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Africanfuturism, placing Africa in the future: an analysis of Pumzi (2009) and Afronauts (2014)

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2023
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University of the Witwatersrand

Faculty of Humanities

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Masters' in Film and Television

Final Dissertation

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Africanfuturism - Placing Africa in the Future: An analysis of *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)*

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Date:
7 November 2022

Africanfuturism - Placing Africa in the future:
An analysis of *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)*

By

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment for the degree Masters' in Film and Television

Supervisor

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2022

Ethics Waiver number:
HRECNMW22/01/08

DECLARATION

I declare this dissertation is my own unaided work, submitted for the degree Masters' of Arts in Film and Television to the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. There has been no submission before for any other degree or examination at any other university.



Karabelo Shirinde

On the 7th of November 2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, I would like to thank God for providing me with the strength to persevere through completing this research.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Mr. Neo Peterson, for his unconditional support and encouragement during the course of my Master's degree; your contribution to this research is immense and highly appreciated.

I would like to say thank you to Dr. Yolo Koba for his guidance throughout this journey and for his continued assistance during the course of my degree.

I would like to thank my family: my dad for his encouragement, my siblings, Karabo and Khothatso, for pushing me to finish - even if they did not know what I was doing most of the time, and finally my mom-ervisor, Dr. Joyce Shirinde, aka mom for continuously holding me down and assisting me as much as possible. I love you guys.

Finally, thank you to my amazing and supportive friends who continued to encourage me to keep going, and always reminded me of the bigger picture.

Bless you all.

DEDICATION

To my mom -
Thank you for always reminding me to reach for the stars.

ABSTRACT

Taking into consideration Africa's long historical relationship with colonialism, alienation and currently neo-colonialism, 'africanfuturism' a sub-genre of science fiction and the focus of this study, brings forward the necessity of rooting African science fiction films in the continent of Africa, created by Black people of African descent and ensuring that narratives are driven by the histories, daily social-political and cultural experiences of the people within the continent. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate how the African science fiction films *Pumzi (2009)* directed by Wanuri Kahiu, and *Afronauts (2014)* directed by Nuotama Frances Bodumo portray africanfuturism.

This study used a developed africanfuturist framework inspired by the description of africanfuturism by author Nnedi Okorafor (2019) and Masego Mashigo (2018). The chosen case study films were analysed according to africanfuturist components, namely: iconography, ideology, geopolitical and socio-cultural background, semiotics and symbolism, and the filmmaker's profile to determine the extent to which they portray africanfuturism. Further research objectives of this study included the discussion on how Western science fiction films present colonial conventions and the difference between afrofuturism and africanfuturism within the literature review.

With the application of the developed africanfuturist framework, this study concludes that both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* successfully portray africanfuturism in the capacity of their geological settings, ideological viewpoints, socio-economic and political representations and local cultural symbolisms within the continent. Finally, both films present a nuanced understanding and portrayal of science and technology as it relates to the African continent, and further dismantles preconceived notions about the African continent as described by the West. These representations essentially redefine the relationship between Africa and the science fiction genre by clearly demonstrating, transforming and representing the continent within an imaginative and realist space, coupled with scientific, technological and globalist expressions.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND ACCOLADES

Africanfuturism - Placing Africa in the Future: An analysis of *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* was presented at the following conferences:

1. The 13th Wits Cross Faculty Postgraduate Symposium 2022, under the GradFlash category. This research came in first place in the aforementioned category.

Link: https://youtu.be/lj84clJzAZw

2. The 2022 Wits School of Arts Postgraduate Conference accepted this research for presentation at The Point of Order on the 1st of September 2022.

Link: https://youtu.be/9Y0Ztcl1rTM

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aim of the study

In this study, the aim was to investigate how the African science fiction films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray africanfuturism. Based on the description and characteristics of the africanfuturism sub-genre, as defined by the authors Nnedi Okorafor (2019) and Mohlale Mashigo (2018) and selected tropes found within the science fiction film genre, I developed a conceptual framework that was used as an analytical tool to examine the chosen case study films. The films' assessment was according to the following components: iconography, ideology, geopolitical and sociocultural background, semiotics and symbolism, and the filmmaker's profile. Furthermore, the study aimed to differentiate between afrofuturism and africanfuturism as two separate sub-genres of science fiction that centre their themes on African-American and African material realities.

Through the final outcomes of this research, the aim was to identify how each case study film applied and/or did not apply africanfuturist frameworks, and provide further recommendations as to how africanfuturist filmmakers can continue to address and reconstruct the concept of science and technology and relate them to the continent of Africa; this will result in africanfuturists engaging, dismantling and confronting colonial representations of the continent and people of Africa through the science fiction genre, and showcasing how factors such as digital development, the digital divide, artificial intelligence, bio-politics, environmentalism, science and technology are relevant to African societies and their standards of living.

1.2 Research question

This study addressed the following key questions:

1) How do the science fiction films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray africanfuturism?
2) How do traditional western science fiction films show colonial conventions?
3) What is the difference between afrofuturism and africanfuturism?

1.3 Rationale

The major focus of this research project is africanfuturism, which is a term coined by author Nnedi Okorafor. Africanfuturism aims to bring forward the necessity of rooting African science fiction films in the continent of Africa, whereby Black African people create narratives driven by the histories, daily social-political and cultural experiences of the people within the continent (Okorafor, 2019).

Two of the most successful African based science fiction films to date, *District 9 (2009)* and *Black Panther (2018),* garnered success for their ability to root the premise and action of their narratives coupled with advanced technology and aliens within the continent of Africa. *District 9 (2009),* directed by Neil Bloemkamp and based in South Africa, told the story of alien space invaders who had been trapped and placed as refugees. *Black Panther (2018),* directed by Ryan Coogler, was based in the fictionalised, technologically advanced country of Wakanda, and followed superhero King T'Challa as he faced off with his vengeful African-American cousin, Killmonger.

The success of these two films was met with criticism from audiences and scholars who questioned the representation of The Other *(District 9)* and the unrealistic portrayal of the African continent under the guise of afrofuturism *(Black Panther).* Although *District 9 (2009)* showcased collaboration between humans and aliens, its representation of Nigerian immigrants stereotyped them as racialised figures, and superstitious thugs with cannibalistic tendencies (Veracini, 2011). This formation and representation of African subjects is what Hopkinson (2004) describes as "critiquing colonialism but simultaneously reifying the problematic assumption and enhancing the colonial project" (Hopkinson, 2004). Similarly, although Black Panther was successful in providing a predominately-Black film based in an African country that never experienced the horrors of colonialism and the current neo-colonial aftermath of social-economic and political despair, it raised concerns about the unrealistic portrayal of what Africa and its people face today. Coupled with these concerns was the criticism of Western influence over the portrayal of Africa as a glorified and romanticised monolithic 'motherland' country, and highlighted the major concern of afrofuturism as a sub-genre of science fiction and its sole focus on African-American socio-political and cultural issues.

Therefore, due to the historical glorification of colonial expansion and the misrepresentation of the other in the science fiction genre, and afrofuturism as a sub-genre focusing mainly on African-American experiences and histories, the researcher identified a gap in the production of successful African science fiction (africanfuturist) films rooted within the African continent and focusing on African cultures, histories, mythologies and experiences; furthermore, she also identified a gap in the conceptualization of a theoretical africanfuturist framework. Hence, in this study the researcher chose two African based science fiction films, *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014),* as well-suited case study films. These two films are not only *from* countries situated in Africa, but explore the daily realities, whether in the present or future *about* Africa; both films also explore various themes that relate science fiction to Africa. *Pumzi (2009),* directed by Wanuri Kahiu*,* imagines a dystopian Africa in the far future that was affected by climate change, and addresses what the long-term effects of climate change would mean to the continent of Africa, and *Afronauts (2014),* directed by Nuotama Frances Bodumo, imagines space exploration through the lens of an African female in conjunction with the Western superpowers during the Cold War in the 1960s.

In closing, there is little to no conceptual or theoretical frameworks in terms of understanding the literary and theoretical components of africanfuturism, and a limited amount of africanfuturist films (short or long form) that stray away from Western tropes that are developed and produced within African cinema. Although africanfuturism has been successful in literature, both African based and Western scholars, who have focused on science fiction within or related to Africa, such as Eshun (2003), Jackson and Moody-Freeman (2009), Nyawalo (2016), Yaszek (2006), Melnyk (2021), Wachira (2020), Rico (2017) and Pereira et al. (2021), have continued to categorise such narratives under afrofuturism without recognising the need to develop a category that represents experiences separate from and not influenced by Western culture. In film, successful African based science fiction films have adopted the Western influence into their visual narratives and have emulated tropes that reify concepts and stereotypes that have damaged the perceptions of the African continent. There has been a progression in African science fiction within film, such as Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes (2006),* that have attempted to develop

narratives that are distinct to the material realities connected to the African continent, and due to the success of films such as *Black Panther (2018)* and *District 9 (2009),* more africanfuturist filmmakers are experimenting and challenging what the science fiction genre could mean for the African continent.

Therefore, by examining the chosen case study films according to the existing definitions and characteristics of africanfuturism and investigating the extent to which they did or did not apply africanfuturism frameworks, the outcome of this study aims to contribute to the development of an africanfuturist theoretical and conceptual framework that can contribute to the knowledge of the new rising movement of africanfuturism within film. Additionally, this study hopes to illustrate the major differences between afrofuturism as a genre that caters to African-American material realities and africanfuturism that solely focuses on Africa and the material realities stemming from the continent. Finally, taking into consideration the reasons for this study mentioned above, the researcher hopes africanfuturist filmmakers will aim to further explore Africa's vision for the future in relation to science and technology through their narratives and visual language so that stereotypes can be dismantled and redefined, and for Black science fiction narratives to be reclaimed and told *from* Africans *about* Africa.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1. Introduction

The literature review section of this study is in three sections. In the first section, the researcher examined the science fiction genre. This section aims to provide context into the relationship between Western science fiction and colonial glorification. The section does not aim to provide an in-depth analysis into the history of science fiction but rather provide a background into the representation of The Other, and the erasure of Black bodies and their experiences within Western science fiction films. The second section of the review focused on afrofuturism and the important role it plays in redefining what science fiction means to the Black lived experience, particularly within African-American culture. Finally, the third section focused on africanfuturism. This section will delve into the rise of africanfuturism and the pivotal role this newly developed sub-genre will have in placing the African continent in the centre of the future. The literature review closes with a brief analysis of Octavia Butler's *Kindred (1979)* and Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death (2010*) to compare the differences and similarities between afrofuturism and africanfuturism.

2.2. Science fiction

Science fiction is a genre, or even a sub-genre that falls under a larger category of fantasy and horror films (Nagl, 1983). There have been varied critical positions in terms of defining science fiction and locating where it is situated within the genre spectrum. Critics such as Cook (1985: p 99) have considered it to be a sub-genre of horror, Kuhn and Radstone (1990: p 355) have distinctly separated science fiction from the horror genre, and critics such as Konigsberg (1993: p 303) have placed science fiction with horror films as a sub-genre of fantasy films.

Robert Heinlein, to whom the term 'science fiction' is attributed, describes science fiction as a genre that falls under the umbrella term 'speculative fiction;' this term includes "all forms of fantastic fiction, inclusive of science fiction, fantasy and horror, supernatural fiction, apocalyptic and post-apocalyptic fiction, utopian and dystopian, alternative history and magical realism" (Shade, 2009: p 2). Heinlein continues to state that within speculative fiction, "the action of the story can take place in worlds and cultures that exist or new worlds that have been created" (Shade, 2009: p 2).

The attempt to achieve a specific definition of science fiction, separated from fantasy and horror, results in a lack of validity since fantasy, horror and science fiction films tend to overlap within their conventions (Nagl, 1983).

Hodgens (1959) describes how science fiction involves extrapolated or fictitious science, or fictitious use of scientific possibilities; which may simply be fiction that takes place in the future, or introduces some radical assumption about the past or present (Hodgens, 1959: 30). Based on the above descriptions of science fiction, the researcher chose to argue that the major factor that distinguishes science fiction films from horror and fantasy is the conventional trope of science and technology. These two elements become the major tools that play a key role in driving the narrative of science fiction films forward. Thus, science fiction is a genre under the broader term of 'speculative fiction,' which deals with imaginative concepts that are often related to science and technology. The genre overtly explores the consequences and potentialities of scientific and technological innovations and relies on writing that is rationally or realistically about alternative worlds or futures (Bisschoff, 2020). Often, there can be the infusion of science and technology with magic or paranormal activity, allowing for the overlap of science fiction between horror and fantasy. By playing with the fears and curiosities of audiences, science fiction films provide a look into the future where audiences are no longer in control and filmmakers rely on audiences to suspend their disbelief (Hayward, 2013: p 315).

The science fiction genre allows filmmakers to ask one major question, "What if" (Shade, 2009: p 2). This question results in the opportunity to explore endless answers and utilise the visual medium to engage in socio-political and cultural commentary creatively, using particular characteristics and conventions linked to speculative fictionalised genres (Shade, 2009: p 2). A range of characteristics can be attributable to speculative fiction. In this regard, under the umbrella term of speculative fiction, these characteristics also apply to the science fiction genre. Science fiction characteristics include 1) Stories that are set in the future or the historical past, 2) Stories set in other worlds in the present or future where humans either take part or not in the story, 3) Stories that are set on Earth before recorded history and contradicting known archaeological historical records 4) Stories about visits from ancient aliens, aliens that left no trace of their civilisation or lost kingdoms,

and 5) Stories that explore or contradict some known or supposed law of nature such as time travel. In conclusion, for films to be regarded as science fiction (or any other speculative fiction sub-genres), they need to take place in worlds that have never existed or are not yet known (Scott, 1990: p 17 quoted from Shade, 2009: pg 2).

Further ingredients or compositional elements that make up science fiction films include space opera, fantastic journeys in future worlds, lost worlds, time travel, monsters and mutants, robots, superheroes, doomsday, future wars, mad scientists, inventions and fabulous encounters (Nagl, 1983).

Particularly known for employing imperialist conventions, Western science fiction films have thematic links and roots in invasion, alienation and destruction. The 'alien other' intentionally becomes a signifier for mass destruction and conquest, and the human-alien relationship becomes that of inferior vs superior, either where aliens invade humans or vice versa (Dillion, 2012: p 5). These invasions often result in alien destruction and / or colonial violence. Hayward (2013) suggests that science fiction is "politically motivated and continues to showcase the status quo of destroying the enemy and getting back home to safety" (Hayward, 2013: p 316). Colonial attributes connected to the genre questions technology or utilises it to destroy the alien other and outsiders that do not represent Euro-America (Hayward, 2013: p 320). Finally, in relation to the indigenous other, the science fiction genre has normalised the action of pointing to otherness as threatening to life and / or society (Nama, 2008).

Science fiction films entrench what author John Reider describes as the "colonial gaze" (Rieder, 2008), which is "when power and knowledge is distributed to the subject who is actively looking, while denying or minimising access to power for the object that is being looked at" (Rieder, 2008). This would be Westerners finding themselves as the objects of a Martian gaze or vice versa, resulting in a superior vs inferior power dynamic, and science and technology becoming the basis of evolution for the future (Higgins, 2009).

Avatar (2009) is a science fiction film that exemplifies the colonial gaze between the human-alien interactions portrayed in the film. Directed by James Cameron, the film's success smashed box office records after earning 2.8 billion USD. In the year of its

release, *Avatar (2009)* was considered the most technologically innovative film due to its intrinsic use of motion capture and the development and building of the extraordinary world of Pandora.

Avatar (2009) follows Jake Sully, a paralysed former marine. Jake becomes mobile again after his recruitment to go to the remarkable alien world of Pandora. Due to the planet's poisonous environment, human beings have to link their human consciousness to Human-Na'vi hybrids, which allows them to explore the planet freely. While in his Avatar state, Jake falls in love with Neytiri, a native Na'vi. As they become closer in their journey, Jake must battle with his human counterparts for the survival of Pandora.

The major theme in *Avatar (2009)* deals with environmentalism, which is the catalyst of the narrative. Humans on Earth desperately need help because Earth will face dystopian related catastrophes in the future such as chronic war, environmental degradation and resource insecurities due to human negligence and destruction (Veracini, 2011). The similarities between *District 9 (2009)* and *Avatar (2009)* include the subjection of aliens to settler colonialism. The aliens in *District 9 (2009)* invade Earth, but in turn become refugees and endure segregation; in *Avatar (2009)*, the invaders are humans and the indigenous people of Pandora, the Na'Vi need help. The colonial gaze imbued within *Avatar (2009)* stems from the Americanised ambivalent representation of a colonial encounter. There is a paranoid anxiety concerning the possibility of contamination or primitive conquest from the alien on one hand, and the perceived fantasy of indigenous others as a demigod on the other (Veracini, 2011).

Together with the ambivalent colonial connotations, *Avatar (2009)* employs the white saviour narrative in which Jake invades the world of Pandora; but, he in turn has to save it from his own kind, thus garnering praise and recognition from the natives of the planet. *Avatar (2009)* highlights traditional science fiction conventions through its portrayal of the alien other, which goes hand-in-hand with the overall colonial gaze strategies mentioned above. The Westerners in this film, similar to many Hollywood science fiction films, expect aliens and / or indigenous people to move and obey once colonial powers settle in; "alien others" or indigenous people are also represented as

obstacles in the narrative which provides the colonial power represented in the film (who is usually the main character) an advantage because audiences sympathise and identify with these characters and their goals, such as Jake's disability and his need for redemption.

In relation to the indigenous experience, the western science fiction genre notably exerts certain ideological fantasies that impose or showcase the physical actions of colonialism (Higgins, 2009). Zizek, quoted by Higgins (2009), describes these ideological fantasies as "beliefs that are consciously disavowed, recognizing them as untrue, but nonetheless supported in practice" (Higgins, 2009). These ideological fantasies are as follows:

a) ***The ideological fantasy of racism***

This fantasy implies the awareness of the racial other by colonial masters. The colonial powers know that the racial other is a human being just like them, but they behave under the assumption that the other is a grotesque parody of humankind (Higgins, 2009). By treating the racial other as inhuman or subhuman, the violent mistreatment of the indigenous other is then justified (Higgins, 2009). It is also imperative to note that within traditional science fiction films, the racial other can also be embodied as alternate alien species, thus the embodiment becomes a physical signifier for difference.

b) ***The ideological fantasy of discovery***

The ideological fantasy of discovery speaks to the awareness by colonists that there are indigenous people living on the land that they 'discovered,' but they continue to act as if the land was empty and infertile before their arrival (Higgins, 2009). In *Avatar (2009)*, the world of Pandora had been "discovered" as an alternative planet that could provide resources for human beings to settle once Earth becomes inhabitable. Through the superior - inferior dichotomy, colonists use the ideological fantasy of discovery to strategically misplace and erase native people, their experiences and their livelihoods from their own land and customs.

c) The ideological fantasy of missionary

Colonial masters are aware that their arrival disrupts and destroys the traditional way of life in indigenous settlements, but they believe their missionary expedites fulfil the deep needs and desires of the natives (Higgins, 2009). By invalidating the existence of indigenous people in their land, colonial masters inherently claim the fruitful progression of indigenous lands and people by justifying their primitiveness and need for social, economic and cultural reform.

It is inherently clear, as Reider (2008) describes, that “science fiction exposes what colonialism imposes" (Reider, 2008). Furthermore, due to science fiction’s continuous showcasing and romanticising of conquest and alienation, the concept and action of colonialism is a significant historical frame of reference for the science fiction genre (Rieder, 2008). Acknowledging these ideological fantasies together with Westernised colonial representations within Western science fiction films, allows culturally diverse futurists to engage, address and redefine what science fiction would mean to the indigenous body and their experiences. A contemporary and revitalised approach towards science fiction would be necessary to disconnect science fiction from colonialism, especially within the 21st century post-colonial age. Afrofuturism and africanfuturism are two sub-genres that ultimately challenge the Western conventions of science fiction and provide a framework individualised particularly to the African-American and African lived experience.

2.3 Afrofuturism

The rise of afrofuturism stems from the omission of culturally diverse people within science fiction narratives. Mainstream Western science fiction films have continually explored issues of empire, but those narratives were limited because Blacks, women and various culturally diverse people and their participation within these narratives were either missing, stereotyped or represented as alien signifiers (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009). In relation to film, afrofuturism can be described as science fiction filmmaking that implores and encourages Black radical expressions that explore futurist imaginings in relation to social-political and cultural experiences and linking those experiences to science, technology and the imagined future or revisited past (Lempert, 2014).

When interrogating and comparing the ideological difference between what Western science fiction has encompassed and what native science fiction would encompass, the former would include narratives that project anxieties and desires that relate to colonisation, imperialism, alien terrorism, self-destruction, chauvinistic utopias and post-apocalyptic dystopia within Euro-America. The latter would explore various diverse subjects within various categories and address non-colonial encounters, utopian sovereignty and dystopian assimilation (Lampert, 2014). In order to reformulate the framework in which science fiction as a genre could possibly relate itself to post-colonial experiences, Lempert (2014) suggests, “any attempt to develop indigenous futurisms should acknowledge the need for a flexible framework that is amenable to the diversity of native community priorities, histories, and concerns. Furthermore, it is imperative that such analytical projects are grounded in material, social and psychological community realities” (Lempert, 2014).

Black and Brown authors between the 1920s and 1930s implemented what Lempert (2014) described above by imagining and curating futures where Blacks and other non-White cultural groups fully existed in all forms, culturally, politically and socially and were agents of their own lives and were outwardly involved in global political change (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009). Although some of these writers were not particularly science fiction authors, writers such as W.E.B Du Bois and George S. Schuyler centred their plots on previously excluded Blacks and other characters of colour who championed courses of social justice and challenged topics such as domination and conquest (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009). This provided a foundation for 20th and 21st century writers such as Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany, Nalo Hopkinson and many more who challenged the status quo of Western representation by reconfiguring narratives that largely represented Black social-political, cultural and social-ecological futures, resulting in the centring and redefining of Black imaginings and representations within the science fiction genre.

Afrofuturist works adopt science fiction genre conventions and embed social commentary within multiple narrative forms with a variety of non-Western tropes, such as race relations and pre-colonial history. The merge between social commentary and science fiction provided afrofuturist thinkers with the ability to use stories about their past as a representative method to call attention to the scientific

and social injustices of the past and present, as well as producing innovative images of futures one cannot whitewash, stereotype or ignore (Lavender III & Yaszek, 2020).

Contemporary works by Black and African diasporic writers and filmmakers between the late 20th and the current 21st century embraced the science fiction genre by extending the boundaries and envisioning different times, places and social arrangements. The issues they addressed were not only limited to race, ethnicity and colour, but also heightened the presence and existence of Black individuals or beings coded as black and went beyond by addressing and interrogating issues of gender, politics and technology (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009). These works fall under Black Speculative Art due to their practical integration of African diasporic or African metaphysics with science or technology and the aim to interpret, engage, design or alter reality for the re-imagination of the past, the contested present, and as a catalyst for the future (Anderson, 2016). Moreover, the themes of these works explore the major question: What is the responsibility of the Black artist in the 21st century? (Anderson, 2016)

Due to the growth of Black science fiction and speculative fiction, Black artists, authors, filmmakers, etc. will have the opportunity to appropriate genre conventions to suit their own needs and portray their own experiences, presenting new perspectives and posing questions not addressed in Western works (Jackson & Moody-Freeman, 2009). Afrofuturism and other native science fiction films illustrated the importance and the potential to imagine new worlds and societies where stereotypes of the represented ‘other’ undergo a re-making and redefining (Cranny-Francis quoted in Kuhn, 1990: 221). Kodwo Eshun characterises afrofuturism as “a programme for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afro-diasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken” (Kodwo, 2003: p 301).

Science fiction films do not only hold the potential to play with mainstream conventions, but they significantly create space for imaginative ideological subversion *(Lempert, 2009).* Furthermore, through creative and imagined ideological subversions, afrofuturism offers a way to reclaim Black futures despite present

continued control and repetitions of violent and discriminatory histories (Fitzpatrick, 2020). Some of the major objectives of afrofuturism include Black scholars, artists, and activists reclaiming their right to tell their own stories, critiquing the European / American digerati class of their narratives about cultural others' past, present and future, as well as challenging their presumed authority to be the sole interpreters of Black lives and futures (Anderson, 2016).

As a movement, Afrofuturism can be described as a body of systemic Black speculative thought that originated in the 1990s as a response to postmodernity (Anderson, 2009) The afrofuturist movement provides a critical space to lay a foundation where society is not bound to the ideals of White enlightenment universalism, Western critical theory, science or technology (Jones, 2015; Rabaka, 2010; Rollefson, 2008: 91). Instead, afrofuturism allows for the abrupt emergence of radical expression of socio-political and cultural politics within the Black community (Nama, 2008: 160).

The box office hit film *Black Panther (2018)* exemplifies this required radical expression in which Black filmmakers and characters are the driving force in presenting African diasporic inclusivity in relation to science and technology, especially pertaining to the African continent. The success of *Black Panther (2018)* illustrates how audiences were interested in and encouraged by the radical framing of Africa and its future. The combination of technology, pro-poor governance, prosperity, ecological sustainability and peace within *Black Panther (2018)* contributes towards plausible tenets of an African future (Pereira & Moyo & Selomane & Sitas & Sitas & Trisos, 2021).

Although *Black Panther (2018)* provides an afrofuturist template of challenging the status quo of the representation of Black bodies and how they participate within secular Western narratives particularly in science fiction. One of the major limitations of afrofuturism is what Stuart Hall describes as "the positions of enunciation" (Hall, 1988); this refers to questioning the positionality of where one comes from and when they are trying to represent something else. "Though we speak, so to say 'in our own name', of ourselves and from our own experience, nevertheless who speaks, and the subject who is spoken of are never exactly in the same place" (Hall, 1988). *Black*

Panther (2018), as a Western Hollywood blockbuster film, still illustrates an African-Americanised perspective of imagining a non-existent country in Africa that was never colonised but instead secretly thrives on an indestructible element that provides technological sovereignty within the continent of Africa. The country of Wakanda is not only ostentatious in its visual representation, exhibiting a romanticised utopia, it also lacks pragmatic neo-colonial representations faced within the continent of Africa today.

Black Panther (2018) aims to present itself as a pan-African liberation film, but Russell Rickford (2018) describes the film as merely counter-revolutionary. Although the film celebrates Black dignity and sophistication, it dually illustrates unprogressive Western tropes that have effectively harmed third world countries for decades. The representations of characters such as Killmonger, N'jobu and the Jabari as radical stereotypes of blackness and the inclusion of the CIA Agent as the convenient White saviour, are stereotypical and classic examples of the West's attempt to represent cultures and continents they deem "other" and third world. Mokoena (2018) describes how the film "could have drawn more from African values and African-centred economies exemplified by communalism rather than buttressing the idea of a self-serving middle and upper class Africa which marginalises, excludes and sustains class struggles" (Mokoena, 2018: 15).

One of the major political facets of the film Rickford (2018) describes as counter-revolutionary is Wakanda's conservative nationalism. Throughout the film, rulers of the Wakandan state continuously reject suggestions to use their technological privileges and power to empower other Black people across the continent and around the world, instead the Wakandan leaders maintain isolationism, assist occasionally on missions in foreign lands and behave like any modern capitalist elites by ignoring the historical and daily realities experienced throughout the African diaspora (Rickford, 2018). Mokoena (2018) further points out that the Wakandan state only assumes themselves into international grounds when partnering with institutions such as the CIA and the United Nations - institutions that are "symbolic of the rescuing of economic warfare waged through economic policies that caused havoc and to some extent are incompatible with African values" (Mokena, 2018: 17).

The presentation of the antagonist of the film, Killmonger, is as deranged for his radical response to the horrors of white supremacy and imperialism, resulting in T'challa becoming the beacon of righteousness as the moderate Black who is acceptable in the eyes of Western imperial globalists. The construction between African and African-American estrangement sets African virtue against African-American vice (Rickford, 2018). This also results in the film's projection of imperialism and equates any vision of globalisation that is not managed by US capitalism and its allies as terrorism (Rickford, 2018), and further highlights the narrative of African dependency on white US imperialism in order to take down the radical Black force.

Nnedi Okorafor pragmatically points out how *Black Panther (2018)* serves, the African-American narrative in which African virtue is set against African-American backdrops, and dually describes the difference between afrofuturism and africanfuturism by describing the final scene of the film:

> "**Afrofuturism**: Wakanda builds its first outpost in Oakland, CA, USA
> **Africanfuturism:** Wakanda builds its first outpost in a neighbouring country" (Okorafor, 2019)

This portrayal speaks to director Ryan Coogler's background, understanding and relatability as a Black African-American from Oakland, and expresses a vision of African virtuism to serve the struggles within the African-American diaspora. African-Americans who have historically embodied the adage of "you cannot go home again" and who seek to "return or connect to the motherland" would essentially find closure in the final scene of the film as it would relate to them.

Although afrofuturism attempts to include the African diaspora at large, the major limitation facing the movement, as discussed above, is its specific focus on the African-American community, treating African-American themes, highlighting their experiences, addressing their concerns in relation to 20th and 21st century techno-culture, and in turn diluting or misrepresenting the African continent and its relationship with science and technology (Lavender III & Yaszek, 2020). Finally, afrofuturism allows for Black expression in relation to science and technology, but

continues to disconnect from African material realities, geopolitical contexts and life experiences (Mashigo, 2018).

To go beyond Afrofuturism and move toward an African-centred futurism, new narrative and aesthetic techniques will be required to rethink race and positionality within science fiction; new critical theories to update Afrofuturist thinking would also be required to mould a distinct futurist movement that focuses on African narratives that are not only *about* Africa but also emerge *from* Africa (Lavender III & Yaszek, 2020).

2.4 Africanfuturism

Author Nnedi Okorafor, coined the term ‘africanfuturism’ as a sub-genre of science fiction. Africanfuturism is an independent futurism similar to afrofuturism through what Stuart Hall defines as “cultural identity” (Hall, 1988). This cultural identity is what people with a shared history and ancestry have in common. The relation between africanfuturism and afrofuturism stems from the connection that Blacks on the African continent and Blacks within the diaspora at large share “through blood, spirit, history and future” (Okorafor, 2019); this allows for common historical experiences and shared cultural codes, which unites both sides (Hall, 1988). Further examination of Nnedi Okorafor’s definition of africanfuturism can be coupled with Mohlale Mashigo’s description of a futurist genre that is specific to the continent of Africa, as well as with various scholars such as Bisschoff (2020), Byrne (2004), Bryce (2019), Hugo (2017), Hanchey (2020) and Yu Burnett (2015) et al. who have provided further discussion about postcolonial speculative fiction and African science fiction.

From Okorafor’s (2019) definition of africanfuturism, these are the following elements embedded into the sub-genre: The socio-cultural, geopolitical and ideological backgrounds expressed in an africanfuturist film provide insight into the everyday material realities experienced within the African continent. Africanfuturism provides an opportunity for creators to experiment and showcase their opinion on Africa’s vision of the future in relation to its current social, economic and political position. Under the socio-cultural component, africanfuturism also includes the cosmologies, traditions and mythologies rooted within the continent as cultural traditions form a

significant part of the daily lives of African societies. An example of this is *Les Saignantes (2006),* a Cameroonian science fiction film by Jean-Pierre Bekolo, which aims to show the daily lived realities of the youth in Cameroon and urges them to challenge dominant modes of thought (Omelsky, 2012).

Bekolo adapts the science fiction cyborgian trope and merges it with the ideological notion of Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *The Decolonised Mind* (1986). This notion speaks to African writers who have the responsibility to rewrite Africa. As African creators, Ngugi emphasises the colonial language as the greatest threat to nations of Africa and thus reclamation is necessary in order to destroy colonial identification within the continent of Africa. Ngugi describes how "we are a product of history, of time and place" and how essentially "the writers subject matter then becomes history," Ngugi envisions the ability for [African] artists to create art that blurs the distinction between personal and political, this results in "the product of a writers imaginative involvement [becoming] a reflection of society: its economic structure, its struggles [and] its structure of values" (quoted from Almquist, 1998: 4).

Therefore, in *Les Saignantes (2006)*, Bekolo illustrates similar sentiments by "uprooting hegemonic tropes of African pathology, recasts narratives of African tradition in a way that forecloses singular, fixed interpretations, and depicts two young women who illustrate the potential for body and machine to merge in opposition to masculinist state power" (Omelsky, 2012: pg 9). *Les Saignantes (2006)* further provides an example of an africanfuturist film that is rooted within a specific country located in African - Cameroon, and aims to dismantle social dualisms that result in hegemonic social structures by applying a "new anatomy" and new modes of thought.

Ngugi's notion of the "poet and politician having many things in common" (Almquist, 1998) is effective in the discussion of africanfuturism, as it describes the importance of africanfuturists who need to change the language of how Africa is viewed compared to what has been historically written. The creation and writing of Western descriptions of Africa are still created and written with certain conditioning in an attempt to represent and express the lived realities and cultures of Africans. The africanfuturist has the responsibility to apply the notion of "what if " and create narratives outside of Western descriptions, including African-American descriptions.

Just like the poet, the africanfuturist requires a tight relationship with culture, politics and their society, because they maintain a special role in post-independent African nations. Africa and Africans are not new subjects, the essential difference between Africa written *about* and Africa written *from* is the political characterisation and subsequent representation of Africans resulting from a shift in viewpoint (Almquist, 1998: 12). Ngugi describes this accordingly:

> “The failure in imaginative comprehension of the African character in European fiction lies in the fact that the African is not seen in an active casual-effect relationship with a significant past; the African novelist has attempted [to] restore the African character with his history. The African character who appears in European literature has no vital relationship with his environment, with his past, he does not create, he is created” (Quoted from Almquist, 1998: 12).

Thus, Bekolo illustrates the above-mentioned notion by merging his ideological position, social experience and commentary, and cultural reconfiguration with technology and machines that are “oppositional subjects" (Omelsky, 2012: 9). The Cyborgian women in the film are instruments depicting radical feminist notions by using the female body to demolish masculine power structures in Cameroon.

Another element included within africanfuturism is the prevalence of science and technology as key factors within the visual narrative. Science and technology should contribute to the themes and the story world. As Okorafor (2019) stated, “Africanfuturism is concerned with visions of the future, is interested in technology” (Okorafor, 2019). The relationship between Africa and technological advancement ranges from the digital divide caused by political and economic factors to progress in scientific and technological innovations in various fields. Exploration in science and technology is the foundation of science fiction and forms part of the iconographical elements of the genre. Africanfuturism’s “interest in technology” aims to explore the globalisation of science and technology and examine the placement of the African continent within the global scene. Africanfuturism provides an opportunity for africanfuturists to centre Africa in the globalised future, allowing for the exploration of the relationship that the continent has with science and technology and what it

means to the people and their daily lived realities within the continent. Finally, the sub-genre of africanfuturism “does not concern itself with Western ideologies or influences... leaves the earth and is centred on and predominantly written and produced by Black people of Africa” (Okorafor, 2019). Africanfuturism is for “Africans living in Africa" (Mashigo, 2018).

Africanfuturist films provide an opportunity for filmmakers to conceptualise visual narratives where Africans are not perpetually on the wrong side of history, subjected to constant violence of slavery, colonialism and perennial neo-colonialism (Bisschoff, 2020). The objectives of africanfuturism includes imagining a new space and time that is radically different from the stereotypical representations of the “dark continent,” which is constantly drenched in a cycle of poverty, corruption, violence and disaster (Bisschoff, 2020). Furthermore, should afrofuturist narratives concern itself with the abovementioned representations, the positionalities in which they stem would come from Africans who resonate with the present-day realities in African countries and backgrounds that result from tragic pasts and determine the continents future. Lauren Beukes, South African science fiction author, states that “science fiction from Africa in particular is able to bring to bear the unique social issues of developing countries and the creative, alternative and unexpected ways in which people living in them respond” (Beukes, 2017).

An example of an africanfuturist film that reifies differences (alien, class, nationality), stereotypes an entire African ethnicity from a nationalist perspective, and still in the same thematic link, confronts socio-political and historical issues is the box office hit *District 9 (2009). District 9 (2009)* is a South African science fiction film directed by Neil Bloomkamp. The film centres on an unexpected alien invasion in the City of Gold, Johannesburg. These aliens, also referred to as ‘prawns,’ find themselves stranded and in need of human assistance; this results in these space invaders becoming refugees. The entire premise of the film strays away from the Westernised depiction of violent and invasive alien conquerors, instead focusing on the stranded who become signifiers for apartheid equivalent race-based segregations and fear-based xenophobia from South African authorities and citizens (Pereira, Moyo, Selomane et al, 2021).

Although *District 9 (2009)* was a co-production between the United states, New Zealand and South Africa, and portrays unfavourable misrepresentations of the alien other and the Nigerian ethnicity, the researcher chose to argue that *District 9 (2009)* is partially an africanfuturist film because it employs and addresses africanfuturist ideological and thematic links in relation to the history and current political climate in South Africa, such as social segregation and xenophobia; Its geographic placing in Johannesburg, South Africa, and its creation and development by the South African born and raised writer-director Neil Bloomkamp.

The above-mentioned factors do not necessarily deconstruct indigenous stereotypes and construct new representations of their existence, experiences and futures as africanfuturist works aim to do, but the film does address the social issues prevalent in South Africa's past during apartheid, which eventually seeped into the country's neo-colonial present and possible future. In relation to the ethos of africanfuturism, the major limitation of *District 9 (2009),* which also played a major role in the film's social commentary, was its portrayal of Nigerians as gruesome and thuggish figures.

Together with the social-realist approach in africanfuturism, another contemporary and radical approach of the sub-genre is its infusion of African cosmologies and ontologies. The science fiction genre addresses the past, present and future through western rationality and scientific truth on one side and traditional liminality and ambiguity on the other (Carstens & Roberts, 2009: p 80). The latter approach provides a space for africanfuturism to apply indigenous forms of rituals, myths and orality, which play an intricate role in African cultures, even if they are not recognised within global, particularly Western futuristic resonances (Bisschoff, 2020). Africanfuturism provides the potential to broaden the definition of science fiction by incorporating fantasy and magical realism. Africanfuturism does not have to confine itself and solely apply generic science fiction conventions, such as aliens, technologically determined and enhanced futures, but instead recognise and acknowledge that science and technology should coexist with rationality, orality, mysticism, religion, ecology, mythology, and spirituality to represent African storytelling traditions in relation to science fiction (Carstens & Roberts, 2009: p 86).

Africanfuturism allows africanfuturist filmmakers with the flexibility to dissect elements of science, technology and traditionalism and merge them within their narratives. Cameroonian writer-director Jean-Pierre Bekolo's *Les Saignantes (2005)* is a hybrid of the science fiction and horror genre that follows two young femme fatales in a dystopian Cameroon setting. The two women 'the bloodettes' aim to rid their futuristic country from corrupt and sex-obsessed powerful men by using their desirable and deadly femininity. This explicit critique of patriarchy in Cameroon aims to leave audiences asking questions such as "how can you watch a film like this and not do anything after?" (Bryce, 2019). The rise of Africanfuturist filmmaking provides a means in which there can be various socio-political, economic, cultural and environmental subjects interrogated and reformed to produce a preferred future of providing social comments or recommendations about the present in relation to the future, particularly within the African continent.

2.5 Afrofuturism vs Africanfuturism: A brief look into Octavia Butler's *Kindred (1979)* & Nnedi Okorafor's *Who Fears Death (2010)*

This section of the literature review attempts to provide a somewhat clear and pragmatic distinction or differentiation between the sub-genre of afrofuturism and africanfuturism through a brief comparative analysis of two prominent science fiction novels written by Black female authors Octavia Butler and Nnedi Okorafor, notably known for their science fiction works and for fusing their social and cultural backgrounds as Black females of African-American and African descent with the conventions of the science fiction genre. These two notable projects continue to be relevant to this study because both novels are of key interest as they will be adapted for screen - *Kindred (1979)* as an upcoming television series by FX Productions and *Who Fears Death (2010)* as an upcoming television series by HBO.

2.5.1 Afrofuturism: Octavia Butler's Kindred (1979)

Kindred is a 1979 neo-slave science fiction novel written by acclaimed author Octavia Butler, who is also known as the 'queen of afrofuturism' for her renowned works of science fiction novels that have covered themes from slavery, race, class, gender, environmentalism and postcolonial discourses of the other. Butler's works include, *Parable of the Sower (1993), Parable of the Talents (1998), Wild Seed (1980), Fledgling (2005),* and many more. Being one of the first African-American

females to cover these themes through science fiction conventions, Butler has directly influenced and innovated the idea of merging African-American social, political issues with science fiction, and by notably placing Black women in the forefront as the main characters in her works.

Kindred (1979) follows a 26 year old, African-American woman named Dana who in 1976 lives in Los Angeles with her White husband Kevin. Dana's life goes awry when she finds herself transported to the 19th century antebellum period, where she is continuously conjured by a slave owner named Rufus. Dana realises that Rufus is her great-great-great grandfather who she has to help continuously in order to exist in the future. Furthermore, Dana discovers that her existence depends on Rufus raping Alice, who in turn is her great-great-great grandmother, and falls pregnant with his child Hagar. Dana is thrown into a loop of endless time travel as she unintentionally travels back to her past, specifically when Rufus is in trouble, forcing Dana to save him every time. In *Kindred (1979),* Butler directly explores the history of American slavery and its effects on the African-American consciousness by employing a time travel device to contrast then and now (Richard, 2005). The novel represents the ongoing effects of colonialism and slavery through Dana's character as she juxtaposes the past and the present in terms of race, class and gender from a postcolonial, Black, feminist perspective (Richard, 2005).

Kindred (1979) makes use of time travel as a tool to transport Dana and audiences to the past, a time zone Dana is forced to adapt to in order to survive the harsh realities of slavery, but to also protect Rufus and Alice, and to find her husband when he is also accidentally transported along with Dana. Dana's process of assimilating in order to survive results in what Hua (2011) describes as a paradoxical elliptical form of violence, particularly referring to the relationship between Dana and Alice - a relationship that forms the bedrock of the Black, feminist and postcolonial perspective within the story. "It is this investment in speculative time that shapes Dana's problematic disidentification with Alice, a disidentification that solidifies Alice's two-dimensionality into perpetuity" (Hua, 2011: pg 392). Throughout the relationship between Dana and Alice, Butler explores nuanced and violent allegories in which Dana has to accept the violence against Alice through rape in order for her lineage to survive.

Through Dana and Alice, Butler recognises how survival for Black women has often depended on their oppressors. Butler intensifies this complexity and paradox, by making Dana's very existence dependant on the rape of Alice. The rapist continuously pulls Dana into the past, forcing her to become party to, and essentially accept the violence towards her ancestress (Richard, 2005). The Black women in *Kindred* (1979), both past and present, do what they need to in order to survive. Richard (2005) describes the themes of kindredship and survival by noting that these two factors remind us "oppression has never been merely a metaphor to those who are oppressed" (Richard, 2005: pg 120), instead Butler physically engraves the past onto the present through Dana's body - when she loses her arm from fighting with Rufus. Her past is also engraved into her present through her ancestry. This illustrates the effects of colonialism and slavery on African-Americans, as it is inscribed in their history, body and mind (Richard, 2005: 120).

Another complex relationship established in *Kindred (1979)* is between Dana and Rufus. Through this relationship, Butler continues to exemplify the theme of depending on your coloniser for survival; the relationship further demonstrates the discourse of the other. In response to this discourse, Richard (2005) describes how the colonised and coloniser relationship between Dana and Rufus "enforces a hierarchical claim that the other is property owned by the coloniser; yet this "property" has a voice…and must challenge that claim" (Richard, 2005: 120). Compared to Alice, Dana has the privilege of experiencing the 19th century through a 20th century lens, which allows her to detach from the "temporary" experience of her new present in the past. Dana's actions and her forced relationship with Rufus becomes the foundation to secure the continuity of her family line, not just to ensure Rufus' survival but her entire family's survival and her own birth (LaCroix, 2007: 110).

The concept of time and time travel is a significant convention within science fiction. Within the sub-genre of afrofuturism, time as a tool allows for African-Americans to revisit the past and relate it to the present or look into the future particularly for black lives. By revisiting the past, Butler applied the temporal concerns of the constructions of humanity that placed slaves outside of historical Western time, with the exploitation of the days, hours and life stories of Black slaves, and further highlighted

the socio-political rhetoric that upheld White superiority throughout the course of history for Black Americans. Throughout the novel there is a recurring contrast between current freedom and past oppression in which Dana is caught between. Dana finds herself in a constant predicament where she is unable to restructure and secure her past in order to avoid altering her future. Friend (1982) concludes that within *Kindred (1979)* "the contemporary woman is not educated enough to survive [the past], that she is as helpless perhaps even more helpless than her predecessors" (Friend, 1982: 55).

Through *Kindred (1979)*, Butler exemplifies an alternative form of science fiction that Samuel Delany describes as stemming from a marginal perspective; this perspective is honest, effective and encourages its readers with political questions that focus on the disenfranchised people in America who were victimised by oppression and oppressive discourse that continued to 'Other' Black bodies (Dery, 1994: 188). Through time travel, Butler took readers back to a social and political space that subjected Black bodies to alienation, and allowed readers to experience these harsh realities through the perspective of a contemporary modern-day Black female.

Through the disruption of time through time travel, Dana's 'history' is complicated by the instability of the past, and by the inability of the past to fully alter what takes place in the present (Steinberg, 2004: 475). This results in the blurring of history with the present, creating what Steinberg refers to as an "inverse slave narrative" in which history becomes cyclical and not linear (Steinberg, 2004: 467). Butler essentially reaffirms the relationship between the past, present and the future and upholds the distinctiveness of each of these temporal horizons (Long, 2002). In *Kindred* (1979), Butler applies the afrofuturism framework of treating an African-American theme through physically revisiting a troubling past in order to survive a present that has now become the future. This emerges from understanding Butler, who, similarly to Dana, historically comes from a lineage of colonisation as an African-American woman, and now has some form of political independence but continues to live with the negative economic and cultural legacy of colonialism (Gallagher, 1994: 4-5).

2.5.2 Africanfuturism: Nnedi Okorafor Who Fears Death (2010)

Who Fears Death (2010) is an africanfuturism and magical realist novel written by renowned Nigerian-American author Nnedi Okorafor, who coined the term “africanfuturism” and “africanjujuism” to describe her works. Okorafor’s novels, such as *Zahrah the Windseeker (2005)*, *The Shadow Speaker (2007)*, *Akata Witch (2011)* and *Who Fears Death (2010),* have contributed to the traditions of Black women within the African diaspora who appropriate the conventions of science fiction and fantasy to evaluate the present and offer alternative visions of the future. Furthermore, Okorafor’s works have continued to better communicate the texture and meaning of the Black [female] experience through the fantastic and scientific (Dowdall, 2013).

Who Fears Death (2010) is a post-apocalyptic science fiction novel that takes place in an unspecified region in future Sudan. Genocide plagues the region, where one tribe, the Nuru, enslaves and oppresses the Okeke tribe. The Great Book manifests and encourages these societal structures resulting in dictatorial power, rape as warfare, slavery, segregation, and colonialism. The novel follows Onyesonwu, a light-skinned girl, with sand-coloured hair. Onyesonwu is referred to as an ‘*Ewu,’* the name given to those who are a product of rape. The dictatorial Nuru sorcerer Diab, raped Onyesonwu’s mother, Najeeba, a native of Okeke; who manages to flee, going deeper into the desert where she eventually gives birth to Onyesonwu. After a few years of living in the desert, Najeeba and Onyesonwu move and settle down in the small Okeke town of Jwahir. As Onyesonwu comes of age, she learns of her magical abilities to shape shift, heal diseases and even bring the dead back to life. Onyesonwu soon learns she is destined to defeat her dictator father and rewrite The Great Book; together with her friends and her Ewu partner Mwita, Onyesonwu leaves Jwahir and travels through the desert perfecting her magic skills, and overcoming discrimination directed towards her as a Ewu and a female, all this eventually leading up to her final battle with her father.

Through *Who Fears Death (2010)*, Okorafor essentially creates a feminist fantasy that is radically counter-narrative to the stereotypical Eurocentric perception of Africa by breaking down the diametrically opposed categories of tradition and modernity, magic and science, and superstition and rationality (Dowdall, 2013). *Who Fears*

Death (2010) also probes into some of the most controversial issues of modern day Africa, such as female genital mutilation and ethnic cleansing. The novel is essentially a 'critical dystopia' that has opened up a space of opposition for women and other eccentric figures, whose subjected position is not contemplated by hegemonic discourses (Baccolini, 166) [Quoted from Dowdall, 2013: 2].

Who Fears Death (2010), takes place in an unspecified time in the future within a post-apocalyptic dystopian setting. Okorafor's futurist approach in the novel includes a hybridity of advanced technology and the presence of magic and mythology. Throughout the novel, the blending of the fantastical and the scientific allows the past to be explored through tradition, beliefs and mythology, which results in elements of the past becoming transmitted into the future merging mythology, juju, and witchcraft with futuristic technology. This hybridity transcends the binary of temporality that African mythology often experiences (Pahl, 2018: 210).

Compared to Western science fiction, the africanfuturist framework that Okorafor has embedded within her works allowed for the emergence of traditional mythology and magical realism to fully engage with the social-political and cultural dynamics within the African continent. Brenda Cooper demonstrates how the fantastic has an important role within African literary texts. West African texts, such as Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's *The Wizard of the Crow* (2006) and Ben Okri's *The Famished Road* (1991) are clear examples of the syncretisation of cultures resulted in the clash between burgeoning capitalism and older social structures and beliefs (Dowdall, 2013: 4). Within African literary texts, magical realism becomes the response to the paradoxes stemming from the uneven and often controversial intersections between modern versus pre-modern and rational constructions of capitalist development versus irrational modes of pre-capitalist society (Cooper, 1998: 32). This response from magical realism exposes the "deep and true reality" more authentically than Western thought towards African realisms and imaginings by capturing the seen, unseen, rational and mysterious dimensions of the (post) colonial experience (Cooper, 1998: 32).

Okorafor's use of hybridity within *Who Fears Death* (2010) allows for the expression of multiple realities and possibilities of African modernity. *Who Fears Death* (2010) exemplifies the blueprint for africanfuturism to disrupt traditional, cultural and Eurocentric hegemonies. By addressing contemporary African issues such as rape as a form of genocide, ethnic cleansing and female genital mutation, Okorafor uses Onyesonwu's character as a disruptor. Throughout the novel, Onyesonwu takes her otherness and her difference and transforms it into a mode of resistance by challenging the stigma against children of rape and by rejecting the corrupted and fallacious basis of genocide (the belief that women should fade away through suffering in order to eradicate opposition). She gains strength from her mother who refused to be victimized and who finds reaffirmation in life through the birth of Onyesonwu (Dowdall, 2013: 6). The novel provides an African feminist approach towards facing traditional and modern issues and critiquing patriarchal culture and violence against women through the female characters - whether traditional or modern - as agents of change. Female adolescence also becomes a transitional period and a space of resistance within the novel. The fantastical and [Black] female empowerment becomes intrinsically linked when Onyesonwu, as a powerful sorcerer and a young woman, moves from subjugation and being "othered" to autonomy and self-actualisation (Dowdall, 2013: 8).

Nnedi Okorafor's background as a Nigerian-American contributes to the africanfuturist framework, as her writings acknowledge different sources within her heritage. Okorafor's hybrid identity allows for an interweaving of different voices, which provides insight into African and African-American diasporic prevalence through her work. Within the africanfuturist framework, identifying with African diasporic prevalence's within all historical, social, cultural, economic facets is essential to the re-writing of the Other in all its many guises. This is imperative, as it is central to speculative fiction written about Africa. The africanfuturist framework demands the deconstruction of hegemonies. In *Who Fears Death* (2010), The Great Book not only represents the persisting legacies of slavery, colonialism and apartheid for African culture and identity, but also served as a trope to negotiate the power of present writing and written history over other forms of representation (Pahl, 2018: 218). The act of Onyesonwu re-writing The Great Book at the end of the novel, interrupts, destroys and ultimately changes existing traditional and cultural

hegemonies and historical colonial underpinnings. This answers Nick Wood's call for a "critical approach that recognises and respects different plans or conceptual blueprints, different foundations…and differing perceptions and experiences (quoted from Bryce, 2019: 12).

Through *Who Fears Death (2010)*, Okorafor builds a story world that resembles the potential blueprint for the africanfuturism framework. Through Onyesonwu's character as an outsider and in-between, between childhood and womanhood, and between Okeke and Nuru, her Otherness forces her to constantly negotiate the practices and beliefs that repress women within the African diaspora and lay bare their flawed foundations. Through gender / femininity, magic and technology Okorafor attempts to depict a society in transition while disrupting Eurocentric stereotypes equated with the African continent. Okorafor avoids a reductive approach towards her depiction of the future of Sudan through careful characterisation that retains the cultural complexity of the narrative's socio-political roots. By recognising the importance of tradition, Okorafor balances tradition and memory while also cautioning against allowing the past to stunt the future. Magic also becomes an agent of weaponry and essentially transformation where eventually freedom is achieved. In the story world of *Who Fears Death* (2010), magic, witchcraft and the supernatural continue to influence the political culture of postcolonial Africa, providing people with the "conceptual terrain for constructing, considering and contesting the multiple manifestations of modernity that positively flourish at the crossroads of local and global worlds" (Dowdall, 2013: 12) and between tradition and modernity. Finally, through The Great Book, which is the source of violence and genocide between the Okeke and the Nuru, Okorafor provides a wide-ranging critique that touches on colonialism, capitalism, dictatorship and religious fundamentalism that continue to linger within post-colonial Africa (Downfall, 2013: 10).

Africanfuturism, according to Okorafor and *Who Fears Death (2010),* provides a subaltern perspective in relation to the science fiction genre by preserving identity through refusing to join and add to the normative colonial discourse, which projects Otherness in a subjective manner. Instead, the aim is to highlight Otherness and its uniqueness in a subversive form. Okorafor's interpretation of "counterculture and

modernity" (Gilroy, 1993) is based on the politics of divergence and difference, and convergence and collaboration, which thoroughly approaches her hybridity of genres. This allows for engagement with new ways of seeing, being and representing the African diaspora.

2.5.3 Conclusion

The establishment of both africanfuturism and afrofuturism by authors and scholars as sub-genres of science fiction aims to contend for the representation of Black lives by bringing otherness to the forefront and disrupting hegemonic institutions against the ongoing material struggle of alienation and oppression within the space of post-colonialism and modernity. The brief analysis of *Kindred* (1979) highlights Dery's (1994) description of afrofuturism to "treat(s) African-American themes and Address African American concerns' ' (Dery, 1994: 180). Eshun (2003) attempted to expand the afrofuturism umbrella and its concern by reiterating the importance of the African continent by suggesting it as a primary concern due to the Western stereotypes projected onto the "dark continent," "Afrofuturism's first priority is to recognise that Africa increasingly exists as the object of futurist projection" (Eshun, 2003: 291). In illustrating the atrocities that African-Americans historically faced, Dery (1994) makes it clear that the aim of afrofuturism is to retrace [African-American] history and reimagine [African-American] futures:

> "African-Americans, in a very real sense, are the descendants of alien abductees; they inhabit a sci-fi nightmare in which unseen…Official histories undo what has been done and technology is too often brought to bear [negatively] on Black bodies" (Dery, 1994: 180).

Although African-American and African bodies relate to the historical discriminatory atrocities they have faced, the major difference between afrofuturism and africanfuturism is the separation of speculative fiction deriving from the African continent from the umbrella term of 'afrofuturism.' This places emphasis on the geographical difference within the africanfuturism framework and instead focuses on African based themes and treats African based concerns, which socially, culturally and economically differ from the present-day realities of African-Americans.

Afrofuturism and Africanfuturism equally operate from the sub-alternate margins in a Black-techno third space that exists to place Black cultural identity and history at the forefront, and redesign a hope for a future where Black bodies no longer face subjection to harmful stereotypes and unrecognition. The similarities between both sub-genres allow for a harmonious blending of recognising Blackness and Otherness outside of Euro-Western views. Africanfuturism, as a stand-alone sub-genre, not only provides africanfuturists with their own autonomy to fully represent African realities apart from African-American influence and culture, the creation of africanfuturism, as its own individual sub-genre, also allows africanfuturists to rightfully claim Africa with its contested past and precarious / unknowable future and re-signify Africa in all its facets as a sign of liberation and transformation in the present and its reimagined future (Bryce, 2019: 16).

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Qualitative Research Design

This study's author applied a qualitative research methodology in order to investigate how the films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray Africanfuturism. The qualitative research method utilised was of a content analysis, where africanfuturist components were used as a conceptual framework (illustrated in **Figure 1)** to analyse the chosen case study films.

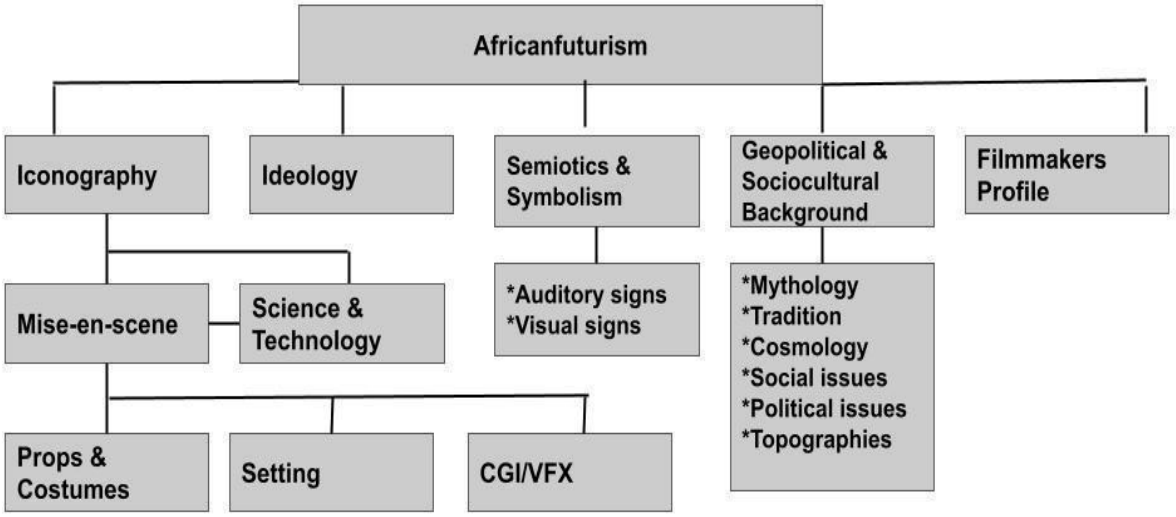


Figure 1: Data collection process

3.2. Case study films: Pumzi (2009) and Afronauts (2014)

3.2.1. Synopsis: Pumzi (2009)

Pumzi is a 2009 Kenyan science fiction short film directed by Kenyan writer - director Wanuri Kahiu. This dystopian film is set in an unspecified region in the far Eastern region of Africa, 35 years after World War III (the water war). Asha (Kudzani Moswela) is a female curator of a natural museum in the Maitu community. The current environment has no water, and is engulfed in toxic soil. Asha receives a mysterious package with coordinates and a note, within this package there is a soil sample that is moist and non-radioactive; this provides Asha with hope, for the world she knows outside is destroyed and uninhabitable. Asha decides to plant a preserved bulb in the museum, and to her surprise, it begins to germinate. After having a dream of a large tree covered in greenery, Asha asks for permission to go

and find the location but the authorities within the community forbid it. Asha decides to go against her superiors' instructions and escapes to search for the spot. After a long journey, when Asha finally reaches the location, she finds nothing but desiccated remnants of a forest. Using the last bit of water from her own body, she adds sweat to the germinating bulb. Asha lies down around the plant and shelters it with her body as she prepares to die. The tree grows through her nourishing body and spells the word 'Pumzi,' which means breathe or air (Melnyk, 2021).

3.2.2. Synopsis: Afronauts (2014)

Afronauts is a 2014 Zambian science fiction short film directed by Ghanaian filmmaker Nuotama Frances Bodomo. *Afronauts (2014) was* inspired by true events. It is the 1960s, and the world is divided by the Cold War. The USA and Russia are in the middle of a space race, who will get to conquer space and the universe? While the international public anxiously observes these two superpowers as they go head-to-head, there are still ambitious dreamers in a remote forgotten part of the world. Zambia, a country in Africa that has just gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1964, celebrates their newly found freedom from colonial rule. In the midst of this celebration, a college professor develops a new and ambitious project for his beloved country. He wants to start a space programme and send the first African astronaut to the moon - possibly before the US and the USSR. Matha (Diandia Forrest) is a 17-year old girl chosen to be one of the Afronauts to go to the moon. A training camp is set up miles from Lusaka so that the chosen afronauts can become accustomed to the lack of gravity through a series of physical exercises. The viewers witness Matha in a training camp as she prepares for her journey, she goes through a reel of emotions from alienation, anticipation and enthusiasm until she boards the copper made space capsule and heads for space (Ferrucci, 2014).

3.3 Content analysis

The description of content analysis is as a qualitative research method that examines a body of materials in order to detect recurring themes and patterns (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015: p 275). Taking into consideration the definitions and descriptions of africanfuturism by Okorafor (2019), Mashigo (2018) and Bisschoff (2020) et al., the researcher developed a conceptual framework using the characteristics of the africanfuturism sub-genre; this conceptual framework was used

as an analytical tool to analyse the chosen case study films **(see Appendix 1)**. The components of africanfuturism utilised as analytical tools were as follows: The filmmaker's profile, iconography, ideology, the geopolitical and socio-cultural background of the film production and narrative, and the semiotics and symbolism portrayed within the films. The aforementioned research approach assisted in illustrating the contextual filmic occurrences within *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014),* and how those occurrences portray or do not portray africanfuturism.

A brief discussion follows each component, and their application as a critical analytical tool within this study.

I) Iconography

As a sub-genre of science fiction, africanfuturism adopts the iconography of the science fiction genre. Iconography refers to the categorisation and analysis of visual motifs and styles in genre films (Hayward, 2013: pg. 211). Through the iconography of a film, the smallest unit of meaning within the film - the image and the largest unit - the generic qualities of the entire film, can be categorised and studied (Hayward, 2013: pg 211). Therefore, iconography encompasses the mise-en-scene of the specific genre film. The iconography may also include the costume of characters and other 'tools of the trade' that are specific to the genre of the film; in this case this would be the presence of science and technology.

The iconography of the science fiction film genre mostly encompasses the unique conventional futuristic extra-terrestrial or technologically advanced styles, themes, settings, props and costumes found in science fiction films, as well as the existence of science and technology as the dominant factors embedded within the narrative and / or story world of the film. In this study, the researcher focused on the specific components within mise-en-scene as it pertains to the science fiction genre (setting, props, and costume, CGI / VFX) within the chosen case study films, as well as the prevalence of science and / or technology as dominant modes within the narrative and / or the story world.

a) Mise-en-scene

The mise-en-scene refers to the arrangement of the visual components within the frame of a film (Gianetti, 2011: 525). In cinema, mise-en-scene includes both the staging of the action and the way it's framed. In this study, the researcher examined the following components within *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)*: the setting, props, costume and CGI / VFX. In science fiction films, these mise-en-scene components are specific to the genre, as they showcase the characteristics and themes of the genre. In science fiction films, the setting is not only a symbolic extension of the theme and characteristics, but they also enhance the stylisation of the narrative and story world. Setting in science fiction films notably takes place in other worlds, universes, and space or alternative versions of Earth. Props and costume in science fiction films aid in suggesting and revealing the futuristic, extra-terrestrial, dystopian or utopian world in which the story is set. Through props and costume, audiences will be able to convey that the narrative takes place in an alternate world or time zone. Computer generated imagery (CGI) plays a pivotal role in enhancing the setting, props and the scientific and technological elements within science fiction films. The use of CGI and special effects allows filmmakers to create, and realise extraordinary worlds and non-human beings, such as droids, aliens and AI, within their narratives.

b) Science & Technology

The science fiction genre has a prevalent relationship with the principles of science and technology. The narratives mostly, if not always, involve partially true or fictitious laws or theories of science and the use of technology. Kirby (2014) describes the use of science within cinema, particularly within the science fiction genre, as “Systems of science *and technology*” (emphasis added). This system includes the methods of science and technology, the social interactions of scientists, and aspects of science and technology that exist in part outside of the scientific community (Kirby, 2014). Science fiction, also notably known for its social commentary, allows filmmakers to question and convey their fears and anxieties in relation to the development of science, advanced technology and artificial intelligence. Finally, science and technology play an integral role in outlining the major themes within science fiction films. Africanfuturism explores the relationship between science, technology and the African continent and uses it as a tool to comment on the developments of science

and technology within African countries and their societies, as well as the prolonged negative capitalist effects it may have on these societies.

II) Ideology

The ideology expressed in a film refers to the systems that explain or make sense of society (Hayward, 2013: pg 213), or the body of ideas that reflect the social needs of particular groups, class or cultures (Gianetti, 2011: pg 403). The ideological expression within africanfuturism tends to deploy post-colonial revisions of the science fiction genre, where hegemonic dualisms within society, such as race, gender and sexuality, are broken down or challenged. Furthermore, through various ideologies within africanfuturism, such as post-colonialism, feminism and ecocriticism, africanfuturist filmmakers can challenge dominant modes of Western thought and provide social and political commentary on the past, present and future of African societies in relation to science and technology. Through africanfuturist ideological expressions, there can be a dismantling of African stereotypes, and through the merging of science fiction tropes, counter hegemonic transformations will be deployed within africanfuturist films (Burnett, 2015)

Finally, within africanfuturism and science fiction films as a whole, there are implicit ideological expressions embedded within the narrative in which protagonists and antagonists represent conflicting value systems. This provides the traditional ‘good vs evil’ trope found in speculative fiction films (Giannetti, 2011).

III) Geopolitical & Socio-cultural background

The make-up of the continent of Africa is a plethora of countries with various cultures, tribes, languages, traditions and standards of living. Africanfuturism aims to recognise and acknowledge the multinational, multicultural, multi-stylistic and multilingual elements within African countries and their societies. Instead of using the continent of Africa as a costume or backdrop to express lazy, uninformed and stereotypical visions of the continent, africanfuturism highlights existing material realities that influence and are a regular part of African societies and cultures. Furthermore, because africanfuturism is rooted within the African continent, it aims to fuse the current socio-political issues, myths, traditions and indigenous forms with

the components of science and technology, further focusing on Africa in relation to its colonial past, neo-colonial present and imagined future.

The social culture in africanfuturism encompasses the traditions, cosmologies, institutions, arts, myths and beliefs that are characteristic of the community, population or individual represented within the film. For example, traditional modes of storytelling and orality assist in describing and recognising issues related to community, identity and the self; people who have not been exposed to or understand alternative cultures tend to incorrectly stereotype these similar components. When it comes to African traditions, "traditional does not mean 'frozen' in time and space or an iconological continuity with some remote 'idyllic' past, but that which is seen as reconfiguring with time, situation and space and therefore in fluidity" (Karangi, 2013). With africanfuturism, one can explore metaphysical themes through African cosmologies.

African cosmology helps one to understand the present situation by revisiting the past and by understanding the past, one can then predict the future (Karangi, 2019). Finally, African cosmology is the way Africans can perceive, conceive and contemplate their universe in relation to their past, present and future. Cosmology provides the lens in which they can see reality, which affects their value systems and attitudinal orientations. It is simply the way Africans search for the meaning of life (Kanu, 2013). The technological developments within the African continent have therefore coexisted with African myths, cosmologies, the fluidity of African traditions and ways of living in societies.

The geo-politics expressed in africanfuturism stem from the sub-genre rooting in its continental materialism and life experiences within the continent of Africa, and about the people living there. The colonial history of Africa and the neo-colonial presence have resulted in Africa being labelled the 'dark continent,' arising from political and economic issues, such as corruption, wars and xenophobia, etc., resulting in unending social issues, such as poverty, famine, crime, high burdens of disease, and the digital divide within the continent; africanfuturism aims to address such issues and merge them with existing science fiction tropes. Popular science fiction films based in Africa tend to exaggerate African continental life, such as *Black Panther*

(2018), or focus solely on white continental lives, such as *District 9 (2009)*. By shifting the focus to existing African topographies or re-imagined versions of the geo-political avenues within the continent, this will result in the change of perception from outside audiences and a continued appreciation and recognition of the continent in relation to the science fiction genre.

IV) Semiotics & Symbolism

Semiotics is the study of signs. In film analysis, semiology focuses on *how* movies signify and link it to *what* is being signified (Giannetti, 2011). The origin of every culture and language is a system of signs, which generates meaning. A sign (word, image or object) can be broken down into meanings that stand for something other than its perceived denotations (Monaco, 2009: p 468). Coupled with semiology is symbolic meaning, conveyed within the film. Symbolism refers to figurative devices in which an object, event or cinematic technique has significance beyond its literal meaning (Giannetti, 2011). Symbolism aids in visually showcasing themes or characterisation, and is driven by the dramatic context within the narrative. Semiotics and symbolism coexist with each other within cinema. In africanfuturism, symbolism is usually connected to cultures and traditions explored within the narrative. Various cultures, groups, tribes and even individuals within the African continent symbolise a range of objects, spaces or sounds.

V) The Filmmakers profile

Africanfuturism not only aims to root africanfuturist narratives within the continent of Africa, but also aims for these narratives to come mainly from Black Africans in order to share their perspectives in relation to the genre. In this study, the profile of creators of africanfuturist film works was with regard to where they came from and their identities. This provides context in their relation, experiences and understanding of the narratives they are creating and representing within africanfuturism. The filmmaker's background, and what they aimed to achieve within their films contributes towards their cinematic and thematic expression and towards a predominantly Western genre and growth of the africanfuturist sub-genre.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The researcher sought ethics approval from the Faculty of Humanities, Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), University of the Witwatersrand. As this study was a film analysis with no human or animal participants, the application was for an ethics waiver, with approval granted on the 15th of December 2021. The researcher attended post-graduate ethics training hosted by Professor Jasper Knight, and received an Ethics Certificate of Competence on the 2nd of June 2021. Ethics Waiver Number: HRECNMW22/01/08 [**Ethics waiver approval-see Appendix 2]**

Chapter 4: Pumzi (2009) Analysis

4.1. Detailed synopsis of Pumzi (2009)

Pumzi (2009) opens with the teletype title *"Maitu Community, East African Territory: 35 years after World War III - 'The Water War'"* on a black screen. We have an introduction to the world of the Maitu community through visuals of framed articles and artefacts in jars that represent the current state of the environment: radioactive air, very little to no water supply and no forms of living organisms within the outside world. We are introduced to the protagonist, Asha in a sleeping state, happily dreaming about a luscious green tree in the middle of the desert. As she is about to touch it, Asha is woken up by an alarming voice reminding her to take her 'dream supplements,' because dreams are regarded as an attack.

Within the Maitu community, the generation of water and energy is through kinetic energy from the inhabitants, and all forms of liquid, such as sweat and urine, undergo constant reprocessing and purifying for usage; not a single drop of water can go to waste. Asha works at the virtual natural history museum, where the last forms of decayed plant life are on display. Asha receives a mysterious package at work containing a rich soil sample. After reporting the sample to her unemotive superiors through virtual communication, Asha has to hand the sample to security and "move on." Curious, Asha ignores this command and continues to test the soil in order to determine its origin. The soil has abnormally high-water content and no radioactive activity. After thoroughly examining the soil by touching and smelling it, she then falls into another dream state where she is under water and sees the roots of a tree, the same luscious, green tree she dreamed about previously. When Asha wakes up, she plants one of the seeds in the museum - The Mother Seed into the soil. Once again, Asha contacts her superiors and requests for an exit visa, as she believes the rich soil is an indication of life on the outside; they refuse her request.

After noticing the seed she planted is alive and germinating, Asha grows increasingly frustrated. Asha then ignores her superiors and is determined to follow the coordinates of the soil sample. With help from one of the cleaners within the community, Asha manages to escape the commune. A long journey in the dry, barren desert ensues and Asha grows increasingly weary and tired, she carries the

growing plant and continuously keeps it moist with the little water she has left, neglecting her own quest for water. The scorching hot sun pounds on her as she drags herself through the desert wasteland. As she slowly reaches her physical breaking point, Asha notices the tree she has been dreaming of in the distance, a sight of hope, and fights her way towards it with the last of her energy. Upon her arrival, Asha realises the tree she has been dreaming of is nothing more than a dried-up tree trunk, with no leaves or any source of life. As she walks around, she notices more decayed trees around her. Hopeless, Asha finally decides to plant the germinating seed, watering it with the final drops of liquid she has left from her body. In her final moments, Asha lies down next to the plant and shades it with her headscarf. As Asha takes her last breath, the seed sprouts into what would be the growth of new life in the desert, the seed grows into the green, luscious tree she had been dreaming of. The final image forms into the title "*Pumzi*", which means breath or air.

4.2. Filmmakers profile: Wanuri Kahiu

Wanuri Kahiu is a Black female award-winning writer, director, author and public speaker who was born and raised in middle class Nairobi, Kenya, where her mother is a paediatrician and her father a businessman. Kahiu obtained her Masters' of Fine Arts degree in Producing and Directing at the University of California, Los Angeles, School of Theatre, Film and Television. Kahiu is the writer and director of *Pumzi (2009)*, the critically acclaimed film, which received the best film award at the Cannes Independent Film Festival, and the Silver at Carthage Film Festival in Tunisia. Kahiu also earned the "Citta di Venezia 2010" award in Venice Italy. (Kahiu, n.d)

Kahiu's filmography includes films such as *From a Whisper (2008)*, her first feature film, which follows an artist and an intelligence officer as they find unique ways to move on from the tragedy that shattered their lives. The film commemorates the 10th anniversary of the August 1998 terrorist bombing of the US embassy in Nairobi, Kenya, where over 250 people died and more than 5000 injured. *From a Whisper (2008)* won Best Narrative Feature at the 2010 Pan African Film Festival in Los Angeles and also five awards at the African Movie Academy Awards, including Best Director and Best Screenplay.

Kahiu's 2018 feature film *Rafiki* garnered critical global acclaim, and it was the first Kenyan feature film to be invited at the 2018 Cannes Film Festival as part of the official Un Certain Regard selection. *Rafiki (2018)* follows two young women, Kena and Ziki who fall for each other in Kenya where homosexuality is still a criminal act. Raised in conservative households, the women learned that "good Kenyan girls become good Kenyan wives." Despite the political rivalry between their families, Kena and Ziki continue to encourage each other. Their love for each other blossoms and they have to choose between their happiness and their safety. *Rafiki (2018)* sparked controversy when banned by the Kenyan Film Classification Board (KFCB) due to its "homosexual theme." Kahiu sued the Kenyan government, resulting in the lifting of the ban for a specific time, and the film was shown to a full cinema in Nairobi. In total, *Rafiki (2018)* received 17 nominations and 17 awards from various international film festivals (Kahiu, n.d).

Wanuri is the co-founder of AFROBUBBLEGUM, which is a collective of African artists who aim to create fun, fierce and frivolous work. Through the AFROBUBBLEGUM collective, Wanuri aims to eradicate single, stereotypical narratives that relate to the African continent and instead, encourages African artists to create art for art's sake, with no political or social agendas; artists should instead create art that highlights the beauty, positivity and joy within the continent.

Ideologically, Wanuri states that her work celebrates a Pan-African experience, focusing on Pan-African people of different natures, minority groups, genders and sexualities. Through her work, Wanuri aims to highlight a holistic Pan-African existence. Together with Pan-Africanism, Wanuri's work expands into feminism, where the majority of her leads are women in order to showcase female representation within the African continent. Wanuri aims to promote and normalise strong, dynamic and wide-ranging women within African cinema. With a line-up of films, such as *From a Whisper (2008), Pumzi (2009), Who Am I? (2018) Rafiki (2018),* and upcoming projects, such as *The thing about Jellyfish*, *Once on this Island* and *Wild seed*, Wanuri has established and continues to develop her ethos of feminism and Pan-African representation in African cinema, resulting in a recognisable auteurship as a Black female African filmmaker.

4.3. Ideology of Pumzi (2009)

Pumzi (2009) focuses on the interconnections between science, women and ecology. With these three major factors, *Pumzi (2009)* portrays the tropes of, what one could describe as, “ecofeminism.” Ecofeminism is a political movement that believes ideologies that authorise injustices based on factors, such as race, gender or class, also relate to ideologies that continue to sanction the exploitation and degradation of the environment (Sturgeon, 1997: pg 260). At its foundation, ecofeminism examines how the subordination, exploitation and appropriation of women, particularly the treatment of ethnic and racial minorities in the Global North and South, interconnects with the treatment of the natural world (Rico, 2017). Furthermore, as a third wave feminist movement, ecofeminism includes race as a core root in which environments will be targets for destructive corporate practices (Rico, 2017).

Although ecofeminism aims to provide a discourse into understanding the position of women in relation to nature, female environmental scholars of colour have argued that the ecofeminist movement is primarily a White feminist movement that has historically, and continues to appropriate the voices and experience of women of colour. The term “Ecowomanism,” an environmental feminist movement, has been recognised for rooting itself in afrocentric thought and intersectional or Black feminism overall. Ecowomanism focuses and adds a Black female perspective on the continued environmental injustice (Rico, 2017).

The approach to ecowomanism links social justice with earth justice by highlighting the overlapping and intersecting modes of oppression that occur between women of colour - particularly Black women and the environment. There continues to be a recurring paradox related to ecowomanism, where on one hand the movement honours the beautiful connection between Black women and the earth; this has become a romanticised epistemology that describes Black women as the “shared creators of the earth” (Harris, 2016: pg 6). On the other side of ecowomanism, as Harris (2016) describes, is the harsh reality that relates the suffering of the earth to the suffering of Black women during the time of colonialism and slavery, where the bodies of Black women were harshly treated (Harris, 2016). *Pumzi (2009)* represents this ambivalence of ecowomanism in which the body of a Black female protagonist

plays a positive role in repopulating and building the natural environment while also having suffered a form of physical and epistemic violence from outside forces, in this case the long journey towards the great tree.

Within the context of this study and the description from environmental scholars, such as Barbara Boswell, *Pumzi (2009)* adopts what one can refer to as “African ecofeminism.” Building on the foundational basis of ecofeminism and ecowomanism, African ecofeminism continues the conversation of foregrounding justice for the environment in relation to justice for women and includes the experiences particularly of Black women; but within African ecofeminism it continues to focus on reconceptualising the two movements by addressing and working through environmental issues, highlighting gender relations and challenging patriarchal structures particularly within an Africa-focused context (Muthuki, 2006: pg 12). Just like the description of ecowomanism Melanie Harris (2016) describes, African ecofeminism as “centring on the perspectives of women of African descent and reflects upon these women’s activist methods, religious practices, and theories on how to engage earth justice” (Harris, 2016: pg 5).

In *Pumzi (2009)*, the Black female body is a metaphorical marker for environmental restoration and through Asha’s body, she becomes the physical root for ecological dispersion within the film. Kahiu has stated that one of the major themes in *Pumzi (2009)* is self-sacrifice, and how it is important to become “mother to the earth.” Kahiu, who previously produced the TV documentary *Our Land (2009)* about Wangari Maathai and adapted her eco-feminist framework, expresses that *Pumzi (2009)* is a representation of what could potentially happen if the environment is not taken care of in this current generation.

Pumzi (2009) visually personifies the work of Kenyan environmental activist and Nobel peace prize winner Wangari Maathai, whose African ecofeminism became a framework for articulating how women, particularly within rural Africa, play a major role in conserving the environment for future generations (Wachira, 2020). The theme of self-sacrifice not only reveals the afrocentric belief that Africans have the ability to attend to their own needs; it also emphasises the aim of African

ecofeminism and essentially africanfuturism that Africans should take charge in safeguarding their environment and regenerating their own futures.

The visual language of *Pumzi (2009)* exemplifies the African-based ecofeminist framework. The film heavily relies on ecological imagery in order to capture and expose the environmental decay and the last remaining inhabitants who work hard to conserve the last of the scarce water resource. The Black female protagonist, Asha, serves as the catalyst who physically roots herself in order to restore and essentially save the environment.

To emphasise the drastic reality of the climate change that has occurred, the film opens with close up shots of newspaper articles showcasing the events leading up to and the effects of the Water War. Headlines, such as “The GreenHouse Effect: The Earth is changing already” (00:00:25) and “Whole day journey in search of water” (00:00:37), exposes the agonies that members of the community endured in order to search for water; further close up shots of animal skulls (00:00:31), jars containing preserved or decayed plant life (00:00:28) (00:00:39), ‘the great seed’ that Pumzi will later plant (00:00:41) and a massive dead tree trunk with an article titled “There goes the last tree” under it (00:04:05), also show the drastic loss of all natural living organisms.

In alignment with the works of Wangari Maathai, and her goal to replenish rural Africa ecologically, Asha also shares the same goal to replenish Eastern Africa after witnessing the growth of The Maitu (Mother) seed when she planted it in the fresh soil package. Asha took on her natural motherly role to root herself in the Earth for there to be regeneration. The setting for *Pumzi (2009)* is against a backdrop 35 years into the future after the “Water War.” The film immediately presents its environmental themes by presenting the isolated members of the Maitu community who live underground and survive through limited water supply and energy produced through kinectism. Taking into consideration Wanuri’s Kenyan nationality, and her inspiration taken from Kenyan activist Wangari Maathai, *Pumzi (2009)* may easily be a reflection of Wanuri’s Kenyan background, and provide insight into the Kenyan water crisis.

Evidently, according to the Union of Concerned Scientists (1999) [Retrieved from Marshall, 2011] between 1997 and 2005 Kenya was the victim of harsh drought conditions. In December 2000, the worst drought conditions in 37 years hit Kenya, resulting in 4 million people needing food and health aid. By December 2005, President Kibaki declared a second “National Catastrophe” in reference to the famine that affected 2.5 million people in the northern parts of Kenya. Thus, the state of climatic dysfunction represented in *Pumzi (2009)* provides a futurist interpretation of imaging Africa's environmental state in the future by encapsulating a post-crisis apocalyptic environment ravaged by nuclear catastrophes, climate change and global capitalism. Within the Anthropocene, the projection is that the continued climatic changes, affecting agriculture, biodiversity and associated human wellbeing and livelihoods, will affect the continent of Africa the most (Pereira et al, 2021). *Pumzi* (2009) explicitly links the devastation of the Anthropocene particularly within Africa, and imagines the “East African” territory as having a waterless and radioactive future.

Asha applies the environmentalist goal to find solutions and unlearn habits that are toxic to the environment. By applying the optimist, africanfuturist, ecowomanist framework Asha initiated and nurtured the restoration of the land and its biodiversity. Through her memories of the environmental past and her research, Asha takes on this final opportunity to replant the Maitu (Mother) seed by going against hegemonic sovereigns who rule the Maitu compound, and physically places her body in danger in order to achieve this goal. This encapsulates Wangari Mathaai’s vision of “helping the earth heal her wounds" through self-sacrifice.

4.4. Geopolitical & Sociocultural background of Pumzi (2009)

The central location of the Maitu community is in an unspecified desert region within Eastern Africa, surrounded by sand, dunes and the final remains of decayed tree trunks. The opening scene of the film is a wide establishing aerial shot that shows the vast, dry desert region and the scale of the underground Maitu compound. The Kenyan topography and other notable desert regions on the African continent, such as the Sahara Desert, possibly influenced the landscape represented in the film. Although the setting for *Pumzi (2009)* is a post-apocalyptic dystopian world, Kaihu’s Kenyan influence and background may have been the framework to base the

apocalyptic disaster. The aftermath of Structural Adjustment programmes implemented in Kenya, resulted in not only large-scale economic devastation experienced by many citizens, but also resulted in environmental devastation in which people were affected by industrial waste, water pollution, deforestation, desertification and drought, and majority of those who suffered were from impoverished backgrounds (Nyawalo, 2016: 216).

Taking place 35 years after the *Third World War: The Water War*, *Pumzi (2009)* highlights the severe effects of climate change through increased radioactivity in the outside world, elimination of living organisms (plant and animal life) and limited water supply. The last remaining members of the Maitu community, forced to live in a controlled underground compound, depict the severity of the Water War. The remaining survivors are locked away from the uninhabitable outside world and live in a self-contained and self-sustaining high-tech underground city protected from the harsh environment above.

The exterior environment and the interior architectural design of the compound merge cultural and geographical figurations with radically futuristic elements, resulting in the creation of restructured social geographics that are recognisable. There is a division of the locations of the story world into habitable and inhabitable zones. The habitable zones are synthetically made, enclosed underground spaces that sustain the remaining human life in biological laboratories, electro-neural interfaces and algorithm super systems (Omelsky, 2014: pg 40). The inhabitable zones depict the Chernobyl aftermath, where natural spaces, which consist mainly of the Earth's entire surface, are inhabitable due to inescapable nuclear contamination.

The visual aesthetics of the film clearly illustrate the difference between the habitable and inhabitable environments. The exterior environment's introduction places the underground compound against the backdrop of a decayed, disfigured, brown and dry Earth surface. Later in the film, when Asha finally escapes the compound, we have a closer look of the exterior surface through the plethora of waste situated just above the compound (00:11:48). During Asha's journey, she encounters a half-buried sign that cautions of a Nuclear Radioactive River; there is no river, thus the sign serves as a reminder of the devastation the environment suffered, from a once

flowing river, to an abandoned contaminated stream, to now a vast dry land of scorched toxic sand. In contrast, the interior enclosed environment is clean, self-sufficient and controlled. Members of the Maitu community work daily like robots to generate power and recycle their bodily fluids, and the entire compound runs on electricity produced by kinetic energy. The entire infrastructure is a sterilised space, socially and hygienically, which has completely locked itself from the outside world. The design of the entire geo-topographical composition in *Pumzi (2009)* is to suppress the toxicity of the surrounding outside world and negate the possibility of life on the outside.

The political structure in the film represents that of a post-colonial, socialist society. Within the Maitu community, there are hierarchies that keep the compound systematically controlled through labour efficiency, controlled resource supply and proficient technological systems. The ruling council of the Maitu community consists of Black women who oversee and control the structures of living. Through holographic communication and assistance from artificial intelligent systems, the ruling council ensures the rift between the outside and the inside world remains secured. The control of the ruling council extends beyond physical seclusion as members of the community undergo neurological monitoring and have to refrain from dreaming. The first introduction to Asha is when she finds herself abruptly woken from a dream to take her dream suppressants. This monetization assists in keeping memories, thoughts and ideas related to the outside world from taking place. When Asha receives a mysterious soil sample and reports it to the council, they tell her she is not “trained” to handle the resource and should deliver it to security for further testing by qualified scientists. This discouragement and suppression from the ruling council illustrates their attempts to rid anything that stems from the outside world in order to keep control within the compound. Asha’s persistence then becomes a threat to the ruling council. Nywalo (2017) writes:

> “The film places an emphasis on the importance of visionary dreams. It exalts the capacity of those who are marginalized to construct and believe in the possibility of alternative futures that present themselves in stark juxtaposition to accepted contemporary dogmas" (Nywalo, 2017: pg 217)

The Maitu community is not only self-sustaining but the economy represented is strong due to the technological advancements and the recycling of water. Through the film, Kahiu has imagined a post-colonial African community that is strong economically, unlike the current post-colonial Africa that is victim to the external forces of capitalism and high levels of unemployment; the Maitu community has no unemployment and everyone takes their turn to physically work and generate power. As Menlyk (2021) describes, the economy of the Maitu community "not only asserts the primacy of Black Africans in post-colonial Africa, but also projects this primacy into the future" (Menlyk, 2021).

The basis for the feminisation of the ruling council is Kahiu's aim to foreground women in her work. The feminist aspects of the film are evident in the protagonist being a woman, the ruling council and the cleaner who helps Asha escape; all prominent characters in the film. Although the community includes males, the ethos of the community is matriarchal.

African orature influences the matriarchal characterisation of the Maitu community. In her 2012 TEDx Talk, Kaihu states that Kenyan Gikuyu oral narratives influenced the film. The employment of traditional oral African narration, coupled with science fiction tropes, is what Lynsey Chutel (2016) describes as science fiction having ancient roots in Africa through its traditional folklore and traditional systems. Rooting African orature into science fiction is what Samatar (2017) describes as "drawing on the past to reimagine the future" by rejecting the separation between traditionalism and modernity (Samatar, 2017: pg 183). *Pumzi (2009)* showcases its influence of African traditional and oral narratives when introducing The (Maitu) Mother Seed in the Kikuyu language (00:00:43). The etymology of the seed is broken down and illustrated as *MAA* (truth) and *ITU* (ours), thus Maitu translates into *"Our Truth."* The naming of the Maitu community after the "Maitu (Mother) seed" signifies its matriarchal characteristics. Menlyk (2021) describes Asha as not only the custodian and protector of the Maitu (Mother) seed in her lab, but she "gives birth" to it, thus becoming its propagator (Menlyk, 2021). Feminist critics, such as Bisschoff (2020), have gone on to note how Kahiu centralised the experience of (Black) women and imagined alternative existing patriarchies (Bisschoff, 2020: 612). The geopolitical and socio-cultural construction represented in *Pumzi (2009)* brings forth an imagined

futuristic post-colonial Africa that blends traditionally based matriarchy and an environmentally sustainable techno-world.

4.5. Iconography of Pumzi (2009)

4.5.1 Science, Technology & VFX Techniques in *Pumzi (2009)*

The representation of science and technology and the VFX techniques used in the film are the two major contributions to the futuristic aesthetic. *Pumzi (2009)* strays away from the high-tech model (highly advanced technological representation) and the low-tech model (post-apocalyptic salvaged technology) (Melnyk, 2021); instead, the techno-aesthetic represented in the film is that of non-polluting 'eco-tech' or clean energy (Melnyk, 2021). The VFX techniques used in the film enhance the simplistic technological world of the Maitu community.

The Maitu community appears as a self-sufficient community (00:01:47). The use of technology stems from the generation of power through kineticism. Members of the community use recognisable and simple gym technology, such as treadmills, rowing machines and bicycle machines, to generate power, and there are bulbs attached to these machines to monitor the electrical power generated. The community thrives on conservation and technology aids in conserving the renewable water and energy. Asha and members of the community are seen getting water from water pumps and scanned as protocol that they have received their daily water source (00:02:04). Technology continues to assist in water conservation, as Asha is seen purifying her bodily fluids (urine and sweat) - "liquid waste," with an advanced liquid purifier located in the bathroom; the effectiveness of the purifier allows Asha to reuse the liquid as drinking water (00:02:18 - 00:03-09).

The Natural History Museum, Asha's workplace, provides further demonstration as to how science and technology contributes to the Maitu community and the story world of the film. Special effects create the hologram screen that Asha uses to test samples and communicate with the ruling council. Asha communicates with the VFX keypad on her desk and receives rolling messages and information from the Artificial intelligence VFX computer shown on the hologram screen. The museum still contains recognisable technology, such as a projector, which projects other multiple VFX hologram screens throughout the museum. The AI technology, distinguished by

a female computerised voice, assists in keeping members of the community from dreaming by reminding them to take their dream suppressants. The repression of dreams results in members of the community acting like robotic figures, seen in the limited communication between members of the community as they continually live according to a routine in order to produce energy.

The prevalence of science is obvious within the museum, as Asha conducts scientific research on the preserved plant life and other natural organic minerals. When she receives a mysterious package containing sand, she immediately tests it with the scanner to determine its origin. This shows how the Maitu community depends on the results of scientific research to learn about its environmental past and how it can assist in how they survive further into the future through conservation.

4.5.2 Mise-en-scene of *Pumzi (2009)*

a) Setting in *Pumzi (2009)*

The setting of *Pumzi (2009)* is in African space and time. The exterior setting of the compound is in the desert region of Eastern Africa, and the grandeur of the compound is visible in the opening establishing shot (00:00:16). The aerial shot of the compound shows the extensive architectural design of the compound, and we see the construction of the dome centered in the vastness of the grand desert region. The brown desert backdrop draws attention to the emptiness of the region, with the Maitu compound being the only remaining structure in the region. The outside world is dead where the impact of climate change is shown through the dry, scorching desert within this Eastern region of Africa.

The interior setting of the compound resembles a large urban futuristic city. The extensiveness of the interior design is Kahiu's ability to reimagine the designs of city landscapes within the African continent. Kahiu's imagining of the African urban city in the future accentuates her African-pessimist notion that Africans themselves can recreate the development of Africa. Compared to the exterior setting, the interior setting represents a functional working society, where all resources are efficient and the societal ills commonly related to African urban cities, such as poverty, homelessness, lack of infrastructure, etc., do not exist.

b) Costume in *Pumzi (2009)*

The intentional design of the costume in the film homogenised the community, especially between the men and women. All the members of the community wear similar uniformed body suits of form-fitting black and grey fabrics. The costumes seem effective in allowing members to undertake physical work. There are certain distinctions made between various hierarchies, such as the cleaner, security guards and the ruling council, who have slight differences in their costumes. Another element of homogenisation is that all members of the community are bald, which generalises all members equally, despite the position they play within the community. The fabric of the costume also assists in absorbing sweat released during physical work, which is then recycled when wrung out of the clothing. Towards the climax of the film, Asha undresses and wrings out pieces of her clothing so that she can water The Great Seed that she planted with drips of her sweat (00:18:14 - 00:18:58).

Asha's costume changes completely when she is in her dreamscape, she no longer wears the uniform of the Maitu community, instead she wears traditionally printed dresses. Asha's costume change in her dreams speaks to the freedom and restoration that she hopes for outside of the compound. The dresses that she wears in her dreams place Asha back into a renewed sense of normality, where she stands out and blossoms like the Mogumo tree; The costume in the dreamscape breaks the monotonous futuristic design of the Maitu community. The uniformed costume in *Pumzi (2009)* intends to show a post-crisis apocalyptic dystopia in which the nuance of uniformity creates a robotic-like community, where the lines of hegemonic dichotomies are blurred.

c) Props in *Pumzi (2009)*

The major props used in *Pumzi (2009)* show an alternate time zone based in the future that is still recognisable to audiences. The futuristic technology in the film consists of gym equipment, which is easily recognisable, that members of the community use to generate power. The use of this recognisable technology emphasises the possibility of a similar dystopia due to ongoing climate change, where audiences may find themselves in similar situations having to use existing technology to survive. The props in the film are distinctively divided into present day technological props and deceased natural props. All previously living organisms,

animals, plants, water. etc. have been arranged in the Natural History museum and packaged as skeletal remains of animals and preserved plant seeds. The prominent natural prop within the film that contributes towards the catalyst and denouement of Asha's journey, is the fresh mysterious soil sample that ignites Asha's curiosity and the Great Mother (Maitu) Seed, which drives Asha into her long journey once she witnesses its growth.

4.6. Semiotics and Symbolism of Pumzi (2009)

a) The blooming tree

Drawing upon the framework of creation myths, *Pumzi (2009)* emphasises the idea of rehabilitation and a new beginning through Asha's recurring dream of the luscious ficus sycomorus tree. Within Kenyan Gikuyu culture and mythology, the ficus sycomorus tree is also known as the Mugumo tree, is a sacred tree that symbolises power, life and fertility, and further represents the scared continuity of the Gikuyu spiritual, cosmic and physical world (Karangi, 2008: pg 117).

Within the context of *Pumzi (2009)* and Asha's dream of the Mugumo tree, the film is influenced by the creation myth of Gikuyu culture, and how the tree represents a new genesis and provides hope to Asha for a new world outside of the Maitu compound. Within Gikuyu cosmology, the tree is symbolically used to make the abstract notion of life more concrete and materialistic (Rival, 1998: pg 3; Jones & Cloke, 2002). The "Gikuyu" name itself derives from the *mikoyo* tree; the deity *Mogai* figured as central to the creation of the Gikuyu people and their relationship to the earth (Sides, 2019: pg 114). In his description of the creation myth associated with trees and Gikuyu culture, Jomo Kenyatta wrote:

> "In the beginning of things, when mankind started to populate the earth, the man Gikuyu…was called by the Mogai…and standing atop Mount Kenya pointed out to the Gikuyu a spot full of fig trees" (Kenyatta, 1962: pg 3) [Received from Sides, 2019: pg 114)

The creation myth associated with the Gikuyu culture further transpires through Asha's journey, as she aims to plant the Maitu (mother) seed to rehabilitate and

regenerate the outside world. The catalyst of Asha's journey is the dream of the tree. Throughout the film, Asha's ongoing vision of the tree punctuates her quest and prolonged desire to go on.

Asha's journey with the Mugumo tree starts as soon as we are introduced to her sleeping in the lab (00:01:03). In her dream state, we see Asha smiling as she witnesses the lush green tree in front of her, and in a state of elation, Asha tries to rush towards the tree until awakened by an alarm reminding her to take her dream suppressants. This brings Asha back to the reality of the destroyed environment in which she currently lives. After receiving a soil sample from an anonymous source, Asha smells the soil, which immediately casts her into another dream state (00: 05: 49); this time Asha is submerged in water where only the roots of a tree are visible.

The amount of water in which Asha is submerged in is the antithesis to her current environment where water is a scarce commodity. When realising the potential of environmental rehabilitation, based on her dreams and the soil sample, Asha requests an exit visa but is denied by the ruling council, which forces Asha to show the ruling council what she has seen in her dream; she places her hand on the scanning machine and the series of dreams that she has had is shown on a small hologram screen to the ruling council (00: 08: 23). After further denial from the council, Asha has to take matters into her own hands and finds a way to escape the compound. After her long journey towards the coordinates of the tree, Asha once again sees the green luscious tree in the middle of the desert as she gets closer to her coordinated destination (00: 16: 20); in another part of her imagination, on her arrival Asha sees it is just a dead tree trunk. In this moment, Asha with the goal of revival and rehabilitation, sacrifices herself in order for her newly planted seed to grow; the tree of her dreams expands rapidly - a new environmental beginning.

Asha's relationship with the Mugumo tree is similar to myths of the Gikuyu culture, in which the Mugumo tree serves as a provider or a form of rebirth. The origin of the Gikuyu people is in the story of Agikuyu, who was led by *Ngai* to the top of Mount Kenya to settle in a place filled with Mugumo trees - in this place, there would be gift exchanges between the Gikuyu people and Ngai. In this myth, the tree symbolises power as Agikuyu, who wanted a son to become heir, but he only had nine

daughters. He sacrificed a goat at the Mogumo tree and asked Ngai to help him get sons to marry his daughters. The following morning, Agikuyu found nine handsome men seated under the Mugumo tree waiting to marry his daughters (Karangi, 2005: pg 162; Mwangi, 1983; Kenyatta, 1995).

The second myth, symbolises the power that the Mugumo tree had to transform and give new life to the Gikuyu people. The following story follows a young boy named Wacici whose father beat him terribly every day because he always forgot about the cattle and played with his friend. One day, Wacici realised his sister was never beaten and instead worked with their mother in the garden, fetching water and collecting wood; he regretted not being born a girl. Wacici told his friend who in turn told him about the ability to change your gender if you went around the Mugumo tree seven times. Without hesitation, Wacici went to the Mugumo tree, walked around it seven times and changed into a girl. From then onwards, Wacici was happy and never looked after the cattle again, thus escaping his father's beatings (Karangi, 2005: pg 163).

The themes of providence, transformation and rebirth, as it relates to the Mugumo tree and the above-mentioned myths, are also themes found in *Pumzi (2009).* As Asha sets on her journey towards finding the Mugumo tree, her hope in the possibility of rehabilitation keeps her moving forward. As soon as she discovers there is no tree, Asha plants the seed and through her body and its nutrients transforms into the new growth of the Mugumo tree, thus providing a new genesis of growth to the destroyed earth. In this moment, Asha inherently becomes mother to the earth through the growth of the tree in which she personifies Maathai's (2003) notion of the importance of trees, "It reveals that taking care of trees is tantamount to taking care of the land and family because when the environment is destroyed, plundered or mismanaged, their quality of life is undermined" (Maathai, 2003 / 1985).

b) The Maitu (Mother) Seed

The etymology of The Maitu (Mother) seed being defined as "Our truth," is what Sides (2019) describes as the "re-planting of a communal narrative…A new world, or even the remaking and the re-inoculating of the planet." Although Asha embarks on

this journey of planting the seed alone, the communality within her actions is to provide a better world for all, thus creating a “communal narrative.” The seed, together with the necessary elements to plant it (fresh soil and water), forms part of the communal foundation for what could become a new world.

Through Gikuyu orature, “Our Truth” describes the seed as being beyond the norm of the Maitu compound. The Maitu compound has established itself as a self-sufficient neo-liberal society, in which each member plays an equal part in order for society to function within the apocalyptic dystopian world. The process of recycling your own sweat and urine into drinkable water illustrates neoliberal individualism under the confines of a heavily monitored and measured ruling council. The basis of the Maitu compound is on “logistics of bare survival where sustainability is paramount, but not rehabilitation” (Sides, 2019: pg 112).

Asha breaks down these ruling structures as she continues to have dreams of the growing Mogumo tree. When Asha recycled her sweat and urine into drinking water and shared it with her fellow compound member and cleaner in the bathroom, she exchanged her bodily fluids, which in this case forms a rare currency for survival to help someone else. In the Maitu compound, each individual is kept alive through their own excretions, resulting in each human having an “autonomous loop of biological sovereignty” (Sides, 2019: 116) over their own lives and survival. Therefore, the donation from Asha to the cleaner metaphorically represents the sowing of communality, which the Maitu seed represents.

Asha’s gesture of good will to the cleaner helps her escape the compound, as the cleaner assists her in retrieving the seed and a compass in order to finally reach the mysterious coordinates she had previously received. Throughout the journey towards her destination, Asha continues to water the seed with the water made from her excretions; Asha’s bodily fluids keep the seed alive. Within African folklore and cosmology, the idea of Asha’s fluids transpositioning into the seed implies the transfer of her spirit into the seed, which will eventually grow into the tree. As soon as Asha plants the seed and uses the last of her bodily fluids to keep the seed moist, she continues further by sacrificing her body to provide nutrients to the seed in order for it to grow; this process of transposition is what Rico (2017) describes as Asha’s

spirit being forever fixed to the tree, through the planting of the seed, and will continue to “engage with human life in meaningful ways - including rites associated with fertility, initiation, religious customs, etc.,” (Rico, 2017 : 90).

The trope of sowing the seed is what Sides (2019) describes as “breaking an apocalyptic narrative temporality and offers us a story whose purpose is to continue the telling of the story” (Sides, 2019: 109). This dismantles the notion of neoliberal individualism and instead values politics outside of individualism and isolationism for survival and brings forth the notion of “co-creational, or sympoietic intimacies of rehabilitation” (Sides, 2019: 109). Through the planting of the seed and the self-sacrificial actions of Asha, *Pumzi (2009)* demonstrates the difference between individual survival and communal rehabilitation. The former was evident within the compound, where there were livelihoods sustained but they were not *alive* and not allowed a life beyond the compound. The latter showed the ability to make the world liveable again by making *life* again within the post-apocalyptic dystopia.

c) Water

In *Pumzi (2009),* water is a scarce commodity and is the difference between life and death for the Maitu community and Asha. Within the Maitu compound, water is no longer readily available and has become a resource that was victim to the harsh realities of climate change. In the Maitu compound, the production of liquid sources has become a major currency and the only form of survival for the remaining humans in the compound. Members have to do physical work to retrieve their portion of water as supplied by the ruling council of the compound and the self-sustaining liquid excreted from their own bodies - urine and sweat. The ruling council rations the amount of water each member receives per day, which is evident when Asha goes to receive her daily ration and the printed barcode on her skin is scanned to register that she has received it.

Water is a notable resource that humans depend on daily for their survival; this post-apocalyptic film imagines an environment where water is limited and measured. In the film, there is a dual representation of water; in the Maitu compound, water symbolises self-sufficiency and post-crises governmental control. Despite having a ration of water provided by the “government” of the compound, the idea of power

self-generation applies to the generation of water. Urine and sweat are also commodities, as they can be recycled into drinking water. Within the community, an individual's survival depends on the self-generation of water. This form of survival and disciplined regulation of individual actions within the compound is what Michael Foucault describes as "biopower." Biopower is the control over mortality, "making live and letting die" (Omelsky, 2014: 42). A further examination of this concept is what Achille Mbembe describes as Necro-politics, the usage of social and political power; in this case, also technological power, in order to dictate how some people may live and how some must die. With water becoming a high commodity resource that the ruling council controls, members of the community are now forced into working a routinely based lifestyle of a ratio between self-sufficiency and government dependency through technology, which Mbembe calls "death-worlds;" these are new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*" (Mbembe, 2003: 40).

For Asha, water represents a form of sustainability and restoration. In relation to the Maitu (Mother) seed, water is one of the major resources needed for the seed to grow. Asha applies the actions of sustainability inside and outside the compound with her aim to restore the environment. The possibility of restoration is exposed through Asha's dream, where she is seen swimming in an abundance of clean water, possibly a river, with the root of a tree growing from it (00:05:50). Asha's gesture to share her water with her colleague in the bathroom is an embodiment of sustaining life within the compound; taking into consideration the realities of individualism within the Maitu compound, this gesture embodies Asha's goal of rehabilitation for all through her self-sacrifice. As a researcher in the Virtual Natural History Museum, Asha also continues to sustain the remaining living organisms. In her goal to restore the environment, Asha takes on a harsh journey into the desert where there is limited water. The reality of the limited water supply and the devastation of climate change is showcased when Asha travels through a dried-up river - only an old sign remains warning of "Nuclear radioactive river" (00:14:06).

To ensure that the Maitu (Mother) seed survives, Asha wipes the last perspiring drops from her body and wrings the sweat -soaked cloth over the seedling. This gesture is a continuation of Asha's representation of sustainability through water,

which in turn resulted in the growth and restoration of the seedling into a tree. Asha's actions continue to personify Wangari Maathai's memory of water:

> "As I conclude, I reflect on my childhood experience when I would visit a stream next to our home to fetch water for my mother. I would drink water straight from the stream…Today, over 50 years later, the stream has dried up, women walk long distances for water, which is not always clean and children will never know what they have lost." (Maathai, 2004)

By disassociating herself with the normative apocalyptic lifestyle of the Maitu compound, Asha expanded the importance of water beyond the compound, and introduced the idea of water as a symbol and a physical tool of restoration and sustainability beyond individualism. Asha's exploration of water is what Neimanis argues as "imaginatively producing it…[water] is a substance but it's also an idea" (Neimanis, 2017: 157).

d) Dreams

In *Pumzi (2009),* Asha's inspiration to escape from the compound and save the environment has its genesis in dreams. Within the Maitu Compound, the action of dreaming is an ailment or sickness. The viewers' first introduction to Asha is in her dreamscape, where she is happily looking at the giant Mugumo tree in front of her (00:00:56 - 00:01:25). Asha's dream is disturbed when the dream detector, in the form of an alarm, wakes her and reminds her to take her dream suppressants; it is here we become aware of the forbidding of dreaming. Dreams have a negative connotation attached to them with the dream suppressants labelled with the following, "DREAM SUPPRESSANTS: Take one immediately after an attack." The taming of dreams illustrates the restricted neoliberal society the Maitu compound represents. A form of neurological control or warfare ensures each member of the community does not think, dream or imagine beyond the confines and the rules of the compound. Mich Nyawalo (2017) writes that the dream suppressants prevent members of the community from "imagining alternative futures, henceforth condemning them to live eternally in a dystopian present…their seclusion from the

outside world also gestures towards their inability to think or imagine an existence outside their immediate material realities" (Nyawalo, 2017: 217).

This form of neurological oppressive control is what Omelsky (2014) refers to as “neuropolitics.” In the Maitu compound, there is a sovereign power that has extended its control onto the memories and thoughts of the community members. Through this control, the ruling council observes and alters the circuits of the human brain and provides medications to alter the chemicals of the brain to repress thought patterns and behaviour. This neuro form of monitoring is what Omelsky describes as futural technologies, having the capabilities to have “control of the body itself, its cognitive and neurological networks” (Omelsky, 2014: 42).

Dreaming in the Maitu community is associated with the outside world and the possibility of life outside the compound; the ruling council, who want to keep control within the compound by insisting that the outside is “dead” and uninhabitable, consider these thoughts a threat. The ruling council sustains its power by “monitoring and manipulating cognitive processes, detecting any insurrectionary behaviour as quickly as a thought or image comes to one’s mind” (Omelsky, 2014: 43). Although Asha abides by the council’s rules by taking her dream suppressants, she still seems to have memories of the outside world. After Asha receives the mysterious soil sample she sniffs it, and this immediately brings her back into another dreamscape. Asha’s memories of the outside world and her desire to rehabilitate the environment overrides the neurological repression of her dreams.

There are two factors that dreaming represents in the film, control and hope. For the ruling council, if they manage to get control of one’s thoughts, memories and dreams, then they keep control of society within the compound through suppression of the outside; but for Asha, dreaming provides a sense of hope and a positive outlook on the possibilities of the outside world. Asha is the personification of Wangari Maathai’s call to dream for a better future by taking care of the current environment. Asha overcomes the structural hierarchies of the Maitu compound, and perseveres towards finding the source of the fertile soil and contributing to the reforestation of her now decimated homeland.

Chapter 5: Afronauts (2014) Analysis

5.1. Detailed synopsis of Afronauts (2014)

Afronauts (2014) opens with a black screen and the titles, “inspired by true events.” With an audio backdrop of the Apollo 11 space mission, further titles slowly reveal a similar mission occurred on the other side of the world: “16 July 1969 - The Zambia Space Academy hopes to beat the USA to the moon,” “Their astronaut is 17-year-old Matha Mwamba.” Back to the black screen, the audio backdrop continues to report on the Apollo 11 space mission, providing clear details as to what is currently occurring as Neil Armstrong and fellow Apollo 11 astronomers make their way to the moon.

“Next stop for them, the moon,” the film slowly fades into members of the Zambian Space Academy and finally hones into Matha, the 17-year old female, Albino Astronaut who is racing to the moon. In a slow-paced frame, the viewer can see Matha physically training, while her fellow tribe members follow and cheer her on chanting “Matha, Matha!” Matha’s physical training is divided into various categories, as titles on the black screen continue to reveal the exercises she is undertaking: *1) Buoyancy training* - Matha is seen being lifted off of a sheet with the help of her fellow tribe members; Nkoloso, the leader of the tribe, shouts encouragement, “don’t stop,” as Matha is lifted into the air; *2) Weightlessness training* - from her point of view, we see Matha rolling down a hill in a metallic drum, her tribe members still continue to shout her name, “Matha, Matha;” *3) Preparation for isolation* - alone with the cat she will be travelling with, Matha sits alone isolated from her tribe members; *4) The Bantu Rocket* - Matha stares at the rocket that will take her to the moon, a small lightweight rocket made up of metal sheets with carved out circle windows. As Matha observes The Bantu Rocket, the chanting of her name increases louder and louder as she pants heavily thinking of her journey to come. The chanting and the visual abruptly cuts as we are taken to the black screen with the main title of the film “AFRONAUTS”.

After the main title, the film opens by establishing the Space Academy base camp, showing various instruments used for training, such as tyres, bicycles, and tents where members of the tribe camp out. The base camp is located in an unspecified

desert region where winds calmly blow. Inside the main tent, the tribe members are seen gathered listening to afrobubblegum music, reading astronomy books and building gadgets for their next space adventure. In the distance, outside the camp area, Matha is sitting isolated in the rocket as she delves deeply into a dreamscape. In her metallic spacesuit, Matha walks slowly as she explores the moon she has successfully landed on; she stares into the distance, observing the endless stares spread out across the black sky. Matha's aunt then awakens her, snapping her out of her dreamscape.

The viewer then has an introduction to Auntie Sunday, the only other female character in the film, who is Matha's guardian within the Space Academy. Auntie Sunday is critical of Matha's pending space exploration, calling her a "stubborn girl" for actively risking her health and safety for the upcoming journey. Although members of the tribe continue to celebrate Matha's courage and strength through their continuous chanting of her name, Auntie Sunday, who is seen attending to Matha's wounds, reminds her of the dangers of the journey - "They are just going to blow you up and turn you to fireworks." Confident, Matha defends herself against her aunt's claims, still ready to take up the space exploration she has been preparing for. Although unimpressed, Auntie Sunday assists Matha for her mission as she helps her put on her space suit.

In a series of slow shots, Matha observes the moon, using her hands to isolate the moon into her periphery, as well as using a handmade telescope. Finally, just like the last supper, the tribe gathers as they celebrate with a feast for what is to come. The backdrop of the Apollo 11 space mission continues to echo in the background as Matha silently sits amongst the feasting men. Nkoloso approaches Matha and provides a form of encouragement and comfort, together with firm instructions as she mentally prepares for her voyage. "I see them welcoming you," Nkoloso's words are intercut as Matha heads towards the spaceship with the tribesmen following right behind her. "Tell them we are all coming, do not impose Christianity on them, do not impose the nation states on them" were Nkoloso's final words as Matha finally makes her way to the rocket alone.

As Matha boards The Bantu Rocket, the tribesmen and Auntie Sunday anxiously wait and watch in anticipation. Matha in the rocket with the two cats also waits as the chanting of her name continues. The Tribesmen countdown to blast off, ten..nine..eight…seven, the suspense builds as Matha gets ready, three…two…one… As the tribesmen throw their fire lit torches at the rocket, The Bantu Rocket ignites and blasts off, intercut with that of Apollo 11 and the US audio backdrop reporting on the launch. The tribesmen and Auntie Sunday watch as The Bantu Rocket launches into the sky. At the pinnacle of the launch, the rocket explodes in the air resulting in a firework extravaganza that lights the sky. The last debris of the The Bantu Rocket comes crashing down as the tribesmen and Auntie Sunday watch in dismay.

Auntie Sunday runs towards the fallen rocket and shouts that Matha has disappeared, screaming “She’s gone.” The tribesmen look to Nkoloso who seems pleased with the recent result. “To the moon. Let us rejoice. My little space girl has gone to the moon!,” he shouts, and the tribesmen break into a song of celebration as they chant Matha's name. Auntie Sunday remains confused and in awe as to what she has just witnessed. At this moment, the film cuts to the live coverage of the Apollo 11 space mission where Neil Armstrong lands on the moon and places the USA flag as a symbol of arrival and conquer. This slowly fades into Matha as she stands firmly on the moon looking out into space.

5.2. Filmmakers profile: Nuotama Frances Bodomo

Writer and director Nuotama Frances Bodomo is a Black female who was born in Ghana and currently residing between Ghana and New York. Before settling in New York, she also lived in Norway and Hong Kong. Bodomo’s award winning short films have been shown at various prestigious film festivals including The Sundance Film Festival, The Berlinale, Telluride, Rotterdam, SXSW, and New Directors / New Films. Bodomo graduated with her BA in Film Studies at Columbia University in 2010 as a Kluge Scholar. She went on to do her Master’s in Fine Arts (MFA) at New York University’s (NYU) Tisch Film School.

Bodomo's first film, *Boneshaker (2013),* premiered at the 2013 Sundance Film Festival. Starring Oscar nominee Quvenzhane Wallis, the film follows a Ghanaian immigrant family on a road trip to a Pentecostal church in Louisiana to cure its problem child. During the journey, the family discovers the effects and complications that come from trying to perform a traditional ritual away from home. The film focuses on the themes surrounding homelessness, landlessness and rootlessness that accompany immigration. *Boneshakers (2013)* went on to be shown at SXSW, The Pan African Film Festival and The Lincoln Center's African Film Festival.

Following *Boneshakers (2013)*, Bodomo wrote and directed the science fiction short film *Afronauts (2014),* which premiered in the US at the 2014 Sundance Film Festival. The film had its international premiere at the 2014 Berlin International Film Festival. *Afronauts (2014)* follows 17-year old Matha, a female astronaut who is part of the Zambian Space Academy, as she prepares for her journey to the moon. Based on a true story, the inspiration for *Afronauts (2014)* was the story of Edward Makuku Nkoloso who founded the Zambia National Academy of Science, Space Research and Philosophy and aimed to beat the US and the Soviet Union during the 1960s Space Race. *Afronauts (2014)* had various exhibitions, including at the Whitney Museum as part of the group show *Dreamlands: Immersive Cinema and Art, 1905-2016*, The Barbican Centre as part of *Into the Unknown: A journey Through Science Fiction,* and at the 2018 Venice Biennale Architecture (US Pavilion) as part of Dimensions of Citizenship.

In 2018, Bodomo served as one of the staff writers and directors on the first season of *Random Acts of Flyness (2018)*, an HBO series created by Terence Nance. Bodomo is currently working on the feature film version of Afronauts with support from various institutions including The Sundance Institute, Tribeca Film Institute, IFP's Emerging Storytellers Programme and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation.

Bodomo's work and research aims to celebrate Pan-African storytelling. With her African, Asian, European and American background, Bodomo's work reflects and attempts to decolonise dominant narratives by focusing on stories from the African continent that operate at the intersection of reality and fiction. Through her work, Bodomo aims to question and redefine the conventional representations of Africa

outside the continent and provide a rather pragmatic view of the continent through fiction.

5.3. Ideology of Afronauts (2014)

Ideologically, *Afronauts (2014)* is a postcolonial feminist story that forewords the possibility of African space travel and pioneering young African women as the martyrs within the space race through innovation and modernisation. The 14-minute short film re-tells an alternative history of the 1960s Zambian space programme. Based on the true life of Second World War Veteran Edward Makuka Nkoloso, who founded the Zambian National Academy of Science Space Research and Philosophy, *Afronauts (2014)* follows 17-year old Matha Mwambwa who is in training to join the space race to the moon. Nkoloso's strong belief in the Zambian Space Programme and his ambition to compete in the space race is what Sarr (2019) describes as a kind of "African renaissance." This renaissance is what Frantz Fanon suggests as the [African] continent that is currently healing from the deep psychological scars and still emancipating itself from identity politics that is at odds with its past (Pilkington, na). The African renaissance is then a larger ongoing project that actualises an African utopia and forms part of the larger post-colonial and de-colonial identity project (Sarr, 2019). By reclaiming the story of Edward Makuka Nkoloso, Bodomo "personalises, multiplies and complexifies the African identity; opposed to the monolithic and ethnographic identity imposed by a Western eye" (Pilkington, na).

On the 24th of October 1964, the former British protectorate, known as Northern Rhodesia, gained its independence and would be henceforth known as Zambia, taking its new name from the great Zambezi River. *TIME* magazine described the nation's first president, Kenneth David Kaunda, as a "teetotal, guitar-strumming, non-smoking Presbyterian preacher's son and ex-school teacher" who spent 11 months in British jails and "opposes Black racism…and instead advocates for a multiracial society" (TIME, 1964). On the birth of Zambia's independence, thousands gathered in Lusaka as they watched the lighting of a 6-ft freedom flame that marked the re-christening of Northern Rhodesia to Zambia and its new proclamation as an independent nation under the British Commonwealth.

The birth of the new Zambian independent nation gave way to new heights, dreams and ambitions for Zambian citizens, whose new freedom paved a way for new opportunities. Bodomo's re-imagining of Nkoloso and his Space Programme is what she describes as Nkoloso using this new-found opportunity to validate himself under the Western gaze. In the film, Nkoloso is seen championing Matha and his cadets as they train vigorously for their adventure to the moon. The 1964 documentary footage that inspired Bodomo to create *Afronauts (2014)* shows a British reporter taking Nkoloso aside to interview him; confident, Nkoloso says "Yes, this is the rocket-launching site, and my rocket is just here…I will fire it from Lusaka and it will go straight to the moon, based on how much money I've got…Some people think I'm crazy, but I'll be laughing the day I plant Zambia's flag on the moon." The optimism from Nkoloso and the reimagined optimism showcased in the film is what Mwenya Kabwe describes as a metaphor that parallels Nkolso's hope to reach the moon with the "expansive and deeply hopeful future of an independent Northern Rhodesia" (Kabwe, 2019).

Drawing from Frantz Fanon's framework of decolonisation and the process of dismantling colonial notions engraved within natives, Fanon's framework included breaking colonial structures by creating a new identity not only for an individual, but also for the collective society; this is only possible through rejecting coloniser culture (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2001). Bodomo's interpretation within *Afronauts (2014)* was Nkoloso joining the space race in order to define his new nation as a way of validating himself and Zambia as an independent and new nation from the Western gaze. Within the film, Matha personified Fanon's approach of dismantling colonial structures through violence. The recreation of the idea of validity is through violence, as Matha appears as a foot soldier sent on a suicide mission to the moon. This extreme form of patriotism aims to redefine and forge the new identity of Zambia as an independent nation.

Nkoloso's actions and the Zambian Space Programme in its entirety represents the extreme form of patriotism through violence. In 1964, Nkoloso wrote an Op-Ed about his space programme. The letter actualises the 'colonized becoming the colonizer' trait with statements that read "We have been studying the planet through telescopes at our headquarters and are now certain Mars is populated by primitive natives."

Nkoloso continued to write, “Our rocket crew is ready. Specially trained space girl Mwamba, two cats (also specially trained) and a missionary will be launched in our first rocket” (Serpell, 2017). This Op-Ed read as an imitation of British colonialism within the African continent refracted through a paranoid Cold War sensibility (Serpell, 2017). The film shows Zambians training to become the would-be-potential colonisers, drawing on the Cold War narrative of nation building. Zambia enters a rivalry that is clearly between two superpowers (U.S & USSR) in order to prove their capability of reaching a new world.

The erasure of identity for former colonised nations is what Fanon described as the creation of an inferiority complex imbued in colonised bodies. Inferiority complex occurs through the colonisation of the mind and manifests in the manner in which a nations’ history is denied, and they are made to feel inferior and incapable of challenging the colonial order; this results in the nations’ national identity coming under denigration and made non-functional (Ahluwalia & Zegeye, 2010). Once a nation receives independence they enter an identity crisis where there is no pure existing trace of their pre-colonial cultural and social structure and a new consciousness and social culture that breaks away from colonial culture is required. The search for this new identity is what Homi Bhaba (1994) refers to as the “third space,” where former colonised nations that were burdened with centuries of colonialism find it impossible to construct identities and forms of knowledge that are uncontaminated by universalist or Eurocentric concepts and images, and are now placed in a space where they have to locate and take up a “third space of revision” and “dwell in a beyond that is neither the indigenous past nor colonised present” (Bhaba, 1994). The Zambian space programme became a nation-building project for Nkoloso and his trainees in order to rectify the notion that the newly independent Zambia was capable of space travel on the same level as Western nations; furthermore, this was an opportunity for a former colonised nation to compete with their former colonisers.

In the film, Matha’s mission is an attempt to locate a third space for the Zambian nation, but Bodomo replicates this mission by noting the violence that comes along with building a new nation. Although the space mission represents the big ideas, dreams and newly formed post-colonial ideologies of Nkoloso, Matha and the entire

space academy, there is still violence perpetuated through Matha, who illustrates the brutal side of patriotism and risks her life to complete the mission. When describing this recreation in the film, Bodomo notes the following:

> "A question people ask when you become a new nation is how can you rebuild a new nation when nobody that's alive saw a pre-colonial Zambia…Like in 1964 when Zambia became independent, even the oldest people in the country were born under colonized Zambia, and it's like we're rebuilding at this point…It's a very painful thing to realize that you've lost certain history, and I think that because of that, people go into these neo-colonial missions-recreating a certain violence. I thought that as it plays out in Matha's character" (Afful, 2016).

Although Nkoloso is demonstrating an identity of 'former colonised turned into potential coloniser' in terms of alluding to primitive life form, his Op-Ed included a decolonial initiative that aimed to dismantle colonial knowledge systems usually enforced on natives. Nkoloso wrote, "But I have warned the missionary he must not force Christianity on the people if they do not want it." Bodomo included the same sentiments in the film; before Matha boards the ready-made rocket that will take her to the moon, Nkoloso gives Matha clear instructions of what to do and not do when she finally lands (00:08:23), "Tell them we are all coming…do not impose Christianity on them…do not impose the nations states on them." Within the third space, Nkoloso's instructions represent the practical action of dismantling imperial structures in the realm of culture (Xie, 1997).

In *Afronauts (2014),* the main character of the film is Matha, played by Diandra Forrest, an African-American albino model. Matha is based on the real life of Matha Mwamba, who trained in the Zambian space programme in 1964. The 1964 *TIME* article described Matha as a "curvaceous 16-year-old" who was being trained by spinning around a tree in an oil drum and taught to walk on her hands as it was the only way humans could walk on the moon (TIME, 1964). When asked why the Zambian Space Programme did not successfully get off the ground, one of Nkoloso's reasons was that Matha fell pregnant and dropped out of the programme.

In the film, there are only two female characters, Matha the protagonist and the aunt / mother figure played by Yolanda Ross. As the hero of the mission, who is expected to carry out the duty of representing her new independent nation in the space race, Matha, being the only female astronaut in the academy, is almost fetishised and idolised by the male astronauts around her, and because of this, Matha is forced to mythologise and martyr herself in a suicide mission to the moon (Bisschoff, 2019: 619). Matha is in a position where she has no direct agency over her choices as she prepares for the mission; she is expected to take one for the team as “the mother of the exiles' (Afful, 2016). Conversely, her aunt / mother figure is the only character in the film who questions and cares about Matha’s feelings and choices, and personally disagrees with the entire mission. Unlike the men, the aunt / mother treats Matha as one who has control of her own personal agency, and personally takes care of her physical well being. The mother / aunt’s protest against the mission stems from her belief that it is unnecessary to get on a rocket to the moon in order to prove to the West that they are worthy (Afful, 2016). While confronting Matha, the aunt bandages Matha while uttering, “You think they care about you? They do not care about you. They are just going to blow you up and turn you into fireworks" (00:06:49). Despite the aunt / mother’s grievances, she still continues to respect Matha’s decision to fulfil her mission and lets her go. Throughout the film, the aunt / mother figure is the only one who seemingly displays a sense of worry and nervousness, while the men continue to cheer. Bodomo states that her immediate assumption when she learned about Matha was that “the aunty character gets who Matha is and was actually scared for her blood and bones' (Quoted in Afful, 2016).

Although Matha attempts to assist in realising Nkoloso’s vision of validity and worthiness, she also aims to prove herself and her individual capability amongst the men she has been training with, and the aunt / mother figure seems to be aware of that when Matha responds with “so tell me where else to go if you are so sure” (00:06:00). Towards the end of the film, when Matha finally boards the rocket and it blows up, there is a contrasting reaction between Nkoloso and the aunt / mother. Nkoloso reacts victoriously screaming “to the moon! My little space girl has gone to the moon” (00:11:04). The mother / aunt wanders aimlessly as she observes the demolished rocket, searching for Matha after screaming that she had gone. The aunt

/ mother figure clearly displays the maternal caring instinct she has carried throughout the film.

Through Nkoloso and Matha's continued perseverance to get to the moon, *Afronauts (2014)* encapsulates a post-colonial expedition that brings light to and reflects upon flawed colonial constructs and the impositions of nation states and how both characters aimed to break that cycle by joining the space race. Furthermore, through the characterisation of Matha, the film draws attention to patriarchal limitations and the violence linked to the nationalist aspirations of former colonised nations.

5.4. Geopolitical and Sociocultural background of *Afronauts (2014)*

The headquarters of The Zambian National Academy of Science Space Research and Philosophy was in Lusaka, Zambia, and the exact location of the academy would change locations according to Nkoloso's day job (Serpell, 2017). In the film, Bodomo re-imagined the location of the training facility as a desolated arid desert landscape. The shooting of this alternative interpretation of the training facility occurred in New Jersey, U.S.A., and the chosen location provided a landscape Bodomo describes as "already feels like the moon" (quoted in Afull, 2016).

The wide desert landscape in the film has an array of dunes, strong winds and dust storms. The chosen location aims to imitate what Matha could possibly expect when she arrives on the moon. According to Bodomo, her aim in shooting at the chosen location was to replicate a lunar landscape. The loneliness, pain and self-negation that Matha experiences as she trains will also exist on the moon. Furthermore, the trials and tribulations she currently experiences, will be the same in space (Afful, 2016). The desolate desert landscape contributes to the theme of isolation that Matha experiences. Throughout the film, Matha is isolated, and surrounded by the stillness of her environment and the rocket that will launch her into space. The Zambian Academy represented in the film is a campsite consisting of tents made from recycled material, tools used for training such as tents, bicycles, cylinder drums, etc. that the cadets train with. During isolation, Matha spends her time in the Bantu rocket, also made up of recycled material. Nkoloso's tent, which is the biggest and main tent, is where all the cadets gather to listen to the radio playing the Apollo 11 mission and feast in celebration as they prepare for Matha's launch. Visually, the

geographical location showcased in the film represents the astronauts' dream space - the moon. When describing the intention behind the desert landscape, Bodomo states that for the cadets, the space was to make them feel as if they were already where they wanted to be (Afull, 2016).

Although Nkoloso was a science teacher and politically involved as a Zambian freedom fighter with accolades, including becoming a district president for the Zambian African National Congress in Ludwig during the late 1950s, a member of the United National Independence Party in the 1960s and later serving as President Kenneth Kaunda's 'Special Representative' at the African Liberation Centre (Serpell, 2017), he was still ridiculed by Western media and his fellow Zambian citizens. The rare piece of 1964 archival footage from the Associated Press went on to call Nokoloso and his trainees "a bunch of crackpots." Zambian citizens dissociated with the Zambian Academy and even former President Kaunda, stated that it was "not a real thing" (Quoted from Serpell, 2017). Although ridiculed, particularly by Western media, Nkoloso continued to request large sums of money, ranging from 20 million to 2 billion dollars from first world countries, including The United States, Russia, Israel and The United Arab Republic (Serpell, 2017). Nkoloso's indifference in the cold war stirred his ambition to beat the U.S and Russia to the moon, even with his limited resources and support. *Afronauts (2014)* approaches these limitations through an ethnographic lens. Bodomo 'documents' the Zambian Space Academy in their isolation and reveals through props and costume the lack of resources and support the academy had. The recycled, Do-it-yourself (DIY) training material, worn out costumes and isolation establishes the lack thereof as experienced by Nkoloso and his academy in the 1960s.

The make-up of the social structure of the Academy was Nkoloso, the founder and leader of the academy, an unspecified number of male cadets and Matha Mwamba, who was the only female in the academy. Chronicle columnist Arthur Hoppe described Matha as "demure, well-rounded young lady with a charming smile" (Quoted from Serpell, 2017). In *Afronauts (2014)*, Matha, who is the protagonist of the film, is an albino female. A report prepared by Under the Same Sun (UTSS), a civil society organisation committed to ending discrimination against people living with albinism, reported heinous crimes committed against albinos in and around

Zambia. The report suggests that some communities, particularly in rural areas, continue to believe people living with albinism are “ghosts,” or have magical powers, that they are a result of incest or are cursed. These beliefs result in hate crimes towards people living with albinism, such as trafficking, isolation, discrimination and beheading, as rituals related to witchcraft use their body parts (UTSS, 2020).

Taking into consideration the discrimination towards people living with albinism, particularly in Zambia, Bodomo, states that the casting of albino Diandra Forrest as Matha was intentional. The albinism was a “twofold device,” as Bodomo mentions she believed any person who would isolate him / herself and risk their life to go to the moon, would be someone who is already experiencing isolation and a lack of safety around belonging (Cassell, 2019). The same way in which Albino’s are ‘othered’ in Zambia, is the same way Matha is ‘othered’ and having to prove her worthiness to the group of cadets within the Space Academy. In the film, Matha’s otherworldliness through her albinism adds to her becoming martyred, fetishised and idolised by the male cadets in the group. Bodomo emphasises that albinism was not an aesthetic choice for the film to “look cool” (Cassell, 2019), instead it was a discriminatory reality against albinism that she wanted to address and will continue to address in the feature adaptation of the film (Cassell, 2019). Therefore, Matha, as an albino female within the film, contributes to what Bodomo describes as a “migrant story on a super-planetary level” (quoted in Afull, 2016), where she has to sacrifice herself in order to create a new myth for her people, eventually contributing to the alternative grand metanarratives of history (Bisschoff, 2020: pg 619).

The geopolitical and socio-cultural re-interpretations by Bodomo in *Afronauts (2014)* portrays Nkoloso as an eccentric visionary whilst forewording social issues related to albinism and recreating narratives through Matha’s character. Compared to archival footage from the West that aimed to ridicule the Zambia Space Academy, Bodomo’s interpretation reclaims and purposefully reframes the past and proposes alternative futures, particularly within the African continent.

5.5. Iconography of *Afronauts (2014)*

5.5.1 Colour in *Afronauts (2014)*

An important visual element that contributes to the scenic dream-like-scape of the film is the colour. *Afronauts (2014)* is a film entirely in black and white. Bodomo explains the shooting of the film was in colour and desaturated through editing (Cassell, 2019). The aim of the visual aesthetic was to approach the film through an ethnographic lens. The faded black and white colour mimicked the ethnographic footage of Africa captured in the 60s. During his periods of training, Nkoloso invited, and allowed Western media to visit and report about his academy. One of the most notable visual documents can be found on YouTube - here we see a reporter for the Associate Press speaking to Nkoloso about his academy; further in the background we see his cadets training as Nkoloso provides the reporter with background information about the Space Academy. Although Nkolso's interaction with the reporter was enthusiastic, the reporter, along with other Western media outlets, reported on Nkoloso and the academy with the aim of ridiculing and trivialising Nkoloso's efforts - an approach the West continued to do as they reported on the inferior complexities related to the African continent.

Inspired by this footage, Bodomo aimed to execute a similar newsreel aesthetic, but instead make it visually enticing. In order to dismantle the long history and legacy of the camera and ethnographic representation and how it was used to weaponise and distort African realities, Bodomo reclaimed the narrative, which was seen as a senseless endeavour reported through a colonial lens and attempted to undo those notions by also using the camera and fictionalising the narrative. By imitating the black and white historical newsreel aesthetic, Bodomo states it was not only an immediate way to transport audiences back into that era, but to also question the validity and the reality of the newsreel (Cassell, 2019). By merging the black and white colour with the high-frame rate for slow motion effects, the film projected an otherworldly and hypnotic atmosphere and induced a feeling of nostalgia for audiences. Pilkington (n.a) described nostalgia through the visual aesthetic as experiencing "a past that never was and a future that can become possible" (Pilkington, n.a).

5.5.2 Science and Technology & VFX Techniques in *Afronauts (2014)*

The science and technology represented in Afronauts (2014) was rudimentary and makeshift. The D.I.Y technology used to train cadets was from recycled materials with elementary explanations as to how they would assist the cadets on their space travels. The opening of the film shows the technology and the use for each instrument with regard to training. In the 1960s, there was a debate as to whether Nkoloso's technology and training were a serious endeavour or a mockery towards multi-billion-dollar funded space programmes. Nevertheless, Nkoloso continued to explain to Western Media how each component would ensure that his cadets got to space and survived.

Afronauts (2014) establishes each training component by dividing them into chapters and illustrating the use of each technological instrument for training and for what purpose:

Buoyancy training: The viewer sees Matha thrown into the air with a large black plastic sheet supported by the male cadets who throw her. Buoyancy training aims to prepare astronauts for spacewalks and movement.

Weightlessness training: Matha finds herself rolled down a large hill in an oil drum. While Matha is rolling down, Nkoloso is watching from the top of the hill and the other male cadets are watching from the bottom of the hill. Weightlessness training aims to assist astronauts in the absence of gravity once they leave the Earth's atmosphere.

Preparation for isolation: Matha sits alone with her cat companions who will be travelling with her. According to Nkoloso, the cats not only provided companionship, but were trained; once they finally arrived on Mars, Matha would open the door of the rocket and drop the cats on the ground, if they survived, it would prove Mars was fit for human habitation (quoted from Serpell, 2017).

The Bantu Rocket: The manufacture of the rocket was from an amalgamation of recycled foil, plastic and fabric materials with a hole on the side of the rocket as a window. The Bantu rocket was small enough to fit Matha and her two cats. The shape of the rocket was an underdeveloped replica of the advanced Western rockets

with a semi-pointed nose cone and a slim cylindrical body. The Bantu rocket would be the main technological item that would eventually take Matha to space.

Coupled with the above-mentioned training montage showcased in the film, Nkoloso demonstrated other methods for training his cadets. In order to produce the feeling of freefall, Nkoloso implemented the *mulolo* (swinging system), which he described as a potential means of space travel. This system involved making his cadets swing from the end of a long rope, when they finally reach the highest point he cuts the rope (Serpell, 2017). The actuality of the training programme is visible from the Associate Press footage; here we see trainees slotted into metal cylinders and floating down streams, and Matha swinging while wearing a bomber jacket. Bodomo states that through the technology used, the aim was not to ask whether or not Matha would make it to space with those type of resources, but instead the story was about the imminent failure (Cassell, 2019) and in Matha's case, focusing on the shift from being aspirational to self-worthy as a migrant narrative (Afful, 2016). The lack of advanced technology and scientific basis for training becomes a personification of perseverance, the belief that even with limited resources they can still challenge Western powers and make it to the moon.

Although it is not necessarily VFX, the slow-motion effect in the film contributed to the atmospheric scenic style of the film. Together with the camera, which dreamily floats around Matha through a variety of close up, medium and longshots, the high-frame slow motion represents the feeling of weightlessness in space. As Matha continues to train, the slow-motion effects provide audiences with a glimpse of what Matha could possibly experience once she finally gets to the moon. During her periods of isolation, Matha dreams of reaching her destination (00:03:37 - 00:04:08); in this dreamscape we see Matha in her astronaut attire taking her first steps on the moon and wandering the vast isolated lunar landscape - this dream can be compared to the Apollo 11 mission, when man made their first step on the moon. The slow-motion effect accentuates this dreamscape, allowing audiences to drift and wander along with Matha. Pilkington (n.a) notes that the slow-motion effect throughout the film grants audiences the pleasure of imagining Matha's first steps on the moon, "certainly testing the emblematised images of Armstrong " (Pilkington, n.a).

The film does not contain a vast number of VFX due to the practical props used throughout the film, but one notable scene in the film that contains VFX is the climax of the film, when the Bantu rocket explodes during take-off. The rocket takes off (00:10:23), and with a wide low angle pointed towards the sky, we see fire residue as the members of the space academy watch the rocket as an almost shooting star across the sky. The rocket then explodes across the sky like fireworks and comes crashing down (00:10:31). After the rocket finally crashes to the ground, we see its remains on fire as the aunt / mother figure goes on to observe (00:10:55). The weight of the magnificent explosion speaks to the looming demise of the mission, although members of the academy were hopeful that Matha would make it to the moon, as audiences we became aware of the impracticality of it due to the rudimentary technology that they were using throughout the film. Matha's disappearance due to the explosion garnered celebratory reactions from members of the academy as they continued to believe, even optimistically, that she had made it to the moon.

5.5.3 Mise-en-scene of *Afronauts (2014)*

a) Setting in *Afronauts (2014)*

The setting of the film is in an arid desert region. The film takes place in the 1960s, within the local Zambian space-time. Although there are no deserts in Zambia, the film aimed to encapsulate the idea of isolation of the entire Space Academy and the protagonist, Matha. The desert setting provided a means to reimagine a base camp that was far from everything and everyone, and confined to members of the academy. The mountainous dunes and drastic winds contributed to their training programmes as Matha prepared for weightlessness and breezy weather conditions. The cluster of tents spread out amongst the desert also aimed to replicate a military base camp.

b) Props in *Afronauts (2014)*

The major props in *Afronauts (2014)* form part of training for the cadets. Although not too advanced, members of the academy utilised recycled materials in order to learn and physically train for their upcoming space adventure. Following the film's title, we have an introduction to the academy's base camp and witness some of the materials

the cadets use (00:03:09 - 00:03:26). In this short montage, the viewer sees a series of worn out tyres, bicycles, tents made from a range of materials patched together, a man-made worn-out banner at the forefront of the camp with 'Nkoloso Space Academy' written on it, makeshift solar viewing glasses, an old antenna radio and science textbooks. A prominent prop within the film is the Bantu rocket itself, not only would it transport Matha to the moon, it was a housing instrument for Matha during her moments of isolation. The props in the film were technological accessories, which, in one way or another, related to developing the necessary skills to get to the moon. Compared to the more advanced Western science and technology, members of The Zambian Space Academy utilised their limited resources to achieve similar goals to get to the moon. As Bodomo describes, it was not about the resources and the technology they had access to, nor was it about whether or not they would actually make it to the moon, but in using these limited resources *Afronauts (2014)* showcased ingenuity from a group of people who did not benefit from globalisation and still enthusiastically believed they could make it to the moon.

c) Costume in *Afronauts (2014)*

The costume in the film is simplistic and convenient for the characters represented in the film. The most notable costume in the film is Nkoloso's attire, as it replicates what Nkoloso wore in the 1960s. The standard-issue helmet, long flowing cape and overall military styled attire is what Pilkington (n.a) described as a disguise that contributed to his space programme as a "front for underground revolutionary activity" (Pilkington, n.a). Nkoloso's attire accentuated his over the top enthusiasm and military styled leadership. Matha's training costume was ragged, made up of a combination of a loose T-Shirt underneath a form-fitting leotard; similar to the training instruments, Matha's training attire was unconventional and rudimentary. Similar to Matha's training costume, the other men in the academy wore costumes consisting of loose, torn T-shirts, trousers and makeshift helmets.

Matha's costume changed in her dreamscapes, and when she finally boarded the Bantu rocket, she wore a space suit. The space suit replicated a modern space suit allowing audiences to see Matha through the prominent glass helmet as she boarded the rocket. The mother / aunt's costume stood out amongst the rest of the

other characters in the film as it was a printed traditional long dress. This outfit allowed the audience to disassociate the mother / aunt from the rest of characters as she was openly against the mission. Just like the character, the traditional "homegrown" attire of the aunt / mother served as a grounding reminder for Matha.

5.6 Semiotics and Symbolism in *Afronauts (2014)*

a) The Moon

In *Afronauts (2014),* the moon becomes a symbol of possibility and freedom. As former colonised bodies and now independent, neo-colonised bodies, the race to get to the moon by members of the Zambian Space Academy is engulfed in a form of escapism for the Black body and the formation of new material realities for citizens of newly independent countries. The film itself takes place against the backdrop of the independence movements taking place across the African continent in the 1960s. The moon itself becomes the ultimate destination for these bodies where they will be able to realise their newly found freedom. For centuries on Earth, Black bodies experienced the horrors of colonialism, slavery, and various other forms of discriminatory laws.

In *Afronauts (2014)*, the moon becomes a visual motif throughout the film. We see the moon from the perspective of the cadets, specifically Matha, when they look up at it through their makeshift telescopes (00:02:57 - 00:03:03 & 00:06:37 - 00:07:14). Their continuous observation of the moon inspires their foresight into the future; although they are still on Earth, they now see themselves on the moon. The moon has become their next destination. In the post-colonial hopes that they will not relive the tortured lives that they lived on Earth, instead, once they get to the moon, they will sprout nations that will never experience similar forms of Earthly colonialism and continuous discrimination. We also see the moon from Matha's perspective; when she goes into her dreamscapes, she envisions that she has successfully made it to the moon - the first human to do so (00:03:37 - 00:04:09 & 00:12:01 - 00:12:19). In these dreamscapes, we see Matha wandering alone on the moon, empty and vast, staring into space.

In order to actualise the new material realities on the moon, Matha is given clear instructions by Nkoloso, “Tell them we are all coming; do not impose Christianity on them; do not impose the nation states on them” (00:08:30 - 00:08:47). A successful landing on the moon would continue to symbolise “a postcolonial celebration of African identity” (Vermeylen, 2021), an identity not corrupted by Western impositions, but instead an opportunity to redefine African identity outside of Earthly colonial influence for Black bodies that have not been able to find home on Earth.

Before his death in 1989, Nkolso still had the vision for the future of man, “I still feel man will freely move from one planet to another” (quoted from Serpell, 2017). The optimistic attitude towards space travel is evident in the film, because after the Bantu Rocket explodes and Matha has disappeared, Nkoloso declares “To the moon.” This is similar to Nkolso in real life, because although his academy did not go beyond frivolous training, the possibility to get to the moon against all odds and failures still lingered. “My little space girl has gone to the moon,” a declaration from Nkolos within the film that exudes the reversal of afro-pessimism through the hopes and possible freedoms of getting to the moon. Bourland (2020) describes this as, “Here the Zambian space programme not only succeeds but effectively reverses the long-standing direction of exploration; colonies in Africa long functioned as military entrepots, or sites of resource and labour extraction” (Bourland, 2020).

b) Apollo 11 Space mission

Fifty-three years ago, the United States did the impossible by landing the first man on the Moon. The Apollo 11 space mission took hundreds of thousands of people, resources and billions of dollars, but the landing was one of the greatest milestones in human history - with Neil Armstrong proclaiming the famous words, “that’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” The success of the Apollo 11 mission proved to Americans and nations across the globe that the impossible was in fact possible.

Afronauts (2014) places the audio of the Apollo 11 mission against the visuals in the film, as well as intercuts pivotal visual moments of the mission within the film. Against this famous backdrop, Bodomo tells the story of space travel from the perspective of “the people whose stories are lost or silenced to an iconic mainstream

history that documents facts" (Vermeylen, 2021). While acknowledging the Apollo 11 mission, *Afronauts (2014)* almost compares the mission to that of the Zambian Space Academy, by bringing Matha to the forefront; this reinterpreted version of the Zambian Space academy sees Matha competing with Neil Armstrong to become the first human on the moon. Falling under a third world nation with negative social and political stigma attached to it, The Zambian Space Academy reshuffled unsettled and perceived ideas about Africa and their potential to get to the moon, thus *Afronauts (2014)* follows characters that have not been able to find a home on earth due to countless acts of social and political discriminations and are therefore most attracted to the promise of the space race (Vermeylen, 2021).

In *Afronauts (2014)*, the narrating of the Apollo 11 mission is by a radio broadcast describing the mission in detail. In the beginning of the film (00:00:20 - 00:00:39), we hear the radio broadcaster describing the astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Michael Collins and Edwin Aldrin Jr. as they prepare for their journey; coupled with this is the introductory visual titles "Their astronaut is 17-year old Matha Mwamba," we then see Matha standing straight up as she faces Nkoloso and the other cadets. We hear the radio broadcast before we see any visuals in the introduction of the film, this eases audiences into the suspenseful nature of the space race as we anticipate whether the astronauts will make it.

In the midpoint of the film (00:07:28 - 00:08:03), as all the cadets gather in a tent to celebrate Matha as she is about to board The Bantu Rocket, the broadcast of the Apollo 11 mission can be faintly heard in the background on the radio amidst the celebration from the men. This establishes that the space academy is indeed going head to head with the U.S as they continue to keep track of the Apollo 11 mission. Approaching the climax of the film (00:10:00), as the Bantu Rocket is set alight and launching for lift off, the radio broadcast continues to describe the Apollo 11 mission, this time the lift off from the Bantu rocket is intercut with the lift off from the Apollo 11. By the denouement of the film, after the Bantu rocket crashed (00:11:37), we see the real live footage of the Apollo 11 mission as the radio broadcaster describes the astronauts setting up the flag to plant on the moon, from the Apollo 11 footage, the radio broadcast fades away and the film finally cuts, slowing revealing Matha as she stares into the lunar horizon.

The comparison between the Zambian space mission and the Apollo 11 space mission allowed audiences to engage with an alternate history. In this alternate history, Africa has no longer been erased from history and instead has urgency with the hopes of getting to the moon. *Afronauts (2014)* takes the narrative of Nkoloso and the Zambian Space Academy and reinvigorates the socio-political landscape of the African continent by imagining its possible inclusion in the space race. The backdrop of the Apollo 11 space mission eliminates the idea of questioning the reality of whether or not they would make it, instead, as Bodomo describes it accordingly: "It's sort of like you hear this story and you're with them, you're with that desire, you're with being up against all odds, you're with their underdog narrative" (quoted from Afull, 2016). The comparison therefore stems from acknowledging that in 1969, the moon landing represented the height of American ingenuity, but *Afronauts (2014)* propelled a visual device that represented historical estrangements where the African is present during moments of historical triumphs.

c) Chanting Matha's name

Together with the radio broadcast, another prominent audio motif throughout the film is the chanting of Matha's name. This chanting within the film showcases Matha's prominence as the protagonist, and what she symbolises within the Zambian Space Academy. The chanting of Matha's name is rhythmic and occurs during moments of celebration from the men in the academy, and as an audio backdrop during moments of isolation and training for Matha.

The first time the chanting occurs is in the beginning of the film when we have the first introduction of Matha during her training. The chanting continues throughout the introductory opening of the film (00:01:13 & 00:01:35 & 00:02:14). This introduction of Matha, coupled with close up shots of her training, establishes her as the protagonist of the film. As the only female cadet, and the one who is going to the moon, the constant chanting of Matha's name from the male cadets establishes Matha as their saviour who is going to take them to the moon. Her self-sacrifice to board the rocket garners Matha a form of obsessive adoration from the male cadets who see her as their only hope to reach the stars. The aunt / mother figure breaks the chanting motif within the film when she wakes Matha up from her isolation training. The aunt / mother figure, who physically takes care of Matha, breaks the

monotonous chanting by calling her with urgency (00:04:07), thus breaking Matha from her dreamscape and into reality. The aunt / mother figure is the only character who does not idolise Matha but instead recognises her attempt to prove herself, thus when the aunt / mother calls Matha's name, it is from a point of worry or concern for her well-being.

Matha's training wears heavily on her physically. After the aunt / mother pulls Matha from the Bantu rocket barely alive and into the tent, the male cadets see her and still continue to chant her name in celebration. Matha enjoys the idolisation and admiration that she receives from the men compared to the harsh critiques she receives from the aunt / mother (00:05:13 - 00:05:51). As Nkoloso gives Matha advice before she boards, he emphasises Matha's name with reverence and declaration (00:08:17 - 00:08:51), giving her rules to live up to for when she gets to the moon. In this scene, Matha's purpose transpires when called, "Matha, mother of the exiles."

Towards the climax of the film, as Matha approaches the Bantu rocket, the men once again begin to quietly chant her name (00:09:22), with the aunt / mother standing in silence. Once Matha enters the rocket and the countdown begins, the chanting has stopped and they all observe silently, with one cadet heading the countdown. After the Bantu rocket comes crashing down, Nkoslo declares that Matha "has gone to the moon." The men begin to chant her name rhythmically once again in celebration (00:11:13); this is the last time in the film that we hear the chanting of Matha's name. Thus, the idolisation and fetishisation of Matha within the film is through the continuous chanting of her name, and reminds the male cadets of their hopes and dreams of getting to the moon through Matha.

d) The Bantu Rocket

The Bantu Rocket is the physical instrument that will carry Matha to the moon. Described as an "upright cylinder with an egg-shaped hole for breathing" (Serpell, 2017), and as a rocket that is "powered by urine-fuelled generators" (Bisschoff, 2020), in *Afronauts (2014)* the rocket not only aims to take Matha to the moon, but is where Matha falls into her dreamscape within the film.

We first see the Bantu Rocket in the opening montage of the film (00:02:14 - 00:02:29). The structure is revealed in a wide shot of the rocket as Matha stares at it from a distance (00:02:27). Together with the training obstacles, The Bantu Rocket forms part of the rudimentary technological apparatus within the Zambian academy. In the film, The Bantu Rocket also becomes the space where Matha falls into her dreamscape during isolation (00:03:33 - 00:04:47). Matha prepares to physically sacrifice her body to continue her training in the rocket; the theme of her bodily sacrifice is encouraged and admired by Nkoloso who declares “America and their Armstrong, Nothing! Over here we are body strong…This is body strong herself” (00:04:50 - 00:05:06), referring to Matha. In this scene, Matha finds herself physically worn out in the isolated Bantu Rocket, where the temperature is freezing, and she is shivering and weak when pulled out by her aunt / mother. The theme of bodily sacrifice within the Bantu Rocket is visible in the climax of the film, when Matha finally boards the rocket and it explodes resulting in her disappearance (00:09:07 - 00:11:04).

Due to the explosion, the viewer assumes the mission was unsuccessful, but the launch of the Bantu rocket represented a utopia that “marked both the space race in general and the sense of exuberant possibility that predominated during the early postcolonial moment of roughly 1960-1968” (Bourland, 2020). Furthermore, the launch of the rocket not only actualised Matha’s bodily sacrifice to get to the moon, it also reimagined the vision of Africa in being fully present in the next phase of space travel that is attuned to space as a place that is beneficial for former colonised bodies (Vermeylen, 2020).

Chapter 6: Findings and Discussions

Through this research study, I have attempted to evaluate the films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* extensively in order to determine the extent to which they portray africanfuturism. This chapter aims to discuss the above-mentioned analysis of *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* by outlining and consolidating the findings of the analysis.

In an attempt to answer the research question "To what extent do *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray africanfuturism," the films were analysed according to what this research prescribes as components related to the sub-genre of africanfuturism, namely iconography, ideology, geopolitical and sociocultural background, semiotics and symbolism, and the filmmakers' profile. This framework is in conjunction with Lempert's (2014) description of an indigenous futurist framework. According to Lempert (2014), there should be critical indigenous methodologies applied in developing such a framework and should emphasise components such as sovereignty, decolonisation and focus on contemporary native community issues (Lempert, 2014: 165). Furthermore, an indigenous framework should critique present state of affairs and reimagining futures, and apply what Sandy Grande (2004) describes as an "emancipatory theory…that acts as a true counter discourse, counter praxis [and] counter ensoulment of indigenous identity" (Grande, 2004: 95).

By evaluating *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* according to the africanfuturist framework of this research and taking into consideration Lempert's (2004) suggested indigenous futurist framework, it is clear that both case study films duly incorporated elements of what one could describe as africanfuturism. Both films have attempted to adapt and / or ground the major narrative of the film within the African continent by considering or incorporating socio-political and / or cultural material realities within the visual narrative.

A prevalent component found in both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* was the major dramatic themes of the films, which both focused on the Black female body and self-sacrifice. The existence of these themes within the context of africanfuturism is paradoxical, as on one hand the likeness of the Black female body

within the science fiction genre dismantles the representation of women as myopic, subordinated characters who are subjected to the white male gaze, but on the other, projects the Black female body as an emancipatory figure, particularly through violence. Furthermore, violence is specifically perpetuated towards the Black female body as an agent of social or cultural transformation and / or healing. The existence of Asha in *Pumzi (2009)* and Matha in *Afronauts (2014)* becomes particularly more nuanced as their characters as female bodies goes beyond feminist science fiction. Although feminist science fiction aims to centralise the experiences of women and imagine alternatives to existing patriarchs, whether in utopian or dystopian settings, the presented question then becomes whether or not Black female bodies within africanfuturism only exist to become liberators within postcolonial-neoliberal societies in order to apprehend or completely destroy existing patriarchies and societal hegemonies. Haraway (1991) notes a similar paradox when discussing the female cyborg as an emancipatory figure versus the cyborg as an object of and created by male desire and fantasy (Haraway, 1991). Bisschoff (2019) describes this paradox accordingly:

> “Part of the enigma and allure of the female cyborg for me lies in the paradox of it being both a symbol of patriarchal control - often effectively materially and imaginatively created by the male desire - and a signifier of freedom from patriarchal constraints. Thus, even if the cyborg is created by man, she can escape male control and become a symbol and force of transgression” (Bisschoff, 2019: 613)

Within the context of Asha and Matha, although they encompass the role of the emancipatory figures within their dystopian, neoliberal societies, their existence as Black femmes within controlled societies equates their freedom with self-sacrifice. The centralising of self-sacrifice through the Black female body may be due to the ultimate quest for liberation, liberation outside of Western-gendered thought, a desire Rowe (2008) describes as seeking a place of belonging (Rowe, 2008) and as an autonomous power that challenges and disrupts traditional hegemonies with regards to race and gender. Beyond feminist science fiction lies African-feminist-futurisms, where the consideration of gender is explicit as it relates to post-colonialism. At the

intersection of race and culture, African-feminist-futurisms focuses on the identity of the Black femme within the continent and challenges forms of subordinations within their own societies as well as myths and stereotypes linked to Western notions of femininity. In *Pumzi (2009)*, Asha occupies the role of healer and nurturer by challenging the ruling council of her own community, and in *Afronauts (2014),* Matha challenges Western perception of African space travel as a Black female astronaut in the midst of a majority male space academy. The identity of African and woman provides grounds to challenge, and the theme of self-sacrifice in both films then speak to and personifies Justice's (2008) description of the aim of native science fiction as a media that is a tool for decolonisation, where stereotypes connected to indigenous societies are deconstructed and new representations are constructed (Justice, 2008).

Ideologically, both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray epistemic theoretical frameworks, namely, African-ecowomanism (Pumzi) and post-colonialism (Afronauts) that idealise societal utopian-sovereignty and the potential to take part in globalised economies. These ideological frameworks presented in the film personify what Frantz Fanon describes as former colonised bodies forging a third way that is not stuck in old traditions that cannot be reinstituted (Hayward, 2013: pg 278). These ideological theoretical frameworks then formulate the gap between the colonised past and the undefined future – the description of this gap is liminality (Turner, 1992: pg 133). The idea of a liminal space, or what Homi Bhaba describes as the "third space" (Bhaba, 2004), can be recognised in different facets within both films. The themes of African environmental regeneration (Pumzi) and African space travel (Afronauts) within the story world of both films, idealise the filmmakers' interpretation and reimagining of what Africa could potentially become and achieve in the future.

The reimagining of each film's material realities represents a culturally complex and political future that is nested in the midst of liminality and forecloses the existing paradoxes of disrupting established dichotomies between Western and Non-Western, and almost regurgitating similar social and political structures within a neo-liberal context. The socio-cultural and geopolitical structures in both films exemplify this third space of confusion and paradox, or liminality within the context of post-colonialism; a space described as 'the beyond' by Bhabha (2004) where colonial structures and

hegemonies are rejected by former colonised nations and for them to only occupy heterogeneous spaces where they can negotiate narratives of their existence as well as of particular spaces of meanings and different identities within the post-colonial condition (Kalua, 2009 : 25). In short, these represented futures are in search of new identities that break away from colonial stereotypes, are rooted in indigenous African cultures but are fluid in global economic and political participation. *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* each represent their own socio-cultural and geo-political liminal position.

The communal structure of the Maitu community in *Pumzi (2009)* represents an almost socialist-afropolitan third space inserted in an African cultural geography but adopts a neo-authoritarian government. Melnyk (2021) points out the post-colonial aspects of the film, and how it replaces the Western viewpoint that emphasises indigenous impoverishment and technological backwardness with “a voice that affirms rather than detracts" (Menlyk, 2021), a major goal of post-colonialism. Menlyk (2021) further points out the post-colonial aspects of the film and the production of the film, due to the film’s protagonist being a Black African woman, who lives in a community that is mixed-race and how the film itself was produced in Cape Town, South Africa, a city known for its mixed-race population (Menlyk, 2021). To add onto Menlyk’s (2021) post-colonial analysis, the representation of the socialist-afropolitan model is the neo-socialist government authorities and hegemonic structures within the community and the cultural and racial intermixing highlighted in the film.

Kaihu’s reimagining of an integrated mixed-race community in Africa falls in line with the afropolitan notion of hybridity, a fluid transcultural and intermixed society that is rooted in the local African geological space and further embraces hyperlinked traditions and cultures within a modernised, dystopian, globalised setting. The capitalistic society harmed *Pumzi’s (2009)* geopolitical and socio-cultural third space, which led to environmental degradation and separated nature and culture resulting in the physical implementation of African-ecowomanism through Asha who saves the space through sacrificial environmental regeneration. Bisschoff (2020) describes this physical implementation as a deconstruction of the wholesome and virtuous myth of the female, a myth that needs reshaping in the world of the post-human Anthropocene (Bisschoff, 2020: 620).

Afronauts (2014) presents an alternate third space, defined by a new independent nation with an intense proliferation of nationalism. Taking place in the 1960s after Zambia achieves independence, Bodomo reimagines an African-Zambian future riddled with the possibility of a Black African Albino female racing to become the first person on the moon in the midst of the Cold War. The gain of independence in African states resulted in a shift in self-perception heightened by the rampant increase in globalisation, which influenced economic, cultural and social undertakings in African countries. Taking into consideration that *Afronauts (2014)* takes place in the 1960s, the decade in which the majority of countries in Africa received their independence, the third space represented in the film oscillates between Pan-Africanism as driven by activist W.E.B du Bois and the recent but relevant notion of an African renaissance, a movement brought forth by former South African President Thabo Mbheki. Both ideological notions are feeders under the post-colonial movement.

The forging and grounding of movements such as Pan-Africanism, Negritude and the African Renaissance were from the need for a unique political and cultural identity (Kalua, 2009: 27). These movements aimed to reify and naturalise the status of the continent by endorsing and valorising Black African individuality and personality, emphasising differences between Blacks and other races and thus using race as the signifier of continental unity (Kalua, 2009: 27-28). Sentiments relating to these movements included ideas of African specifics, changing Africa's place in the world economy, the rediscovery of Africa's creative past to recapture the people's cultures and reclaiming the lost traditions of a past African glory (Mistry, 2001: 12). These movements also aimed to conscientise the African / Black intelligentsia with problems and challenges faced by the continent in the wake of globalisation (Kalua, 2009: 28).

Afronauts (2009) encapsulated some of these sentiments through characters such as Nkolomso and Matha, who evidently wanted to prove to the West that Africa has the capacity to participate in one of the globe's largest events. An African landing on the moon would become a signifier for disrupting and dismantling the myth of the 'dark continent' and uplifting the continent onto the world stage. The dangers of extreme African nationalism, where African identity is reduced to racial essentialism or chauvinism, is showcased through Nkolomso who is willing to send Matha to the

moon by any means necessary and carry out a mission where Zambia would then become the potential coloniser of a new world. Frantz Fanon argues this action of would-be-colonisers in his famous neo-Freudian question: 'What does the Black man want?' Here Fanon argues that the colonised seek only to occupy the place of the coloniser. Once a country has obtained independence, the colonised elite class will only mimic what the white coloniser has already done (Hayward, 2013: 277). In *Afronauts (2014),* however, Nkolomso's intentions are made clear when he tells Matha not to impose nation states and Christianity on "them" when she finally arrives; the physical imposition and power dynamic affiliated with claiming a new world mimics colonial sentiments.

Matha's pursuit to the moon is not necessarily similar to the above-mentioned colonial sentiments but instead focuses on forging her identity as a Black African albino female to the rest of the Western world, an identity usually inscribed in subordinated, mythologised and fetishised cultural and social stereotypes both locally and internationally. In this third space, similar to Asha in *Pumzi (2009)*, Matha engages in the self-sacrificial demythologising and rebuilding of her identity for the sake of the future. As the only female cadet in the Zambian Space Academy, Matha undermines the organic notions of femininity and masculinist power structures, thus emphasising her sovereignty and subverting tropes that construct and focus on difference.

Pumzi (2009) and *Afronauts (2014)* both represent the idealisation of a new better world for former colonised bodies, both looking towards the future by addressing contemporary challenges showcased in the story worlds of both films and utilising the Black female body as a means to critique present state affairs and lead the charge towards a viable, inclusive, technological advanced and ideologically fluid African future. Living in the desolated, decayed, East African desert 35 years after the water war, Asha journeys to make the once flourishing earth inhabitable again by planting the last growing seed. She escapes from the confinements of her subterranean community and charges towards a greener environment. Zambia, a former colonised nation that endured the atrocious acts of othering and various forms of discrimination, was finally independent. Matha trains to make it to the Moon, a new destination outside the Earth's atmosphere where former colonised bodies could potentially

experience a world that does not bear similar colonial atrocities. *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* root themselves in their African geological spaces, but beyond this, they adopt a third ideological space merged with cultural and traditional paradigms that form part of a larger community in which they construct meanings. Furthermore, in these African futurist imaginings, the protagonists displace themselves from the colonised periphery and attempt to benefit from the techno-cultural globalised paradigms.

Amongst the components under iconography, science and technology are the principal components because they directly constitutes towards the definitive nature of the science fiction genre. Both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* present different levels of the use and influence of science and technology in their story worlds, a decision the filmmakers of each film possibly opted for in order to directly or slightly represent the prevalence and actuality of science and technology within the African continent.

Both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* implement science and technology as instruments or driving factors within their story worlds; however, compared to the excessively advanced and sophisticated technology portrayed in Western science fiction films, *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* showcase the nether position of the global digital divide with their science and technology, a position notably affiliated with the third world. Anderson (2016) describes how the global digital divide is responsible for the interruption of Africa, its diaspora, and other countries in the global south in attaining optimal growth or enhancement in political, economic, social or cultural capital (Anderson, 2016).

Pumzi (2009) and *Afronauts (2014)* implement a similar approach with the use of science and technology. The science and technology is simplistic with each technological tool strategically used and placed within the context of the story world. The difference between the two films is the particular time zones that each takes place in; this difference affects the type of technology used in the films. *Pumzi (2009)* takes place 35 years after the Third World War. Although a date is not specified, the time forewords a distant future where technology is moderately advanced and assists with the livelihood of characters. The technology in the film plays an active role as

characters are dependent on it, for example for water filters, computers and exercise equipment, which is easily recognisable, to ensure their survival. Conversely, *Afronauts (2014)* takes place in 1969 and is inspired by true events. Recycled materials become various instruments to help with training and the space mission. These everyday recycled materials are not state-of-the-art, for example, barrels and tyres, which reflect the realistic lower-class facilities to which the academy had access to. The film strategically focuses on the rudimentary technology to emphasise the willingness of the cadets to make use of what they had so that they could make it to space compared to the West's access to capital and advanced technology. On different levels, both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* attempts to usher in a reimagined positive outlook into Africa's relationship with science and technology, one that attempts to close the gap and allow Africa to benefit economically, socially and culturally within the global digital market.

Another iconographic element within the framework of this research is the mise-en-scene, particularly the setting, props and costume elements. These similar elements are definitive to Western science fiction mise-en-scene, and influenced by the story's space and time. Although the filming of *Afronauts (2014)* was in New Jersey, the desert setting aimed at mimicking an isolated region within the Zambian geographical landscape. Similarly, the influence for *Pumzi's (2009)* desert region, situated in an unspecified East African region, was the general theme of desolated environmental decay. Bodomo's reimagination of The Zambian Space Academy was limited due to not being able to shoot in Lusaka, thus she recreated an atmospheric setting that attempted to represent a lunar landscape. *Pumzi (2009)* displays a more contemporary setting compared to *Afronauts (2014),* which once again speaks to the space and time in which each film takes place. A description of *Afronauts (2014)* is a 1960s period piece that is visually emphasised by the black and white colour palette. Based on each film's period and setting, the props and costumes assist in navigating and accentuating the themes and characteristics of the story's worlds.

Symbolically and semiotically, *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* utilise various visual and audio motifs to carry out the major themes of the films. *Pumzi (2009)* depends on visual cultural symbolism to speak to the theme of rebirth and regeneration, and *Afronauts (2014)* depends on the meaning created by audio

narrations and chanting to substitute the minimal dialogue in the film. Due to the cultural symbolism and etymology showcased in *Pumzi (2009),* the film displays a contemporary science fiction that Carstens and Roberts (2009) describe as “drawing heavily from mythology [or culture] and undertakes journeys both forwards and backwards in time, enabling the writing of alternative histories in the mythic mode” (Carstens & Roberts, 2009). The cultural Gikuyu influence in *Pumzi (2009)* is evident as soon as there is the introduction of the etymology of the Mother Seed; furthermore, before defined as a science fiction film, Kahiu describes how her vision for the film was rooted in African oral storytelling traditions and foretelling by seers (Melnyk, 2021). Inspired by Gikuyu culture, The Mother Seed and the tree within the film evidently became the central symbol of the film, representing African traditions, and places a Black African woman at the centre of the narrative infused with futuristic expressions. The major cultural symbolism that drives the visual narrative of the film has successfully managed to merge culture and modernity in an otherwise Western genre that has experienced a cultural decay that actively depends on outdated first world - third world dichotomies. *Afronauts (2014)* semiotically depends on retrieving meaning through its audio motifs. The film has limited dialogue and instead uses audio from the original Apollo 11 space mission as a narrator for Matha’s journey. Furthermore, the chanting of Matha’s name continues to place emphasis on Matha as the martyr of the space mission. Compared to *Pumzi (2009), Afronauts (2014)* does not display any culturally linked symbols but instead focuses on its futuristic expressions through the form of the technology displayed, hence why the Bantu rocket in turn becomes the only tangible symbol for the journey at large.

Similarly, *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* contend the notion of portending and dreams, which play a vital role in both films. Dreams become a motif throughout both films and actively symbolise what could potentially or will happen in the future. Asha’s dream in *Pumzi (2009)* of the tree foresaw the end of Asha's journey, where her self-sacrifice would indeed result in the blooming of the great tree. Matha’s dream of being on the moon in *Afronauts (2014)* was instead the potential results of her journey that unfortunately did not come into fruition but ended in her demise. The motif of dreaming in both films could potentially form part of the futuristic expression of the films. The fusion between science [the real] and the otherworldly [the dreams] articulates the “crossing of thresholds" between worlds, as described by Brown

(1993, 161) [Quoted from Carstens and Roberts, 2009: 80], which is at ease and is supported by African traditional philosophy (and culture) through its fluidity and ambiguity (Carstens & Roberts, 2009: 80). Finally, the merging of scientific expression with dreams in both films highlights the notions of hybridity, transformation and non-linearity, which align with African orality / traditional storytelling, practices that stray away from the fixed (anchored) Western narratives and "interpretations that cling to centralised and critically recognised discursive practices" (Carstens & Roberts, 2009: 80].

The findings of this research highlight the attempts by both Kahiu and Bodomo to each stray away from Western thought when introducing and re-telling African based narratives within the form of science fiction. This attempt saw the merger of traditional African modes of storytelling, ideologies and a reimagined and almost pure representation of the socio-economic and cultural means within the African continent, particularly within the rampant growth of globalised and capitalistic endeavours controlled by the West and the effects they have and will have on the continent presently, in the past, as well as the future. Both filmmakers have also attempted to introduce the genre to the continent with an awareness of a non-particularly filmic or scholarly africanfuturist framework, instead depending on heavy post-colonialist ideologies and the goal to re-centre the Black female within the imagined futures of both films, taking into consideration the cultural and social implications of the geopolitics related to each country. Finally, *Both Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* demonstrated the paradox between the notion of modernity uprooting indigenous cultures and nations from their ontological certainties within the African continent, and utilising science fiction as a tool to express and re-articulate oral storytelling methods linked to culture while creating a future for Africa that is techno-affiliated, techno-cultural and techno-enhanced and accommodates the link between the past, present and the future (Carstens & Roberts, 2009: 81).

Chapter 7: Recommendations & Conclusion

From the analysis and the findings of this research, the chapter will conclude the findings and discussion in order to answer the research question, 'To what extent do the films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* portray africanfuturism?' Furthermore, this chapter will discuss the limitations of this research and provide recommendations for potential contributions in the development of an africanfuturist framework for africanfuturist filmmakers.

Taking into consideration the initial description of 'africanfuturism' by Nnedi Okorafor, and the development of an africanfuturist framework in this research study, the films *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* successfully portray africanfuturism in the capacity of their geological settings, ideological viewpoints and socio-cultural and economic representations of the continent in relation to science and technology, and what the advancement of science and technology could potentially mean for the future of Africa.

Although the case study films portray africanfuturism within the capacity mentioned above, particular limitations within the framework of this study emphasise the necessity in analysing certain filmic components in order to characterise the africanfuturist sub-genre at large. The particular components under iconography, namely mise-en-scene: props and costume were restrictive components within the analysis of both films. Although props and costume are important components in the world of science fiction films, I choose to argue that these components should not be nuanced factors when describing africanfuturist films unless of course they were highly specialised in the approach of the film. African based science fiction films may approach the props and costume components in a limited manner in order to portray and provide commentary on the socio-economic standards within the continent, compared to the grandeur portrayals in Western science fiction films. Thus, the mise-en-scene components: props and costume are limited when becoming fixed physical components for futuristic expressions within African science fiction films. The props and costumes in *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* were not the grand and nuanced filmic elements usually seen in Western science fiction films, but in their limitations contributed to the authentic world based 35 years into the future in

Pumzi (2009) and the pragmatic representation of the Zambian Space Academy in *Afronauts (2014).*

The analysis of this research illustrated how the components, ideology, social-cultural and geopolitical contributed significantly to the africanfuturist expression in both *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)*. This analysis brings forth the question to what extent do africanfuturist films depend on explicit political engagement in order to fully emphasise and present the realist experience of the African continent within the science fiction genre. The debate between social cultural and political engagement, and frivolous entertainment within African cinema at large, is what Okorafor (2009) describes as African audiences wanting art as 'a tool for social commentary and change *and* entertainment' (Okorafor, 2009). Filmmakers such as Ousmane Sembene, Djibril diop Mambety, Souleymane Cisse, and many more, have dominated African cinema and dedicated their narratives to the anticolonial and post-colonial struggle, which continued to set the precedent for African speculative fiction films that have adopted the ideals of social-realist representation. Contemporary africanfuturist films, such as *District 9 (2009)*, *Les Saignantes (2005), Jonah (2013), Sweetheart (2010), Beti & Amare (2014),* and *Crumbs (2015),* have heavily, as well as notably, incorporated social-realist themes and representations. The developed framework of this research study acknowledges the necessity for africanfuturist films to adopt and represent social-realist realities and changes within the continent through the geopolitical and socio-cultural components. Within the larger context of African Cinema, Stefanson (2009) describes the results of these representations accordingly:

> "The result is an unexpected vision of Africa through the gaze of film directors: Africa looking at its own merits and faults, without submitting itself to the judgement of the Ancestor…or to the agenda of the 'Other,' be it the colonial master, the bossy Western film producer and now the global competitor" (Stefanson, 2009: 10)

This research study acknowledges and agrees with Chukwunonso (2018), Maurits (2020), Okorafor (2009) and Kahiu (*TED*, 2017), who advocate for creating ‘arts for art’s sake’ and employing africanfuturist creations, whether in film or literature as a token for “pleasure, for the aesthetic beauty of work and to escape from the real world” (Chukwunonso, 2018: 59-61). This research study recommends a framework that emphasises the importance of geopolitical and social-cultural representations within africanfuturist works, but also provides room for experimentation and re-imagination of factors outside social realities. The recommendation between political and social engagement and pleasurable escapism within africanfuturism does not have to be mutually exclusive, but in turn provide africanfuturist filmmaking that can be socially involved and entertaining for local and international audiences, resulting in an africanfuturist framework the *Omenana Webzine* suggests will not only “entertain us, [but] it will show us what is and what could be" (Quoted from Maurits, 2020: 65).

The concept of africanfuturism, particularly within filmmaking, is new and therefore open to further discussion from scholars and experimentation from filmmakers. This research study developed an africanfuturist framework significantly based on the description of africanfuturism by Okorafor (2019) and Mashigo (2018). It is important that further attempts, particularly by scholars, within the African science fiction and indigenous futurisms field continue to develop flexible africanfuturist frameworks that are amenable to the diversity of the African continent and prioritises its histories, communities and concerns. Furthermore, scholarly discussions about an africanfuturist framework will allow debate into what the genre should or should not entail and provide room for experimentation amongst filmmakers who aim to apply these various forms of experimentation practically.

The development of an africanfuturist framework would also require debates, online and in person, between authors, scholars and filmmakers alike to provide discrepancies and recommendations to outline the basic factors of what would constitute the genre of africanfuturism. The boom in African science fiction literature and the steady rise in African science fiction films has afforded upcoming africanfuturists with the opportunity to engage with existing works to continuously develop and exchange their ideas and interpretations of what they believe to be

africanfuturism. From Neil Blomkamps' *District 9 (2009)*, and novels from Nnedi Okorafor, including *Who Fears Death*, and the *Binti* series, as well as Lauren Beukes' cyberpunk-inflected *Zoo City* and Wanuri Kahiu's film *Pumzi (2009),* all served as critically acclaimed works of science fiction from African authors and filmmakers that provided edgy, distinct and inventive takes on science and technology within the African continent. The commercial success of these works provided gradual visibility to science fiction in Africa and were instrumental in paving the way for emerging authors and filmmakers (Eatough, 2017). Since the release of critically acclaimed afrofuturist film *Black Panther (2018)* and the anticipated sequel *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022),* africanfuturists have gradually begun experimenting in African science fiction concepts within film, literature, fashion and music; particularly with film and literature platforms opening up in an attempt to push these works within the particular afrofuturism and africanfuturism categories. The gearing of platforms and publishers, such as *Omenana (2014) and Something Wicked (2006),* and blogs, such as Jonathan Dotse's *Afrocyberpunk*, micro-press in South Africa (*Wordsmack)*, Zimbabwe's *Story Time, The Brittle Paper, Okay Africa,* and many more online platforms are focused on authors and filmmakers who are encouraged to submit their africanfuturist works. Although these platforms exist, there is a limited understanding between afrofuturism and africanfuturism that still needs to be stressed amongst African science fiction creators.

Africanfuturist creators should become the pioneers of removing themselves away from the Western school of thought where all Black futurisms belong under one category, and instead instil the culture of differentiating between afrofuturism and africanfuturism; this will allow the africanfuturism genre itself to become prioritised in its approach and become broader and nuanced in its representation and understanding as a sub-genre of science fiction. This would require Africans to take the lead in redefining African science fiction away from historically Western representations. To encourage and emphasise what africanfuturism is and what it could potentially become would require further publication platforms, especially on digital media platforms, roundtable discussions, experimental film festivals and scholarly publications that focus on an African science fiction that is not influenced by Western tropes and is given room to grow into its own authentic genre.

Africanfuturism requires avid participation from its creators, similar to the likes of Ousmane Sembene and other prominent African filmmakers who have contributed to the language of African cinema. Similar to how anti-colonial African cinema filmmakers introduced new themes to African cinema by focusing on the present day trials and realities of their countries, the theoretical and practical approach towards africanfuturism requires new ideologies and definitions of science fiction for the African. European methodologies and frameworks cannot account for ways in which African forms of expression have integrated with other forms, or for indigenous ways of knowing and making sense of interpreting films (Tomaselli, Shepperson & Eke, 1995: 21). Western theories offer explanations as to how Western audiences and filmmakers interpret films that set out to portray such a world but simultaneously displace and discount the interpretations of non-western audiences. Thus, the key to developing an authentic africanfuturist framework that is applicable to the African context would require a rethinking of Western theory and approaches to science fiction (Tomaselli, Shepperson, Eke, 1995: 22-23). Mudimbe discusses the importance of honing into specified African epistemic generation:

> “The fact of the matter is that, up to now, Western interpreters as well as African analysts have been using categories and conceptual systems dependant on Western epistemological order and even in the most explicitly “afrocentric” descriptions, models of analysis, explicitly or implicitly, knowingly or unknowingly, refer to the same order. Does this mean African Weltanschauungen and African traditional systems of thought are unthinkable and cannot be made explicitly within the framework of their own rationality” (Mudimbe, 1985: 150).

The analysis of this study proved that by examining each film outside of a Euro-Western lens and framework, it was easier to identify particular traditional and non-Western epistemic devices that contributed towards the overall themes within each case study film. Any attempt to recreate non-Western narratives with Western epistemic devices and frameworks may not be a true reflection of Africa and the African. By adopting and continuously applying African traditional systems and epistemic modes of thought, africanfuturism then becomes a liberatory sub-genre of

science fiction, in which the ethnicity, orality and other crucial aspects of African traditions are represented and historical upheavals have been overcome, side lined or embraced (Stefanson, 2009: 9). This then becomes relevant to African societies and their cinematic expressions through science fiction. The developed framework in this study was a pragmatic example of how to examine africanfuturist films while also being aware of certain components that may not be necessary and still reflect Western modes of thought. The development of African science fiction films would increase once africanfuturists explicitly discard Western frameworks of science fiction and redefine frameworks that would suit African-based narratives.

This research concludes that *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* both portrayed africanfuturism extensively according to the developed framework of this research study, with liminal suggestions for particular components moving forward. It is evident that these two films, amongst others, have served as pioneers for the evolving sub-genre and can be examined by africanfuturist scholars and creators for creative and pragmatic influence and discussions moving forward. Both case study films may also be points of departure in the discussions, future recommendations and developments for africanfuturist frameworks. Through the analysis of this research, *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* have clearly distinguished themselves as films that fall under the africanfuturism sub-genre and have taken further steps away from the generic afrofuturism description through their pragmatic ideological, geopolitical and socio-cultural filmic representations. Science fiction film holds a particular promise towards the continent of Africa, because it clearly demonstrates the potential for expressing, transforming and representing the continent within an imaginative and realist space accompanied with scientific, technological and globalist expressions. Now more than ever is the development and honing of africanfuturist frameworks, film experimentations and discussions necessary in providing awareness and a solid foundation to the evolving genre of africanfuturism and further actualise the fundamental anti-colonial thinking and objectives of what Frantz Fanon described:

> “But if we want humanity to take one step forward, if we want to take it to another level than the one Europe [The West] has placed it, then we must innovate, we must be pioneers…For Europe, for ourselves, and for humanity…we must make a new start, develop

> a new way of thinking and endeavour to create a new man" (Fanon, 1961: 239)

With the same sentiments towards africanfuturism, we as africanfuturists should take one-step forward, above where the West has placed and represented the African continent, and from where we are now, we should continue to build from existing africanfuturists. We should innovate, become pioneers, more so for ourselves, develop a new start and at the core, create futurological investments and representations for Africa through the genre of science fiction.

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Appendix 1: Film assessment criteria

Africanfuturism			
Components	**Description**	**Tools**	**Analysis**
1. Iconography	The visual motifs and styles showcased in *Pumzi (2009)* and *Afronauts (2014)* that can be categorised and analysed in accordance to africanfuturism and the science fiction genre	1.1) Mise-en-scene	**1.1.1 Costume & Props** ● Do the props and costume speak to the period in the film? (past, present, future) ● Do the props and costumes enhance themes and characterisation? ● How do the props and costumes contribute to the story world? **1.1.2) Setting** ● Where is the story world set? ● What life forms are in this setting? ● How does the setting enhance themes and characteristics? ● What are the rules of this setting? **1.1.3) CGI/VFX** ● How do visual/special effects enhance technological and scientific imagination?
		1.2) Science & Technology	● What forms of science & technology are in the film? ● How does science and technology contribute to the plot of the story? ● What new technology or scientific principles does the film use? ● What techniques in the film emphasise the importance of science & technology
2. Ideology	The body of theoretical ideas that are explored which reflect the	2.1) Example of ideologies	● Post-colonialism ● Feminism ● Ecocriticism

	social needs of the represented group, culture, community or individual in the film		
3. Geopolitical and Sociocultural background	Social culture refers to the set of values, traditions and beliefs, etc. that are characteristic of a particular community, group or an individual These factors contribute to the social standards of living The geopolitical aspects focus on the politics relating to and influenced by geographical factors	3.1) Social & political Issues/commentary	● What social issues/ comments does the film address? ● What political issues/ comments does the film address? ● How (narratively or visually) are these issues addressed? ● Are these issues past, present or future issues? ● Are the issues/ comments specific to the African continent as a whole or the established location of the film?
		3.2) Topographies	● Where is the story world geographically located? ● What is the historical background of the location? ● Where did the production of the film take place? ● What physical topographies does the film show? ● How does the physical topography contribute to the story world?
		3.3) Myths, traditions and cosmologies	● What languages are spoken in the film? ● What mythologies, cosmologies or traditions does the film express? ● How are the mythologies, cosmologies and traditions expressed in the film? ● How do the mythologies, cosmologies or traditions contribute to the plot?
4. Semiotics and Symbolism	Semiotics refers to signs and symbols that convey a specific meaning or	Visual signs/symbols	● What are the visual signs/symbols expressed in the film? ● What do these visual

	message beyond how it is literally perceived		signs/symbols mean?
		Auditory signs/ symbols	● What are the auditory signs expressed in the film? ● What do these auditory signs or lack thereof mean?
5. Filmmakers profile	The filmmakers (writer & directors) background	Example of profile:	● Race ● Gender ● Age ● Nationality

Appendix 2: Ethics waiver

UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND, JOHANNESBURG

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)

Registration number: REC-101114-044

15 December 2021

Re: Miss Karabelo Shirinde (1353878)

Waiver letter number: HRECNMW22/01/08

To whom it may concern,

Miss Shirinde is currently a registered Masters student at the School of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. This letter is to confirm that, at the time of writing, Miss Shirinde does not need ethical clearance for her Masters study entitled *'Africanfuturism - Placing Africa in the Future : An analysis of Pumzi (2009) and Afronauts (2014)'*. This decision has been reached based upon a description of the project supplied by Miss Shirinde to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical), which has been evaluated by the Chairs and Deputy Chairs. If, however, if Miss Shirinde changes the methods of data collection and analysis for this study, this decision may no longer be valid. If such changes take place, this should be communicated to the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical) as soon as possible. This waiver letter is valid until 14 December 2024.

Please feel free to contact me should you require any further information.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,
S Schoeman

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