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Exploring the phenomenon of Afrofuturism in film in decolonizing the university curriculum: A case study of a South African university

When the #RhodesMustFall movement called for the decolonization of the university curriculum in South Africa in 2015, academics were soon under pressure to begin to explore various ways to go about beginning such a complex process. One possible approach to this would be to explore whether Afrofuturism could practically liberate the mind towards addressing any forms of cognitive injustice that students may experience as a result of a colonized curriculum, and in what ways it might do so. A literature review has found a paucity of empirical research exploring ways in which a film that employs Afrofuturism could be used to advance the decolonization project in teaching and learning practices in South African higher education. This article aims to contribute to this discourse through a case study which attempted to uncover the attitudes and emotions of a group of students who, after viewing the film Black Panther, which employs Afrofuturism, were or were not, able to make sense of and/or re-imagine their identities and relationships with

KEYWORDS

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teaching

others in the context of Afrofuturism, and to what extent. The article thus reports on a case study at a university of technology (UoT) in South Africa in which the film was used to attempt to advance the idea of Afrofuturism in the university curriculum and to uncover the lived experiences, social realities and ideas of self/identity of particular students from marginalized communities.

INTRODUCTION

When the #RhodesMustFall movement called for the decolonization of the university curriculum in South Africa in 2015, academics were soon under pressure to begin to explore various ways to go about beginning such a complex process. Of course, decolonizing any university curriculum is not a once-off process, and neither does it entail a mere box-ticking compliance exercise (Heleta 2016). In his book *Decolonising the Mind*, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o ([1986] 2004: 3) describes, what he calls, the 'cultural bomb' of imperialism and its devastating effects, particularly on those born and living in Africa. Nearly 35 years after Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's coining of this term, this 'cultural bomb' continues to have an annihilating effect on many individuals' faith in their names, their environment, their languages, their heritage/culture, their unity, their capacities, and ultimately in themselves (wa Thiong'o [1986] 2004: 3).

In the context of this study, Leibowitz's (2017) call for the 'how' is vital in addressing cognitive injustice, particularly if university educators are under pressure to create democratic spaces for students to learn, the kinds of spaces in which students are capable of contesting, and are empowered to contest, the unequal power relations that exist in society. One possible approach to this would be to explore whether Afrofuturism could practically liberate the mind towards addressing any forms of cognitive injustice that students may experience as a result of a colonized curriculum, and in what ways it might do so. This approach would seem to be appropriate given that the aim of Afrofuturism is to create fissures in the present moment by using references of the past to envision futures that counter a negative historical imaginary (Waghid et al. 2020). An Afrofuturism approach may further offer academics ways in which to disrupt the epistemic violence and hegemonic practices that continue to circle teaching and learning practices (Hanchey 2020). Although this approach has been explored through various avenues and mediums, such as visual art and music, our medium of choice for this particular study was film. Many education researchers and practitioners have found that film, in general, continues to function as a powerful and essential pedagogical tool towards developing in students critical thinking and deep approaches to learning (Bright 2015; Olson et al. 2016; Marquis et al. 2020).

A literature review has found a paucity of empirical research exploring ways in which a film that employs Afrofuturism could be used to advance the decolonization project in teaching and learning practices in South African higher education. This article aims to contribute to this discourse through a case study that attempted to uncover the attitudes and emotions of a group of students who, after viewing the film *Black Panther* which employs Afrofuturism, were, or were not, able to make sense of and/or re-imagine their identities and relationships with others in the context of Afrofuturism, and to what extent. This was geared, through a conscious reflective process, towards disrupting the kinds of power and ideologies that work to maintain western/European ideals. We considered whether the Oscar-winning film *Black Panther* might

further serve as a catalyst towards debunking myths surrounding African history, culture and tradition in light of neo-liberal practices.

The article thus reports on a case study at a university of technology (UoT) in South Africa in which the film *Black Panther* was used to attempt to advance the idea of Afrofuturism in the university curriculum and to uncover the lived experiences, social realities and ideas of self/identity of particular students from marginalized communities. The authors argue that the need to explore critical pedagogical approaches and decolonizing methodologies is one approach towards further establishing a cosmopolitanist, pluralist, inclusive and sustainable model for decolonizing the university curriculum in South Africa (Waghid et al. 2018). The case study aimed, and this article aims, to respond to the following questions:

- RQ 1: In what specific ways were the students in the study empowered, or did they feel empowered, by a film that used Afrofuturism?
- RQ 2: How could or should Afrofuturism used in a film assist students in recognizing the need to be aware of, re-imagine and consciously disrupt the power that works to maintain social hierarchies in society?

In responding to the two research questions, the article is divided into five sections, which include this first section as the introduction to the study. Secondly, we discuss Afrofuturism as a theoretical framework for critical theory. Thirdly, the methodological aspects are discussed. Fourth, the results of the specific case study undertaken at a UoT in South Africa are presented. Last, we offer a critical discussion delineating the conclusions, the main implications of this study, its limitations as well as suggestions for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Afrofuturism as a framework for critical theory

Mark Dery (1994) first coined Afrofuturism in his book titled *Black to the Future*. At the time Dery (1994: 180) argued that African voices had (and still have) further stories to tell about culture, technology and imagined things to come than usually portrayed in popular western culture. Dery (1994) claimed at the time that Afrofuturism must be sought and drawn upon in unlikely places, such as in film and art. In response to the initial call for a retelling of stories from the African perspective, Kodwo Eshun described Afrofuturism as ‘concerned with the possibilities for intervention within the dimension of the predictive, the projected [...] the virtual [...] the future’ (2003: 293). In her book *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*, Ytasha Womack (2013) defines Afrofuturism as a coming together of imagination, technology, the future and freedom. Drawing on the original thoughts of LaFleur (2011), Womack (2013) claims that the philosophy of Afrofuturism is a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens (LaFleur cited in Womack 2013). The idea of Afrofuturism can thus inform and inspire an approach to encouraging experimentation, reimagining identities and activating the capabilities necessary for individuals who are categorized as non-White (Womack 2013).

Furthermore, Afrofuturism is seen as functioning as both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory by combining elements of Afrocentricity, fantasy, historical fiction, science fiction, speculative fiction and magic realism with non-western beliefs (Womack 2013; Holbert et al. 2020).

As an aesthetic practice, it emerged out of the nexus of transnational capital, migration, international and domestic social movements and conflict, the influences of technology, religion, black literature, black music and other forms of aesthetic expression (Anderson and Jennings 2014: 35). As an aesthetic practice, it aims to re-envision or re-imagine the past, and to speculate about and re-imagine a future rife with cultural critiques (Womack 2013; Holbert et al. 2020). In this regard, the authors of this article argue that Afrofuturism, with its roots in critical theory, is thus informed by inter-subjective actions that are value-laden, and subjectively applicable to disrupting situations influenced by colonial thought.

The notion of racialized social and knowledge systems constructed and consolidated by current capitalist entrenched systems continue to signify the hierarchical relationship that exists between developed and developing contexts (Anderson and Jennings 2014; Holbert et al. 2020). These authors argue that this historical problem is implicated by a lack of awareness of, or limited exposure to, such knowledge systems articulated and subscribed to by people on the basis of race (Anderson and Jennings 2014). Therefore, as a framework for critical theory, the authors of this study submit that the implied aim of Afrofuturism is to raise consciousness through problem-posing in order, in turn, to consciously oppose dominant and/or hegemonic power and, through a process of reimagining, transform oppressive situations. Following Burbles and Berk (1999: 65), who confirm the belief that society is divided by relations of unequal power, and call for a position held firmly in critical theory: fostering a critical (and critical reflective) capacity in citizens is a way of enabling them to consciously resist such oppressive power. The notion concerning Afrofuturism as a framework for critical theory and as a decolonial lens may further be linked to a Habermasian (1987) account of critical theory.

The idea of theory and practice couched in the tradition of critical theory, Habermas (1987: 124) argues, specifies a requirement of emancipatory or transformative social action. In the process of learning to understand and implement certain ideas in practice, people embark upon ways of doing geared towards changing undesirable situations. If we consider praxis from a Habermasian perspective in relation to Afrofuturism, then it is possible to conceive of praxis as that which extends beyond a particular process of the realization or enactment of theory. If students, for instance, are able to make sense, or be consciously and critically aware of what they are being taught, and through what cultural and/or hegemonic lens, and this sense takes on the embodiment of a particular way of thinking or being, then it is possible to argue that praxis takes on the form of a doing. The latter involves particular forms of action, which see the student moving from one position to another – theoretical to practical, and vice versa. That is, praxis is informed by both the ideas of theory and the manifestation of such ideas in extrinsic action – in other words, a social (real) practice. Such transformative action, Habermas (1987: 200) contends, makes people autonomous and liberates them from various forms of prejudice. Simply put, praxis accentuates both the reason for acting (theory) and the culmination of the act in social practices. Thus, learning about social justice, and starting to re-imagine an alternative system, within the context of an enriching film that employs, or is informed by, Afrofuturism, we would argue, has the potential to engender transformative action in society. This means that the possibility is there that what students acquire, or begin to re-imagine, in a university classroom does not have to remain independent from, or unconnected to, the real social experiences they encounter.

As a framework for critical theory, it makes sense to argue that being exposed to, responding to and reflecting on Afrofuturism might assist individuals in describing, interpreting and explaining social problems – and their own experience of these and how these affect their ideas of self and agency – in order to challenge relations of power and dominance in contemporary society. Considering that the discourse around the decolonization of the university curriculum has aimed, and continues to aim, to engender social change in pedagogical practices, it may further be argued that there exists an affinity between Afrofuturism and critical theory on the basis that literacy and ‘conscientisation’, or consciousness-raising for transformative change, are two of the prominent aspects of critical theory that cohere intimately with Afrofuturism (Kincheloe 2007: 252). To substantiate this claim, Freire’s (2005: 35) argument that literacy education could be used for liberation or domestication. In other words, his argument applies here, in the sense that domesticating literacies teach literacy from superior power, and this in turn invites false communication which preserves the status quo (Freire 2005: 35).

METHODOLOGY

Interpretive paradigm

The qualitative study took on a case study design located within the interpretivist paradigm. The main aim of interpretivist research is to ‘understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of different participants’ (Cohen et al. 2007: 19). Thus, according to interpretivism, human beings (who are stakeholders) should be given a chance to explain themselves in terms of the meanings they attribute to their actions and experience (Babbie and Mouton 2001). Through interpretivism, a researcher is further able to acquire a rich description of an individual or context, analyse the data for themes, and lastly make an elucidation or draw conclusions about its meaning theoretically or personally (Wolcott 1994; Creswell 2014). By implication, a researcher is able to shift data through a personal lens that is placed in a particular socio-political and historical moment (Creswell 2014). Through interpretivism, the authors were, therefore, able to acquire a deep understanding concerning the extent to which students may have felt empowered after viewing the film that used Afrofuturism. The interpretivist paradigm further assisted the researchers in ascertaining the extent to which the film that used Afrofuturism developed in the students the capacities to recognizing the need to disrupt the unequal power relations that exist in contemporary African society.

Data collection and analysis

Online focus groups were used to communicate to the sampled group of students and to help them to understand the purpose, nature and extent of the use of a film such as *Black Panther*. The discussions were around a film that employed Afrofuturism and the possibility of its enhancing their critical and reimagining capacities which could lead to their and others’ self-empowerment within the African context. The comments and views of students in the online focus groups were analysed, and categories developed, using the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), ATLAS.ti. We each coded all comments multiple times using the CAQDAS. Following the establishment of inter-rater reliability before coding all the discussions on the blogs according to particular themes, we coded and verified the data

separately. In instances of disagreement, we held discussions until we were able to agree on the particular themes each of us saw emerging.

Sampling

The sample population of this study was produced from a cohort of fourth-year Further Education and Training students for 2019 (*n* = 52) at a university in South Africa through purposive and deliberate sampling. The demographics of the population constituted mainly of Black African and Coloured students as racially categorized according to the South African Government for statistics purposes. The sample population indicating their willingness to participate in the project constituted a total number of thirteen focus groups. Each online focus group comprised of between five and seven students. The rationale for limiting the research to the fourth-year senior phase and further education and training students was because they had three years of teaching experience at distinct schools in the Western Cape. In the study, data were collected solely from the research participants who signed and submitted informed consent forms. The research participants were made aware in class that their participation was voluntary and private. Ethical clearance was acquired from the Faculty of Education’s Ethics Research Committee, and ethical considerations were observed throughout the study. The research participants’ names on the screenshots analysed were consequently replaced with acronyms to safeguard anonymity. In the online group blogs, students were required to answer the following question:

Do you feel that the film empowered you as an African student? Explain.

FINDINGS

In this section, we present the main themes that stemmed from the online discussion groups between the students, using the university’s Learning Management System. In response to the first research question: ‘In what specific ways were the students in the study empowered, or did they feel empowered, by a film that used Afrofuturism?’, we drew on the seminal thoughts of Womack (2013) and on Anderson and Jennings (2014). In response to the second research question: ‘How can Afrofuturism used in film assist students in recognizing the need to disrupt the power that works to maintain social hierarchies in society?’, we drew on understandings of Afrofuturism in line with a Habermasian (1987) account of critical theory. Thus, we have categorized the data according to three themes, and in response to the two research questions:

- embracing the African culture, identity, language and technology;
- disrupting unequal power relations in contemporary African society;
- challenging political and epistemic ideology.

Table 1: Percentages of each comment coded in response to whether the participants felt empowered by the film.

	No. of posts
Film empowered the student	50
Ambiguity concerning film empowering the student	1
Unanswered	1

We also present screenshots of the relevant online discussions from which the key insightful comments emanated (see Figures 1–10).

In terms of the participants' responses to the question in the online group blogs – Do you feel that the film empowered you as an African student? – an overwhelming number of participants ($n = 50$) confirmed that the film empowered them as depicted in Table 1. Only one participant ($n = 1$) confirmed that he felt a sense of ambiguity concerning being empowered by the film. Participant LJJ in Group 1 in Figure 1 instead related this sense of ambiguity as a result of the fictitious world portrayed through the film and the status quo in Africa.

Embracing the African culture, identity, language and technology

In response to the first research question, the results confirm that the students' sense of empowerment resonated with understandings of Afrofuturism in line with the seminal works of Womack (2013) and Anderson and Jennings (2014) that point to instances concerning culture, identity, language, gender equity and technology, and as shown in Table 2. In Figure 2, student AD makes an important claim about the need to affirm and appreciate one's culture and identity as an African. Student AD intimates 'natural beauty' which she describes as '[t]heir dark beautiful skin and the women's bald heads and natural hair styles'. The student's use of the word 'natural' by implication may infer how she perceives, or her image of, individuals in contemporary African society who may have replaced this natural tendency with a globalized or westernized culture or feminine identity 'unnatural' to the authentic African individual woman. However, the film played a paramount role in raising the consciousness of the participants (Anderson and Jennings 2014) by affirming for students AD and LPK the idea that one should embrace one's physical appearance, and that beauty is not tied to a grand or western or global standard, but is, in fact, fluid and unique. Student AD further claimed that it is exactly this acceptance and celebration of the self that should be advocated among learners, specifically female learners. In this sense, one could argue that Afrofuturism as an aesthetic practice (Womack 2013) served as a powerful catalyst in the minds of students AD and LPK as they re-imagined the contemporary notion of feminine beauty as African women. By further implication, one could infer that the film stimulated a double consciousness: affirmation of African beauty and, from this, a feeling of empowerment and pride of female learners. This pedagogical moment signifies the potential for transformative social action as advocated by Habermas (1987).

Student AD's comments are further vindicated by certain students across the other focus group discussions. For instance, in her response to how the film empowered her, student LPK in Group 7 in Figure 3 links the way she sees herself, and perhaps how others see her, with the need to look beyond the aesthetic beauty of having 'straight hair'. This is confirmed in her comment:

I do not have straight lined hair to be beautiful, I can wear my afro or my natural black hair and still be beautiful. It also made me to be more proud of my African Black culture.

(LPK)

The semiotic elements in the film appeared to make these students (AD in Figure 1 and LPK in Figure 3) aware of the need to embrace blackness by

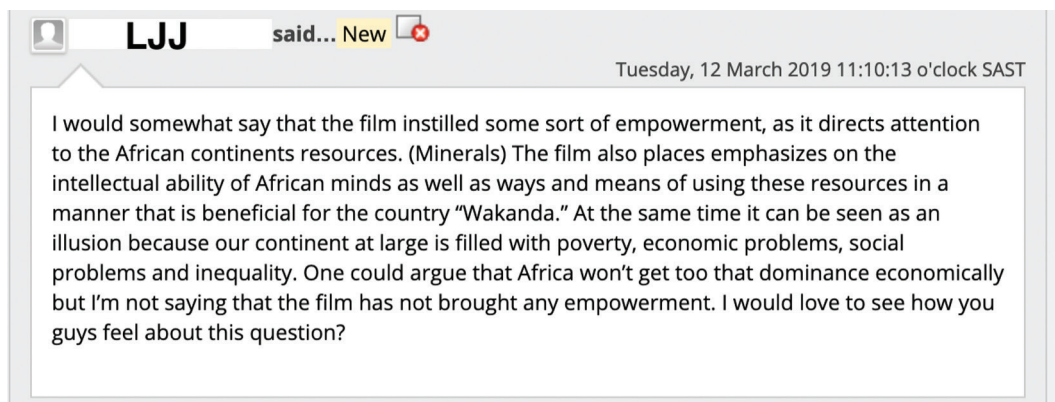


Figure 1: Student LJJ in Group 1.

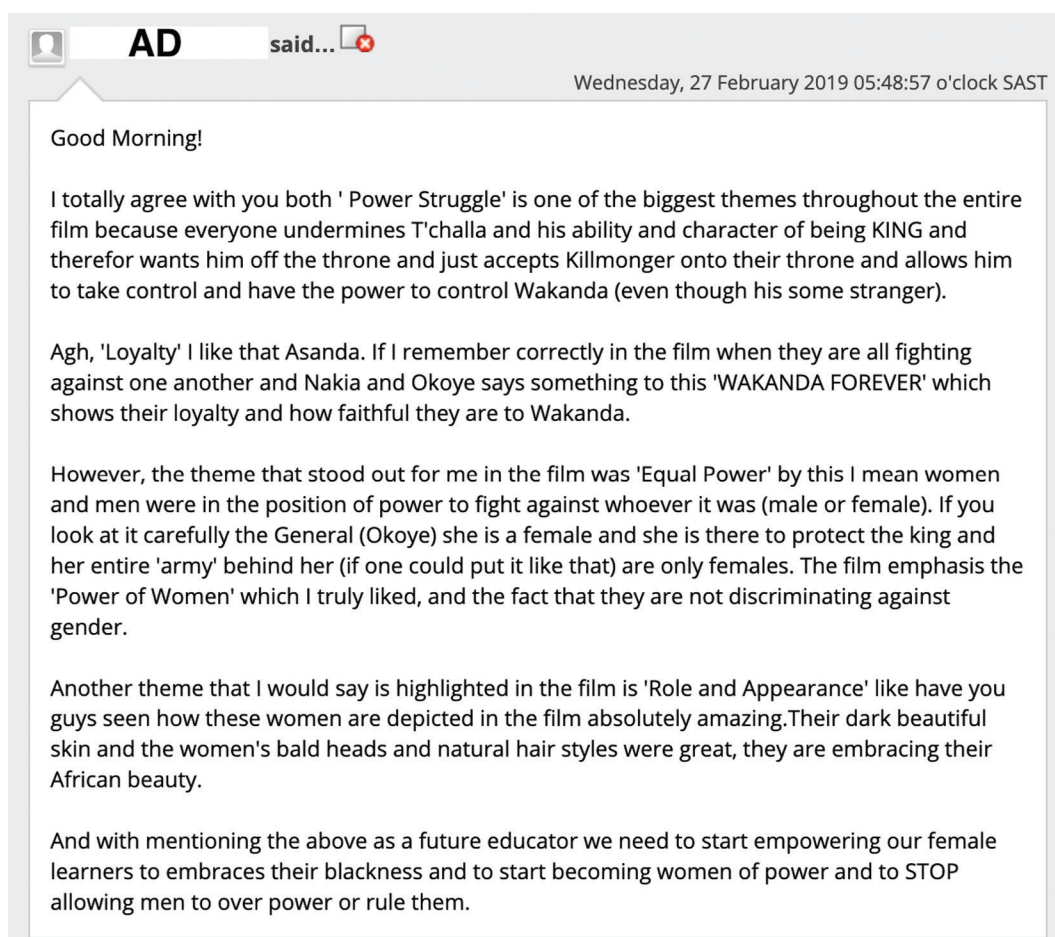


Figure 2: Student AD in Group 1.

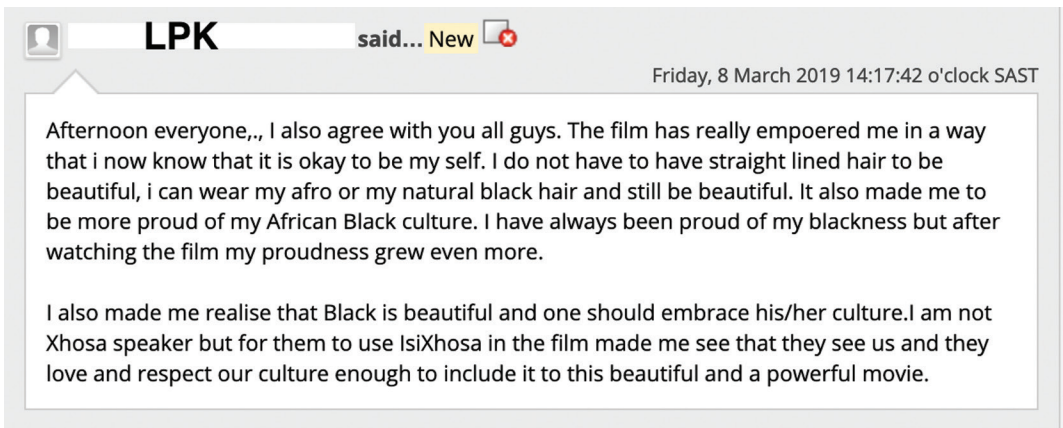


Figure 3: Student LPK in Group 7.

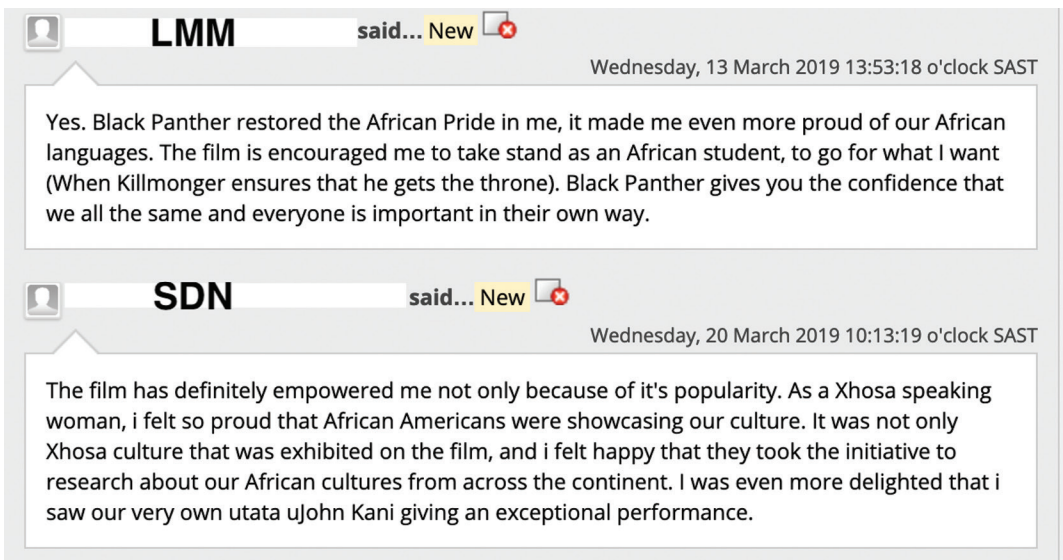


Figure 4: Students LMM and SDN in Group 5.

disrupting their own entrenched or internalized perceptions of how they are perceived by others. What these comments further confirm is these students' perception of a need to disrupt their assimilation and acculturation into western/European ideals while maintaining their strongly felt authentic identity within the African context.

Several students across the groups, as described in Table 1, further confirmed that they felt empowered as a result of the use of the film due to its Afrofuturism, which, for them, expressed/represented and affirmed what they saw as the authentic African culture ($n = 19$) and African languages ($n = 8$). These sentiments were shared among the sampled students LMM and SDN in Group 5 in Figure 4.

Table 2: Descriptions of each sense of empowerment.

	No. of posts
Culture	19
Identity	34
Language	8
Gender equity	20
Technology	7

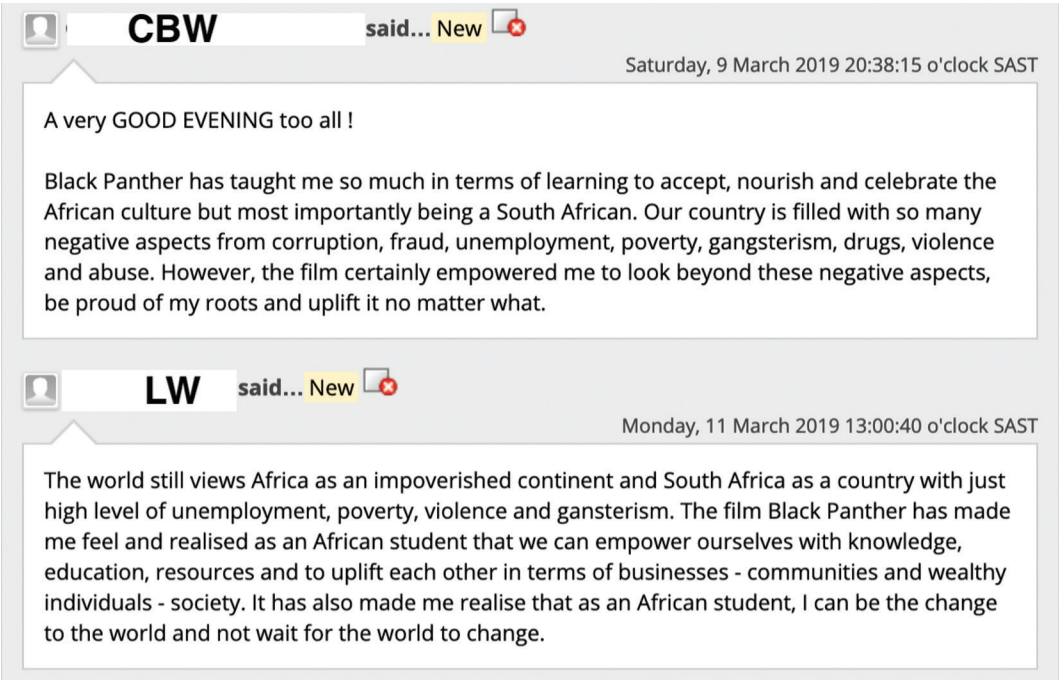


Figure 5: Students CBW and LW in Group 7.

It [the film] made me even more proud of our African languages. (LMM)

As a Xhosa speaking woman, I felt so proud that African Americans were showcasing our culture. It was not only Xhosa culture that was exhibited on the film, and I felt happy that they took the initiative to research about our African cultures across the continent. (SDN)

It is evident that the sense of empowerment of these selected students' (AD, LPK, LMM and SDN) was linked to the film's semiotic elements by affirming the African identity and culture through Afrofuturism.

While the film, through Afrofuturism, was considered by most participants to be effective in expressing an African language, certain students further acknowledged the importance of the African culture setting of the film in (re)imagining their identities, and in so doing, disrupting the status quo in the South African as well as the African context, as confirmed by students CBW and LW in Group 7:

Black Panther has taught me so much in terms of learning to accept, nourish, and celebrate the African culture, but most importantly being a South African. Our country is filled with so many negative aspects, from corruption, fraud, unemployment, poverty, gangsterism, drugs, violence, and abuse. However, the film certainly empowered me to look beyond these negative aspects be proud of my roots and uplift no matter what.
(CBW)

The film *Black Panther* has made me feel and realise as an African student that we can empower ourselves with knowledge, education, resources, and to uplift each other in terms of businesses – communities and wealthy individuals – society. It has also made me realise that as an African student, I can be the change to the world and not wait for the world to change.
(LW)

These findings further confirm Womack's (2013) claim concerning the role of Afrofuturism in encouraging experimentation amongst students and the process of (re)imagining of their identities he claimed as necessary in order not only to challenge, the external forces at play that plague society, but also encouraging in them an inclination to transform undesirable and demoralising/disempowering circumstances, starting with the self. In as much as Afrofuturism was found to support participating students in understanding what they might be against, it also revealed to them what they value, and how important it is to position themselves in a specific place, space and time.

The technology depicted in the film also played an important role among certain students ($n = 7$) in terms of the ways in which the students felt empowered. Although student GSP in Group 10 in Figure 6 acknowledged that Africa continues to follow and lag behind the developed world in terms of technology, it was welcoming to view the imagined potential Africans could be capable of, and fulfil.

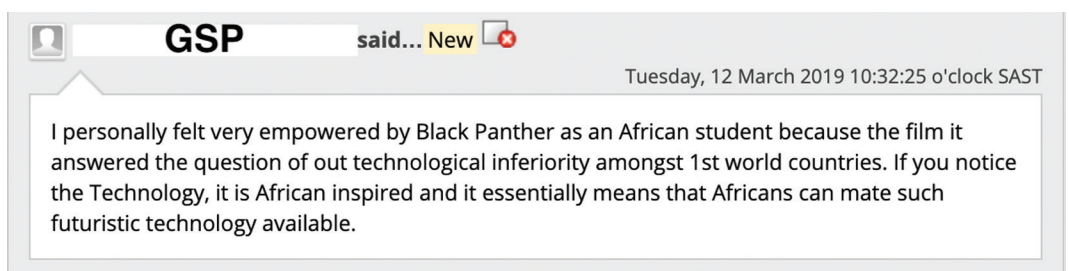


Figure 6: Student GSP in Group 10.

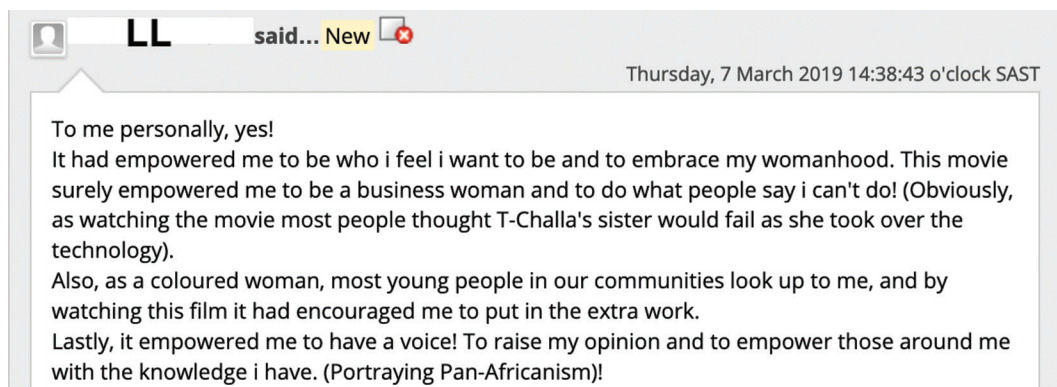


Figure 7: Student LL in Group 7.

Disrupting unequal power relations in contemporary African society

In response to the second research question, an interpretive analysis of the online discussions among the students in their respective focus groups suggests that the film *Black Panther* assisted several students in recognizing the need to disrupt unequal power relations in contemporary society in terms of gender inequity ($n = 20$). As shown in Figure 2, student AD (Figure 2) aptly states that “‘power struggle’ is one of the biggest themes throughout the entire film’. Deeper examination of student AD’s comments suggests further underlying themes she highlights within the context of power. Although, student AD starts off her comment by linking power to the physical control over the fictional land of Wakanda, the theme that resonated with her the most was that of equality in terms of gender: the physical and emotional capacities of women she saw as linked to their taking on different roles in the film. To student AD power can be disrupted when women are treated equally in society and the film, through the use of Afrofuturism in this way seemed to conscientize student AD in her comment:

we need to start empowering our female learners to embrace their blackness and to start becoming women of power, and to STOP allowing men to overpower or rule them.

(AD)

The fact that student AD places emphasis on the word ‘STOP’ by implication means that the way women are treated in her community or society is generally perceived as powerless in relation to the role of men. These sentiments are shared by student LL in Group 7 concerning the need to disrupt – or imagining the (possibility of) the disruption of – the status quo in terms of the role of women in contemporary society:

This movie surely empowered me to be a business woman and to do what people say I can’t do!

(LL)

The need to disrupt the unequal power relations that exist in society concerning the role of women is further vindicated by her (imagined) capacity to raise her voice in society:

[the film] empowered me to have a voice! To raise my opinion and to answer those around me with the knowledge I have [expressing Pan-Africanism].
(LL)

The role of the female characters further seemed to empower student LL in disrupting this stereotypical misconception as confirmed in her comment:

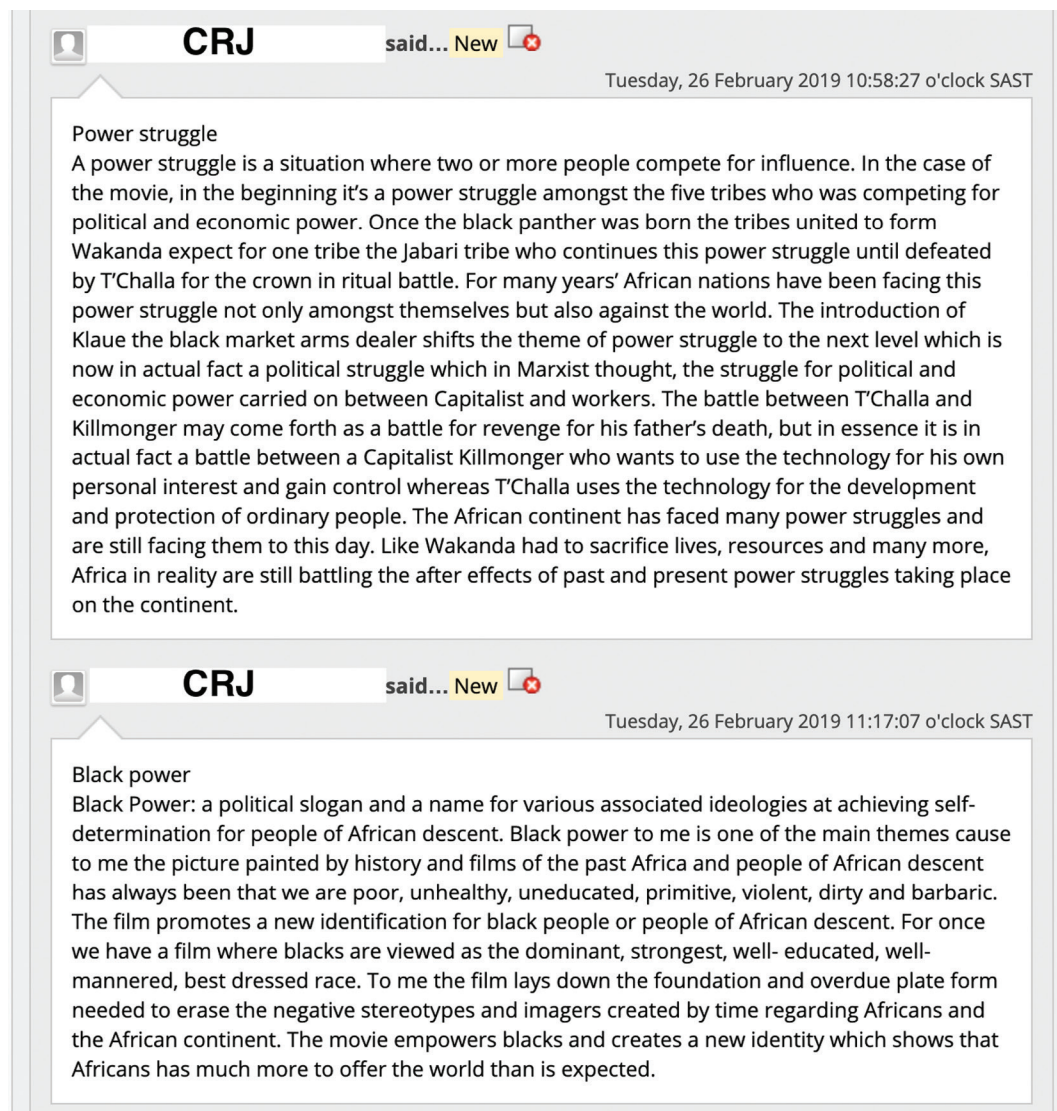
Obviously, as watching the movie most people thought T-Challa's sister would fail as she took over the technology.
(LL)

Her comment further vindicates resisting this technology-challenged stereotype of women. The capacity of the selected students to imagine their ability and intention to resist oppressive power in society, commensurate with their willingness to transform undesirable events in society suggests that the film, through Afrofuturism, enabled them to imagine emancipatory or transformative social action (Habermas 1987). In other words, it can be inferred that these students felt liberated by their exposure to the film to contest the various forms of prejudice that act against the fair distribution of roles in contemporary society, more specifically the role of women in certain positions in society. One could argue that these responses also exemplify leanings of African feminism. Chilisa (2012) claims that African feminism rejects dominant narratives, seeks awareness of specific situations, and stresses the power of agency, such that women theorize about their lived experiences to produce knowledge that is contextually relevant. We argue that it is such forms of knowledge production that should be promoted in higher education, and should be reflected in the university curriculum.

Challenging political and epistemic ideology

In response to the second research question, an analysis of the students' discussion found that certain students highlighted the need to challenge the prevailing/hegemonic political ideology. Student CRJ in Group 4 in Figure 8, like Student AD in Group 1 in Figure 2, sees the political power struggle between the various tribes in the film in relation to contemporary Africa. However, student CRJ further highlights the challenges that African nation states continue to be confronted with concerning political sovereignty. The student links his argument to thoughts concerning free market capitalism and Marxism. One could infer from the student's comment that globalization economic and foreign policies continue to place tremendous pressure on African nation states to conform to pro-capitalist ideologies as confirmed by his comments:

For many years African nations have been facing this power struggle not only amongst themselves but also against the world.
(CRJ)



CRJ said... New

Tuesday, 26 February 2019 10:58:27 o'clock SAST

Power struggle

A power struggle is a situation where two or more people compete for influence. In the case of the movie, in the beginning it's a power struggle amongst the five tribes who was competing for political and economic power. Once the black panther was born the tribes united to form Wakanda expect for one tribe the Jabari tribe who continues this power struggle until defeated by T'Challa for the crown in ritual battle. For many years' African nations have been facing this power struggle not only amongst themselves but also against the world. The introduction of Klaue the black market arms dealer shifts the theme of power struggle to the next level which is now in actual fact a political struggle which in Marxist thought, the struggle for political and economic power carried on between Capitalist and workers. The battle between T'Challa and Killmonger may come forth as a battle for revenge for his father's death, but in essence it is in actual fact a battle between a Capitalist Killmonger who wants to use the technology for his own personal interest and gain control whereas T'Challa uses the technology for the development and protection of ordinary people. The African continent has faced many power struggles and are still facing them to this day. Like Wakanda had to sacrifice lives, resources and many more, Africa in reality are still battling the after effects of past and present power struggles taking place on the continent.

CRJ said... New

Tuesday, 26 February 2019 11:17:07 o'clock SAST

Black power

Black Power: a political slogan and a name for various associated ideologies at achieving self-determination for people of African descent. Black power to me is one of the main themes cause to me the picture painted by history and films of the past Africa and people of African descent has always been that we are poor, unhealthy, uneducated, primitive, violent, dirty and barbaric. The film promotes a new identification for black people or people of African descent. For once we have a film where blacks are viewed as the dominant, strongest, well- educated, well-mannered, best dressed race. To me the film lays down the foundation and overdue plate form needed to erase the negative stereotypes and imagers created by time regarding Africans and the African continent. The movie empowers blacks and creates a new identity which shows that Africans has much more to offer the world than is expected.

Figure 8: Student CRJ in Group 4.

Although, student CRJ indicates an awareness of the continued power struggle that African nation states are faced with concerning ideology within the global environment, for him the lack of establishing one African community for this student further highlights how Africa continues to conform to globalization policies instead of developing one appropriate to the African context. Instead, continued infighting, plagued by corruption, maladministration and bureaucracy limits African nation states from transcending beyond current levels of growth. The authors' analysis of student CRJ's comments concerning political infighting across nation states sees him as suggesting that this undermines the essence of ubuntu. The fact that the student CRJ was able to reflect critically concerning the role of African nations is perhaps an indication that

the film, through Afrofuturism, assisted him in further unpacking and reflecting critically on the need to disrupt political and epistemic ideology and its continued influence on the African people. This is further confirmed by his comments:

For once we have a film where blacks are viewed as the dominant, strongest, well-educated, well mannered, best dressed race.

(CRJ)

To student CRJ, the film served as an impetus to debunk myths concerning African in the global context, this as a means of contesting dominance and privilege.

Several other students were conscientized as a result of the Afrofuturism in the film, expressing their views on the need to disrupt political and epistemic ideology. For instance, students LM and MSM, in their comments in Group 3 in Figure 9, acknowledged the negative/disempowering connotations surrounding colonialism. However, they also acknowledged the need to establish relationships within the global context instead of functioning in isolation:

I think the era of colonization came with some confusion, and also to doubt our indigenous knowledge we ought [sic] to look to the western countries to approve something; we can't take a stand on our own.

(LM)

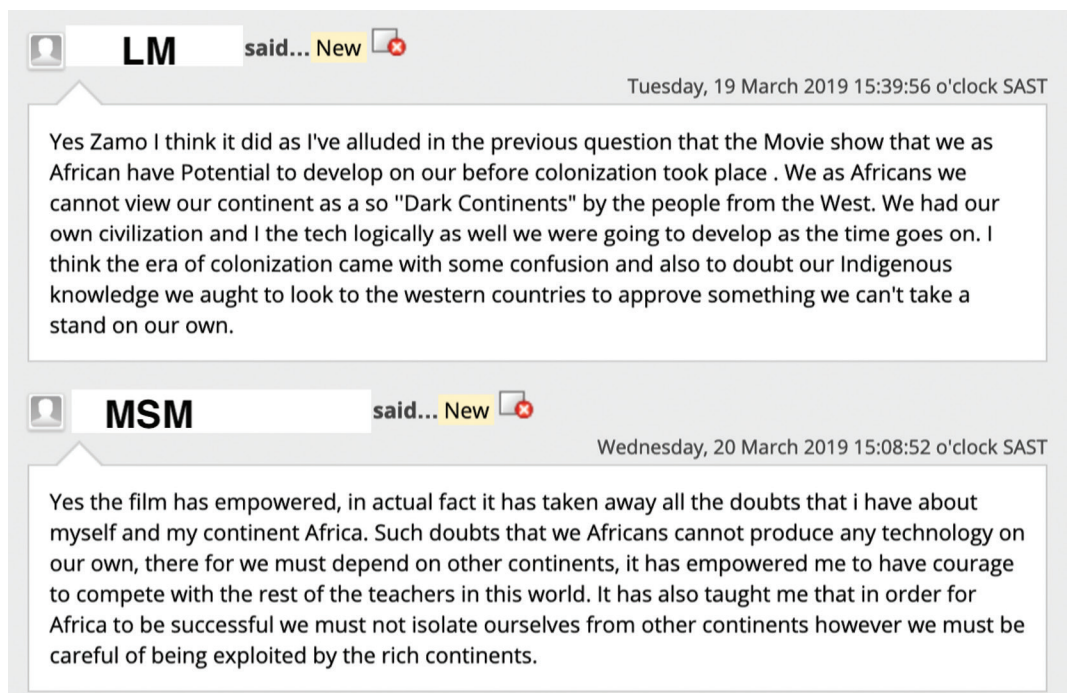


Figure 9: Students LM and MSM in Group 3.

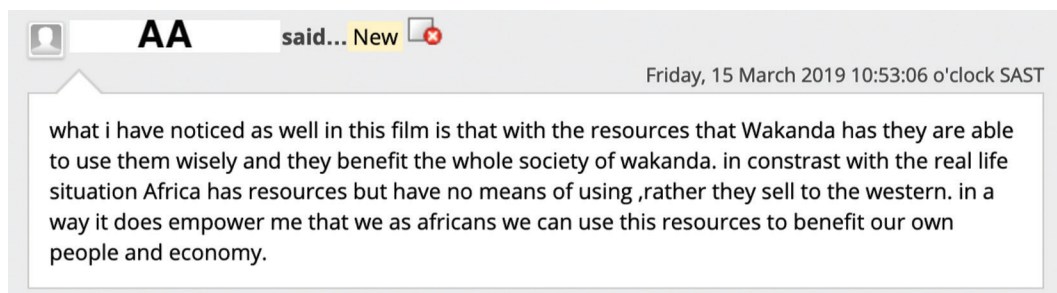


Figure 10: Student AA in Group 1.

in order for Africa to be successful we must not isolate ourselves from other continents; however we must be careful of being exploited by the rich continents.

(MSM)

Although these students argued for the need to disrupt political ideology, they also saw the need to establish a holistic and united community, one where African nation states are not undermined by global policies, and the film helped them imagine the possibility of this being realized. These sentiments were shared by student AA in Group 1 in Figure 10:

What I have noticed as well in this film is that with the resources that Wakanda has they are able to use them wisely, and they benefit the whole society of Wakanda. In contrast with the real life situation Africa has resources but have no means of using, rather they sell to the western. In a way it does empower me that we as Africans we can use this resources to benefit our own people and economy.

(AA)

Our analysis of these comments suggests that, for these students, decolonization does not necessarily result in the exclusion of the global context, but rather the need to place African knowledge and policies at the centre of the African context alongside western/European knowledge. These findings further seem to corroborate Womack's (2013) thoughts concerning the approach of Afrofuturism in the film towards encouraging experimentation, reimagining identities and activating the capabilities necessary for critical self-reflexivity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this article we aimed to demonstrate the ways in which a group of students were empowered as a result of their exposure to a film underpinned by Afrofuturism. The article further aimed to explore the possible ways in which Afrofuturism could assist students in both recognizing and imagining the need to disrupt hegemonic power structures and ideologies that work to maintain social hierarchies in contemporary African society. The students in the study clearly felt empowered by the film's (imaginary) demonstration of African capacity and empowerment through Afrofuturism through its representation of African culture, identity, language, technology, and, not least, African heroism and courage. Furthermore, we consider the study to have confirmed

that Afrofuturism assisted these students in recognizing the need to disrupt the unequal power relations that exist in contemporary society, and that have been internalized by Africans, more specifically those of gender inequity and the political and epistemic ideologies that work against the freedom of individuals in experiencing development.

We now offer our insights on the implications of this research on ongoing practices in higher education. First, as has been mentioned, it is important as a starting point to understand that advocating for a decolonized curriculum is not simply about discarding the 'old' curriculum and 'replacing' it with a new one. Instead we consider it necessary and desirable for university educators to create pedagogical moments for students where they can engage in deep discussions, which enable them to consciously and reflectively address past social injustices and to seek a renegotiation between westernized/Eurocentric knowledge systems and Indigenous values and Indigenous knowledge systems. In this study, we have demonstrated such pedagogical moments through the medium of film, underpinned by Afrofuturism. Students were afforded opportunities where they could reflect critically and (re)imagine their identities and their future within an African context. We argue that one of the greatest struggles to date in the process of decolonizing the higher education curriculum could be the persisting absence of such pedagogical encounters in which students are able to interrogate their identities, desires and lived experiences. The act of these students embracing the elements of Afrofuturism in the film, which included and represented African culture, language, identity and technology, provided significant meaning for them that might be less apparent in the explicit/received curriculum. Given the fact that the students in this study were able to (re)imagine their identities through Afrofuturism, a context in which a fictional African nation state functions as a utopia, might be considered as a possible starting point for them to experience praxis – where they would be able to, or imagine themselves as being able to, move from theoretical to practical and vice versa (Habermas 1987). Smith and Smith (2018) argue that praxicality is a key aspect in a transformative approach which involves the constant reflection on, thinking about and deliberating on Indigenous knowledge to bring about change. Hence, we would argue that it is imperative that as educators we should go beyond reproducing the status quo. Instead, we should start to critically question our actions (transformability): 'what are we doing?', 'why are we doing it?', 'in whose interest are we doing it?' (Smith and Smith 2018).

Second, it was evident from the results that certain students appreciated the need to establish a holistic, unified community while acknowledging the need to place African knowledge and policies at the centre of development in a global context. While the need to appreciate the African philosophical ethic of ubuntu 'I am, therefore, we are', has a strong connection with Afrofuturism, a higher education curriculum attuned to such an idea of cultivating one shared African community may be necessary for disrupting instances of xenophobia and gender-based violence. These continue to plague contemporary South African society by working against democratic values (Waghid 2019). Le Grange (2019) claims that challenges such as xenophobia are manifestations of a single crisis, the crisis of humanism. Drawing on the works of Nietzsche, Le Grange (2019) argues that the crisis of humanism could be ascribed to one of the great errors in western thought: the problem of transcendence which promotes the notion of two ontological substances of which the one transcends the other. He further argues that ubuntu is an active force

of currere, and entails a transition away from the 'I' towards 'we' (Le Grange 2019). We contend that ubuntu and Afrofuturism could together serve as active forces in attempts to decolonize the university curriculum. However, one should be cognizant of the fact that 'curriculum' holds different meanings for different people. Drawing on Pinar's (2012) work, Le Grange (2016) distinguishes between the explicit, the hidden and the null curriculum. The 'explicit' curriculum is what is provided and formally taught to the learners, such as the content, readings and assessments. The 'hidden' curriculum refers to that which is not formally taught. Lebeloane (2017) is of the view that coloniality is also enacted in the hidden curriculum, in the process of which the dominant values and cultures of the colonizers are taught informally and implicitly in such a way as to indoctrinate students to think and act in certain ways, and to be submissive. The 'null' curriculum refers to content knowledge which has been excluded in a formal curriculum (Le Grange 2016).

This implies that educators might consider adopting a pedagogy of disruption and discomfort for students to interrogate the hidden and null curricula, and to share their stories and lived experiences of this hidden curriculum. A higher education curriculum in which students are afforded spaces to (re)imagine contemporary society beyond the underlying social ills that permeate society may be necessary to develop plausible solutions towards transforming these ills for the betterment of society. We envisage students being better prepared for freeing their minds to enable them to recognize instances of dominance, privilege and oppression, in other words what could be described in wa Thiong'o's sense, as instances of a colonized mind. All of these work against the freedoms that ought to be enjoyed by individuals in a truly democratic society. Hence, Smith and Smith (2018) aver that if one wants to understand how power is manipulated on the subjugated, it is imperative that both students and educators challenge those hegemonic structures that confine Indigenous knowledge thinking through the way they design, interpret and implement the curriculum. They continue by stating that, in order to facilitate transformative teaching and learning in the space of decolonization, educators need to become autonomous thinkers and critically interrogate their own knowledge, beliefs and thinking that is not based on others' decisions; they need to challenge taken-for-granted ideologies to bring about social change (Smith and Smith 2018).

Third, the film continues to function as an emancipatory tool that works to position students in contexts that they are unfamiliar with. The need to decolonize the mind through the ideals of Afrofuturism was further advanced through the medium used in this study. While the film used served as an impetus towards driving the students towards a deeper exploration of the underlying elements of Afrofuturism, it was also necessary for students to experience the kind of emotional well-being that is perhaps often overlooked in educational encounters between university students and their lecturers. While the higher education curriculum in South Africa cannot of course exclude western knowledge, the integration of Afrofuturism in the existing curriculum might be a necessary step for students to embrace the ideals of being true to one's identity and origin while still recognizing the need for progress and economic development in a global context. Afrofuturism may be necessary for illuminating all students in racially diverse universities to the risks of dominant and/or hegemonic cultures and its adverse effects on those susceptible by it. Put more aptly, students from both African and western/European university contexts we infer may

be more adequately inclined to cultural openness by reimagining both their identities and contexts unfamiliar to them. Here, Oelofsen's (2015) notion of a 'hybrid identity' might be useful in understanding how Indigenous values, cultures, languages and knowledge could be integrated into westernized world-views to foster a humanizing pedagogy. Hence, it is crucial that educators shift the focus from entrenched and undeviating knowledge hierarchies and pedagogical practices towards the development of pedagogical experiences for students and for themselves (Le Grange 2019). We propose the adoption of what Smith and Smith (2018) call a self-reflective approach through which educators interrogate their own positionality and criticality as they deconstruct how power and privilege are manipulated and maintained over those colonized.

In conclusion, we draw attention to some of the limitations of the study. First, this study was primarily carried out among students at the university where one of the authors is based, and thus the results can obviously not be generalized. The authors, therefore, recommend a comparative study to investigate the nature and effects on students of Afrofuturism used in film among students at other universities from both developing and developed contexts. Second, although the majority of the students in this study felt empowered to imagine new identities and futures through the Afrofuturism in the film, they were not forthcoming in developing plausible solutions to address instances of social injustice in contemporary African society. Thus, we recommend a longitudinal study that may assist researchers in further exploring how Afrofuturism could assist students in not only reimagining, but in developing, practical solutions to address instances of violence that work against the ideals of a decolonized and democratized African society. Lastly, the study has once again highlighted the key role that university educators play as agents of change in giving a voice to the colonized and subjugated through the pedagogy and discourses they employ. These educators are also best positioned to propose pragmatic solutions for decolonizing the university curriculum and effective transformation.

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