanfuturism enables the reconfigurement of self in changing landscape that is still haunted by the effects of white supremacy, anti-black racism, xenophobia, and imperialism. I argue that the images of the African city that I will briefly refer to reconfigure the self and the city by constructing a futuristic reimagination of an already familiar world – Lagos, Nigeria and the Sharjah desert. Africanfuturist representations of the city, however, participate in the necessary interruption of dominant Eurocentric patterns of thinking, culture, knowledge production, and urbanisation by emphasising African perspectives. For example, Africanfuturist representations of the city emphasise the African city not as a signal of exoticism or black victimisation, but as an innovative site marked by new infrastructural, architectural, and technological typologies. Therefore, it can be said overall that futuristic visions of the African city act as a visual counterpoint to Euro-American centric concepts of progress and urbanisation.

6.6.1.1 The African city

Much writing about the African city places it on the margins of urban theory. By emphasising the rural and questioning the urban, many of these writers put into question whether or not the African city is truly urban. To help reframe the myopic focus on the 'informal' operations and occupation that make the African city appear less of an urban space, urban theorists like Paul Jenkins (2013) re-frame the discussion by beginning with an inquiry into what such texts understand to be the *nature* of the 'urban' in the first place. Njambi and O'Brien (2021) argue that Hollywood depictions of African urban spaces are indelibly marked by enduring colonial

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stereotypes that fix an image of urban Africa as a place where one can find the exotic wild 'Other'; or as a hopeless place of violence, impoverishment, corruption, and perpetual victimisation. Such films, according to Njambi and O'Brien (2021:3), promote a skewed preoccupation with the degraded parts of African city life and thus continue to trade a more nuanced vision of African urban life that emphasises specificity for a static, unreflective, and one-dimensional image.

Without attempting to understand the social and cultural attitudes, as well as the aspirations and needs of the city residents, definitions of what is considered to be 'urban' within African contexts therefore remain prescriptive rather than descriptive (Jenkins 2013:19). The persistent idea of the 'squalor' of the African city is built from the constant juxtapositioning of African urban spaces against normalising ideas of the city that are based on processes of urbanisation that originate from another time and another place (Jenkins 2013),[115] namely, the urban infrastructures of the late 18th century that began in the Global North. Such referencing to city structuring, when placed with African urban spacing, should be marked as irrelevant and, in some sense, abnormal.

Although the nature of a city cannot ever be fully known as abstracted knowledge and lived experiences are both involved in the process of perceiving what is 'urban' (Jenkins 2013), the angles from which perceptions of urbanity are built must be contextualised to the African settings from which they emerge. According to Jenkins (2013), African formations of the city (and urbanism)[116] necessarily factor in the rapidly growing demography of the city, the limited capacity of the state's economic growth, and the city dwellers' limited political representation. Therefore, from African perspectives, the shape of the African city is not necessarily 'chaotic', but is only the responsive result to the prior listed factors. In summary, it is important to formulate an understanding and ideal of the city that is not positioned on Eurocentric moral judgements of space in Africa, but on African embedded cultures, values, aspirations, and importantly, the African city dweller's needs.

[115] What is considered 'adequate' urban (infra)structure is largely determined by the urban infrastructures of the late 18th century that began in the North (Jenkins 2013).
[116] Jenkins (2013:23) formulates that the essential qualities of the urban include the physical (architecture; infrastructure), economic, cultural and social; these qualities are what determine the physical shape of urban areas in Africa.

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6.6.1.2 Olalekan Jeyifous: Africa's Mega City 2050

Figure 23: Olalekan Jeyifous, *Lagos 2050: Shanty Megastructures,* 2016. (*Lagos 2050?,* 2016)

Nigerian-born artist, Olalekan Jeyifous melds together art, architecture and fantasy to produce his Africanfuturist digital artwork series *Lagos 2050: Shanty Megastructures* (2016). In this series, Jeyifous depicts Nigeria's capital meta-city[117] Lagos in the year 2050. In his future vision of Lagos, the capital city is an urban palimpsest of cosmopolitan Western infrastructures and informal, or improved, settlements (Figure 23). Jeyifous adapts Western science fictional examples of urban planning and inserts them into everyday settings and activities that take place in the African city. This combination of science fictional urban planning and everyday city movement produces an absurdity of elements giving rise to feelings of confusion, tension, and contradiction (Figure 23). This mixture of unpleasant emotions extends beyond the artworks' slippery yet loud boundaries between fantasy and reality; virtual and physical; function and malfunction; and the future, present, and past in an urban space. This discomfort also arises from the series' disruption of dominant ideas of the future and urbanisation that lock

[117] A meta-city is described as a city space that has more than twenty million inhabitants.

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Africa in the periphery. By digitally enhancing Lagos's already existing landscape, Jeyifous disrupts this urban space shaped by colonialism and moulded after Eurocentric ideals of the city.

Jeyifous' vision of future Lagos re-configures and re-thinks the aesthetic, the function, and the formation of the city by inserting and emphasising the presence of the African city dweller whose activities and residential knowledge and needs of the city are no longer subsumed by paternalistic and normalising ideas of 'development' or 'improvement'. By inserting absurd infrastructures, African presence, and building a vision of the future city from an African perspective, Jeyifous helps audiences to avoid a reading of the city that panders to normative sensibilities. According to Jeyifous' vision, it is in the future where the African city dweller will be the predominant builder and shaper of Lagos's city identity, and not the state's continual imposition of abstract city knowledge taken from another time and place (Jenkins 2013).

Using digital photography, layering and collaging to create an alternate future for Lagos, Jeyifous formulates a response to present-day urban issues. Interestingly, Jeyifous' vision of Lagos in the year 2050 does not erase what already exists. Instead, the artist questions the manner in which the African city has been framed and configured by Eurocentric ideas of urban planning by building onto architectures of the colonial past that place, at the centre of the urban aesthetic and narrative, the marginalised urban majority. With the continued rapid increase in urban growth in Africa, Lagos is projected to move from being home to twenty million inhabitants to eighty-eight million by the next century, in the year 2100 (Jenkins 2013; Kniaz 2020). Most of the residents of Lagos comprise the marginalised poor who are vulnerable to being displaced by the state in attempts to replace what is considered to be 'improper' elements in urban spaces with more expensive housing developments that many cannot afford to occupy (Okuwuosa 2018; Kniaz 2020). In this sense, Jeyifous also questions the purpose of the city if it is not to provide housing – an ongoing issue in neo-colonial African settings. Ironically, it is the futuristic megastructures that act as housing solutions for the urban majority in his artworks that further highlight this present question by remaining obviously unrealistic and architecturally 'out-of-this-world' in structure.

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Jeyifous' artwork is not meant to be 'realistic' but they do however remain in touch with reality. Similar to many Afrofuturist artworks, the black imagination builds and animates alternative radical worlds that are meant to cause a real shift; a shift in our thinking, in our knowledge and in our responses to "concrete oppressive and repressive experiences [happening] on the ground" (Gunkel & Lynch 2019:26). In this same manner, Jeyifous's incorporation of housing materials and iconographies typically used or associated with informal settlements such as over-crowdedness, rusted corrugated iron, washed clothing hanging from window sills or improvised washing lines, and the presence of boat transportation onto Lagos's urban but European architecture, also works to re-frame our thinking about the 'slum' as something that is equally urban, and as equally creative as European models.

Figure 24: Olalekan Jeyifous, *Lagos 2050: Shanty Megastructures*, 2016. (*Lagos 2050?,* 2016)

Furthermore, Jeyifous (Figure 24) envisions an alternative future in which overcrowding and poverty do not change, but are reconfigured as components that should not be ignored, should not be condemned, and should not really be changed but must be included. Evidently, or Jeyifous, issues framed as the 'African problem' like poverty and overcrowding are things that

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should be embraced and must be emphasised as central parts of the urbanisation process in Africa. As an "aesthetic-political counterpoint", Jeyifous' imagination of a black future cuts through dominant Eurocentric ideologies that intend on extracting and consuming the 'Other' as its own (Gunkel & Lynch 2019:26-27). In this light, Jeyifous' image of Lagos in the future refuses for the African city to be consumed by Europeanness and its ideological value judgements.

By asserting the presence and visibility of the marginalised poor urban majority in urban planning in the African future, Jeyifous furthermore provides a safe(r) space from which we can critique the absence of black bodies in planning urban futures, as well as the erasure of colonialism by hiding its consequences. The presence of black poverty in Africa is, among many things, the inheritance of our colonial history. Although things appear to be different in the postcolony (also signified by the altering of the appearance of colonial buildings in his artwork), these changes only mask the real effects of colonialism that continue in African attempts to urbanise. The fact that this goes unignored by Jeyifous' vision of Lagos in the year 2050 also goes to show that for many Africanfuturist artists, it is easier to imagine the future than it is to imagine the end of colonialism (Kniaź 2020:61).

6.6.1.3 *A City Called Mirage*: Kiluanji Kia Henda

Figure 25: Kiluanji Kia Henda & Mais al Azab, *Rusty Mirage (The City Skyline)*, 2013.
Series of 8 images printed on cotton paper, 70 × 100 cm.
New Museum, New York.
(Artsy.net, 2023)

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Angolan-born artist, Kiluanji Kia Henda offers similar critiques of the city by chronicling the birth, life, and death of the modern city in *A City Called Mirage* (2013-2017). *A City Called Mirage* (ACCM henceforth) is made up of a series of artistic practices like sculpture, photography, video, land and performance art used as an expression of his contemplation on the symbolism and representation of the city. By constructing an imaginary ideal city, Kia Henda reclaims and transforms symbols and space, their meanings, and narratives into a new structure that probes viewers to shift their thinking around history, heritage, the present, and the future.

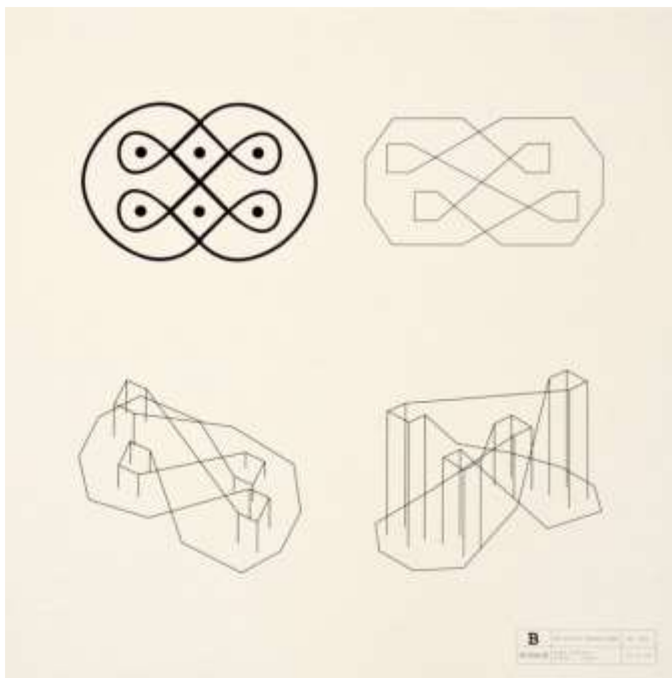

Figure 26: Kiluanji Kia Henda, *The Palace of Abstract Power*, Building Series 1, 2014.
Silkscreen and inkjet print on photographic paper, 100 x 100 cm
(Daily Art Fair, 2019)

Kia Henda constructs this city using thin iron sculptures (Figure 25) sculptured to form only the outline of a city skyline without any concrete material to fill it. ACCM is also placed in the middle of the dry and vacant Sharjah desert. The desert acts as a motif in Kia Henda's work to symbolise a "place with no history - narrative within [his] work" (Kia Henda 2017 & Moorman 2018). In his artwork, the desert is framed as a 'blank' slate. making it the perfect place to re-inscribe the city with a new narrative that is dissociated from any kind of history. Without any attention being given to history, Kia Henda is therefore able to freely explore the future, in particular the future of the city.

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Figure 27: Kiluanji Kia Henda, *The Palace of Abstract Power*, Building Series 1, 2014.
Silkscreen and inkjet print on photographic paper, 100 x 100 cm.
(Daily Art Fair, 2019)

Drawing back to Jeyifous' alternate vision of Lagos in the year 2050, Kia Henda also draws on a city-yet-to-come that inserts African symbols and oral tradition at centre of future-making (Figure 27). The identity of the city and its foundational structure is modelled against the *sonu* sand drawings of the Tchokwe people originating from the Eastern parts of Angola (Figure 26). As the Tchokwe told their stories, they would draw continuous intricate patterns onto the sand until the story was over. To tell a new story, they would erase the old pattern and begin a new one over it, and this process of erasure becomes central in Kia Henda's interpretation of the future city. By incorporating *lusonu* (plural of *sonu*) drawings in the construction of the city, Kia Henda provides commentary on how the city is built with material structures, and yet it is essentially illusive and ephemeral. The city is not permanent, it is comprised of a set of short-

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lived ideas and presences, and as Barthes (1988) considers it, the city is more of a symbolic space than it is a material one.

For Greer (1962), the city remains a guided *image*; one that is fashioned by the discourse and ideology of its image-makers. In other words, even though the city is a material reality, it is understood as a discourse that ultimately only produces an image – a *miragem*; exactly the shape that Kia Henda's model city takes. To emphasise this idea of the city as image, Kia Henda chooses to leave his city as a mere outline (Figure 24) and by choosing not to fill in his skeletal iron sculptures with concrete materials, Kia Henda creates a sense of perpetual incompletion. What the audience is then forced to do is to fill the city with their own ideas, cultures, ideologies, and even questions surrounding what this particular city's function seems to be. The city therefore begins to take a new shape each time and Kia Henda reflects to audiences the perspectives brought forth by Barthes and Greer: what gives the city its recognition and meaning are the infilling of ideas; both the ideas of the maker and those who are exposed to, and inhabit, the city environment.

6.6.1.4 In closing: A tale of two cities

Cities are defined as the driving engine for social and economic growth. The city space is a space of multiplicity: the co-existence of multiple spaces, lines, and webs of interactions and relations which play significant roles in developing social exchange, markets, providing job opportunities and inspiring economic activities (Massey 2020; Massey 2013). Cities also exist as centres of knowledge, creative thinking and innovation making them fecund spaces of potential with unbounded forms it can take shape. The malleability of the city becomes clearer when we consider that cities in the Global South continue to grow in extent and population far beyond their colonial origins; with their former 'colonial masters' having largely departed (Home 2014). As "sites of potential freedom" (Pinder 2013), the African city therefore, can act as an apt playground to imagine and speculate the future of Africa and its diaspora.

The primary aim of Afrofuturistic imagination of future cities, especially of those located in the global South, is to produce countervailing perspectives of urban development. Modernist

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conceptions of urban development frame and evaluate African cities as unplanned, and therefore unwanted, spaces of congestion, disease, chaos, and squalor. The imposition of European (and more recently, Asian) models onto African city planning do not often consider the contexts within which they are built, thus producing segregationist zones that place the poor urban majority on the periphery. Contemporary urban development is therefore in danger of perpetuating colonial definitions of city planning that class unplanned settlements caused by structural poverty as "ulcers on the very face of [the city's] beautiful island" (Howard in Pinder 2013:33). This is further entrenched by the current pressures placed on urban development by global capital and economic competitiveness, cities in the global south are particularly vulnerable to colonial urban legacies that perpetuate segregationist zones which reproduce exclusivity, inequality and the erasure of the poor urban majority.

Concern for the removal and erasure of the poor urban majority in urban planning is the strong statement made by Jeyifous' work that forcibly includes eccentric 'slum' presence into the character of his vision of the future city that Lagos will become. Huchzermeyer (2014:95) insists that enduring negative connotations associated with the slum labelling them as "disease, density and overcrowding causing congestion, disorderliness" and more recently as "deterrence of direct foreign investment", continue modernist conceptions of city planning that frame the slums appositionally to urban norms and aspirations; what is considered to be "appropriate" urban planning (Huchzermeyer 2014:86).

Such modernist ideas of urban development are reinforced even by postcolonial state powers that react against makeshift city settlements, not viewing them as low-cost creative responses to housing shortage issues, but as substandard, value-depreciating eyesores. To combat this, Huchzermeyer (2014) argues for a renewed relationship to the 'slum' in contemporary urban theory and planning. Contemporary urban planning should challenge such totalising discourses that relegate the slum as a visual affront and deficit of urbanisation, as urban theorists such as Turner (in Huchzermeyer 2014:92) petition for a rethinking of the slum as a means of the city ensuring inclusivity.

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Slums are essentially low-cost housing facilities that provide low-income to zero-income households access and participation in the social and market economies produced in the city. Not only that, but low-income families living in slums can allocate more resources to things like education. Turner (ibid) continues to caution against urban theory's tendency to paint the slum as something purely negative, but to interrogate whether the slums cause more alleged and actual harm than good, especially when considering the income, expectations, and the alternatives available to slum residents.

However, the forced and often violent, removal of poor city inhabitants are comfortably justified when the demolition of these homes is associated with the 'escape of poverty'. However, removal of informal settlements only leaves inhabitants destitute without access to the city's economic and business networks thus not alleviating poverty but only propagating it. Jeyifous' digital art questions this contradiction caused by the absence of informal settlements in worlding practices in light of global capital's continued to reliance on cheap, and often migrant, labour to sustain itself. For as long as unequal economies continue to exist, the poverty that produces informal settlements will not be eradicated even while planned visions of the global city attempt to erase them[118] (Huchzermeyer 2014).

Commensurate with the above positions taken by Huchzermeyer and Turner, Jeyifous redefines urban development and planning, as well as urban discourses, by placing the 'eyesore' and undesirable aspects of African city life in the form of slum housing in the centre, and back onto the world city map. African speculative imagination of the future in his artwork creates a blueprint of what an inclusive notion of the city can look like by illustrating a vision of the city radically different to modernist desires for the city. In *Lagos 2050,* Jeyifous ensures that the erasure of unplanned settlements in the city is impossible to imagine. Furthermore, the radical future he presents includes the African city as "being in the world" but more powerfully, *on its own terms*. Jeyifous, therefore, reminds audiences that urbanisation in Africa will always be an *African* process that requires constant re-configuring, and a continuous openness to re-shaping

[118] Third world visions of a globalised city were guided by global campaigns such as the Millennium Development Goals Target 7's 'Cities without slums' initiative (promoted by world organisations United Nations (UN-Habitat) and the World Bank), as well as World Bank's encouragement for cities in the global South to compete globally for foreign investment. Countries like South Africa implemented the 'war against shacks' (2004) interpreted as an obligatory call to eliminate all slums from the city in order to successfully participate in and survive global economic competitiveness. Please refer to Huchzermeyer (2014) for more on this topic.

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African urban identity while possessing the sturdy knowledge that colonisation, especially when perpetuated by global capital, cannot be easily undone even well into the future. Jeyifous thus illustrates the challenges of constructing an Africanfuturist vision of an African city when we consider how “[t]he physical immovability of the built environment, the rigidity of inherited administrative norms and institutions leave shadows of past dispensations” (Parnell 2014:74).

In ACCM, the skeletal city structure does indeed to appear to be a facsimile of a ruin; a shadow of the past or the beginning of a future. With this, Kia Henda highlights to audiences that for the future of the city to begin, it requires an end. The future city (and urban development theory) requires an end to the erasure of Africa from global processes that make up contemporary urban discourses, and an end to the inconsiderate treatment of the environment which must put into question humanity’s insatiable quest to urbanise. All in all, Kia Henda beckons to viewers how “the rupture of global change unleashed by demographic, economic or climatic forces transforms the form of urban life and the way that urbanity is understood” (Parnell 2014:74) not only for today, but for the future, too.

6.6.2 *Sounds Like the Future: Black Sonic Fiction*

The thematic sprouting from Africanfuturism and mining to black sonic fiction was directed more towards building postcolonial pedagogies for the classroom. I am privileged to teach a postcolonial course at second year level at a higher education institution. Trying to test the relevance of Afrofuturism in attempts to understanding history, identity politics, and popular culture, I introduced a section on black sonic fiction that revolved around the audiovisual work of various Afrodiasporic and Afrofuturist musicians. Leaning on the work of Kodwo Eshun and Erik Steinskog, students were tasked to critically engage with the work of Solange Knowles, Janelle Monae, Simphiwe Dana, and Erykah Badu. From this it was discovered that ‘black’ sounds/music are the part of the "New World black traditions & practices" wherein communication & communication networks were hidden behind song and sound during the period of slavery (Steinskog 2018).

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Futuristic musical acts and visuals that are targeted towards unpacking issues affecting the Afrodiaspora draw from the historic usage of sound as a "secret technology" used during Atlantic slavery to conceal in-messages from their white slave masters. The Afrofuturistic and contemporary work of Solange Knowles in *When I Get Home: Director's Cut* (2019), for example, is cryptic in sight and sound, requiring audiences (students and myself) to look and listen with different senses. The requirement for another kind of ear and a different pair of eyes to decode the music videos that were being analysed cut straight into our own biases and expectations that are built on, and informed by, hetero-normative, patriarchal, and even white supremacist ideologies; the same ideological attitudes that have long-prevented those marginalised from the norm from sincerely being listened to, and recognised. In further analysing Afrodiasporic sights and sounds of the future in popular culture, critical themes of black history, black feminism, belonging, identity, black strategies of survival, and 'Othering' can be successfully explored within more contemporary and relevant contexts thus strongly emphasising how Afrofuturism manifests itself in dynamic, evolving, and heterogenous ways.

6.6.2.1 Afro-surrealism in South African visual culture: The work of Zoe Modiga

This section sets the tone for a deeper exploration of Africanfuturism's applicability in critically analysing the self-representation of black African women in popular culture. This time, Africanfuturism is traded for *Afrosurrealism,* and I commence this discussion by briefly illustrating how Afrosurrealism is made manifest in the work of South African female musician, Zoe Modiga.

Similar to Afrofuturism, Afrosurrealism regards the struggle for black freedom and liberation through creative strategies as an integral and on-going pursuit. Zoe Modiga's infusion of the familiar and the marvellous in her visuals works alongside the references she makes to history and the future in her lyrics. Modiga's single *Sinenkani,* taken from her second studio album *Inganekwane* (2020), takes audiences on a harmonic journey that combines music, messages, and visuals. In the song, Modiga gives repeated melody to the phrase *Intsh' inenkani* thus guiding listeners with melisma into contemplation on the resilience of the South African

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youth.[119] Quite different to her vocals, the video itself is unembellished, straying away from the grandeur of large sets, excessive ornamentation, and even the consistent use of colour scenes.

Modiga's visuals deliberately make audiences aware that they are watching a music video that has been constructed. The showcasing of the 'behind-the-scenes' footage on the on-set of the video, the performative aspects and the process of creation are revealed. To compound this, Modiga decidedly leaves the photographic frame, thereby breaking the fourth wall and encouraging audiences to engage their disbelief. Furthermore, the documentary-like footage that locates audiences on set in 'real time', are combined with images that dislocate time and place. The intercutting between blue sky and white canvas give little clues about where Modiga and her back-up dancers are placed, as their bodies seem to exist outside a specific time and place, thus creating an unsettling view for audiences.

The absurdity of Modiga's visuals play part of a fundamental strategy in Afrosurrealism. Spencer (2019) explains that surrealism, although dominated by Europeaness, is not exclusively European territory. Through the use elements reflective of the weird, the fantastic, and magical realism, surrealism has historically challenged the social, cultural, and economic hegemony of rationality (Spencer 2019:9). Surrealism, as a movement, is aware of the dangers posed by hegemonic rationality that has caused gross discrimination against race, gender, sexuality, and class to become the predominant lens of interpretation. Surrealism's resistance against such mainstream ways of thinking imposed by authoritative, but deeply oppressive ways of thinking, is one of the strategies adopted by black culture to expose racism as socially constructed and therefore an absurd reality. Additionally, black culture also adopted surrealism's freedom of imagination to resist oppression, secure survival, and to preserve memory. Afrosurrealism, therefore, primarily uses the lens of race to examine the active tensions and contradictions that operate in oppressive societies by using the fantastic (Spencer 2019:7).

[119] On the song's official YouTube page, Modiga labels it a "tribute to the South African youth of 1976 who led a revolution with their sacrifices and all the young all over the world that have been a part of watershed moments in history. It is also a celebration of how the present youth embody and fortify these revolutions" (Modiga 2021).

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In the beginning of the *Sinenkani* video, Modiga looks into the mirror in assessment of her make-up look, playfully singing "Go, go Power Rangers" (lyrics written by Ron Wasserman 1994) – a popular cultural reference to the opening theme song of the original *Mighty Morphin Power Rangers* television series. Modiga's reference to this song is not incidental as she openly exposes audiences to the process of creation behind *Sinenkani*. Modiga's make-up has an uncanny resemblance to that of the *Power Ranger*'s arch-villain, Rita Repulsa – a humanoid sorceress who was determined to take on intergalactic domination. Modiga's make-up thus introduces audiences to the fantastic elements of her work as the exigent shimmer of metallic make-up around her eyes create a dramatic re-shaping of her features. Modiga therefore reconfigures her body to exist as more than the common markers of identity that may mark her black body as a site of oppression. Like Rita Repulsa, Modiga's body, and therefore existence, resists the ordering of earthly society by presenting herself as someone other-worldly, leaving audiences uncertain as to whether or not she is real or imagined. It is at this point of audience hesitation that Modiga experiences the freedom to present herself in anti-authoritarian ways.

Furthermore, for Modiga, dance is another outlet for her self-expression. By keeping the setting of the dance performance in the video unadorned, the focus rests on the movement of the black women bodies as a highly visible presence and signifier of how power over black women and their bodies (historically and presently) is in a state of constant negotiation. The fibrillation of their bodies becomes a metaphor for the uncanny ability of black individuals, particularly black women, to contort, remain agile, flexible, and fluid enough to improvise and therefore survive the cruelty and trauma of historic oppression. *Sinenkani*, therefore uses black performance as a source and site of knowledge for how shapeshifting for black women is a fundamental part of resilience and reminds viewers of the integral role lack women played in building up the historic resilience of the South African youth.

Sinenkani becomes even more poignant when audiences consider the idea that contemporary post-apartheid South African music, including Modiga's, is no longer responsible to comment on the struggle *for* freedom, but has now become a reproduction of the struggle *of* freedom (Steingo 2016). Adding to Steingo's analysis, when examining her Afrosurreal visuals and choreography, one sees how Modiga encourages her post-apartheid audience to listen differently. Modiga's struggle of freedom begins with getting audiences to enter into the realm

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of the unreal. Classic of Afrosurrealist text, Modiga uses the mysterious dislocation of time and place, the discordance between lyrics and image, and the foregrounding of the black body's free movement to create a rupture that frees audiences from normative ways of thinking that render the strategies of black women in the fight for freedom superfluous.

Afrosurrealism, and its alternative order, makes conceivable to the mind of audiences that in the face of white heteropatriarchal oppression, and no freedom, black women still develop "complex, intricate methods [that] rebel against societal mandates, question oppressive forces, and rewrite trauma" (Spencer 2020:9). By highlighting the danger of normativity, Modiga positions the seemingly less powerful as "heroic, emotionally strong, and intellectually savvy" (Spencer 2020:9). It is in this sense that Modiga, through her own body and the bodies of other black women, powerfully brings into full visibility a history of black women that have added to present definitions of black resilience. *Sinenkani* therefore reveals how hegemonic attempts to rationalise and normalise the invisibility of black women only creates significant and necessary moments of panic and rupture wherein the normative is disordered in South African music and its representations. Moreover, Sinenkani's self-conscious recording of itself creates a contrapuntal sonic and visual archive that allows audiences to arrive at new questions; questions like, what kinds of thinking do we need freedom *from*?

6.6.2.2 Blacks & blues: Afrofuturism, blackness and black music technology in *The Last Angel of History* (1995)

Akomfrah's use of technology in the Afrofuturistic film *The Last Angel of History* (1995) brings to visibility questions surrounding digital technology and its contentious relationship to race. Released for public viewing in 1995, the film very closely coincided with the conceptual birth of Afrofuturism when it was first coined by Dery in 1994. Despite unintentionally making the film a product of Afrofuturism (Fullerton 2021), Akomfrah still manages to produce a speculative documentary. Using science fictional tropes and narratives, Akomfrah likens the experience of forced displacement and alienation experienced by Africans during Atlantic slavery and colonialism to alien abduction and estrangement. In using Afrofuturism in such a manner, Akomfrah sets the scene for a set of ideas and questions that are not only located at

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the margins of mainstream culture, but are also found in the interstellar heart, and centre, of black identity.

Akomfrah understands that the black identity is a composite identity that exists as an ever-moving fusion between history, present, and future, and his exploration of the black identity involves a deep search into history to surface the historical and cultural closeness between technology and blackness. For Akomfrah, this relationship is important to establish as part of the black identity, as blackness is marred with a presumed absence in the construction of early technological inventions of modernity. By inserting archival footage of black men and women in proximity to early technology, Akomfrah confirms that black absence in the history of technological progress is not true and therefore an unwarranted misconception that hides a deliberate erasure of blackness from ideas of Western 'progress'.

The Last Angel of History (1995) is therefore Akomfrah's attempt to mitigate the manners in which 'progress' excludes the contributions made by the socially and historically marginalised, by powerfully repositioning the black figure as the subject of technological history rather than its oppressed and invisibilised object. For instance, when Akomfrah explores an Afrofuturistic fascination with space and technological progress in the film, he does not pay much attention to the technical configurations of Western space machines, but rather places full focus on the efforts made by early Africans and those presently part of the Afrodiaspora to firstly *imagine*, and then manifest black bodies into space. The act of imagination by Africans now becomes the genesis point in the history of man's entry into space rather than say, the hyper-focus on the first landing on the moon. By laying such a foundation, Akomfrah is better able to build a relational trajectory between technology and blackness that brings viewers into more contemporary contexts. *The Last Angel of History* (1995), therefore, transmits audiences into contemplating the digital and tech mastery held by black individuals in the arena of music and sound.

For Akomfrah, the relationship between blackness and technology is most profound through sound and music, and he highlights this by tracing out the proximity of both. The narrator's introduction of a popular jazz legend early in the film generates a metaphoric likening of the

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Blues to a "black secret technology". As a piece of technology, the blues is the origin of all other 'technologies' that also find manifestation in the various forms of black musical expression that are birthed from the blues. From jazz to funk, reggae to deejaying, Akomfrah makes a metaphoric and literal musical comparative to black uses of technology that have been functional in facilitating expression, communication, community, and survival in black communities. Glissant (in Gilroy 1991:113) also points to this functional history of music, gesture, and dance to be a unique form of communication within black cultures, a form of communication "as important as the gift of speech".

Within black histories, music and sound functioned as one of the earliest forms of telecommunication technologies used by slaves to communicate hidden messages (Steinskog 2017). Slave songs, for instance, produced clandestine knowledge that could not be detected by the ears of the slave masters who held the power of preventing such communication from executing the necessary acts of resistance that would secure black survival (Keeling 2007). Songs such as *Wade in the Water* (1901), for instance, secretly communicated to slaves the way in which to successfully escape the plantation. Given instruction from the song, the slaves then planned their escape route knowing that upon hearing the sound of the slave catcher's ravenous dogs, they would wade in the water so that their scent could not be detected.

Hidden from Euro-American understanding and interpretation of music and sound, sound is exposed to be one of the earliest forms of telecommunication technologies used by black communities to navigate through anti-black structures of racism, pain, and punishment. In black liberation history, music is indeed a "black secret technology" where the application of alternative (scientific) knowledge meets a functional and practical use specifically used to reach the ends and interests of black individuals and communities – albeit covertly. Technologies like the blues mentioned earlier, and other more current forms of black music genres like hip-hop and techno, are therefore not recent phenomena, but are part of a long standing strategic "New World Black traditions and practices" (Steinskog 2017) that began with the beat of the drum.

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ANNEXURE A: SYNOPSIS OF THE FILM: *BLACK PANTHER* (2018)

Based on Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's 1966 debut of the first black African superhero, *Black Panther* premiered globally to audiences in 2018. Directed by Ryan Coogler, Black Panther [BP henceforth] is an Afrofuturistic film following the story of intelligent and noble African heir T'Challa who is also known as the Black Panther. With the death of his father, King T'Chaka, in the preceding Marvel film *Captain America: Civil War* (Anthony Russo, 2016), Prince T'Challa is now heir to the throne of the super African nation of Wakanda. Wakanda is an African powerhouse hosting superior technologies and the most developed scientific research. Wakanda is also an affluent nation possessing the most expensive mineral resource in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), vibranium. Hidden beneath advanced holographic equipment, Wakanda is hidden from the rest of world thus hiding their mineral and scientific wealth from the rest of the world. Without ever being colonised, Wakanda is able to experience scientific progression without betraying its traditions, ritual and dress thus making it an Afrocentric high-tech wonderland.

Upon T'Challa's return home, he must undergo a kingship ceremony wherein he battles against the leader of the Jabari tribe, M'Baku. Strengthened by the heart-shaped herb, T'Challa wins the battle for king. Now titled the King of Wakanda, T'Challa is confronted by the re-appearance of, Ulysses Klaue, a black-market arms dealer who has often stole vibranium from Wakandans. Illegally trading vibranium in Seoul, T'Challa goes on a trip to South Korea try to stop him. With the help of leader of the all-women Wakandan army (the Dora Mijale), War Dog espionage and Wakanda's most intelligent scientist, Okoye, Nakia and Shuri respectively, T'Challa finds Klaue and pursues him. At the same time, American C.I.A agent Agent K. Ross is also on a mission to arrest Klaue for his participation in illegal arms deals. Eventually captured by Ross, Klaue is arrested and sent in for interrogation where he makes Ross aware of the power and wealth of vibranium found in Wakanda. While in interrogation, Klaue escapes with the help of Erik "Killmonger" Stevens – a U.S military mastermind, but also a long-lost cousin to T'Challa who was born and raised in Oakland California.

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Killmonger's father, N'jobu, and T'Chaka were brothers. Involved in the struggle during the Civil Rights Movement, N'jobu gave Klaue illegal access vibranium who would create the arms used to support African-American militant groups against white supremacist threats against black lives. During a confrontation made between T'Chaka and N'Jobu, T'Chaka reluctantly kills him after N'Jobu threatens to kill his informant, Zuri. Killmonger not only loses his father, but is also left behind by T'Chaka who returns to Wakanda without him. Years later, at this point, Killmonger makes a return to Wakanda with the dead body of Klaue. Met with the leader of the Border Tribe, W'Kabi, who wishes to defend Killmonger against entering Wakanda, he introduces himself by his Wakandan name N'Jadaka, shows him the identification number imprinted at the bottom of his lip and shows him the dead body. Upon seeing Klaue's dead body W'Kabi, softens his defenses and becomes interested in knowing the man who was able to do what King T'Challa failed to do.

Once it is revealed to T'Challa and the tribal council that Killmonger is N'Jobu's son and thereby, according to African custom, an equally rightful heir to the throne, T'Challa must defend the title of King once more. While at battle during the ceremony, Killmonger supercedes T'Challa in agility, strength and brutality eventually pushing the defeated T'Challa over the edge of the waterfall. Assumed to be dead, Killmonger is named the new king of Wakanda and begins his mission to use Wakandan technology and weaponry to free Black and brown people who are still under neo-colonial, neo-liberal and white supremacist structures all over the world. For Killmonger, true liberation for people of colour who live in a world that operates using anti-black systems and ideologies, can only come way through a final act of violence. Furthermore, Killmonger feels betrayed by the royal family and council of elders for not bringing him back home to Wakanda despite T'Chaka killing his father. The same attitude of abandonment is Killmonger's biggest critique against Wakanda as they have chosen to isolate themselves from the rest of the world – including giving aid to other Africans, and people of African descent who have been left powerless to social, political and economic structures that place them at the bottom.

While T'Challa lay comatose, he is found by M'Baku and returned to the Jabari tribe where is preserved beneath ice. Found by Nakia, Shuri and Queen Mother Ramonda, T'Challa is given the final heart-shaped herb left after Killmonger's siege of Wakanda including its traditions.

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Brought back to full health, T'Challa makes his return to the Kingdom where he fights against Killmonger's title as King. Because T'Challa did not die nor did he give over his title, Killmonger's kingship is now invalidated. All those who supported Killmonger, save for the Border Tribe, now turn against him and fight for T'Challa's return to the throne. The Dora Mijale, Nakia, Shuri and Agent Ross who was boarded on the Wakandan ship after getting shot by Klaue and his cronies, come together to prevent Wakandan arms and weaponry from leaving the country. Now under threat of global war and violence, the Jabari tribe also join to assist in protecting Wakanda and her people.

Meanwhile, T'Challa and Killmonger combat one another using their respective highly technologised Black Panther suits. However, now thrown deep into the vibranium mines, T'Challa and Killmonger's suits are made vulnerable due to the sonic disruptions caused by the movement of trains which carry the vibranium mineral. While Killmonger's suit is weakened, T'Challa stabs him thus causing him a fatal injury. Above ground, Agent Ross with the assistance of Shuri, is able to destroy the planes sent by Killmonger to export Wakandan arms all over the world. Trying to save Killmonger's life from death, T'Challa carries him outside of the mine. However, knowing that he will face imprisonment, Killmonger opts to die a free man. T'Challa thus returns to his seat as King of Wakanda, restores peace to his land and changes Wakandan socio-political and economic approaches. Wakanda has now opened its borders and resources to aid the rest of the world building the first Wakandan international embassy and research centre in Oakland California where Killmonger was born and raised.

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