

Superhero Narratives - Captain America vs Captain South Africa: Insight through the cultural lens

By Nqobile Ndwandwe (882025)

Supervisor: Tiisetso Dladla

Research Overview

This research was an unconventional academic and cultural analysis of the comic book and film medium using photo essays and text. A visual and textual discourse analysis was conducted to examine the narrative and images used in the films and comic books Captain America (1941) and the comic book Captain South Africa (2018).

During the process of this research, the idea of comic book adaptations into film as the art of reinventing and revitalizing cultural heroes was realized. Mythic history and epistemologies were turned into creative services and were not exclusive to the popular medium of video films (Fasan, 2016). African narratives have often been characterized in terms of their oral origins which has led many critics into the literary misadventure of always seeking oral 'continuities' in African narratives of European expression. However, the point bears repeating that there are instances in which African writers have in their mythopoesis reinvented or recharged local superheroes (Fasan, 2016).

In the research, there was an exploration of the battle between genres of Westernization and genres of De-Westernization (African) and what each suggested about the current state of identity in South Africa and America. Adding race, culture, and gender to superhero narratives was redefined and (re)imagined as an ideology regarding who or how superhero characters should be portrayed.

Introduction

Each chapter of this paper, whether in the traditional format or a photo essay, aimed to produce public knowledge that could be shared. It also sought to create correspondences between the influence of culture on film or comic book creators and their work. Captain America (1941) and Captain South Africa (2018) were chosen because of their various and similar identities, intended audiences, potential scholarly discussions, and degree of innovation in the era and context in which they were conceived.

The superhero characters are analyzed based on their diversity and complex behaviour which is implied in their narratives. In contrast, there were also discussions on the more stereotypical traits, marginalization, underrepresentation, and sexualization of the characters which were largely influenced by Grace Deneice Gipson's research on *The Power of a Black Superheroine: Exploring Black Female Identities in Comics and Fandom Culture* 2019.

Throughout this research, race, gender, and political influence were questioned in the creation of these superheroes. In addition, how past and present representations and creative practices occurring in superhero narratives and popular culture can inspire imagined future superhero identities.

Captain South Africa (2018) was not merely an appropriation of American pop culture, "Captain America" (1941), but rather a syncretic adaptation of the genre for local cultures. African superhero narratives extend beyond being simple appropriations of American pop culture.

In *Akokhan Returns: Kenyan Newspaper Comics and Making of An African Superhero Journal*, (Omanga: 2016) argues that African narratives are complex syncretic forms in which a 'primordial' superhero figure drawn from African tradition is yoked to a narrative technique, the comic strip and imported from North American popular culture. In African orality and folktales, epics and stories of powerful men and women subduing their communities' enemies have long been a feature. Omanga continues to mention, "the transformation and appropriation" of these tales into comic superheroes requires, and imposes upon its creators, the need to draw from both tradition and modernity" (Omanga, 2016).

Ultimately, this dissertation became a manifesto as it allowed for a shift in who gets to be represented and given a voice. When certain comic book characters and narratives have been

minimalised or dismissed, isolation can have an impact on what narratives are recognized in the present and future.

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Bibliography

- Film references
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CHAPTER 1

Aim

This research aimed to explore ideological points of view about superhero characters, powers, and social context from Western culture and African cultures concerning producing and distributing superhero narratives.

A comparative analysis was conducted between Hollywood superhero narratives and African superhero narratives created by Africans born and raised on the continent. The chosen texts to compare were the Captain America film series (2011) and comic books (1941) created by Paul Simon and John Kirby versus Captain South Africa comic books (2018) created by Bill Masuku. The purpose of this study was to explore the two superhero narrative's ability to reproduce, critique, challenge, and contest the dominant ideology evident within the cultural space.

This study examined the relationship between superhero narratives and culture. One may assume that Captain America and Captain South Africa are similar and function in the same manner under the category of superhero narratives however each story formed its own identity when one took into consideration the multiple influences and choices made in creating the story. The need to study these narratives was relevant to how they both promoted nationalism; each story spoke to the daily struggles and events happening within the capital cities of each country represented (America and South Africa). By understanding the cultural context in which each superhero story was set, one could better comprehend the events that occurred in the narrative.

The analogy of these two narratives seeks to shine a light on the premise that narratives are ultimately produced by culture, and cultural constructs, and generate meanings. Narratives take on significance and assume forms that are articulations of the values, beliefs, and ideology of the culture (Baines, 2009). The superhero narrative may perform the same function in all cultures however the specific way the narrative was articulated was determined by the context in which the story was written.

In this study, a broader picture of the superhero narrative was built based on two geographical and contextual backgrounds that helped identify the nation's cultural space in the story. Every nation or cultural space has characteristics that may evolve. For viewers and readers to better

understand the intention contained within the narrative shared, it was useful to identify the setting in which the story was being told.

Rational

This study sought to contribute to the understanding of the societal role of superhero narratives as forms of popular culture by exploring the process of hegemony and de-westernization in contemporary American and South African society. One gets a deeper understanding of these two distinct societies and spaces through a cultural lens. In his African culture and values research, Gabrielle Idang explains that “culture embraces a wide range of human phenomena, material achievements and norms, beliefs, feelings, manners, morals and so on. It is the patterned way of life shared by a particular group of people that claim to share a single origin or descent” (Idang, 2015).

An understanding of Western culture and African culture was necessary before discussing the differences between the two cultures. The research compared the influence of Western cultural groups who identify with living and working towards the goal of attaining the American dream, with African cultural groups specifically South Africans living in the post-Apartheid era who are driven by the moral compass of maintaining the democratic notion of a rainbow nation and Ubuntu.

To define what is “Western,” Lyon writes about how the “Western” was coined, “Thousands of years ago when “the West” was born in Greece with all its advancements in culture and science. Greek plays and myths, the architecture of the great temples, and even the basic schools of thought all survived long past the fall of the ancient Greek city-states. They moved westward with the next great civilization, the Romans, and, after Rome fell, continued to move even further west until they reached America” (2020).

The distinction of “Western” culture speaks to a broader understanding of world culture. What it ultimately speaks to are the origins of philosophies that dictate diverse ways of life across the planet (Lyon, 2020). “The West” is vague, but purposefully so, a single word or term can’t prove description enough for content as broad as culture, architecture, basic thinking, storytelling practices, rules for law and governance, and so forth. By being vague, “the West”

can serve as the blanket term used for all of it and provides easy distinction from the other main school of thought in the world, “the East” (Lyon, 2020).

“Western scholars may be tempted to use their cultural categories in judging other distinctively different people as “primitive”, often deny that such people have history, religion and even philosophy; but cannot say that they have no culture” (Idang, 2015). Both schools of thought have drastically different ideas on how the world and society should be governed. “The East” is far more communal, and far more reverent of the elderly. “The West,” on the other hand, is wildly individualistic, pushing for each person to carve out their mark. Family names became less important in the west because of this” (Lyon, 2020).

Eastern philosophies focus significantly on the collective good, whereas Western philosophies are centred on the good for the individual. These fundamental philosophies ultimately influenced cultural development. For instance, the advent of the American dream is a result of “the West’s” tendency towards individualism. Similarly, cultures of vanity, celebrity, and social media stem from the same self-interested nature of Western thought (Lyon, 2020).

While in Africa, there are many cultures. Africa is inhabited by various ethnic nationalities with their different languages, modes of dressing, eating, dancing, and even greeting habits. Despite their diverse cultures, Africans do share some dominant traits in their belief systems and have similar values that mark them out from other peoples around the world. African culture is rooted in strong moral considerations. It has a system of various beliefs and customs that every individual should follow to live a long life and avoid bringing curses on themselves and others.

Although the cultural identifiers may be interpreted in this manner in the present times, “one can see that since culture is carried by people and people do change their social patterns and institutions, beliefs, and values and even skills and tools of work, then culture cannot but be an adaptive system. Once an aspect of culture adjusts or shifts in response to changes from within or outside the environment, then other aspects of the culture are affected, whether directly or indirectly” (Idang, 2015).

The various pointers identified in Western and African cultural spaces determine their differences. However, with time these two cultural spaces have evolved and become more alike than different. The similarities and differences are evident in the context and influence to which the writer is exposed when creating the superhero narrative. The formulation of the superhero narrative, characters, and the world of the story was heavily influenced by the culture in which the story was set and by knowing which cultural group was being represented for the reader or viewer to be able to identify and resonate with the familiarity expressed in the text.

While originally populated in comic books, superheroes' narratives have successfully transitioned to other mediums such as radio, television, cinema, and video games. It is through these mediums that a cultural heroic symbol is constructed. Stuart Hall states that “there are at least two ways of thinking about cultural identity.

The first position defines cultural identity as shared culture, a sort of collective ‘one’s true self’, hiding inside the many others, the more superficially or artificially imposed self which a people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Our cultural identity reflects the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes that provide us as ‘one people’ with stable, unchanging, and continuous frames of reference and meaning beneath the shifting divisions and vices-studies of our actual history” (Hall, 1976).

African superhero narratives both in the form of comics and cinema have become a tool for taking ownership of our history as well as a means to realize how African artists envision the African experience to be relived and witnessed by one individual in the context of a collective experience. This research intends to promote a vision of Africa and her people unstained by colonialism. The political function of the superhero has been subjected to a transformation: from its origins as an ideological myth, as a popular symptom of closed, ideological consciousness, the superhero has been reinscribed with a hopeful ambivalence which transforms it into a symptom of history.

Sean Carney states in the Iowa Journal of Cultural Studies in his essay ‘The Function of the Superhero at the Present Time’; “Contemporary superhero narratives seek to return responsibility to humanity for its deeds while also maintaining the importance of superheroes: they are necessary because they are figures for humanity’s ability to overreach itself, but superheroes cannot be allowed to take over human responsibility from humans.” This is to say

that the superhero now is a symptom of humanity becoming historical, in a philosophical sense (Carney, 2005).

Humans experience history as a metaphysical process to which they are subjected, when in fact they become history through living and moving forward as the human race. Sean Carney argues that “a rendering conscious of this process of humanity overreaching itself. The problem with traditional superheroes is that their narratives imply readers who will imaginatively abdicate responsibility for human actions to these heroes, in the same way, that humans abdicate responsibility for their actions to something they call “history”. When human actions become achieved as forms of history elevated to a transhuman, metaphysical position, their actions become alienated” (Carney, 2005).

Stuart Hall has a different perspective than Sean Carney. He sees the philosophy of history as a collective and individual experience that can coexist as truth. This indicates there is no one truth overpowering the other in the essence of human experience. The research will explore the superhero narrative as a form of shared cultural influence on the human experience; by investigating the ideologies set in place within the African superhero narrative of Captain South Africa, in comparison to the Western superhero narrative of Captain America.

The media which consists of television, radio, newspapers, and social media platforms in African countries and black diasporic spaces have allowed the voice of an individual to be heard in a collective cultural space. However, around the world where black people dispersedly reside and their attempts to climb the corporate ladders and add value to communities are still undermined; this is due to the lack of urgency on the topic of African narratives within such institutional and hierarchical spaces.

African cultural identity has its code of conduct and wants to refrain from the vision of Western identity. As a consequence of Western hegemony over most of the world, African cultural identity has been marginalized for so long that it dictates African identity for most Africans living in modern society, starting from young children who attend western schools to working adults.

Children from African backgrounds are eager to learn but struggle to identify with the limited knowledge communicated about the African history of slavery or Apartheid. It is essential to know the context of the African narrative. However, only sharing parts constructed by Western

ideologies continues to undermine the way individuals from black backgrounds have progressed from being viewed as inferior and oppressed. This state of mind was also carried into the art space outside of institutional spaces.

This research explored the African voice of Bill Masuku, who created Captain South Africa. The intention was to fully experience the ideas and perspective of an African-created superhero narrative which was predominantly created by Western European individuals.

Understanding Bill Masuku's perspective and truth determined what Hall reiterates as "the oneness of Africans and the Black Diaspora should discover, bring to light, and express through cinematic representation" (Hall, 1976). For this research, Bill Masuku as an individual and African born and raised in Africa, as collectives should discover, bring to light, and express their narrative.

The reason why the research explored more Africans born and raised in Africa is that each African narrative and experience around the world is unique. As a result, it needs its platform on which to be told. However, for one to understand the full scheme of Black Lives Matter, accessing narratives of other Africans living in Western cultural spaces can help diversify the experience of an African specifically one that was creating African superhero narratives in a space that does not fully welcome it.

An example of this was in 1947 when African-descent journalist Orrin C Evans created All-Negro Comics, the first ever all-black comic book within the diasporic space. At a time when cartoons and comic books echoed the often-racist beliefs of the society that created and read them, Evans wanted to elevate Black voices, as well as raise the profiles of Black artists. In his only editor's letter for the comic book, Evans said: "Every brush stroke and pen line in the drawings on these pages are by Negro artists," and called the publication "another milestone in the splendid history of Negro journalism" that will "glorify Negro achievements" (Thomas, 2020).

The need for diversity in superhero narratives is key to empowering a wider community through storytelling. The more individuals speak up about an experience the less power the hegemonic group has in constructing a cultural experience and voice.

What Evans created was a far cry from other comic book characters of the time, such as Tintin that was created by a western European (Hergé, 1930). Characters of African descent were often portrayed as violent, uneducated, and lazy in comic books. While Evans' work was influential at the time, the systems chose to echo a dominantly western American and European ideology and have not evolved to be inclusive of uplifting knowledge from all cultural groups.

The issue of Western hegemony has dominated to the point where children from diverse cultures living in modern society were not able to be tested in their native language if they attended what one calls “model C” institutions. Similarly, Western cultural and ideological influences were evident in the choice of books read in class or plays written by writers whose characters are based on people they don't physically identify with and do not resonate with the social context they are exposed to daily. Therefore, the relevance of Captain South Africa created by Bill Masuku was a refreshing and updated view of how young Africans are living in the 21st century.

In recent years, an empowering representation of African people and their locations was seen in *Black Panthers* (2018) *Wakanda* which brought to life a technologically advanced kingdom in Central Africa free from Western colonizers. Chadwick Boseman as Black Panther, the noble king of an unconquered people, who was sworn to fight for and protect. “The movie celebrated everything from African culture and heritage to the beauty and strength of Black women. Most of all, the movie glorified African tribal dress and Afrocentric hairstyles; something that audiences just do not see enough, especially on a global scale” (Thomas, 2020).

Black Panther (2018) is a film that made a wide impact around the world, to the point where children finally had a visual representation of a superhero that looked like them and even to a point spoke in their language. Sean Carney's explanation of the function of a superhero is practical when it comes to how the symbol of *Black Panther* (2018) became at a time when African American issues of Black Lives Matter were on the rise. The actions taken by humanity to celebrate black identity soon became an act of “history” when the movie also celebrated the black experience. However, it also managed to unify black people around the world and allowed what Stuart Hall refers to as the collective experience.

Black Panther (2018) was just one example of Hollywood showing their ability to be inclusive, but one narrative does not offset all the other superhero narratives that spread the American culture globally. The need to discover South African voices in superhero narratives was vital

in gaining a better understanding of what is the South African cultural experience. Black Panther identifies as an African narrative as a product however the influence of American culture still seeps through in ways that dilute the African cultural experience. Ultimately, the goal was for the production to still reach a global market and sell a product.

By looking into the African cultural experience and the western Hollywood cultural experience when it comes to storytelling, one seeks to get a clear indication of what similarities and differences distinguish the two voices in superhero narratives created by Africans born and raised within the African cultural experience versus those born and raised within the American cultural experience.

The composition and formation of culture whether African or Western was directly or indirectly influenced by religion. Christianity can be interpreted as a Western tool to deteriorate the concentration of African identity. This is because western culture scrutinized African traditional religion and devalued African practices, referring to ancestral praise as evil in comparison to the Christian faith.

However, Samson A Fatokun in his research paper titled ‘Christianity in Africa: a historical appraisal’, speaks strongly about how there is a misinterpretation of how Christianity in Africa “is a latecomer introduced only with the advent of colonialism. This view of the age of Christianity in Africa is problematic as it is based on limited research and backed up by a selection of facts that can be misleading when taken out of context. To expose the errors of this insistence that Christianity is but a recent and therefore alien introduction to the religious traditions on the continent” (Fatokun, 2005).

Samson attempted to provide a corrective reconstruction of the origins, growth, and development of Christianity in Africa. By tracing the origins of the Christian faith in both North and sub-Saharan Africa including North-Central and West Africa, Samson shows that Christianity has been in Africa since its inception and that the continent’s loyalty to this faith played an instrumental role in the formation and advancement of Christianity elsewhere.

Samson states that "the accessibility of Africa from Palestine is shown by the story of the flight into Egypt by Joseph and Mary with the infant Jesus in Matthew 2:13-15. Another gospel character, Simon of Cyrene who bore the cross of Christ, also came from North Africa. Then in Acts 8:26-40 one also reads of an African on his way home who became a Christian – this time an African called an Ethiopian” (Fatokun, 2005).

Christianity in Africa can be found almost everywhere on the continent and indigenous varieties of the tradition developed which allowed it to become a part of Africa as an African traditional religion (Fatokun. 2005).

Nevertheless, the misunderstanding of the origin of faith has created a culture clash because what Africans considered to be angels or ancestors, Christian missionaries viewed as idols and demonized them as sinful. In African culture, goats and lambs were sacrificed to celebrate spiritual thanksgiving, but they were thought to be blasphemous in European culture. Similarly, you could say that slaughtering a goat as a sign of thanksgiving is similar to the way western culture uses turkey as a symbol on Thanksgiving day. The Christian religion brought about a different perspective on thinking and living in Africa. However, the principles of the religion were imposed without first understanding why Africans have been living and praising their ancestors as a higher power.

The root of these contrasting but similar religious practices is spirituality and the desire to connect with a higher source of creation. Spirituality is an eternal quality that each individual seeks whether it is labelled as Christian or African Traditional religion or the Law of attraction. This is the essence of all life's meanings and all things created. This paper aims to address based on how cultural representation and ideologies have been influenced to create meaning within superhero narratives that can be relatable on a universal level.

CHAPTER 2

Theory and Literature

The research looked at the United States as the western cultural group and South Africa as the African cultural group. It focuses on its ideological power structures and cultural spaces that influenced superhero narratives. The ideology of American society itself was analysed based on the theory of Antonio Gramsci's Marxist concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) as radicalised by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria were the countries representative of the African cultural point of view through the theory of de-westernization (Maty Ba & Higbee, 2012).

This research identified the United States as the Western cultural group and South Africa as the African cultural group in examining the ideological power structures and cultural spaces that have influenced superhero narratives. The ideology of American society itself was analyzed based on the theory of Antonio Gramsci's Marxist concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1971) as radicalized by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (2001). South Africa, Ghana, and Nigeria were the countries representative of the African cultural point of view through the theory of de-westernization (Maty Ba & Higbee, 2012).

Derek Parker Royal mentions how there was something relatively direct about an image's ability to affect the reader's response. The figures that make up a comic book rub against reality in ways that words cannot; it reveals the assumptions, predispositions, and prejudices the author may hold (Royal, 2007).

Images and words are powerful tools the film industry continues to use in delivering impactful narratives. Although there may be restrictions to how audiences receive it due to language barriers and lack of representation of cultures and ethnic groups. This is especially true when products are created from a Western ideological perspective. In recent times, African creatives have steadily made paths and platforms for their voices to be heard.

This is to make sure all African narratives are shared under the correct socio-political lens and not infiltrated by the western ideologies that have been set in place for over a century in graphic novels, comic books, and motion picture mediums. There have been too many moments in history where the identity and value of non-white people are measured by the requirements instilled by the hegemonic groups in power in how they use images and language in the media.

The narrative conventions of superhero comic books have been seen to restrict the narrative's ability to critique, contest, and challenge dominant ideologies. This is evident in *Captain America* (1941), which is discussed in this chapter. Other conventions such as an "open narrative", mean that superhero narratives cannot reach a final narrative conclusion and as such are always in the middle of the narrative. The need to have the fictional world of the comic book represent the world of the reader; in other words, to be the world that was not the world of the reader means that the superhero narrative cannot show an alternative version of the real world in which change was realized. These restrictions and limits are not insurmountable for the creative team but create the space in which superhero narratives must operate" (McGuire, 2014).

Western Point of View

Superhero comic books have been part of American popular culture since 1938. It is recognized as a site for the reproduction of dominant ideology. However, their ability to resist dominant ideology and culture was not fully explored until the release of *Black Panther* (2018).

Gramsci's theory of hegemony was the process that enabled an economically dominant class to create and preserve cultural dominance over the other classes in a society. The dominant class can do this by promoting a shared ideology or worldview that encompasses the totality of society (cultural, economic, and social). "As a process, hegemony needs intellectuals in service to the dominant class. They have the task to manage and negotiate the shared ideology, ensuring that the ideology can adapt to threats and crises that challenge it and the dominant classes rule." This definition explains that the majority of or most of the cultural groups are excluded from decision-making, which already leaves the ideology as a restricted and biased set of views to rule a wider group expected to abide by in society (McGuire, 2014).

The cultural self-sufficiency of American society facilitates the identification of its ideology. "By cultural self-sufficiency, American society consumes its cultural products largely without interest in the cultural products of other nations although from time-to-time exceptions will be made". By ignoring other nations' cultural products, America is not exposed to other nations' ideologies that are within those foreign cultural products (McGuire, 2014).

To understand American ideology, one could analyze the superhero narrative of *Captain America*. This narrative of a nationalistic superhero with a uniform and shield that was

essentially the American flag, and America with all its ideologies and cultural views was at the centre of the Captain America narrative. The Captain America comic was first published in the spring of 1941, in the context of almost a full year before America entered World War II. This was before America entered the war in Europe.

The narrative was created by writer Paul Simon and artist Jack Kirby for Timely Comics, later to be Marvel. Captain America was not a fully original creation but was drawn in large part from another superhero called the "Shield". While the Shield and Captain America share patriotic imagery, there was an evident difference between the goals of the Shield and those of Captain America Comics issue #1 (Simon & Kirby, 1941).

The Captain America comic book differed from the other patriotic superheroes of its time like the "Shield" because it took a clear and overt political stand on America's need to enter World War II (McGur, 2014). America is a country built on the foundations of prosperity and war. Their drive to dominate other countries is instilled in their culture. This made Captain America a narrative weapon that vividly showed the qualities present in American society at that time.



[Fig 1. Captain America]

Captain America was rooted in the character's origin to fight America's enemies and can be seen as a tool through which the views of American dominant rulers could speak. Nationalistic heroes like Captain America through their unique relation to the nation can explore cultural and conceptual ideas of the nation, and society and how it simply reproduces nationalism as hegemony and does not challenge it.

McGuire argues that "the western narrative approach provides a space for legitimizing, contesting and reworking states' foreign policies. At the core of America's ideology is the belief in its superiority, its uniqueness, a celebration of competition and success, and a manifested destiny. These elements are brought together in the concept of the American Dream." The American Dream has the potential to work ideologically and culturally in the

support of hegemony in American society. This is why Captain America is a suitable superhero narrative used to address and promote these views (McGuire, 2014).

The Captain America narrative was initially portrayed as the white supreme American, however, if the narrative aims to speak to a wide group of Americans the need to include other races and cultures allows the narrative to communicate to the ever-evolving American society. This is evident from years of having the Captain America role played by Chris Evans a white male in film series, to a Black superhero on The Falcon and the winter soldier (2021) played by Anthony Mackie, who was the focus of the narrative.

At the time it was released one would have expected more excitement from the African American community. However, the idea of an African American community having a superhero to solve their problems was not a realistic solution to the injustices African Americans are subjected to. Though the gesture was inspirational, social issues in America discouraged African Americans to the point where they couldn't imagine an American being saved because of an African American man.



[Fig 2. The Falcon and The Winter Soldier]

On the other hand, Peniel E. Joseph saw another light in the film. He states that “Black Captain America is significant because it challenges notions of American exceptionalism that gloss over the most painful chapters in our nation's history. It also underscores the need to understand contemporary political crises as rooted in an origin story Americans have often stubbornly refused to acknowledge” (Joseph, 2021).

The American dream is still not as tangible for all African Americans born and living there in the 21st century. The system continues to fail them because of the colour of their skin. “For non-Americans, the dream is more difficult to grasp. Without an understanding of the Dream, a fundamental part of the understanding of American society is lost. Non-Americans across the

globe are consuming American media and entertainment that is saturated with the concept of the American Dream, yet this media refuses to call it by name. Without an understanding of the complexities and details of the American Dream, these ideological messages broadcast to the rest of the world are fragmented and incomplete. This can give the rest of the world a confusing impression of American society. It is no surprise that many non-American societies struggle to define their national ideological perspectives when they are awash in messages about America's national cultural beliefs" (McGuire, 2014).

Therefore, superhero narratives are evident that one supreme fictional character cannot solve the issues of a country. Furthermore, a black superhero cannot remove the history of oppression and injustice ruling in failed systems that were built to exclude people of colour.

There is difficulty in fully accepting the decision to create a black superhero based on western ideology. This is because it is constructed from a place of misunderstanding and lack of experience of living as an African American in a society such as America. One is not to say that non-African descent cannot tell African stories, however, one cannot create an African or African American story without or before living through the African or African American experience.

African Point of View

Laclau and Mouffe's radicalization of hegemony in a democratic space showed how there are multiple sites and groups in the contest for hegemony. Therefore, to identify counter-hegemony, it was necessary to identify the hegemonic principle of hegemony, the groups whose dominance it justified; and the ideological component that has the strongest relationship to other ideologies and therefore primacy in articulating the accepted ideology (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001).

In opposition to the hegemony, there is "the potential for counter-hegemony which goes beyond simple critique and attempts to create an opposing ideology. While critique involves expressing difference to some degree, counter-hegemony attempts to create an opposing ideology through a process of re-articulation that constructs an opposing ideology" (McGuire, 2014).

As a result of much-dreaded silence, Africans have expressed their desire to speak in their unique voice through de-westernization, which opposes dominant western culture, hegemony, and identity. The aim of de-westernizing has become an act of theory and practice working to expose, challenge and reposition the west's dominance as a conceptual force, the representational norm in forms of art such as comic books, graphic novels, and their transition into cinema.

The purpose was to question hierarchies and art produced under western cultural conditions (Maty Ba, Higbee: 2012). As time evolves many artists from different post-colonial grounds have sought to nationalize what was once seen as solely western culture; to now use it as an artistic weapon of resistance against the oppressive state of control and dictatorship.

The strategies for counter-hegemony include re-articulation of the ideological elements and social-cultural groups of the western hegemony. This allows counter-hegemony and the articulation of social-cultural elements and groups outside the hegemony to be established. This re-articulation and articulation of ideologies create a different ideology that may at first be difficult to differentiate from the hegemony because they may contain many of the same ideological components that as a result shape the culture within the environment- in this case in South African culture specifically in how it is reflected in African Superhero narratives.

Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is one of the first acclaimed African novels that sophisticatedly uses the main character, Okonkwo as a counter-hegemonic symbol against western ideologies and religion. *Things Fall Apart* (1958) is a fictional novel that speaks to the real cultural clash that happened on African soil when western culture arrived in Africa. Although Okonkwo may not be regarded in the novel as an African superhero in the conventional sense of what we know it as today, his position in the social climate makes him appear as the people's leader and in a sense a saviour during times of trouble in the village.

Okonkwo was portrayed as extremely masculine and the most powerful man in his tribe. His characteristic qualities can be a benefit and a downfall. The story shows both sides very well. Okonkwo's need for control becomes an obsession to the point where his power and custom become challenged when he finds Christian missionaries have settled in the village (Achebe, 1958: p144-145).

To restore the tribe's cultural identity and ideologies, he encourages its members to wage war against the missionaries, but he fails, as the missionaries have already won over most of the tribe members, many of whom convert to Christianity for many reasons, including freedom from the tribe clansmen and men's dictatorship.

Okonkwo began to see that he had not only lost control and power over his people but also that his people had disregarded their ancestors. Due to his stubborn nature, he committed suicide (Achebe, 1958: p195-196) as he could not live to see the day when western ideologies and cultural views dominated the Africans (Gosling, 2013).

Okonkwo's character symbolizes resistance to the western ideological, political, cultural, and religious views that occurred in Africa whether it was imposed or accepted. Chinua Achebe as the creator used the novel as a form tool to communicate how the idea of dominance can cause cultural clashes that play a vital role in creating conflict within societies and each individual.

West Africa

The current production of African superhero narratives is not so 'new'. While not explicitly mentioned by contemporary developers of African superhero comics and games as influences, already in the 1970s and 1980s there were African superhero comics created by Africans. Their design and meanings show many similarities with contemporary superheroes seen in Hollywood blockbusters such as Spider-man, a character inspired by Trickster God turned spider from the Twi folktale called Anansi. There were also comics developed by foreign companies specifically for African audiences (Pijnaker, 2018). Pijnaker believes that most Marvel superhero imagery has taken inspiration from earlier African superhero comics developed by Africans.



[Fig 3. Anansi]



[Fig 4. Spider-Man]

In the early stages of American Spiderman, Marvel created pamphlets featuring Spiderman and African trickster god turned spider Kwaku Ananse working together. Inspiration for the storyline was taken from old folktales popular in Ghana, other West African countries, the Caribbean, and the United States (Pijnaker, 2018).

Pijnaker shared how these pamphlets followed a similar storyline but became different based on the social-cultural context of Western comics and indigenous folktales. In the stories, some ordinary Ghanaians reminisced about the glorious past and complained about contemporary issues, such as corrupt soldiers and politicians. Marvel comic book heroes, Ananse, and other folktale figures would discuss these issues. The characters hide among ordinary Ghanaian people and use their superhuman strength to lead a popular revolt in seeking justice, showing the corrupted Ghanaians the error of their ways.

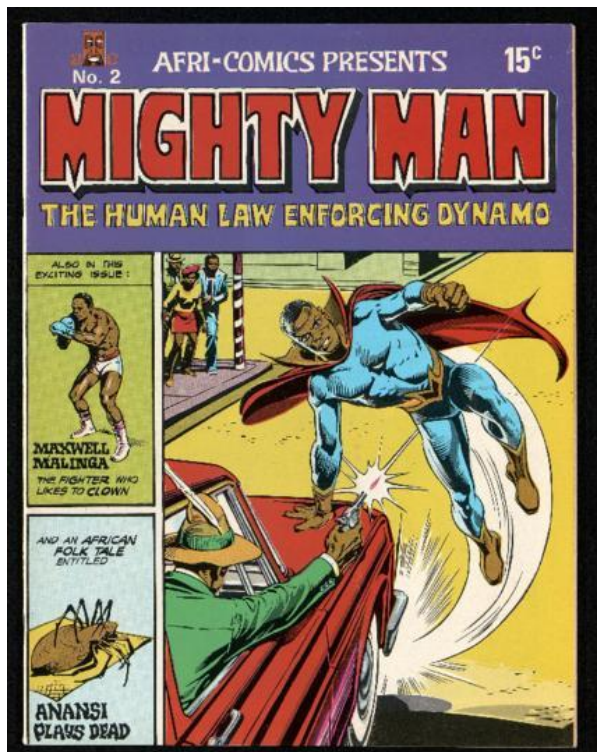
These superheroes were generally described as having special powers due to otherworldly connections or a connection to the past beyond that of the everyday African. These powers gave them the ability to change the world and cause political transformation (Pijnaker, 2018).

Derek Parker Royal continues to speak about how the power underlying the comic book image becomes evident when placed within the context of race and ethnicity. This shows how comics are a heavily coded medium that relies on stereotyping to concentrate narrative effectiveness (Royal, 2007). As we explore more narrative and illustrative styles in Africa, we get access to a variety of works from different groups of people, locally, nationally, and internationally.

South Africa

One of the known comic distributors in South Africa dates to the seventies named Afri- Comics and it was the home of South Africa's first black comics superhero, Mighty Man. Mighty Man was funded by the Apartheid government, with money shifted from the Defence budget (Wood: 2019). The representation of black communities being seen as superheroes for the first time in an oppressed system might have caused some excitement, however, Nick Wood argues otherwise in an article titled 'A Personal Perspective on South African Comics: From Superheroes to Ordinary Heroes.'

Wood (2019) argues that Mighty Man took on many township villains and gangsters. However, he was never considered 'powerful' enough by his white creators to confront the white might of the South African government, which was tacitly hidden off the page. A black superhero, then, but written and drawn by white hands including a government-sponsored collaboration from several rich American Republicans, keen to reinforce the status quo within South Africa" (Wood, 2019).



[Fig 5. Mighty Man]

Mighty Man was imposed with the ideology of the ruling government as a weapon to promote black-on-black violence. The narrative shared about township communities is seen as negative and the issues in the community are stereotypical. They only focus on the surface of black people committing crimes without showing the context of why they could be stealing. In the apartheid era, the black race had few resources to sustain itself.

The system placed black people in a lower class or working-class status by paying them minimum wage to give their families basic needs such as education, food, and shelter whilst the white races were given more opportunities for their middle- to upper-class lifestyle. If one is not aware of the context in which the characters live, the story may fail to appeal to the market due to unfair representation.

Indeed, the comic aimed to “help educate the black man in the ways of Western society, social concerns, and free enterprise,” as John McGoff, the American collaborator on the project, told Newsweek in 1976 (Wood, 2019).

The apartheid government used comic books as a colonising opiate tool for the masses. When it came to the Soweto Uprising, the protestors knew the tools of the state and how attractively dressed up they may have been. This shows how their aim to entertain was unsuccessful due to their inability to relate to the black South African audience culturally and socially.

The Mighty Man comic book in its pre-production phase was modelled on western ideologies, theoretical and historical frameworks of representation of what a black superhero should do, critical perspectives of how black audiences should aim to be like Mighty Man as well as institutional and artistic practices taken in the seventies.

Storytellers and academics should be wary of holding an academic-centric view of the human phenomenon to produce genuine truths about the nature of our world. Wariness should be viewed as a key element of us being responsibly engaged members and makers of universities and art. Art tells us it is not one thing but many; not one set of creative achievements, not approached from a singular critical perspective but by understanding many perspectives (Maty Ba & Higbee, 2012).

The creative process between Mighty Man and Twi Folktales of Kwaku Ananse narratives is similar in the superheroes' race and ethnicity. However, they differ in the intentionality of how their character's goal to find solutions within their community is established. Although both the African superhero narratives were formed at the same time which was the 70s, the ideologies and cultural norms imposed on the target audience are different due to the social context of the two African countries.

The Ghanaians aimed to empower their people in using their voice and taking a stand against political corruption whilst South Africans under the Apartheid government which opposed black excellence, chose to digress from the ongoing socio-political issues of the time. Instead, the superhero narrative Mighty Man became a tool to represent black South Africans in a negative light by labelling people who resided in townships as criminals.

Another difference between the two superhero characters is that Ananse gained his powers from otherworldly realms that one could view as spiritual and not man-made whereas Mighty Man was the result of a scientific experiment gone wrong, which shows that his powers can be flawed as it comes from a man-made force.

African superhero narratives and characters created in South Africa when South Africa was ruled and governed by western decent parties cannot be considered to be proudly black South Africans who are superior to white men. In those days, a black man could only be a superhero if the idea had been created in a scientific lab by a white man, inferring that the scientist created Mighty Man close to God's image. In recent times, the stories created are counter-narratives to those produced during Apartheid. Thus, South African culture and characters will be portrayed more progressively and openly than during Apartheid.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

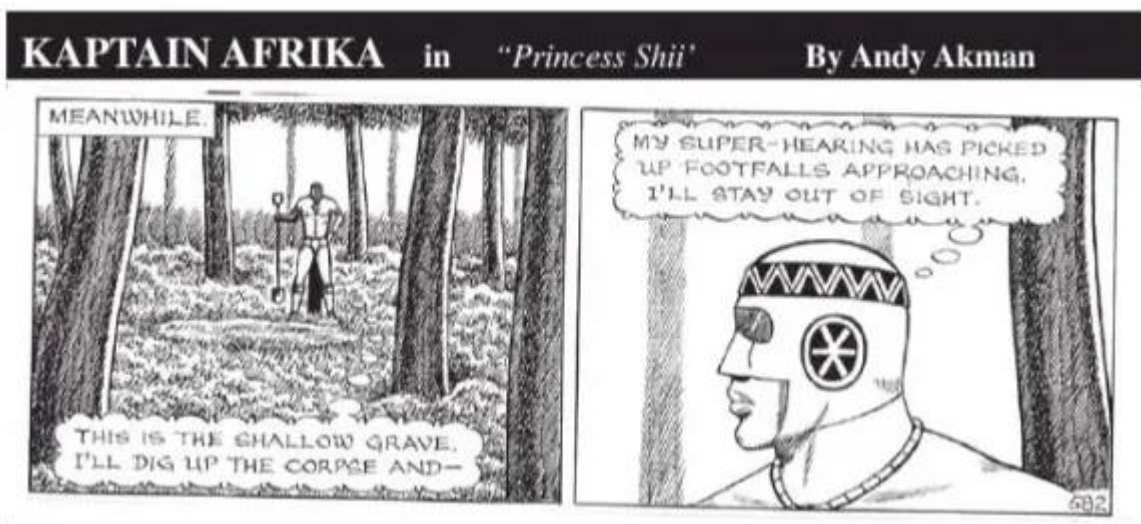
After the 1970s, Andy Akman created Captain Africa in Nigeria. He started the publication of Captain Africa magazine in 1987, with the help of the publisher African Comics Ltd run by Mbadiwe Emelumba. While information about this comic is scarce, a reprint and accompanying commentary by the Canadian comic book designer Scott Dutton in 1996 makes clear that there were at least fifteen issues of the comic, and that at the time of the reprint, Akman did not publish the comic anymore (Pijnaker, 2018).



[Fig 6. Captain Africa]

In 1988, the New York Times featured an article by James Brooke. In the article, Captain Africa was characterised as part of a trend among an emerging generation of illustrators across Africa to decolonise comics. This was seen as a reaction to white saviour stories such as 'Tarzan' and 'The Phantom'.

The black Captain Africa was meant to displace the white Captain Africa who was featured in a 1950s Hollywood series in which he stumbled upon conflict and saved an African nation (Pijnaker, 2018). Andy Akman portrayed black Captain Africa as someone whose mission was to fight evil forces in Africa and the rest of the world. This was to move away from the narrative of Africans being seen as savages and barbaric people that are helpless and in need of a white saviour. Many Africans recognized Captain Africa's battle against everyday contemporary issues covered in news media such as child murder and kidnapping.



[Fig 7. Captain Africa]

Every drawing is by its style a visual interpretation of the world. The form of the drawing influences how the viewer will experience and interpret the drawing. A drawn image offers a specific view of reality and the creator's subjectivity to this reality is built into the work. The viewer is obliged to share this figurative view of the maker and cannot look at the object-in-picture from another visual point of view than the one the picture offers (Kreuter, 2015).

For example on the cover of *Mighty Man* (Fig 5), the image of crime is represented as a black man because it was created in an era of Apartheid and the idea of black people was shown with negative connotations. Akman's use of illustration to complement the narrative he aimed to tell was clear with his use of the bold colours of the Ghanaian flag. Captain Africa wore a green body suit, decorated with a map of Africa, and a solar-powered cape for super-speed flight.

In Akman's own words: "Gone are the days of Africans wearing raffia skirts." We live in modern houses. He must be Superman, not a Tarzan." Emelumba added: "We have our own culture, our heritage. It's a necessity to defend against cultural colonialism" (Pijnaker, 2018). This reveals Akman's intention of how he wants Africans to be seen and portrayed in the media, as powerful bold, and proud. It is through his style that the trend of African superhero narratives has inspired generations of illustrators to come such as the *Urban Legend* (2012) created by Josef Yohannes.

African superheroes are emerging as comic book creators from the African continent seek to change the meaning of diversity. They bring relatable characters and rich storytelling traditions to the increasingly popular industry.

Captain South Africa

A recent comic book that has made an impact is Captain South Africa, released by self-published Zimbabwean writer and illustrator Bill Masuku. His comic book is one of the top 16 African superhero comic books to check out. Captain South Africa took to the stands in 2018 and left the country in awe. The #RhodesMustFall movement inspired the comic book female superhero character style, and the narrative was infused with fantasy, sci-fi, action, and politics. It stands as a comic book and is heavily inspired by both Captain America (1941) and Captain Africa (1970s). During an interview with Bill Masuku, the researcher had the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the narrative.



[Fig 8. Captain South Africa: The Origin]

Captain South Africa was initially made for teenagers, but the witty social commentary attracts an older crowd as well. After analysing his work, one was better able to understand the intentionality, socio-political, and cultural influence he was exposed to being born and bred in one of the most economically challenged countries in Africa, Zimbabwe. Growing up in

Zimbabwe allows his narrative to be from a place of understanding and relating to many Africans. These Africans daily struggle in overcoming poverty, and navigate around the antagonistic system. What one was able to appreciate about Bill was his ability to be outspoken about both colonial and post-colonial corrupt governments. Throughout his research, his focus has been on African social-political issues and the need to find solutions.

What was revealed from the literature review was that narratives produced under corporate laws and funded by political interests result in less freedom of individualistic expression. This is evident in South African comics from the Apartheid regime. This power structure hovering over the creative process interferes with the ability to expose a radiant truth that the audience can fully resonate with. Instead, the work becomes a tool of propaganda towards promoting the funders' ideological views as well as purely seen as entertainment.

In contrast, independent publishers like Bill Masuku have great freedom of expression, but getting global distribution may be more challenging. But independent publishers have a major role in creating work that resonates and is authentic to them as individuals. This work has a chance of speaking for a collective experience with the hope of finding solutions to the challenges faced within their society.

In gaining an understanding of works from Western cultural groups, the research was able to envision ways to establish African cultural creatives within their unique ideological views. This was done by considering the differences and similarities implemented to produce comic books, graphic novels, and their adaptation into films. As a form of recognition to empower hybridity in the realm of hegemonic discourse.

An interview with Bill Masuku enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of his ideological point of view when creating *Captain South Africa* (2018) through the research question. Furthermore, the researcher also had the opportunity to adapt his comic book into a film script. This was once the researcher had a better understanding of the cultural context and intentionality of the African superhero narrative. With Dittmer's ideas as a foundation for gaining the contextual and cultural intentions of the characters in the narrative, one was able to identify if the protagonist Captain South Africa in the comic book was a nationalistic hero or a pro-social hero.

Pro-social vs Nationalistic heroes

Nationalist superheroes such as Captain America, signify the "nation-state" for readers, but how do these characters and comic books address issues of multiculturalism and geopolitical order? As a result of his exploration of nationalistic superhero narratives and pro-social superhero narratives, Dittmer (2013) assisted in answering these questions. All superheroes have a heroic mission, but Dittmer made the case that nationalistic superheroes like Captain America who are a personification of the nation-state concerning the superhero costume, their physical body, and morality have the nation-state at the centre of their narrative.



[Fig 9. Captain America: The Origin]

Dittmer (2013) argues that these iconic superheroes contribute to our contemporary understandings of national identity, the righteous use of power, and the role of the United States in the world. Tracing the nationalist superhero genre from its World War II origins to contemporary manifestations throughout the world, would Captain South Africa be one of these manifestations? At first glance, Captain South Africa may seem like a nationalistic hero, but the narrative unfolds so that she becomes a pro-social hero.

Alternatively, superhero characters that lack an intrinsic link to a nation-state are pro-social superheroes (Dittmer, 2013). Dittmer (2013) further described their mission as not essentially

linked to the nation-state and therefore their heroic mission is pro-society, oriented to a more general concept of society, although he notes that these pro-social superheroes can also explore nationalistic concepts as well. Dittmer's ideas of nationalistic and pro-social superhero narratives became significant when analysing Captain America and Captain South Africa.

Ethical Considerations

A memorandum of understanding was written and signed by both the researcher and the author, Bill Masuku before the interview took place. Masuku agreed to have his answers to the questions below published and was aware that his answers via telecommunication/ zoom were being recorded.

Understanding Captain South Africa Interview with creator Bill Masuku

Questions:

1. Who is Captain South Africa?
2. Out of all the countries in the continent, why choose to focus on Captain South Africa?
3. What was the contextual influence behind the development of Captain South Africa?
4. Which ideologies would you say were the foundations/ guides in developing the character?
5. Which ideologies would you say were the foundations/guides in developing the world of the story?
6. Who is the comic narrative targeted?
7. What are the meanings/signs and symbols behind the costume she wears?
8. Which elements from Captain America inspired Captain South Africa?
9. What comparisons and differences are evident between Captain South Africa and Captain America?
10. Which choices did you make to maintain the Africanacity within the story (without diverging from the conventions of western comic narratives)?
11. Do you have a favourite African Superhero Narrative and what is this?
12. Where do you see the future of Captain South Africa?
13. What is the process you undertook in publishing Captain South Africa?

14. What are the pros and cons of self-publishing your work?
15. What advice would you give the younger you/ or anyone starting that's aspiring to be able to self-publish their work?
16. Where and how far do you see the African Superhero Narrative growing in the global space?

Some of the answers are evident as the researcher delved deep into the different themes used to unpack the narrative and its intentionality.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The Dewesternized Pro-Social Hero: Captain South Africa

**“Charity without conscience is ostentation.
Heroism without humility is totalitarianism.
Being a superhero hinges on this balance
of superiority and humanity.”**

-CAPTAIN SOUTH AFRICA

[Fig 10. Captain South Africa: The Origin]

According to Gipson (2019), African female superheroines in comic books are not as well known and documented in comic book history. Diverse and complex narratives of black superheroines have slowly been gaining traction and are worthy of scholarly attention. This was the reason the comic book Captain South Africa was chosen for this research. Captain South Africa also known as Khanyisile has a crucial narrative significant to the overall story of African comics. Gipson (2019) further states that examining Black (in this case African) female superheroine stories offers an opportunity to (re)explore new identities and territories in comics, reframe one's understanding of certain popular culture and comic book terminology and concepts, and most notably empower the Black female voice. Captain South Africa (2018) illustrates this vividly through the following findings.

Who are the storytellers?

Bill Masuku was a Zimbabwean student residing in South Africa at the time he created Captain South Africa. He took it upon himself to write a story echoing the challenges and issues faced in South Africa specifically Cape Town. This was done to breathe hope into the racial politics, gender inequalities, and class disparities haunting the city. Masuku analysed the issues from an outside perspective and developed creative and sensitive solutions.

Cape Town is a city that houses many cultures from different walks of life. This allows Bill Masuku to also truthfully address the politics that occur with being a foreigner and how

ongoing issues affect foreigners residing in Cape Town as well. He used heterosapiens (people with supernatural abilities) as a symbol to confront how they too are foreigners and, in a sense, feel like ‘outsiders’ in a community of non-heterosapiens. The issue of xenophobia has been a major concern over the years in South Africa. His being viewed as a foreigner in South Africa allowed him to tell the story truthfully and with a sincere tone.

How does the writer's identity influence the story?

Bill Masuku having written Captain South Africa from the perspective of an African student studying in a foreign country has influenced his point of view. This is seen in the narrative, but so much so that he has also been able to share the nuances of South African culture, specifically of the Xhosa nation. Bill Masuku was inspired by the feminists he studied with especially in creating the main character Captain South Africa, also known as Khanyisile, a female Xhosa student.

The environment Bill Masuku was in during that time has influenced and shaped him and the story. The narrative mirrors his experience and the future he hopes to see in the country and Africa as a whole. A world that has solutions that do not resolve through violence. Instead, it has an understanding of how much stronger Africa can be as a continent if people work together and embrace the intercultural space people find themselves in today.

The Origin of Captain South Africa

To fully comprehend the birth of Captain South Africa, it was necessary to understand how it was conceived. With the opportunity to speak with the creator, the researcher was able to grasp the whole concept behind the story. This was once the knowledge of who and what kind of background the creator, Bill Masuku, was exposed to.

Q: What is Bill Masuku's backstory?

A: He hasn't always been a comic artist. Initially, his goals were to attain a degree in commerce by studying management and information systems at Rhodes University. While he was studying, he had a calling for comics and the urge to create them overrode his academics at university. His love for comics started when he was twelve; he grew up aspiring to create

comics, games, movies, and animation. However, he had very limited resources as a child growing up in a third-world country such as Zimbabwe.

Although he had limitations, he had an abundance of stories, and he wrote and drew them whenever he was allowed to use his skills in English assignments. For example, when assigned the task of solving story problems, teachers took notice of his skill and encouraged him to hone his skills further. Bill did well in his academics as he retained an 'A' in maths. This allowed him to study at Rhodes University. In his second year, the urge to tell stories was still ingrained in him. That's when he started drafting the story of Captain South Africa during the time of Fees Must Fall in 2015.

Captain South Africa was inspired by the shifting events of the 'Fees Must Fall' protests. This was an uprising against the exclusion of students from continuing their university studies due to a lack of funds. Within that struggle, issues of gender inequality and racism within the institutions simmered to the surface. At this point, the story became a form of expression for the issues at hand. The political standpoint in the country is dominated by black South African voices which is why the narrative in Captain South Africa shares a desire for political change in it.

Elements that were identified within the narrative were the concepts of nationhood and identity, especially with the use of an African female superhero character as a lead. Although Captain South Africa is a strong text to study, there were limitations in finding research articles about the narrative in the context of storytelling. With the growing digital space, one was able to access shared online content from peers. However, further research is needed on the analysis of African female lead characters created.

The need for more content based on facts is vital in the space of African Superhero narratives; so that they can become a part of the comic book archive. Creating the archive will allow for more African characters to become a part of comic book history, especially superheroes, without being silenced. Gipson (2019) argues that “much of what is depicted or not depicted in popular culture plays a significant role in how Black women are included and represented.” This is a point supported by this research.

South African culture – African setting: Cape Town, Western Cape

Cape Town as a port city has seen the comings and goings of all people and at the turn of the 20th century was considered one of the most diverse cities in the world (Mint, 2018). Being a port city has shaped Cape Town in many ways, with many cultures, diversity, and its ability to be rich in expression. Cape Town is an ancient place, with a deep energy field and an overwhelming sense of conflict beneath its surface.

In an article written by Zady Minty in 2018, where he unpacks Cape Town's Culture Transformation, he speaks about the history of the city. He mentions how the Dutch arrived in 1652 and set up the vis-dorpie (fishing town) that would ultimately become the capital of the newly established colony. The events followed with the British arriving and successfully claiming the city as their own. However, they could not escape the fact that the city was built by slaves brought from various places, including Java, India, and two Portuguese colonies - today's Angola and Mozambique. The brutality of the slave-master relationship continues today, and many feel it still defines the psyche of this city (Minty, 2018).

During the country's (South Africa's) political transformation Cape Town was disturbing in terms of racialized politics. The first election brought the Nationalist party, the party of the oppressor, to power regionally. They were voted in by the very same people they had brutalized for over three centuries. This reveals a reflection of the complex slave-master relationship of the past which indicates that the city is still healing, and it may take another three centuries for its people to be truly free mentally and physically (Minty, 2018).

Despite everything, Cape Town provides a significant opportunity for South Africa to experiment with and come to grips with racial complexity and differences. It will enable the country to discover what an intercultural future could look like. This is evident in the superhero narrative of Captain South Africa. Cape Town has a combination of documented history that makes it distinct. The city used in Captain South Africa is more than simply the infrastructure and hubs of economic activity. They are social hubs for individuals and families with different cultural backgrounds, needs, and aspirations. All these factors are addressed in various tones and concentrations.

In the narrative, there is also evidence of the city playing a much broader role than just being a setting. This is because it starts to form its character that gives birth to all its characters, such as humans with superhuman abilities known in the comic book as Heterosapiens.

The Influence of the Setting In the Story

Captain South Africa is set in Cape Town in 2018; according to research done by the Research Branch of Organisational and Planning Policy of Cape Town, examining the state of the city in that year shows how the city is a work in progress but still haunted by racial politics and social inequality from the past. In 2018, South Africa developed a vision by which urban dwellers have access to social and economic services, opportunities, and choices. This vision was aligned with the global vision of sustainable and resilient cities as advocated through the New Urban Agenda (Armien & Rilityana, 2018).

The social dynamics of South African cities need to be understood by gaining insight into the factors that affect their growth and development trends. Cape Town's demographic, health, education, poverty, inequality, and crime trends continue to provide significant indications of multiple social opportunities and challenges affecting the growth and development of the city (Armien & Rilityana, 2018).

Cape Town hosts a unique natural environment providing several irreplaceable ecosystem goods and services with associated economic and social benefits to its people. This is a common asset that should belong to all its citizens, both current and future generations. However, many socio-economic challenges rooted in Cape Town's historical and current socio-economic inequalities hinder the ability of all citizens to gain access to the benefits of the natural environment (Armien & Rilityana, 2018). These challenges include the capacity to manage scarce resources and the provision of housing located close to economic opportunities.

These issues are creatively addressed in the superhero narrative of Captain South Africa. In this narrative, the people of Langa Township are being relocated from their homes to use their land for industrial gain. The state of Langa Township is at risk due to the unequal resources the township offers compared to the urban city of Cape Town. This results in the rise of crime and violence because people become frustrated with the quality of living in these circumstances. Therefore, it forces the heterosapiens (people with supernatural abilities) to use their powers whether it is for the betterment of the city or selfish gain. Captain South Africa becomes the moral compass for the city and the people as she aims to make a difference in whichever way she can. However, she will do so without the use of violence.

The Journey of the Comic book

The narrative's journey influences its present destination. Many aspects such as context, and social and geographical influence play a part in the process of who the narrative caters to and where it can resonate best. This brings the researcher to the question of Bill Masuku.

Q: Why Captain South Africa instead of Captain Zimbabwe?

A: Bill had many reasons as to why he chose South Africa, one of them being the result of the space and environment he was in at the time he was writing the story in the Eastern Cape. Another reason is that the people he was surrounded by were majority South African and a mixture of international students as well. He interacted mostly with South Africans and immersed himself in the culture and politics of the country through his peers. He had many conversations concerning, identity, social activism race, radicalisation, and politics in the university space. Initially, Bill had written the character as a black buff male in spandex influenced by the superhero narratives he grew up reading.

Through his collection of thought based on the context he was in, Bill was inspired and influenced by Japanese manga and Western superheroes. However, he saw the gap in that there were no heroes that he knew of that looked like him. His driving force then became the need to create a character that resonated with his background and upbringing regardless of whether the story was compelling or not. For him, it was the idea of self-validation.

At the end of it, he had a black guy with the South African flag on his chest carrying a gun as a weapon without any powers. Bill realised he had done nothing revolutionary. He started questioning the motivation behind creating the character and story along with the conversations he had with the feminists with whom he was surrounded. All interactions were dominated by discussions of gender, race, ethnicity, and tribal background. The conversations changed his approach to comic book writing, and he decided to start again. This time with Captain South Africa/Khanyisile as a female character instead of simply replacing the male character, he created them both together. The female character has the will to continue the legacy.

Meaning and Representation: Supernatural and Technology

“Africa has been a recipient of a lot of superhero knowledge from the west so now the question lies, how do we become independent of this charity if we have been taught that’s the only way to survive and yet find it hard to identify our indigenous knowledge yet alone it could build empires? However, there is hope.” – Samba Yonga, 2019, TED X Lusaka.

Comic books have also played a role in interpreting speculative blackness. Comic books today use Afrofuturistic and exploratory elements to create a fantasy setting resulting in visual storytelling. These choices sometimes express a desire for black characters to escape traumatic and oppressive encounters. How does one address universal African issues and still offer an engaging and meaningful space that an African audience member can experience? Bill Masuku was successful in creating a space that was impacted by the South African culture, from the chosen language, where the comic book had strips where South African cultural terms were used such as “Haibo” and “Mara why?”, these are known South African terms translated into “No” and “But why?”. (See figure 11).

The use of South African indigenous terms was well represented in the Captain South Africa comic book. However, western terminologies were also vividly present in the world of the story. Bold westernised terms such as “Captain” and “Heterosapiens”, the term captain originated from the word "Katepano", a Greek term for on top, which then in the 14th century was spelt “Capitayn”, which is a leader or one who stands a head above others. The word since then has evolved to “Capitaine” from old French and late Latin pronounced “Capitaneus” which defines a chief. The military sense of an officer who commands a company spelt Captain was first used in the 1520s (Online Etymology Dictionary). The origin of the word creates a contrast in the purpose it is meant to fulfil in the African comic book Captain South Africa.

The word has been historically identified as a title used to promote hierarchical systems ranking from above to lower ranks. Khanyisile sees herself differently as a superior being. If anything her character is an amalgamation of everyone who has been historically oppressed and considered inferior, being a young black female born and raised in a post-apartheid system. Captain shouldn't be referred to as an inferior being, but the name does not challenge any ideologies that the comic book challenges.

An alternative word for Captain could be 'isiThunywa'. It originates from the Zulu and Xhosa languages, and the literal translation of the word is the divine messenger. IsiThunywa is understood to be a universal spirit found in people and nature alike (Mann, 2021). Within

African spirituality, the role of IsiThunywa is a messenger and mediator between the physical realm and the spiritual realm. This term becomes evident later in the comic book series when Katlego who is Khanyisile's friend dies and returns as a spirit and guide who gives insight, messages of healing, and solutions to the challenges Khanyisile must face in her attempt to protect and fulfil the purpose for which she has been called.

Humans with supernatural abilities in comic books are referred to as Heterosapiens. According to the Medical Dictionary, hetero is a Greek word meaning different, other, or dissimilarity. Hetero is a prefix denoting different or varied. (Medical Dictionary) Sapiens according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary is defined as relating to or being recent humans (Homo Sapiens) as distinguished from various fossil hominids (Merriam Webster). Considering that heterosapien in the comic book is used as an opposing term to homo-sapiens, however, this term has limitations in a world where labels are constantly questioned, and people do not want to be grouped or labelled based on society's standards.

Although the world of the story has supernatural beings that have supernatural abilities, labelling them as "other" or "different" dismisses the progressive ideologies the narrative aims to stand for. Captain South Africa was created to redefine how superheroes have historically been represented. The comic book has the purpose to challenge all aspects beyond representation, such as ideologies, societal standards, African identity, and cultural understanding. However, it did not push those boundaries when it came to addressing supernatural beings. Not challenging boundaries teaches the audience/reader to be comfortable viewing the characters as the other. Instead, they should embrace them as a key to unlocking the endless possibilities that the human experience can evolve into.



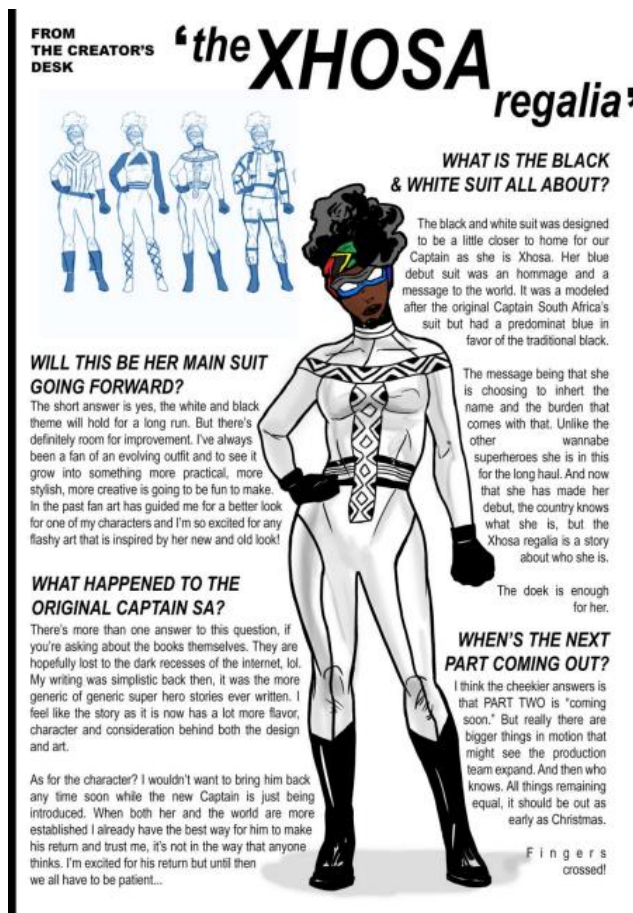
[Fig 11. Captain South Africa comic, the character is Major Mzansi].

Bill Masuku also intentionally made Khanyisile who is also known as Captain South Africa wear two attires once she had attained her powers. The initial costume she wore was inspired by the South African flag and its colours, which was a standard iconic symbol that the audience could relate to and resonate with when it comes to understanding the responsibilities that come with embracing the colours that represent the meaning of a rainbow nation.



[Fig 12. Captain South Africa _ Initial Uniform]

The second attire was inspired by the Xhosa tribe's traditional attire. This became a significant moment for her as a character because of the meaning the attire carries the message of who she is not what she is. It also helps identify her cultural influence as a young African woman raised in the townships of Cape Town. Like many cultures, their clothing was symbolic of identifying status, community, and a sense of belonging to a lineage, the legacy of ancestors who are alive and resting.



[Fig 13. Captain South Africa Xhosa Uniform]

The theme of spirituality was addressed subtly, and the idea of believing in our ancestors was represented in different ways in the comic book. The most obvious of which was her traditional attire. There was a point later in the narrative where her close friend Kathlego was accidentally killed. However, the character does not die out instead she becomes a living spirit inside Khanyisile. This became a symbol of guardianship and guidance for Khanyisile, especially when faced with challenges she could not foresee. This belief is very evident in African culture, where loved ones are perceived as ancestors who spiritually guide and protect us once they have physically left the earthly realm.

Superheroes rely heavily on magic systems for their narratives. In Captain South Africa, the supernatural power systems are referenced as follows:

Performance Type: People who have superhuman physical abilities and senses. Strength, hearing, smell, etc

Concentration Type: People who have psychic abilities, mental control, and a base level of high intelligence.

Emission Type: People who can create substances and energy from nothingness.

Transmutation Type: People who can manipulate pre-existing substances and energies.

Transfiguration Type: People who can manipulate their flesh and bone into substances and energies.

Mutation Type: People who are permanently transformed look far less human.

The last power or magic system that was not blatantly mentioned was money. The idea of having large amounts of money to gain power and ownership in South Africa is a constant battle, which was heavily reflected in the narrative. There are various cases where people have lost their housing or informal settlements to those in power who purchase land to build more profitable corporations. Alistair Rise is a billionaire CEO who is using his funds to develop the upcoming nation of The Langa Empire. His character does not have conventional powers however his money is his super strength; it was used to fund Captain South Africa in her mission and gave her the support and status she needed at the beginning of her journey to save the country.

Comics have provided an entry point to discuss and explore the way that race and gender intersect with science fiction and technology. They create historically rare opportunities for creatives to re-write and redraw previously depicted narratives; imagining realms that are filled with science-fiction realms, magical realism, African spiritual explorations, and technological advances (Gipson, 2019).

Who will be saved by Captain South Africa?

Samba Yonga stated in her 2019 Ted Talk, "The Blueprint for an African Superhero Curriculum, that "we need to acknowledge and restore African indigenous knowledge so we can create our superheroes". She quotes Tom Mboya who was assassinated in the 60s for his progressive thinking— "I have news for you, there is no Superman, it is up to us. Samba Yonga reiterates that Superman has already come to do his part and save his people. As Africans, we have to find a way to save ourselves, and that's important to remember.

Yonga (2019) argues that Africa has been a recipient of a lot of superhero knowledge from the West. Therefore, the question lies, how do we become independent of this charity if we have been taught that's the only way to survive? As Africans, we find it difficult to identify our

indigenous knowledge. Africans need to relearn indigenous knowledge not as a way of living in the past but as a way of impacting the future. This is so that they can find their place in the evolving world order and rise and create new superheroes.

The researcher has identified that Captain South Africa is a creative product of service. This is because it was used for entertainment. It can also be a tool for getting children and teenagers excited about reading, as well as a platform for gaining indigenous knowledge. The narrative encourages African teenagers to develop their imaginations and express their viewpoints about matters within their environment and country (Gipson, 2019).

According to Yonga (2019), there is a problem with what is taught and how it is taught by Africans in the present-day world. Africans educate themselves in a manner where “somebody will come and save us, whether it’s a job, degree, NGO, a corporate company, a relative or the west.” She continued with a solution to the problem, “What we should do is be educated in a way that will save others, save Africa, and even save the world. We are super beings who are capable mentally and intellectually of impacting our circumstances (Yonga, 2019).

Yonga (2019) makes a strong argument, especially when the researcher relates it to the use of storytelling as a teaching tool. African Superhero narratives are powerful forms of art once it is more absorbed within our continent. However, the idea of the genre being a western trophy needs to be addressed because both worlds can hold space in the same industry without overpowering the other.

More African superhero genres are being birthed today than before. This is because audiences can move in the direction where they can gain access to content. Especially if the youth, who are the future of Africa, could get access to indigenous knowledge in the form of stories in school and community libraries. In accomplishing this act, new superheroes would be born for the future. However, if the majority of comic book characters are adults and vital historical information is withdrawn from them, this decreases the relatability of the content produced for African children. Thus, the researcher has identified the potential of Captain South Africa in providing much-needed content for African youth.

As a result, young gifted black comic book characters do not need to take on the attributes of an adult hero to be identified as African superheroes. Gipson (2019) argues that “young fans can identify more fully with characters who look, talk, and feel like them, and share similar life challenges. These gifted and talented characters and their storylines reveal a needed change

beyond the world of comics. Despite the struggles faced by these characters, their narratives speak to a will to survive and thrive.”

This is why Captain South Africa as a narrative, has been analysed as a stride and symbol of the continuation of creating indigenous African superheroes as a tool in restoring indigenous knowledge systems that will “save” Africans beyond a comic view but from a worldly perspective.

CHAPTER 5

The Western Nationalist Hero: Captain America

“Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully realize their horizons in the mind's eye. Such an image of the nation or narration might seem impossibly romantic and excessively metaphorical, but it is from those traditions of political thought and literary language that the nation emerges as a powerful historical idea in the west.

To encounter the nation as it is written displays a temporality of culture and social consciousness more in tune with the partial, overdetermined process by which textual meaning is produced. These approaches are valuable in drawing our attention to those easily obscured but highly significant recesses of the national culture from which alternative constituencies of peoples and oppositional analytic capacities may arise." (Bhabha, 1990: 1-3).

Bhabha's term refers to the nation as primarily a textual phenomenon, in which dominant national discourses are not overturned rapidly but shift direction incrementally. Although they continue to change, these changing discourses are reflected in, and constituted by, the changing discourses of popular culture. The reason for this was not just because the popular culture of the day had to remain relevant to the nation to maintain sales; even science fiction and superhero comics had to resemble the world of the readers in some manner (Dittmer, 2011).

This is true because the popular culture narratives of the day are national discourses. They are constitutive and inseparable. Therefore, it is necessary to think of discourses on nationalism and popular culture as being mutually constitutive in some circumstances. This was evident in the case of serial narratives, which share structure with the serial narratives of nationhood. The nation is often conceptualized as a discrete group of people with a common identity conceived as a common narrative of identity.

This is because a group of people both adhere to themselves and exclude others. National history becomes packaged as a set of common understandings about how events are linked together serially through narrative, from a mythologized origin until the present (Dittmer, 2011).

Steve Rogers' Captain America was never political. He always adopted a humane, reasonable, and concerned attitude to what state his country was in. This shows how the narrative and the

character are shaped and formed by the cultural and political state of the environment in which it is created.

Who are the storytellers?

The authors of Captain America's early adventures were liberals, Joe Simon and Jack Kirby (1941). Steve Rogers' character of Captain America is infused with the universalist spirit of American liberalism. Captain America was created as a contribution to the U.S. struggle against the powers that were already on the horizon (Gray, 2014).

The superhero narrative became a shield and gave a sense of hope in defending America from its enemies. This ignited a sense of pride within the people of America in how much they are willing to sacrifice to protect their nation. Over the more than 70 years that the narrative has been published, different writers have jumped on board to steer the ship in the direction in which the narrative must sail allowing the storytelling to evolve with time.

How does the writer's identity influence the story?

Due to their liberalist background, whenever Joe Simon and Jack Kirby were pushed by readers to reveal Captain America's political views - the editors would respond that due to his place and time of birth (New York City, in the 1920s) he would have come of age as a New Deal Democrat, a positioning that located his political attitudes for the liberal consensus (Dittmer, 2010). Any issues that divided the political consensus, like the war in Vietnam, were ignored. In the narrative, Captain America would travel to Vietnam only twice. Both times not to fight alongside American troops. Instead, he would go on rescue missions that did not align him with American objectives (Dittmer, 2010).

However, in 2015 there was a plot twist, in which the original Captain America, Steve Rogers, was temporarily replaced by Sam Wilson, who played 'the Falcon'. Sam Wilson brought a fresh perspective to his role as Captain America. Upon Steve Rogers' return, Marvel continued to publish two comic books: Captain America: Steve Rogers (a white man) and Captain America: Sam Wilson (a black man).

Each embodied a different vision of the American people (Dittmer, 2010). In his stories, Sam Wilson is a hero in the age of Black Lives Matter. He fights for people of colour and

immigrants, trying to protect them from the dehumanising forces both of the state and white supremacy (Dittmer, 2010).



[Fig14. Captain America: Sam Wilson]

Over the years, Captain America has split into two versions. And it may be some time before a definitive consensus on what it means to be American emerges. This reveals how with the change of times and perspectives, different writers have stepped in, allowing the story to evolve and speak to the relevant issues in America.

The Origin

Marvel created Captain America after World War II had begun in Europe but it was before the United States entered the war. The idea was to create an American nationalist superhero produced by Americans for the American market. Captain America is an embodiment of an icon of American identity, connecting the abstract body politics of the nation with the body of the hero in the imaginations of young readers (Dittmer, 2011).

The backstory of Captain America dates back to when Steve Rogers was an ordinary New Yorker. He was inspired by his moral opposition to Nazi Germany so he volunteered for the U.S. Army. However, he was rejected by the army for being undersized. An officer noticed Rogers' desire to contribute, and inducted him into a top-secret program, "Operation: Rebirth,"

which was intended to create an army of drug-enhanced supersoldiers to prevent Nazi sabotage (Captain America, 1941).

“Operation Rebirth” as a term implies that Steve Rogers as a character has been born again figuratively, being given a new identity. This notion resonates with the ideologies pursued in the American Dream. This is an ideology that is a constant advocate for reinventing one’s life to higher standards than the ones citizens currently face. For Steve Rogers to be considered a noteworthy example of heroism in the narrative, the American audience had to understand how the American system works and believe there is value in the character once he is reinvented as a “super soldier” (Captain America, 1941).

Steve Rogers transforms from ordinary to a superhero, a story that is sold within the context of the American dream. Considering that the narrative is packaged as a superhero genre, it holds weight when the audience engages and seeks to identify an example of what an American superhero should look like, especially one that can save Americans from enemies or anyone who goes against American values and systems (Captain America, 1941).

After being enhanced by drugs, the newly reinvented muscular Rogers witnesses the assassination of the scientist in charge of "Operation Rebirth" by a Nazi spy. Once the American superhero is identified, the creators make a clear distinction about which nation is villainized, and in this case, it was the German Nazis. This was so the audience could identify what values and systems were upheld in other nations of Europe which was a competing world-class race that could threaten the American narrative and their power (Captain America, 1941).



[Fig 15. Captain America punching Adolf Hitler]

Due to America being under attack by Germans, Dittmer (2011) stated that the American government used Rogers as a propaganda symbol for America. Because the super soldier serum that created him was lost with the scientist, he was referred to as Captain America rather than a vanguard of a super army. Armed only with an indestructible shield and its inherently defensive connotations. Captain America's origin was found in an understanding of the United States as a permeable and vulnerable body of politics, dependent on continual policing.

American culture - Western setting: Manhattan, New York City

New York City is one city that is no stranger to the media space. It is a city built on liberal thinking. One of its monumental symbols is the Statue of Liberty which is one of the most instantly recognizable statues in the world. It is often viewed as a symbol of both New York City and the United States. Additionally, the statue is situated near Ellis Island, where millions of immigrants were received until 1954. Because of this, the Statue of Liberty is also understood to represent hope, freedom, and justice which are some of the pillars of the American Dream (Britannica, 2022). Therefore, the creators intentionally set Captain America in New York City, Manhattan.

New York City is home to some of the biggest names in Marvel Comics. It has been the setting of countless superhero fights over the past several decades that the Marvel Universe has grown. While New York City has experienced its fair share of difficulties over the years, the people and its superheroes demonstrate a strength of character that differentiates it from any other city depicted in a superhero comic based in America. Especially because most of the superheroes were ordinary citizens born and raised there before they acquired their powers.

Captain America shows how New York remains prosperous despite all odds. This is because Steve Rogers will even defy a corrupt politician to ensure the American Dream is maintained. Serving and helping others is built into the DNA of the American Dream because while there are an unusually high number of tragedies that happen in New York such as 9/11, there are always people who will respond in a moment of crisis (Chin-Greene, 2021).

The Influence of the Setting in the Story

Captain America/Steve Rogers could only have appeared in America because the formative influence of American religion on the Captain's mission of fighting evil is an intriguing question. In 2006, Marvel Comics launched a 'crossover event' called Civil War, in which virtually all their heroes became tied up in a 'battle royale' that mirrored the increasing divide in American political culture. When the U.S. government passed a law requiring all superheroes to register with the government and effectively go to work as civil servants, Captain America led the anti-registration forces, arguing that it was un-American for the state to have that much control over superheroes' lives (Dittmer, 2010).

Dittmer (2010) adds that the anti-registration movement was evident in the story however it was a critique of the Bush Administration and the Patriot Act. In the narrative of the Civil War, the story was written in a way that Captain America was shot and killed on the courthouse steps. This was a scene that many viewed as an analogy for the death of the American Dream.

This analogy led to a vast amount of publicity, including an obituary in the New York Times and an appearance by Marvel Editor-in-Chief Joe Quesada on CNN, which led to the following exchange -

CNN Correspondent: "So if the current storyline is an allegory for the post-9/11 social and political situation, what does the death of Captain America represent?"

Joe Quesada: "There is a lot to be read in there, but I'm not trying to tell people 'This is what you should read into it', because I can look at it and say, 'you know, I can read several different types of messages.'"

It is clear from this exchange that Marvel was trying to benefit from the political resonances of the allegory without committing to any political stance. In this way, Captain America has been creatively influenced by real-life socio-political events in America, specifically New York City. The lines between reality and fiction become blurred as they both imitate each other.

The Journey from Comic book to Film franchise.

Captain America has been defending the United States for almost seventy years. However, this origin narrative has been modified over time as understandings of the United States have changed. The first Captain America narrative was constructed with militaristic and modernist

themes that seem problematic today. This is because post-war American identity became the subject of critical perspectives, and the creators found many ways to modify the hero's origin so that it reflected increasing anxiety about the roles of the military and the government (Dittmer, 2011).

A 2003 narrative unveiled another dimension in the original narrative, in which remaining "Operation: Rebirth" scientists used African American test subjects in 1942 as part of their efforts to rediscover the supersoldier serum. The catastrophic results included death and deformity.

This effectively recasts Captain America's origin as darker and less idealistic. However, it did not tarnish the man himself, who is almost always portrayed as the creator's ideal American. This revision shows another layer of American identity being added to the narrative, one that reflects moves in American historiography to portray the crucial role of racial minorities in the creation of the United States (Dittmer, 2011).

As Captain America continues to be produced, Marvel studios are reinventing themselves to play new roles as part of the Avengers. The legacy of Captain America is constantly adapting to popular media platforms beyond the comics. It is an excellent example of narratives evolving with the times.

Meaning and Representation: Science and Technology

Academic accounts of popular culture often dissolve the text into its preferred meanings, losing sight of other elements that contribute to the meanings consumers make of it. For example, the daily, weekly, annual, and other intervals at which national or popular culture can be released construct a ritualised societal experience.

The act of sitting down to watch the national news or an episode of the televised singing competition American Idol, the act of buying a Captain America Weekly comic book, and the act of going to the movie theatre, are all performances in the collective narrative that reflect active participation by audiences. Billing (1995) refers to these acts as "banal nationalism," reflecting their non-conflictual, everyday nature. The performance of banal nationalism was powerful because it provided a ritualised and unnoticeable connection to the otherwise abstract body of politics.

Depending on genre and narrative, different forms of popular/national culture can predispose to different emotional experiences for consumers. Horror at the news reporting on a school shooting. In addition, thrills and anxiety at the plight of soldiers in a war movie. Finally, pride in the exultant physicality and triumph of a nationalist superhero. These feelings are not reducible to geopolitical representation; instead, they reflect more visceral geopolitics that is more about experiencing nationalism than thinking about nationalism (Tuathail, 2003).

Dittmer (2011) argues that it would be a mistake to conflate these with the production and consumption of popular culture, respectively. This is because producers were known as propagandists and consumers as their tragic victims. Rather, both producers and consumers are embedded within, and participants in, multiple national discourses.

Who will be saved by Captain America?

The Captain America franchise was created for the youth of America however it has become a resonating narrative with adults. In light of the narrative being a symbol of American exceptionalism, likely, one would first view this product as a tool to help those who qualify to live and achieve the American Dream.

The question lies, who does Captain America save? Looking at the cultural cues established in American pop culture, the American market is more likely to be saved. This is because those who believe in the core values and financial freedom that the American Dream symbolises. Freedom is a fundamental condition of American society.

It can be seen as both an ideological part of the creation of the American Dream, and a product of the American Dream as well. There is a belief that the American Dream is accessible to those only within the United States, which suggests that American society is superior to other societies and cultures. This raises questions about what type of people resonate with Captain America.

A patriarchal collective that celebrates its form of superiority and therefore identifies with a Superhero. The contradicting part of the Superhero narratives and characters in the form of comic books, graphic novels, or movies is that they have become the most influential and highest-grossing form of blockbuster film to date because of their underlying use and ability to condition American cultural groups.

The genre was built on the blueprint of the American Dream. It is used as a vessel that reflects the heroic qualities that make up a patriotic American - one who is willing to do anything to protect their nation. The contradiction is that Americans do not need a saviour but instead an idol to compare their standards to. American citizens are the real superheroes, who perpetuate the American ideology today.

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie stated in her 2013 Ted talk – we should all be feminists - and that “culture does not make people, people make culture.” The narrative incites the idea that American citizens are the ones who can save or be of sovereignty regarding world threats or problems. Due to the people who create what the American Superhero should look like, the narrative has survived for over 80 years. However, in today's America cultural curators are no longer predominantly white male figures. Based on the evolving narrative of Captain America, the character has the potential to evolve into an African American version because the people that need “saving” change over time.

CHAPTER 6

Captain American and Captain South Africa

In this paper, both texts were used to compare and analyse the use of themes in Captain South Africa (2018) and Captain America (1941). The purpose of comparing these two superhero narratives was not only because they perform their duty in similar ways on the surface. However, the deeper purpose was also to explore the power of Western cultural influence within storytelling in comparison to African cultural influence in storytelling. Furthermore, it also explores how both those influences serve different purposes for various audience groups.

Although Captain America is a more established and popular superhero, both superhero narratives can be recognised as culturally impactful within the specific cultural group they cater to in their ways and style. Each approach brings its quality and uses the same themes in a uniquely distinct manner. Therefore, by better understanding each cultural niche, one can appreciate its influence and the role it plays in popular culture. As a result, a variety of universal stories will be able to be produced together rather than separately.

Representation

According to Nadine Gordimer (1973), in 'The Black Interpreters', black heroes differ from modern European heroes. While the modern European hero is characterised by saying 'no' to the world, the African hero, despite his disaffection and bitterness, is a man who says 'yes' most of the time. The African man is left in a position of leading with the white man's skills, political systems, philosophies, arts, whisky, and malaria prophylaxis. At the same time, he also wants to preserve his own African ancestral tradition, language, philosophy, arts, skills, customs, and manners. He wants this because this is expected of him as an African "hero" which results in his firm and courageous 'yes' in the face of the difficulty and opposition likely to be met with in the attempt to bring together, in Africa, for Africa, the best of both worlds.

In the creation of an African narrative, the view of the African hero plays a significant role. Captain South Africa is primarily intended for children. The strip is not simplistic or simple, but it does not claim to provide a critical analysis of social dynamics. Even so, it is a work that

has a clear pedagogical intent and, in its representation of black identity, is intended to intervene on a social level.

Then the question was raised -

Q: Who is Captain South Africa?

A: The female Captain South Africa is also referred to as Khanyisile by those who knew her before she attained her powers. She is a politics student at the University of Good Hope and fighting for justice has always been her calling. Khanyisile/Captain South Africa handles the country's issues dealt with in the narrative differently from the male character/Captain South Africa.

Khanyisile almost lost her life when she shadowed the first Captain South Africa. She admired him, his convictions, and his bravery as one of the few superheroes left. After being shot and receiving a blood transfusion from him, she later gained the same adrenaline abilities as him. Shortly after this incident, he vanished, and she began her studies in politics at the University of Good Hope. She gained new insight and realized that fighting crime never stops crime. She wanted to save the country but needed to do it differently from her predecessor. No more punching criminals. A non-violent superhero.

Captain South Africa was inspired by the women Bill attended Rhodes university with who were fighting for a cause greater than their gain. The 2015 protests of "Fees Must Fall" revealed the power and role that women play in bringing about change and action in matters of society. Captain South Africa represents every woman that was and continues to be on the front line for equal rights and justice for all. In this case, the African hero is a woman who provides a slight respite, because the pressures and observations presented by Nadine Gordimer begin to be challenged in a way that shows African women are not always "yes".

For instance, take Khanyisile/Captain South Africa. Along her journey to becoming a superhero, she learns to stand her ground against the unlawful and unfair laws passed on by the government within the narrative. This revealed that she was different from the original Captain South Africa and Captain America/Steve Rogers in the role they played in pursuing the governments' requests. This was all in the name of serving the country. Captain South Africa who is also known as Khanyisile speaks for the people and serves the people's rights rather

than pleasing the government. Some would view her nature as rebellious, while others would see her methods as just.

Captain South Africa's/Khanyisile's ambition is the creation of an African epic for a postmodern age. An epic that does not attempt to reduce "Africanness" into a single essence but rather infuses the diverse strands of contemporary black life with the potency of heroic identity. On the other hand, Captain America represents the US government's vision of how the hero must be translated.

This vision is based on the idea of designating a male figure as the only symbol of heroism for the country. Therefore, people who do not identify as strong white males will be marginalised. They view the experience as exclusive instead of inclusive. The narrative was intended to give hope and control to the people of America, but the ideology behind it was rooted in the American Dream.

The American Dream becomes restrictive when an audience far from America still wants to engage with the content but feels removed from the cultural experience shared within the narrative.

As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the idea of 'The Falcon and The Winter Soldier' as a gesture from the creators to hold space for historically marginalised groups to finally see themselves as heroes within America was the first step to inclusion. Black Captain America was significant because it challenged notions of American exceptionalism that glossed over the most painful chapters in America's history (Joseph, 2021).

However, the issue remains to this day in 2022. This is because the American dream is still not as tangible for all African Americans born and living there in the 21st century. The system has continued to fail its people because of the colour of their skin. For non-Americans, the "dream" is more difficult to grasp. Without an understanding of the "dream", a fundamental part of the understanding of American society is lost.

There is difficulty in fully accepting the decision to create a black superhero based on Western ideology as genuine. This is because it is constructed from a place of misunderstanding and lack of experience living as an African American in a society such as America. One is not to say non-African descendants cannot tell African stories however one cannot create an African

or African American story without or before living through the African and African American experience.

Space and Place in Superhero Narratives: Captain America and Captain South Africa

There are a few key differences between Captain South Africa and Captain America. The most obvious is in the importance of gender, race, and supernatural elements to the origin of Captain South Africa. Although other scholars have argued that science and magic are interchangeable in comic books (Locke, 2005). In this context, a difference exists.

Captain America is the product of a US military project, with science at its core. Whereas, Captain South Africa gains her power from a mystical blood transfusion from the original male Captain South Africa. The story of how he received his powers becomes a supernatural element that is considered taboo in the African community where he was born. This is because elders viewed it as a curse more than a superpower. However, he defies the odds and becomes a national superhero that works closely with the police officers of the city.

Although Captain America succeeds at delivering a message of hope and control to the country, it can get misinterpreted and mistranslated outside the country. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, non-Americans across the globe have been consuming American media and entertainment that is saturated with the concept of the American Dream, yet this media refuses to call it by name. Without an understanding of the complexities and details of the American Dream, these ideological messages broadcast to the rest of the world are fragmented and incomplete. This can give the rest of the world a confusing view of American society.

It is no surprise that many non-American societies struggle to define their national ideological perspectives when they are consumed by messages about America's national cultural beliefs (McGuire, 2014). As a result, this narrative has demonstrated that one supreme fictional character cannot solve the issues of a country. Furthermore, a black superhero cannot remove the history of oppression and injustice in the failed systems that were built to exclude people of colour.

Captain South Africa is set in modern-day South Africa, where the country is falling apart and struggling through a socio-economic crisis. Humans with supernatural abilities known as hetero-sapiens are emerging at the same time; initially, they turned to heroism or petty crimes. Upon discovering the business potential of these individuals, they began to form companies in which they were funded for their abilities leaving Captain South Africa as the last superhero.

The idea of tenders in South Africa is a system in which people get money for their services. In this case, Captain South Africa has taken that same concept but utilised it in the form of supernatural abilities to be used as a means of exchange of goods or services. Where both concepts are intended to better the environment in some way or form, there is always going to be a turn to corruption and self-interest along the way.

Beyond the world of the story as a space and place, it is also imperative to acknowledge the spaces in which relevant discussions and conversations are happening. These are around the industry in Africa and around the world. Although numerous articles, books, and commentaries engage with the many aspects of the need for diversity in comics specifically in the political superhero genre, there need to be more conventions and conference spaces to be created as an outlet to create and continue those dialogues of diversity and cultural inclusivity.

New Imaginings of Cultural Identity

When the idea of new cultural identities came to mind, one had the urge to ask Bill –

Q: Where do you see the future of Captain South Africa?

A: Captain South Africa is a character who will thrive over time, the primary goal is not only to save the day but also the country. This allows for a shift in how an African superhero can be created beyond the genre conventions and narrative structures that are in place to keep the audience entertained. Captain South Africa is there to make people think beyond the scope of a 48-minute series or 50-page comic book experience.

This analogy brings about a fresh perspective on the role that creatives can continue to explore when formulating cultural identities and experiences. The future is Afrofuturistic, and it is here to shake and question the conventional way of storytelling. The audience is smart and is cognitive of how the creator communicates with them which is why the future of storytelling will eventually become a two-way street between the creator and the audience. This is because of the influence both parties have on each other. This path will allow more innovative, intelligent, and powerful identities to form within the cultural space.

The Comic Book Industry and Superhero Narratives

The writers of both Captain America and Captain South Africa share commonalities and differences. One is black (African) and the other is white but both are male. This raises questions about the comic industry's current structure. On a global scale, American comics are leading, and Africa has recently been able to get recognition regarding African comic narratives. However, the industry remains male-dominated and the challenge for the industry to evolve is at a standstill.

The system needs to be evaluated in all aspects of the comic space. This can be done by not only writing about female characters that are of colour but by also giving a platform to female writers to successfully share their experiences and stories. The need for more platforms, comic conventions, and spaces for their voices to be heard is a crucial aspect that the industry is missing, especially if the comic industry prides itself as a unique and non-conformist medium. There is hope for an amalgamation of characters in comics in the future. This is so that vast audiences around the world can relate not just based on skin colour but also to an experience that is unique to them being represented in comics.

Limitations

Captain South Africa (2018) has played an impactful role in the African comic industry and continues to do so; however, the journey of Captain South Africa is still relatively unknown to most South Africans. Captain South Africa cannot reach its full potential in South Africa due to the lack of promotion and support from South African media houses. Captain South Africa in comparison to Loyiso Mkhize's 'Kwezi' (2016), has less public attention and following, although both narratives focus on African superhero narratives and both tackle South African social issues.

There are many reasons why that is the case. These include the creator's birthplace, the dates the comic books were published, and the character model on which both superhero characters are based. Bill Masuku was born and raised in Zimbabwe and Loyiso Mkhize was born and raised in South Africa. The birthplace can be an influencing factor as to why these two comics have not received the same attraction. This is mainly because South African media houses benefit from broadcasting local content produced by local creators.

One of many articles on Kwezi (2016) was on VukaDarkie an online platform that is pro-blackness, where the intro was “Kwezi is a comic book series founded by our very own noble son of the soil, Loyiso Mkhize, a prolific and internationally acclaimed illustrator, designer and fine artist from Butterworth, Eastern Cape.” – Khulani Sikhosana (Sikhosana, 2015).

The timing of the two comics played a huge role in how it was received. Kwezi in 2014 was the first comic book published about the new South Africa that was internationally acclaimed, as seen in The Afternoon Express Show on SABC 3, in 2016, where Loyiso Mkhize and his team made an appearance with the sub-heading titled Kwezi, South Africa’s first Superhero. The false hype around Kwezi being the first African Superhero Narrative published from South Africa can outshine most of the work that follows even though Kwezi was not the first comic book produced in South Africa.

On the other hand, there have not been any Captain South Africa appearances on South African Public Broadcasting Networks. Unfortunately, stakeholders of South African media houses have yet to overcome the very stigmas and Western ideologies that threaten our growth and unity as an African continent. Despite such limitations, Bill Masuku has been warmly welcomed to the South African Comic Cons and has sold many copies on that platform since 2018 when the comic book appeared.

Bill Masuku’s character model of a South African can be limiting. This is especially in how he can fully navigate around the local slang, and mantras of daily South Africans like how Loyiso Mkhize can. Therefore, more South Africans in the past couple of years have been drawn to Kwezi (2016) however that should not take away from the insight Bill Masuku has as a Zimbabwean looking at South Africa. Bill Masuku’s perspective on South Africa is refreshing, he created a world of the story with a new set of eyes and gave it a utopia. A world where crime is resolved without violence is something a South African living here would not have thought of when all they have seen is violence and crime.

To date, comic conferences and conventions have played a significant role in allowing African voices and bodies to move from “margin to centre.” However, the number of African characters, writers, and creatives in the mainstream and academic fields has not increased globally. There is more information in the archives about Western (American and European) work than African work concerning the superhero narrative genre. One can recommend that there be an increase in access to African archives in the digital and library spaces as there is an

apparent need to see diverse individuals represented in comic book pages; that same feeling is also desired in larger pop culture arenas.

Recommendations

The researcher can recommend this study to young aspiring comics or filmmakers seeking answers to cultural influences in storytelling. Both Africans and Non-Africans can read because it is aimed at shedding light on information that was historically hidden and now is the time to share knowledge about it. This research helped in gaining insight into the creative influence that is incorporated into some of the work the researcher has willingly ingrained growing up. This is due to a lack of access and awareness of what the researcher identified as a young African child.

Conclusion

Upon analysis of all the responses, the researcher can see themes that stand out, including cultural influence, gender, and race. Each hero represents a different vision of what a nation is, pre-existing and eternal (Captain South Africa) or produced as an ongoing political project (Captain America). After comparing and analysing each Superhero narrative, Captain South Africa (2018) and Captain America (1941), the researcher concluded that each comparison had a deeper purpose that explored the power of Western cultural influence within storytelling and African cultural influence in storytelling and found key differences within the same genre.

Despite Captain America being more established and popular, both superhero stories were fully accepted as culturally significant within the cultural group they served. Each approach brought its unique characteristics and distinctly used the same themes because of the unique issues faced in each country. Therefore, by better understanding each cultural niche, the researcher was able to critique and appreciate its influence along with the role it played in the ever-evolving popular culture.

With this study, the researcher was able to achieve being a mirror and reflect on how narratives can inspire more creatives to think outside the box instead of aiming to tick box office checklists. The research aimed for future superhero genre creatives to create content that influences the items needed on the box office checklist. To put it another way, creatives must

have the power to influence culture. Again, the researcher would like to quote Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's words, "culture does not make people, people make culture."

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