



Tsholofelo (Mothusi), Matome.

mothusit@tut.ac.za

Tsholofelo has been a Visual Communications lecturer at the Tshwane University of Technology in Pretoria (South Africa) for the past 10 years. She has been teaching subjects such as African Design, Information Design, Illustration and Drawing. Her interest in Afrikan Identity stems from her own sociopolitical and educational upbringing that transcended into her questioning her own Identity as a Motswana and as an Afrikan. Her undergraduate degree as well as her research in writing her master's dissertation brought her to an understanding of the need to include more Afrikan content within the design curriculum. This includes designing projects that would foster students' interrogation of their own cultural identities or political history and intentionally instilling a sense of self-worth and cultural pride. Tsholofelo has recently enrolled at the University of Johannesburg pursuing her PhD in Design.

Afrika: Design, Change Mindsets, Educate and Shine

Tsholofelo (Mothusi), Matome

Faculty of Arts and Design, Tshwane University of Technology

Abstract

Afrika's²⁰ visual culture and its myriad of rich aesthetics offer designers much to draw from. Concomitantly, Afrika has always had to navigate through a multiplicity of identities. However, the latter is further complicated seeing as globalisation has contributed to various layers of identities that resonate with the individual and not so much (or even exclusively) for the advancement of the collective. Thus, this paper discusses the self-determination of Afrika with specific reference to South Africa's response to globalisation contexts and the Afrikan agenda. This paper also reflects how young Afrikan designers are unapologetic as regards their inherent Afrikan identity, including how South African (and Afrikan) design education should assimilate Afrikan contexts such as African cosmologies and the young Afrikan designers. The goal here is – and should be – to impart self-determination and cultural pride.

Keywords: *Afrikan design; Afrikan identity; Young Afrikan designers; Afrikan agenda; globalisation*

1. Introduction

²⁰ *I use the term Afrika as a conscious reminder to critically inspect and question the construction of Afrikan epistemology through languages, visual cultures, history and Afrikan identity. Thus, the use of the term Africa will be used in direct quotations and when referring to South Africa as a country.*

There is no doubt that Afrika's visual culture has vast, colourful arts and symbols that, over time, have come to be commodified. The everyday consumption of global cultural entities perpetuated by globalisation sees the continuous devaluing of Afrika's rich history and culture. Georghiou (2004:176) rightly states that "Globalisation is causing distances to shrink and knowledge and ideas to be shared in what can be characterised as a movement towards a 'borderless world' with a 'common culture'." Georghiou furthermore highlights how the effect of globalisation in Third World countries continues to suppress Cultural Identities. In Umeogu's (2013) paper titled "The Aftermath of Globalization on African Identity" it is suggested that globalisation's intentions have inversely resulted in 'the loss of cultural identities and heritage' and has perpetuated the socio-economical gap of a country such as Nigeria. When it comes to globalisation within an Afrikan context, cultural identity and contemporary socio-economic structures cannot be separated from Afrikan nations' colonial creators who continue to influence Afrikan cultures to this day.

Georghiou and Umeogu both reflect on cultural deterioration and the increase of ethnocentrism – the purported superiority of a specific culture as opposed to the inferiority of the 'other' (Georghiou, 2004; Hammond and Axelrod, 2006; Mbembe, 2016). For instance, America's cultural 'superiority' is overtly exposed to the world through digitisation with the use of varied media platforms; thus, the consumption of American products, trends, and inventions is merely a click away. On the other hand, Umeogu (2013:177) suggests that "people [should] slow-down in the consumption and

thirst for foreign products and life so as to salvage [their] culture, [their] identity, [their] pride". However, the concept of salvaging a culture can be construed as a fallacy, as culture is fluid, ever absorbing and discarding as it moves along. Culture's fluidity, thus, results in it being continuously shifting, and the question of (cultural) identity and authenticity is and remains ongoing (UNESCO, 2009). Within the context of previously colonised nations, salvaging of culture speaks to correcting the narrative that has helped perpetuate Imperialism, segregation, and apartheid education systems such as previously employed in South Africa (Letseka, 2012; Umeogu, 2013). In South Africa, this would result in Eurocentric approaches giving way to an Afrikan agenda.

2. Afrikan Agenda

The Afrikan agenda could be the reassertion of the Afrikan "organic epistemological centre" (Nyoni, 2019:2), contributed and disseminated through various media platforms, Afrikan intellectuals, Afrika's creative industry and through formal educational institutions (such as Universities). The hybridity of ideas should be mobilised to contribute to Afrika's advancement and to the glocalisation of Afrikan cultures. As a postcolonial concept, the term 'glocal' or glocalisation is defined as the merging of global and local culture. This concept revolves around how glocalisation cannot exist without local participation (Ashcroft, Gareth and Helen, 2013). The assimilation or the adaptation of global cultural identities into local cultural identities gives the foreign culture a localised touch (Tong and Cheung, 2011). For example, the Coca-Cola brand tailors its messages to the South African market, or the serving of "pap" (i.e.

porridge made from maizeflour) in South African-based Kentucky Fried Chicken (KFC) outlets. Even though glocalisation benefits the local economy, we should nonetheless remain mindful that international companies mostly own these products and services and as such capital flows out of Afrika.

Within the South African context, the transformation or assimilation of foreign goods and services for local consumptions also serves as a reminder that Southern Afrikan designers and marketers are catalysts in the glocalising of products and services. Southern Afrikan designers also perpetuate the altering of local contemporary cultures into absorbing a global – which is to say mostly an Americanised – culture. As a marketing concept, glocalisation is inspired by everyday human behaviour expressed through the adaption of local languages and local visual cultures (Erić, 2007).

Despite the absorption of global cultures, Ashcroft, Gareth and Helen (2013: 147) nonetheless found that the relationship between local and global communities is "marked by a far greater degree of self-determination". Over time, local cultures appropriated and adapted foreign products, thus assimilating them to the point of becoming a local brand – for example, the 'Three Cats' Da Gama textile fabrics also known as *Shweshwe/Seshoeshoe* (in Sesotho) or *Leteise* (in Setswana) or *Ujamani* (in isiXhosa) (Pheto-Moeti et al., 2017; Disele, Tyler and Power, 2011). The 'Three Cats' (indigo cotton fabric) originated in Germany and was introduced to South Africa by the missionaries but is now manufactured in South Africa. The assimilation and further hybridisation of products such as Shweshwe came about because "[amaXhosa] women responded to pressure to

dress in a European style, often choosing Shweshwe prints sewn in the current European fashion" (Farber, 2010:144) as the women initially wore animal skin. Pheto-Moeti, Riekert and Pelsler (2017:25) also suggest that young amaXhosa women saw that the "indigo gave them a blue hue that was beautiful on their skins" but the selection of the fabric could have also been due to the fact that the fabric was cheap and durable, on account of its original intended target market which was poor whites and Trek-Boers (Farber, 2010). Within the 20th and 21st century, the Shweshwe has evolved into a local brand that offers various fashionable patterned cotton fabrics, and it is culturally associated with modern traditional weddings locally. Furthermore, specific Shweshwe colours and patterns distinguish cultural groups. For instance, in wedding ceremonies such as Magadi (Setswana name for dowry negotiation), Basotho and Batswana women wear skirts of a specific blue or brown colour that visually locate their sub-group or clan.

The distinct ownership of Shweshwe fabrics, as shown by the localised use of specific colours and nicknames given to the Three Cats Da Gama textiles, underlines a sociopolitical undertone of self-determination and ownership to Southern Afrika's cultural heritage. This powerful ownership of the Shweshwe fabric pushes forth an Afrikan agenda rooted in the colonial past that can never be ignored or forgotten. That is why Afrika's push for self-preservation and self-determination forms part of the African Union Agenda 2063 and its Seven Aspirations (African Union Commission, 2015). The Agenda 2063's 5th Aspiration advocates for:

"An Africa with a strong cultural identity, common heritage, shared values and ethics: inculcating the spirit of Pan Africanism; tapping Africa's rich heritage and culture to ensure that the creative arts are major contributors to Africa's growth and transformation; and restoring and preserving Africa's cultural heritage, including its languages." (African Union, 2020).

In light of the above, the inevitable question of how many of Southern Afrika's young designers (not limited to fashion designers) know about or have been educated on Shweshwe fabric history, now came to the fore. And so did the question of how the assimilation of the patterns used on the fabrics have influenced Southern Afrika's visual culture.

3. Afrikan design education

Within the context of South African design education, design students navigate dual or multiple realities; for example, the school and home cultures force students to assume multiple personalities and use different languages in different social settings. Simultaneously, students try to understand foreign design principles and philosophers and understand or uphold Afrikan cultural value systems and languages. Yet some design students find little value in preserving their Afrikan cultures, but rather seek and often find familiarity in Western, Eurocentric, Manga and global views of what is constituted as sound design, thus reiterating Georghiou's (2004: 176) thoughts on globalisation's 'borderless world'.

In 2015-2016, conscientised students raised the drive for self-determination and self-preservation in movements such as

#Rhodesmustfall, #feesmustfall and the hair policy protest at South African universities and high schools. Movements such as #Rhodesmustfall tapped into postcolonial theories that played a role in planting the seeds for decolonisation and transformational activism. The aforementioned movements directed mirrors to the South African higher education system and forced changes on the curriculum and old institutional policies formulated during the apartheid era. It is worth noting that South Africa's design education was not excluded from the transformational and Decolonisation discourse.

South Africa's design education should never be contend with 'making things look pretty'. Afrikan design students should develop cultural consciousness that would allow them to question their socio-economical stance that form local, Afrikan and global perspectives. Thus, Afrikan designers and design education must equally interrogate the history of the Afrikan diaspora, Afrikan aesthetics and further develop an understanding of Afrika's Indigenous knowledge systems – this categorically includes complex discourse on Afrikan spirituality (Marumo and Chakale, 2018). Afrikan designers armed with such a plethora of knowledge serve as gatekeepers of Afrika's visual culture; they potentially can teach and change mindsets of the viewers or consumers of local products – and thus increasing Afrika's self-determination to a level of consciousness and an appreciation of Afrika's cultural identities.

The complexity of self-determination and cultural identity can position designers into identifying themselves through a specific genre or design philosophy. Magazines such as *Ijusi* and *Design*

Indaba assist Afrikan Designers or visual artists by providing platforms to showcase their work and design philosophies to not only Afrika, but the world. Over the years, the Design Indaba conference and its online counterpart have featured various Afrikan artists, artisans and designers who have made a meaningful contribution to Afrika's creative industry. As Design Indaba celebrates its 26th anniversary, it is also fitting to remember that the birth of Design Indaba "was one far bigger than design – one inspired by societal issues and intrinsically tied to the story of Africa" (Design Indaba, 2020). The Design Indaba's online magazine is also a tremendous archival tool for recording contemporary design trends that continue to change South Africa and Afrika's creative economies as it is also an indicator of Afrikan and global design trends.

Over the years and in addition to the Design Indaba, social media platforms such as Instagram and Behance have given young Afrikan designers a platform to express their views on topics such as Afrikan identity and other contemporary sociopolitical constructs. Young Afrikan designers such as Osmond Tshuma, Zana Masombuka, SsanyuSematimba, Karabo Poppy Moletsane, Karo Akpokiere, SonwaboValashiya, Zana Masombuka and MasonwabeNtloko are unapologetic about their conscious assertion of their Afrikanness through their work or in how they see Afrika. For instance, Moletsane states that she is "inspired by the visual aesthetic of Africa, both contemporary and traditional" and further notes that "[our] aesthetic has a long rich heritage rooted in constant innovation and hybridity" (Moletsane, 2013).

On the other hand, these young Afrikan designers also reflect steadfastness in their identity and on how one cannot ignore the fact that Afrikan design is political. Afrikan design should not accept to be labelled as the exotic, according to Masombuka "Africans need to interpret their history themselves and seek to reinvent Africa according to their own terms" (Design Indaba, 2019), thus reiterating Umeogu's stance. Young Afrikan designers are catalysts to bridging the knowledge gap in teaching Afrikan designers to first and foremost valuing themselves as well as their diverse cultures. Ntloko states that, "The main reason we as the youth don't know much about our culture is the way it's being taught to us, so I came up with a way to teach my peers in a way they will understand, through art and social media" (in Gadgil, 2018).

Due to culture's fluidity, continuous radical shift in community ideology will always be present, but the instilling of cultural pride, Afrikan values and norms must be attempted through any and all means available. Afrikan design should continuously interrogate our value systems and how we fit into this world. Within the context of South African design education, a concerted and deliberate effort to include relevant Afrikan designs, cosmologies, philosophies and even Afrikan folktales and proverbs in the design students' educational experience will significantly advance efforts towards a better appreciation of Afrikan aesthetics, Afrikan culture and the concept of self. According to Nyoni (2019:6), "An African intellectual should promote Afrocentric developmental agendas and not look to the West to proffer solutions for African challenges." In so doing, they are contributing to the ongoing debates on 'decolonising of the

mind' (Ngugi wa Thiong'o, 1998; Kgatla, 2018) or towards 'de-caging the mind' (Nyoni, 2019).

4. Conclusion

The challenges brought by living in a global village are that it necessitates that we demonstrate tolerance for and understand other cultures. However, it does not mean that value must only be placed on outside influences brought about by globalisation and colonial past; the unlearning of the colonial and Eurocentric brainwashing has to be dismantled as it will forever overshadow Afrika's glory. Thus, glocalisation can to a degree make us value our own cultures.

The creative industry should celebrate the new ever-increasing number of conscientised young Afrikan designers coming into the mainstream media. The young designers unapologetically celebrate their Afrikan identities and whilst navigating global acceptance. I advocate that South Africa's design education needs to develop more critically conscious designers who can navigate the intersectionality of globalisation and the Afrikan Agenda. Afrika, let us design with a purpose; let us promote African pride, change mindsets and educate future generations on the value of knowing thyself.

References:

- African Union (2020) "Our Aspirations for the Africa We Want." African Union. 2020. <https://au.int/agenda2063/aspirations>.**
- African Union Commission (2015) Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.**
- Ashcroft, B, Griffiths, G and Tiffin, H (2013) Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts, Vol. 53, Third Edition. Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling. Vol. 53. London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>.**
- Design Indaba (2019) "Zana Masombuka on Ndebele Superhero as a Process of Reimagination | Design Indaba." Design Indaba. November 26, 2019. <https://www.designindaba.com/articles/creative-work/zana-masombuka-ndebele-superhero-process-reimagination>.**
- (2020) "History | Design Indaba." Design Indaba. 2020. <https://www.designindaba.com/about-us/history>.**
- Disele, P L P, Tyler, D J, and Power, E J (2011) "Conserving and Sustaining Culture Through Traditional Dress." Journal of Social Development in Africa 26 (1): 15–45. <https://doi.org/10.4314/jsda.v26i1.68499>.**
- Erić, Z (2007) "Glocalisation, Art Exhibitions and the Balkans." Third Text 21 (2): 207–10. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820701273547>.**
- Farber, L (2010) "Africanising Hybridity? Toward an Afropolitan Aesthetic in Contemporary South African Fashion Design." Critical Arts: A Journal of South-North Cultural Studies 24 (1): 128–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02560040903509234>.**
- Gadgil, S (2018) "Two Emerging Illustrators from South Africa – Creative Review." Centaur Media Plc. March 16, 2018. <https://www.creativereview.co.uk/two-emerging-illustrators->**

south-africa-sonwabo-valashiya-masonwabe-ntloko/.

Georghiou, C (2004) "The Impact of Globalisation on Cultural Diversity in World Politics." *Journal for Contemporary History* 29 (14): 170–83.

<https://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/sabinet/contemp/2004/00000029/00000001/art00010>.

Hammond, R A and Axelrod, R (2006) "The Evolution of Ethnocentrism." *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 50 (6): 926–36. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002706293470>.

Kgatla, T (2018) "The Decolonisation of the Mind and Black Consciousness Community Projects by the Limpopo Council of Churches." *Missionalia* 46 (1): 146–62. <https://doi.org/10.7832/46-1-270>.

Letseka, M (2012) "In Defence of Ubuntu." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 31 (1): 47–60. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-011-9267-2>.

Marumo, P O and Chakale V C (2018) "Understanding African Philosophy and African Spirituality: Challenges and Prospects." *Gender & Behaviour*, no. 2 March: 11695–704.

Mbembe, J A (2016) "Decolonizing the University: New Directions." *Arts and Humanities in Higher Education* 15 (1): 29–45. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474022215618513>.

Moletsane, K P (2013) "Karabo Poppy Moletsane." *Behance*. 2013. https://www.behance.net/Karabo_Poppy/info.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o. 1998. "Decolonising the Mind." *Diogenes* 46 (184): 101–4. <https://doi.org/10.1177/039219219804618409>.

Nyoni, J (2019) "Transformation in Higher Education Affiliation." <https://doi.org/10.4102/the.v4i0.69>.

Pheto-Moeti, B, Riekert, D M, Pelsaer A J, -Mrs D M Riekert, and -Prof. A J

- Pelser (2017) "Perceptions of Seshoeshoe Fabric, Naming and Meanings of Motifs on Fabric." *Journal of Consumer Sciences, Special Edition Diversifying Clothing Research in Southern Africa* 2: 24–39.**
- Tong, H K and Cheung, L H (2011) "Cultural Identity and Language: A Proposed Framework for Cultural Globalisation and Glocalisation." *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 32 (1): 55–69. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2010.527344>.**
- Umeogu, B (2013) "The Aftermath of Globalization on African Identity." *Open Journal of Philosophy* 3 (1A): 174–77. <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.4236/ojpp.2013.31A029>.**
- UNESCO (2009) "Towards Sustainable Strategies for Creative Tourism. *Tourism Discussion Report of the Planning Meeting for 2008 International Conference on Creative Tourism*" https://www.academia.edu/30641094/Towards_Sustainable_Strategies_for_Creative_Tourism_Discussion_Report_of_the_Planning_Meeting_for_2008_International_Conference_on_Creative_Tourism**