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Inkosi Masondo: a photographic investigation into identity,
religion, representation and cultural heritage within the Black
South African community

Visual Studies 4

Event 7

Hons Visual Communication

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01 November 2024

The logo is a dark green, horizontally-oriented rectangle with a slight 3D effect, featuring the text 'STELLENBOSCH ACADEMY' in a bold, white, sans-serif font, with 'OF DESIGN & PHOTOGRAPHY' in a smaller, white, sans-serif font directly below it.

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the complex relationship between fashion, cultural heritage and black South African identity. The study investigates the historical legacy of colonialism which suppressed cultures, belief systems and indigenous traditional attire. The thesis is informed by literature on black consciousness (SAHO, n.d.), contemporary black fashion (Ewa, 2022), self-representation (Hall, 1997) and black identity within South Africa (McKinney 2020). The visual analysis of contemporary South African fashion icons Trevor Stuurman and Thebe Magugu, as well as the fine art photography of Kudzanai Chiurai, provides insights into narrative strategies to attire through self-representation. The project outcome is a series of photographs entitled Inkosi Masondo which explores my own identity and provides insight into the experience of navigating multiple, and at time, conflicting identities.

Keywords: photography, black identity, visual representation, cultural heritage, South Africa

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Glossary

<u>Term</u>	<u>Definition</u>
Afrofuturism	a style of literature, music, art, etc. that combines science-fiction elements (= stories or ideas about an imagined future) with ideas from the culture and history of Africa and African people
Multi-culturalism	the belief that different cultures within a society should all be given importance
Identity	a person's name and other facts about who they are.
Religion	the belief in and worship of a god or gods, or any such system of belief and worship.
Afrocentric	giving central importance to the culture and history of Africa and people from Africa
Culture	the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time
Representation	a person or organization that speaks, acts, or is present officially for someone else.
Symbols	a sign, shape, or object that is used to represent something else.
Bible	(a copy of) the holy book of the Christian religion consisting of the Old and New Testaments, or the holy book of the Jewish religion consisting of the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings
Masks	a covering for all or part of the face that protects, hides, or decorates the person wearing it.
Christianity	a religion based on belief in God and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, and on the Bible.
Contemporary Fashion	is a clothing style that is happening now but happened before. Fashion brands are looking to choose styles that are evergreen and still stand out(Contributor, 2024)
Ancestry	a person related to you who lived a long time ago.
Beliefs	the feeling of being certain that something exists or is true. (Cambridge, 2024)

Chapter One: Introduction

Growing up in a multi-cultural home, my mom taught me much about my identity, my roots and traditions. During this time, I also grew up in a church and Christianity became my new found reality but my mother stepped in early to hold conversations about my relationship with the church and South African history to develop the knowledge of who I am, in culture and spirit. As many challenged my views and perspectives, I have stood firm on many occasions on what is wrong, right and what my beliefs should be. This experience has led me to create a body of work that expresses my conflicting identity and religious beliefs.

My background story is the foundation of this thesis. For years I have struggled with my identity in a society where as Black South Africans we align our values with Western values. My resistance to not abide by the rules of society has led me to a place where I questioned much of who I am, where I come from and what I stand for. Being born in a multi-cultural home has allowed me to carry many cultures (Swati, Sotho, Ndebele, Pedi, Shangaan and Tswana). This has led to a struggle of not being able to identify who I am and how to present myself. Religion was always an important subject in my household with teachings about the relationship with God and my Ancestors. Religion indirectly conflicted with my cultural values as some aspects were deemed unethical to practice.

The thesis focuses on investigating my conflicting cultural identity and religion, since I was raised under the banner of western and traditional manners. The concepts of multiculturalism, identity, representation, religion, and contemporary fashion inform the thesis as I seek to understand my identity as a Black South African in a western society with traditional values. The research on this concept guides my body of work as I explore the relationship of who I am, who I am meant to be, and where I stand with my values in relation to culture and religion.

1.1 Chapter Overview

The Literature Review chapter delves into studying the concepts to examine and dissect a more in depth understanding. Black Consciousness founded by Steve Biko in 1960s and 70s provides an important starting point for this thesis. Black Consciousness provided a voice for blacks to express views against apartheid, and a broader struggle for freedom and equality in South Africa (Mandakovic, n.a). The conflicting relationship between culture and religion stems from colonialism and the apartheid regime that caused a national migration and dispersed cultures with traditions (Blakemore, 2019).

Stuart Hall's research on representation and identity (1997) provides an important foundation in understanding the nature of representation and identity. Blakemore, Arabindan-Kesson, Bauman and Mgwebi Snail will be closely looked at for the literature review.

The visual analysis in Chapter Three investigates artists whose work and theories align with my creative project and research. Thebe Magugu, Trevor Stuurman and Kudzanai Chiurai are examined to discuss their relationship to my research concepts of representation, multiculturalism and identity. Their work informs my research into context, concepts and narrative in creative work. Thebe Magugu's selected work is titled *Lobola*(2024) and is based on the century-old practice of marriage within black South African cultures and celebrates these cultural customs and heritage. . Trevor Stuurman's work *Home*(n.a) attracts my curiosity in relation to the way he represents his context and finding the sense of home in cultures across Africa. Trevor Stuurman uses contemporary black fashion to develop a concept of Afrofuturism. Kudzanai Chiurai investigates the contexts of politics and social issues that were led by colonialism effects. I am curious about Chiurai's boldness and not playing safe when speaking out about colonialism in his art.

Chapter Four reflects on the links between the research and the making of the creative body of work.

The Chapter Five concludes my thoughts and opinions on the thesis and summarises the key points and theories from the research of the thesis.

1.2 Research Question

1. How can the medium of photography contribute to the ongoing dialogue about identity, religion, representation and cultural heritage within the Black South African community?

Sub questions:

2. In what ways has colonialism disrupted Black South African cultures, and caused national migration leading to cultural mixtures?
3. , How does attire convey the rich cultural legacy of black South African identity?

1.3 Introduction

This thesis explores the complexities of cultural identity and theological conflict in post-colonial South Africa, drawing from personal experiences of being raised in a multi-cultural home. I examine how the historical effects of colonialism through my body of work on how migration, religious conversion, and cultural disruption have shaped a conflicted sense of self. By integrating fashion, performance, and visual language, the body of work engages with themes of identity, representation, and resistance. Grounded in theories by scholars like Stuart Hall, Molefi Asante, and Lauren Leve, the project reflects on the tension between inherited traditions and the imposition of Western religious and cultural systems. Through a performative series of photographs that will be analysed and discussed.

The creative project statement is as followed: The project delves into my multicultural identity and religious conflict as a Black South African raised in a post-colonial society. Colonialism led to migration and religious and cultural conflict, that developed into a complex tapestry of identities. With indigenous fashion as a visual language, I express this conflict by applying an expressive and performative element to convey my journey. The project reflects the ongoing battle and challenges I face and showcases my unique story and self-discovery.

The research of the thesis focused on the conflicting relationship between my culture and identity. I aim to develop a manner to understand the subject of representation on Identity and culture to explore more concepts under the banner of what representation means. The research aims to assess the literature, visual analysis and qualitative analysis to construct a relationship on what my Identity is, on who I am and what I desire to be, battling the conflicted Identity. The goal of the thesis is to express my cultural and religious conflict growing up till present time to display how the significant of my Identity, can enlighten my nearly two-decade struggle on the Identity of being myself as a Black South African with what society wants us to be and the colonial effects on the complex tapestry of my identity.

Chapter Two: Context and Theory (Literature Review)

This chapter examines the various theories that will be used to inform my research. These include Stuart Hall's *Representation Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (1997) Additionally Karen Alexander's journal article on representation (1994) will be explored as they investigate representation of one self. Steve Biko's journals on Black Consciousness and Ranwedzi Nengwekhulu's research on the meaning of black consciousness in the struggle for liberation in south Africa will be explored as this delves into black identity and history of Black South Africans. Oluwadara Fakunle's *Colonialism and Transformations in Yoruba Traditional Attires : The Lagos Experience* (n.a) and the article by Lara Eviota titled *The Cultural Impact of Colonialism: From Production to Disposal* (2023) will be included to study the colonialism effects on culture and fashion in Africa.

As a Black South African, my cultural identity is a complex and evolving narrative shaped by the historical effects of colonialism, migration, and religious conflict. The literature that will be consulted in this study reflects these layered experiences. The impact of colonial rule in South Africa fragmented not only the land but also the cultural and spiritual foundations that form black heritage which will be explored further on. The effect of colonialism created a complex literature tapestry of identities, often in conflict with one another. The research in the literature review relating to my identity and the representation of my culture will inform the understanding of my who I am. This guides the large part of the research to gain insights on how colonialism in South Africa has led to the displacement of cultures and complex identities for Black South African.

My background of being born culturally diverse and with a mother who is socially aware provided a unique upbringing of a traditional and western home with appreciation of identity and understanding of current times. My background narrative will influence the research to investigate how my narrative can be applied in the context of visual language to portray the harsh discourse of the post-colonial society I exist in.

The review seeks to marry fashion and aesthetics with traditional attire, to develop a powerful tool for a cultural affirmation and a celebration of black identity. Studying the evolution in black South African attire under colonial rule, the review aims to display how contemporary black fashion not only celebrates and reinterprets but serves as a form of resistance against lingering colonial narratives and a testament to the enduring strength of black cultural identity. Ultimately, this exploration will focus on the transformative power of contemporary black fashion in articulating and the celebration of black resilience, providing a vital avenue of storytelling, empowerment, and cultural resilience.

2.1 Theories of Representation

According to Stuart Hall (1997:24) representation is often mediated through language and symbolic systems, and the representation of these meanings can be understood through various theoretical frameworks. Hall is a pivotal figure in cultural studies and proposed a model of representation that facilitates the analysis of how pictures and words generate meaning. Hall delineates three overarching methodologies for comprehending the representation of meaning: the reflective, the purposeful, and the constructionist (or constructivist) approach. Each of these efforts seeks to elucidate the origins of meaning and the methods by which we perceive the "true" significance of a picture or phrase (Hall, 1997).

The purposeful approach claims that meaning in representation is produced by the maker (Hall 1997: 25). This indicates that the artist or speaker projects their intended meaning onto the item or picture (Hall 1997: 25). This method emphasises the individual's involvement in meaning-making, acknowledging that personal expression and distinct views shape representation. Stuart Hall blocks this approach by arguing that meaning cannot be exclusively dictated by the artist's aim. Language, whether spoken or visual, is a social system regulated by rules and norms. In the absence of these communal networks, communication would collapse, and representations would diminish to private languages, unintelligible to others (Hall, 1997).

Stuart Hall (1997: 25) supports a more sophisticated and nuanced constructionist approach. It acknowledges that meaning is not only dictated by the external environment or the creator. Meaning is generated by the interplay of signs and symbols within a cultural framework. A picture of a rose conveys meaning not by directly replicating a genuine rose or by the artist's assertion, but by a shared system of signals among viewers and artists that links the rose to certain concepts, feelings, or symbols—such as love or beauty (Hall, 1997).

Hall's model suggests that visual analysis should focus on how representation function within larger cultural and symbolic systems. Images are not merely reflections of reality nor simply vehicles for the artist's personal meanings. Instead, they are part of a complex system of signs that construct meaning through shared cultural understandings, with representation itself being a form of social communication (Hall, 1997).

2.2 Self-representation, Identity, and Culture

According to Stuart Hall (1997) representation in people conveys meaning about the world through signs, imagery and words. This guides the act of creating and spreading significance within a community, in addition to just describing or defining something. Representation is how people within specific cultures create and communicate meaning. Symbols are the complex processes by which individuals understand the world and convey their information to others. Symbols extend beyond communication of worldly knowledge. Culture norms, beliefs, and perceptions are shaped in part by symbols. There is a lot of complexity involved in utilising symbols to express important ideas. Context, interpretation, and cultural background may all affect the meaning that is taken from representation. Various cultural representations of the same idea may have different impacts on people's perceptions, attitudes and actions (Hall, 1997).

Karen Alexander (1994:265) research British racial identity and states that the visual depiction of Black people in cultural media often exhibits a detrimental portrayal, clearly demonstrating the historical and enduring presence of racism within white British society. This depiction may be seen from various perspectives: throughout history the portrayal of Black people in visual culture has spanned from their enslavement and objectification to their relegation (Alexander, 1994). These depictions have played a role in a well-established practice of racism, highlighting and strengthening of prejudiced beliefs and societal systems. The main problem with representation in visual media is that it propagates stereotypes and negative portrayals instead of offering a nuanced and precise picture of Black communities. Even attempts to depict the multiculturalism of society can prove inadequate, since they may inadvertently perpetuate existing prejudices and overlook the wide range of variety among Black British communities (Alexander 1994). While Alexander focuses on the British context, this analysis of the representation Black people in the media can be applied more broadly to global media since it persists in our contemporary media.

Helen Spencer Oetay (2012:24) states that culture as a notion is fundamentally social and cannot exist in a vacuum. It is shared by at least one or more persons within a civilization, differentiating it from unique opinions or actions of lonely individuals. This study examines the dynamic and diverse characteristics of culture, comparing conventional viewpoints with modern perspectives that highlight its complex and diverse nature. In the past, the social sciences, especially in areas like international relations and conflict resolution, have seen culture as a fixed and uniform thing. These previous views often associated culture with quasikinship and groupings such as tribes,

ethnic groups, and countries, portraying it as a unified, cohesive, and interconnected system. The concept of culture proposes that culture comprises a collection of enduring and distinct patterns that remain largely stable within certain social groupings.

Contemporary ideas emphasise the significance of connecting culture to people, indicating that culture is not primarily based on rigid patterns but rather on social and cognitive processes. This strategy broadens the range of cultural references to include various social groups beyond conventional familial connections. These categorizations may be established according to one's profession, employment, social status, religion, or geographical location, suggesting that people can own numerous cultural identities concurrently (Oetay 2012).

Lauren Leve (2011:513) discusses how identity has emerged as a crucial guiding element in modern social existence, exerting a substantial impact on both individual conduct and institutional procedures. With further investigation on the complex and diverse nature of identity, its impact on society, and its significance in the current global landscape. The power of Identity leads to influential contemporary culture, seen by the significant amount of work people dedicate to asserting, nurturing, displaying, or grieving over their identities. This emphasis on identification encompasses a wide range of categories, such as ethnic, national, religious, racial, Indigenous, sexual, and other socially identifiable groupings. The focus placed on identity by both people and organisations highlights its significance as a current social reality (Leve, 2011).

2.3 Contemporary Black Fashion versus Traditional Attire

According to the authors Arabindan-Kesson *et al* (2015) describe contemporary black fashion as a diverse investigation of African fashion. Their theory dives deep into the current African fashion industry, including viewpoints from luxury fashion and international designers. With the inclusion of an in-depth case study that focuses on specific fashion choices and the local networks involved in production and consumption. names of authors examine the marriage between African fashion and its worldly context, offering added information that sways the perspectives that challenge traditional approaches to understanding African design. It considers not only artistic and technological progress, but also production techniques and the impact of global media on local perspectives of modernity.

This study examines the intricate processes that impacts the movement of people, the creative endeavours, and dress throughout several continents. Moreover, it provides a historical view on Africa's involvement in worldwide networks, demonstrating how Africans have actively participated in global commerce and consumption, adapting to evolving tastes, fashions, and materials. The study explores the complex networks and theoretical elements that underpin the fashion and attire industry in Africa and its diaspora by exploring Africa's historical relationship with global fashion trends. (Arabindan-Kesson *et al*. 2015)

Disele *et al* (2011:16) examine the marriage between clothing and identity. The article highlights how people from many ethnic groups often choose clothing that fits their own sense of self. In social settings, the writers observe that individuals use their clothes to express their identities, attitudes, habits, and views. African communities believe that identity defining characteristics of clothing are malleable and subject to change in reaction to a variety of variables, including materials, technology, economy, social issues, and belief systems. Moreover, things could change when certain aspects of the clothing lose their uniqueness. The paragraph suggests in conclusion that changes in social, economic, and cultural conditions cause the importance of clothes in a culture to fluctuate throughout time. (Disele *et al* 2011)

2.4 Representation in Black Identity

According to McKinney, (2020:5) the concept of Black intersects with the realm of psychology. This study looks on the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) created by Sellers, Rowley, Chavous, Shelton, and Smith, which offers a thorough framework for comprehending the many aspects of Black identity. The MMRI is based on identity theory and provides a sophisticated method for assessing racial identification in Black individuals. The study determines three enduring aspects of racial identity: centrality, ideology, and esteem. Sellers *et al* created the Multidimensional Inventory of Black Identity (MIBI) to evaluate these aspects. The MIBI is a psychometric instrument that assesses the enduring aspects of racial identity, offering a systematic approach to understanding how Black persons perceive and incorporate their racial identity into their self-concept (McKinney 2020).

An Afro metrics Poll on Self Definition conducted in February 2013 with Black people aimed to explore how black people identified as being black. Significant insights into the community's perspectives on their racial identity were uncovered via participant responses to the query "What is the significance of being African American/Black to you? The responses yielded six major themes, among which "Struggle and Resilience" was the most often stated by 25% of the participants. (McDougal and Jayawardene 2013)

This study highlights historical as well as current obstacles in the continuous struggle. Themes were "Physicality" and "African Descent Community". Whereas the latter highlights the feeling of unity and connection among those of African heritage, the former is related to the outward traits acknowledged as indicators of racial categorization. Together, these components provide a nuanced image of Black identity, moulded by a broad spectrum of common experiences, historical occurrences, and communal beliefs that all profoundly influence how people see their own identities and their position in society. (McDougal and Jayawardene 2013)

2.5 Cultural Identity

Stuart Hall (1989:68) explores the concept of expression of cultural identity and representation. The fundamental concept is that representational activities are always linked to certain vantage points from which we articulate. This indicates that our representation of identity is shaped by our cultural, historical, and social contexts (Hall, 1989).

Hall argues that identity is neither a static nor a transparent construct. Hall argues that identity is a continuous construction that is never really completed. This undermines conventional perceptions of identity as a completed or unchanging entity. Identity is perpetually formed within the process of representation itself. This viewpoint challenges the concepts of authority and authenticity sometimes associated with cultural identity. If identity is ever evolving through representation, the concept of a unique, true cultural identity becomes contentious. This concept is particularly significant when examining film and other cultural representations, which not only mirror an existing identity but also play a crucial role in its construction. (Hall, 1989).

Hall personalises this theoretical discourse by recognising his own position. He observes that he writes from the perspective of his own life experiences, including his upbringing in Jamaica and his interactions within the Black diaspora. This highlights that all speech, including his, is contextualised and shaped by certain historical, social, and cultural factors. By highlighting his own positionality, Hall illustrates that all representations are inherently contextual, and that no speaker or writer lives in total isolation from the cultural and historical factors that shape their identity (Hall, 1989).

2.6 The effect of Colonialism on African attire

African attire underwent significant changes during the colonial period due to European colonialism and missionaries' efforts to convert indigenous groups to Christianity. Olaitan (2022) examines the influence of these variables on the traditional attire in Lagos, Nigeria, throughout the colonial period, as well as the enduring alterations that continue to affect contemporary fashion. European colonists and missionaries thought traditional African clothing was inadequate and unacceptable, thus indigenous people tried to "civilise" themselves by changing their clothes. Throughout various African locations, this project was mostly successful (Olaitan 2022).

Politics, sociology, and economics have been applied to an evaluate colonialism (2022:133). In particular, the sociocultural effects of colonialism on Lagos, Nigerian traditional dress are examined in this article. According to the authors they believe colonialism to be a kind of government in which domination over people or groups is exercised. In anthropological research, cultural transition often involves the domination and subjugation of other civilizations by European nations, leading to significant cultural interactions. A culture that lost its traditional dress due to the implications of colonialism (2022:136) is the Yoruba ethnicity which served as the origin of the

abundant cultural heritage that the people of Lagos exhibit through their traditional attire. Prior to European colonisation, the people of Lagos used traditional attire such as wraps for women and winding cloths for men. One important Yoruba town, Oyo-Ile, influenced dress patterns by fusing elements of Northern Nigeria and North Africa. Beads, hairstyles, and wraps from other areas were added to traditional Lagos clothing to create a sophisticated local style that predated colonial impact (Fakunle, 2022).

2.7 Black Consciousness

According to the South African Students Organization, the Black Consciousness Movement, as expounded (SASO) in their 1972 Policy Manifesto, offered a solid foundation for understanding and combating the entrenched oppression experienced by Black individuals in South Africa during the apartheid era. The manifesto describes Black Consciousness as more than just self-awareness, but as a dynamic and innovative process that challenges the deeply rooted injustices created by colonial and apartheid rule (Nengwekhulu, n.a).

According to Mgwebi Snail (2008:67) which the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM) had its start in South Africa in the late 1960s and early 1970s, represents a significant turning point and amplification of the greater historical fight against racial injustice. The American Civil Rights Movement promoted the fair distribution of rights provided by the U.S. Constitution to attain racial equality, whereas the BCM had to operate inside South Africa and confront a legal system that was specifically designed to oppress Black people and other marginalised groups.

Apart from establishing links with other liberation organisation's aiming at complete emancipation from apartheid, the BCM also showed creativity by fusing theory and practice. This strategy was obviously a development over prior manifestations of Black consciousness, including those supported by Mangaliso Sobukwe of the Pan Africanist Congress, who commended the BCM for its excellent presentation and application of these concepts. Black liberation journal *Ikwezi* credited the BCM's success to its inventive organisational structures and its capacity to successfully spread and implement Black awareness concepts. It is different in this respect from both its predecessors and contemporaries. The backdrop of this movement is a perfect illustration of a special and situation-dependent Black consciousness adaptation that greatly enhanced the worldwide discussion on racial fairness and freedom (Snail 2008).

2.8 Symbolism of Masks

Wingert (1973) examines how south of the Sahara, masks are a common artistic medium that represent many basic aspects of culture and community. Wingert states that the masks symbolise ancestral images or, in certain tribes, carry ancestral power. Masks often function as social control tools, following set practices to present identity and traditions. Additionally, they may represent hallowed Gods or be controlled by prophets or divine entities. Certain masks serve as generic portraits, with person like

features. In religious ceremonies masks are often used to personify mythological beings and cosmic symbols. Masks have distinct forming and organisation that often represents tribal roots or commonalities throughout certain areas(Wingert 1973). This section is relevant because of the use of masks in contemporary South African fashion and my own work.

2.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, an examination of contemporary black fashion within the framework of South Africa's colonial and historical past unveils a direct storyline revolving around resilience, cultural reclamation, and identity. Contemporary traditional attire originates in the indigenous dress of the black community in South Africa.. Subsequently, it evolved into a dynamic mode of cultural exchange that surpasses aesthetic considerations, transforming into a formidable visual language. The perpetuation of cultural inferiority myths can be attributed to the interference with and marginalisation of Indigenous sartorial traditions during the colonial period. However, upon conducting an in-depth examination of its historical development and present-day iterations, it becomes indisputable that modern black fashion serves as a fervent declaration of resistance and self-identity.

In Black South African communities, the significance of dress is a dynamic form of cultural representation that transcends mere aesthetics to convey identity, values, and social hierarchy is initially situated. By reviewing the historical evolution of clothing during colonial rule, the review exposed the distressing effects of colonialism on indigenous fashion traditions

Through the remodelling of traditional indigenous attire and applying concepts such as Afrofuturism, contemporary African Fashion shifts to being a force for change. Afrofuturism is a perspective that allows one to imagine a future in which Black identity is more acknowledged and valued, which examines an experience of Black people in historical, modern, and futuristic contexts.

Moreover, the significance of representation in forming Black identity cannot be overstated. In postcolonial countries like South Africa, contemporary black fashion play a vital part in telling the story of Black resistance via its many forms and expressions. The journey of Black South African identity viewed through the lens of traditional clothing and narrative is a monument to the indomitable spirit that remains. Black South Africans take back and celebrate their story from the shadow of colonial oppression to the forefront of cultural celebration with a fabric of diverse identity. In the end, the ability of modern black fashion to honour and represent the complexity and tenacity of Black cultural identity has the power to transform and bring in a more inclusive and powerful future.

Chapter 3: Visual Analysis

Through this chapter, attention will be directed to the visual analysis of diverse group of artworks in conjunction with theories on multiculturalism, identity and fashion. Three artists are examined to understand their form of visual language, including Trevor Stuurman *Arise FW 18* (Figure 1) from the British Vogue collection of fashion week (2018), Thebe Magugu *Lobola* (Figure 2), and Kudzanai Chiurai *We Live in Silence I* (Figure 3).. The visual analysis examines the visual language of the artworks in terms of what they depict, what ideas are being communicated and the message received by an audience. This analysis includes the concepts of cultural diversity, representation, contemporary black fashion theories and guides the visual narrative of my own photographic work.

3.1 Trevor Stuurman *Arise FW 18*

Trevor Stuurman is a talented South African photographer, visual artists and stylist. Stuurman's reputation has assisted him to be an established global fashion and visual artist. His work is vibrant and colourful. (Stuurman 2023) Stuurman captures the beauty of African culture by combining traditional and contemporary styles. Stuurman's African exploration of African experience has b a major impact in his work and narrative. This inspires my Multiculturism concept to explore my identity and express my narrative through a visual language of fashion and photography. Trevor Stuurman's highlight was the solo exhibition "Home" (Gallery, n.a) (Figure 4) that features Namibia's himba women and was displayed at the Johannesburg Hazard Gallery. (Gallery, n.a)

Arise FW 18 is a collaboration exhibition by British Vogue with Trevor Stuurman, held at Fashion Week 2018. Stuurman photographed a quantity of portraits, showcasing the depth and diversity that he encountered in Nigeria (Figure 1). Stuurman explores contemporary African fashion throughout the series with the mixture of clothing, vibrant colours, the use of excessive accessories such as face jewellery and rich fashion techniques. The images represent the significant look of Nigerian's fashion in a contemporary art space to examine the indigenous attire and style to how rich in fashion the culture is. The attire photographed presents a visual language, based on garments and the people wearing them and a cultural narrative.

The photographs offer a comprehensive viewpoint by highlighting the linkages between culture and identity which relates to Hall's theory on representation(1997). Stuurman's rewrites the traditional beauty standards impact by the Western influence to develop a narrative of African fashion.

All the photographs of the exhibition run in the similar style with the use of the same background, vibrant colours, the use of hats and the different garments worn based on gender. With this method, Stuurman highlights the social classes of Nigeria and who wears what based on the background and age. He then highlights the different gender's on how they dress based on those Ideologies. This allows Stuurman's series

to create a narrative on the significance of Nigerian fashion and the diversity that can be explored within. The photographs expose the viewer to a representation of culture where the garments become the voice of the culture.

Each character in the photographs wears a different attire. This allows a variety of fashion trends and styles to be developed for concept (Stuurman,2018). The exhibition relates with ideas of Afrofuturism which is represented through the fashion techniques. Mark Dery (1994) presents this concept with the focus being the transformation of traditional narratives by including state-of-the-art technology, contemporary fashion, intergalactic and temporal journeys, alien settings, and supernatural powers, to examine the views and experiences of individuals of African cultures (Wallace and Schwartz 2022).

Hall's theory on representation can be explored throughout the photographs of Stuurman as there is cultural background, cultural representation, identity and presentation in fashion. Stuurman presents identity by not allowing any form of Western influences on the models in photographs by their hair (Figure 1), allowing a more natural look, less make up and the use of more traditional hairstyles. He further explores identity in Figure 5, using the garments worn which marry the relationship between the two traditional Nigerian patterns and textiles with modern times and other contemporary fashion elements. Stuurman combines the complex, hybrid identities of other African cultures with the use of traditional and western styles. With the accessories identity is transformed to cultural representation, these items can be mixed with any other garments to carry the sense of culture.

This relates to Holmes 'argument that traditional accessories are a sense of cultural legacy, due to how the craftsmanship and designs have a connection to the local community and uphold their Identity and culture with pride. This allows for the accessories to have a form of symbolism that becomes more important in Stuurman's photographs. (The accessories give a hint on cultural Identity, which serves a symbol of travel, and personal history. The mixture of garments hints at the concept of migration and blending cultural elements. Why is the extensive use of the hat with the Nigerian cultural? Hats uphold a significant element of African fashion not only in Nigerian culture but various others in Africa such as Zulu and Sotho. Hats symbolize a sense of power, social status, and religious beliefs. This simple accessory has become a symbol of Africa's traditions highlighting the diversity and beauty of the people(Ames 2023).

3.2 Thebe Magugu. *Lobola*.

Thebe Magugu is a highly respected fashion designer who is widely acknowledged for their unique fashion ambitions to promote South African cultures and themes in his brand. Magugu's designs are Identified by the vibrant patterns, retro inspiration, cultural adornments, and shapes. He draws his narrative and semiotics from the everyday experiences of Black South African's, the socio-political narratives, the Black culture in South Africa and colonial history in South Africa. (Magugu, n.a)

Lobola is a performative photographic piece photographed by Imman Christian Thebe draws his narrative from South African history and personal narratives, weaving traditional motifs with modern silhouettes to tell compelling stories that resonate with both local and global audiences. The *Lobola* series features a series of Black South African women carrying a large bowl on their heads wearing garments with a South African traditional cultural theme (Figure 2) (Magugu 2024). The series highlights the century old marriage practice encountered in South African culture that joins two families under the concept of love. The series express the significance of the customs and dress associated with marriage in Southern African heritage. The photographic series provides a distinctive perspective that explore the link of representation and culture.

According to Glynis Parker (2015:175) in various African countries including South Africa, Zambia, Botswana, Swaziland, the tradition of Lobola for a bride has become an important cultural practice within the Black community.. Marriage becomes a verbal contract to exchange a form of value between families. Cattle and money are the first form of trade to begin the marriage process. This comes from the groom represented by his family to the bride's relatives. The bride's relatives will solidify this transaction with an agreed price that ensure rights to the groom's family. The rights are to allow the children born in the new family to carry the father's legacy and surname. Lobola allows a greater bond for the groom and bride because it is believed that the absence of this transaction may lead to an unsettling marriage. (Parker 2015)

Magugu's range entitled *Lobola* (Figure 2) features a series of women dressed in the same garment and carrying an object over their head, standing shoulder to shoulder. The image includes women from young to old with the inclusion of South African public figures such as Nomzamo Mbatha and Boity. Thebe Magugu presents the concept of "Lobola" as the context focuses mainly on the woman involved in the negotiations, to ensure the transaction secures their new bride to be. Magugu does not shy away from the South African historical context of Lobola, he explores this with the bowls on their heads, in which they normally carry water but famously known for brewing traditional beer which is also associated with the wedding ceremony.(Sabi 2021). The women are presented wearing long covering garments, and head piece to cover themselves as a sense of respect and honour to their relatives and the brides' relatives. The grass in the image (Figure 2) presents an idea of the villages since Lobola negotiations usually occur in the rural home.

The linkage to the literature review is the conjunction to Afrofuturism by how the attire draws from African garments, in which refines the modern and futuristic aesthetics. This allows a relationship of old and new which are parallel to Afrofuturism concept and reimagine the historical events through a modern lens. (Larkin 2022) iThe headwraps and vibrant dresses bring forth a cultural symbolism and Identity. With this elements, Mahugu's work celebrates African traditions by developing the context of futuristic utopia fashion.

3.3 Kudzanai Chiurai, *We live in silence I*

Kudzanai Chiurai is a contemporary Zimbabwean artist well-known for his mixed-media and complex paintings, photographs, video, and installations. Chiurai explores concepts related to political and social ideologies. He draws his narrative and semiotics from African politics, the economy, social issues, and inequality to develop the relationship between history, modernity, colonialism, and independence to meet his artworks visual language. His well know series “*We Live in Silence*” explores current issues in relation to the harsh history of social displacement, violence, and the western influence over Africa.

Chiurai’s art is not based on fashion and representation but examines political and social narratives connected to colonialism’s effects on Africa. The analysis aims to explore the narrative Chiurai paints on political issues to form a statement on the relationship with culture and representation.

Colonialism affects a society on a long-term stand point and leads to African countries facing long effects of official colonial authority even when it ends. Unbeneficial legacies take various forms, including economic reliance, political instability, social disintegration, cultural estrangement that led to the community being silenced. The colonial era altered indigenous institutions and traditions, leaving behind a complex web of issues that former colonies are still dealing with today. The *We Live in Silence* series represents the harsh effects of colonialism's long-term effects on African civilisations that destroys religions, cultures, fashion and traditions worth saving for future knowledge (Samuel-Mbaekwe 1986).

Chiurai creates a visual language with different viewpoints that are staged with the photographs. He combines a historical element with contemporary visual language with the use of colours, paintings, clothing, objects, and performance. “*We Live in Silence I*” (Figure 3) interprets a colonial-era with military uniforms and traditional African attire, especially how African’s dressed up in a highly different manner from the world. The Black woman stands right inside a large box, which was used for exports and imports of heavy materials. This develops the connotation of the slave-trade. The visual setting creates a powerful narrative that addresses a historical era that has almost silenced the voice of Africans and suppressed their power. The visual illustrates the cultural notion of cultural transformation via dominance and inferiority. It shows the imposition of European dress norms on Indigenous people and the subsequent cultural exchanges and modifications.(Olaitan 2022).

3.4 Conclusion

The visual assessment of artists Trevor Stuurman, Thebe Magugu, and Kudzanai Chiurai has focuses on African identity, culture, representation, and fashion. Through examinations of diversity, identity, representation and fashion, these artists navigate the complex relationship that exists between traditional African heritage and modern self-expression. Stuurman's vibrant photos in “*Arise FW 18*” highlight Nigerian

fashion's determination and power, combining traditional components with modern aesthetics to challenge Western beauty standards and celebrate African diversity. Stuurman's context aligns well with Stuart Hall's theories and findings on self-presentation (1997). His work highlights the significance of cultural expression, cultural background, and identity in fashion, presenting a narrative that restores and redefines African beauty.

Magugu's "Lobola" series examines the cultural heritage of South African marriage tradition, developing a visual story that pays homage to the past while embracing modernity. Magugu's fashion design combines the context between past traditions and contemporary Identity by including prominent personalities and common women, emphasising traditional practices' long-term value in building modern African identity. Their work emphasises the significance of knowing and enjoying the rich tapestry of African traditions, while also calling for a more inclusive and truthful depiction of African identities in the global cultural scene. This theory emphasises the importance of art in questioning prevailing narratives, conserving cultural legacies, and developing a greater awareness for the variety and complexity of African expression.

Chapter 4: Linking theory and practice

Within this chapter, I will reflect on the research of the thesis and, how it guides a body of work that translates the experience of being raised in a multi-cultural home that has led to my conflicting Identity.

The research in the thesis guided me to explore the concept statement and my own theories around the context. During this process, I went down the road to explore myself, examine my narrative and discover literature that can support and enlighten me. The readings in the literature guided me to discover how to define my multi-cultural background and character. Stuart Hall (1997), Lauren Leve and Mgwebi Snail and Nengwekhulu R their theories informed my body of work and provided a foundation on my narrative and make a concise point on what I am exploring. *Inkosi Masondo* explores the concepts of history, fashion, colonialism, identity to paint a better picture on this reality of being raised in a post-colonial society.

Since I wanted to explore a post-colonial society, the Creative Exchange that took place as part of the BA Honours in Visual Communication shed light on my thesis, by allowing me to see that I don't simply want to make work for the masses and brought the project closer to myself. This allowed me to form a narrative I understand and am well equipped to examine and discuss. The trip to Mbare Art Space, in Zimbabwe was not just an experience of a space to collaborate and share with others. Nkosiyabo Frank, an emerging artist I worked with on the Creative Exchange, inspired me to take a more personal direction and not shy away from uncomfortable subjects that are a source of conflict with many Black South Africans. With that learning I began to constantly experiment in the body of work me to portray the message in a photographic series titled *Inkosi Masondo* that represents the conflicting identity.

With my background story of how my mom raised me to always acknowledge my inherited identity and co-exists with Western traditions, it came to my attention to explore religion as well. With my identity crisis her guidance has been a central form of shaping how I understand myself, especially when it comes to exploring the complex tapestry of my cultural heritage and religious beliefs. Religion was never part of the project in the beginning as I did not see it fitting enough to explore. With further development religion became a key part of the thesis to examine as I added my personal narrative on how I was raised and the environment I was in, it seemed fitting enough to explore the idea as a Black South African I am conflicted between this space of inherited tradition and the western religions.

4.1 Making and Research Link

During the thesis, I examined my conflicting identity through the lens of fashion and visual language. Stuart Hall's (1997) concepts on representation and Lauren Leve's (2011) discussions on identities guided me to explore the complexities of how I express my identity. The body of work is an attempt to convey the layers of my identity, constructed by the effects of South Africa's colonial history that led to migration and a complex tapestry of cultures. The performative aspects allow me to express my conflicting identity in an engaging manner with both personal experience and broader cultural narratives.

Hall (1997) described being a process in which context is created and spread within a community. During the project the use of Indigenous fashion serves as symbolic statements that communicate my multi-cultural identity to serve as a reflective form of representation aligned with Hall's theories. In Figure 9 The use of the garments is a cultural sign that links me to my inherited roots as a Black South African. Through this I engage in expressing the representation my mother taught me as this is a sign of my complex identity I embody. It was key to understanding that the Hall's approach to representation is not solely dictated by Identity but constructed by my cultural and symbolic system that I operate in.

Symbols were crucial in the practical work and to understand the importance of this complex concepts. Helen Spencer-Oetay (2012) analysis on culture as a dynamic approach to use fashion in my body of work, as the garments carry a deep cultural significance. They symbolise my connection to my tradition, beliefs and historical background. This communicates to the audience that this is who I am, being a multi-cultural individual. It was key to understand that this symbol can be interpreted in other manners in the body of work as social groups shape a culture, and my fashion choices will depend on the viewer's own cultural background and context.

Colonialism's impact in South Africa, caused a nationwide effect on identity and it is impossible to separate my complex tapestry from the effect of this history. Colonialism enforced Western cultural norms that disrupted indigenous traditions, developing this conflict to my heritage. This conflict can be viewed by how Indigenous clothing was altered by European influence. As seen in studies like Olaitan (2022), traditional

African attire underwent significant changes due to the influence of colonialism and the efforts of missionaries to convert Indigenous populations to Christianity. Indigenous attire in the body of work is used as symbols to reclaim and reconstruct my identity, representing the colonial effects on my traditions. Applying fashion in the project I draw from colonialism's intent to erase the cultural identity of Black South Africans. The use of indigenous fashion in the body of work is a symbolic statement to use fashion as a powerful visual format to express the layered identity I embody.

Karen Alexander's (1994) theory on the visual culture of how Black Africans have been portrayed is something to reflect on when it comes to my mother's teachings. , She often spoke about the importance of rejecting the negative portrayals on Black South Africans in the media or society. As my mother encouraged me to look beyond the harmful representation, it did not only inspire the practical work's art direction but gave rise to the notion to express the subject of black colonial effects to not only portray myself in a positive light but shed light my conflicting identities. I worked with fashion in the project to represent these figures and myself in a manner that resists the negative image of my identity as a Black South African.

Lauren Leve's (2011) theory on the role of identity in a contemporary society is relevant to my thesis. Leve's insights on identity as a massive force that can shape both individual behaviour and social constructs. In Figure 10, I consider the conflicting elements of my Identity as Black South African, constructed by colonialism, migration and religion are at constant play. In *Inkosi Masondo III* Figure 9 I explore my conflicting identity with the use indigenous attire to perform these conflicts visually, using the clothing as a metaphor for the multi-cultured background person. These garments reflect the tension between tradition and modernity, between belief systems and colonial legacies.

Black Consciousness was an important addition to the thesis. Black Consciousness, is a dynamic process in arguing and challenging the injustices constructed by the colonial and apartheid systems that are sought to degrade Black identity in South Africa.) Just as the BCM empowered Black South Africans to resist the injustice of apartheid, my project uses indigenous fashion to portray the resistance of erasing my cultural heritage. In some form of manner, the body work pays homage to the the Black Conscious Movement. Mgwebi Snail (2008) was creative and passionate in expressing the BCM movement. Within my project seen in Figure 12 and Figure 11 I apply the indigenous attire as a symbol of engaging with the tensions and contradictions that define my Identity as a Black South African. The context of the fashion and being a performative piece represents the resilience of my inherited tradition.

Kudzanai Chiurai's work relates to my body of work as part of the Visual Analysis. His work explores the socio-political narratives constructed by colonial rule confronting the long effects of colonialism in African societies. His work is focused on the interplay between narration, culture and colonial authority in which are the themes for the

discussion that are centred around my body of work. Like my work, Chiurai's work expressed the post-colonial society that as Africans we exist in, and my work expresses the conflict of colonialism on who I am as an individual today. The way he photographs his work, mixing traditional African elements with contemporary visual format, parallels my use of fashion as a tool for reclamation. Chiurai's visual format of military uniforms and traditional attire highlights the moment the cultural transformation occurred representing inferiority and dominance. This is seen Figure with my use of body movements in the photographs to represent that tension and the anger that cannot be resisted in expression as I exist in this post-colonial society.

The process photos Figure 6, 7 and 8 assisted and influenced the final body of work in Figure 9, 10, 11 and 12 as this laid the foundation on the body of work. The process work touched on the idea of the post-colonial society I exist in by presenting my mom who well informed me on my heritage. The mixture of clothing in Figure 6, 7, 8 is to present the multiculturalism in my mother as she comes from a diverse background of cultures being Pedi, Sotho, Siswati, Ndebele and Portuguese. Then with Figure 9, 10 and 11 I mixed the indigenous attire to present who I am being a multicultural individual. Figure 6 in the photo the female is dresses in indigenous South African attire that Sotho and Pedi.

The initial concept around the clothing is represent where my multicultural identity derives from. My mother herself is a multicultural person and grow up with the conflicted religious belief as her parents taught her well about ancestry and society persuaded her to Christianity. The use of unnatural colours in Figure 1 showcases this dysfunctional dystopia. As the cows are behind the character signifies the power and wealth, that has been disfigured by colonisation in South Africa to develop the idea that our heritage does not exists in this western society. The masks worn are exploring that harsh reality that my mother had to endure due to colonisation and apartheid regime as a Black South African in Figure 7 the camera held by the character showcases this captured moment that cannot be seen with the eye and about the conversations the Black South African Community does not discuss on this post-colonial society. This sparks the conversation of the forgotten history and true wealth of a Black South African.

Figure 9 is a key moment in presenting my conflicting identity through a visual language, lighting, shadows and the use of symbolic items. During the exploration of the project, I started to realise that it needed to be more about myself as this journey, though based on my mother's teachings on religious beliefs, is about how I navigate my multiculturalism in a post-colonial society. in Figure 9 I started to present not just the conflict but how I am feeling being in this space of submission and anger, I am stuck in between these two worlds. The bible with the cassette tapes explores the layered relationship between beliefs and a western religion.

The symbolic items in the photo are the Bible, Music Tapes. The bible displays the Christianity I am submitting to as with the historical context of the religious debates.

With this symbol this displays the power of Christianity, a religion associated with being introduced through colonisation. The bible goes further to display my background of being raised in a church, where my conflict in religion began and with a margin of questions on why we neglect our inherited traditions as Black South Africans. Music is a tradition with both Christianity and Ancestry beliefs (Bloguser and Bloguser 2023). The purpose of the cassette tapes is to showcase the noise, the unchanging music to express my conflict. The cassette tapes may be an old symbol but was the first format I used to listen to music, from Christian music to kwaito and more. Music has been my way of communicating my emotions and it is a shared experience me and my mom share.

Figures 9, 10, and 11 are not just a sad story about the post-colonial society I exist in, but rather what my experience is and what I must live by every day. Identity is not stale rather it is flexible, as with constant reconstructions in response to historical, social, and political forces. By incorporating indigenous fashion into my work, I am navigating the colonial legacy that has distorted and erased my inherited traditions. My project reflects this flexible identity, as I am not shying away from the reality of the world, we exist in but rather co-existing in both tradition and western society regardless of the tension.

Throughout the practical work development, the photographs changed from placing others in my space to express this conflicting Identity and religion to becoming the centre of the body of work. This did not just change and open doors for many discoveries. This opened my mind to the conflicting religion being part of the core foundation in the argument to discuss. Being raised in a multi-cultured and religious home, it was a challenge to discuss with people on who I am. That's why in Figure 9 you see me in these intensive positions, located in dark spaces, being contempt and the symbolic meaning of the objects in the photograph. Figure 11 is in well displaying what I am currently battling, as I ask myself all these form of questions about what is wrong, what should we believe in, should I disregard my identity for to fit societies want from me or should I become more expressive of my anger. The red cloth is a representation of that sense of anger as I cannot express these two conflicting sides of myself. The indigenous fashion is to show my inherited tradition, that is who I am being a Black South African. But then there's that conflict I struggle with as Western religion I did not inherit; it was due to colonisation experienced by many non-white South Africans. The bible being held on the hand in this dark space is the sense of conflict and tension on who am I meant to be in this post-colonial society.

At the core of this project is the concept that Black Identity is always in a conversation with historical effects, The migration, religious conversion and cultural oppression, brought by colonialism have left an argument on Black South Africans on who we are supposed to be. With the story of how my mother always kept me alert and well educated on my identity, the history of South Africa, on why some things are portrayed in certain manners. She is becoming a part of the core foundation of the project being the reason why the project exists and the challenge she left me with to examine,

express and explore. In Figure 10 I am engaging in a form of performative resistance to display the conflict and tension, applying the visual language of clothing, lighting and space to examine the complex tapestry of identities that colonialism left behind. In the series the excessive use of the red hood Figure 12 displays the anger I contain inside me about this subject. Even with the contempt body position show's how I am in this disagreement with myself that I say hey this is who I am but the same time with historical knowledge what am I meant to be. The water is a significant symbol with Christianity and Ancestry that is why I got myself into that space to represent that sense of contempt with what I have been dealing with.

4.2 New Insights

My work examines cultural identity and theological conflict through performative photographs with symbols of attire and objects. According to Adam Clark (2013:383) the merging of Afrocentrism and Black religious philosophy, notably its critiques of Christianity, gives vital contextual information. The criticism of Christianity by authors Maulana Karenga and Molefi Asante (2013:382) as a Eurocentric obligation fits well with the complex theological dynamics, I believe it fits well with South Africa, where colonialism imposed not only political and economic domination but also cultural and spiritual supremacy. The conflict between Christianity and culture is a recurring theme in my journey of expressing the harsh reality of the conflict and tension I face. As I understand with how these outside religious influences have shaped and even disrupted my sense of self (Clark, 2013).

The religious argument that my body of work on later explored has some form of connection with the Afrocentric critique of Christianity, especially Asante's (2013:382) assertion that Black people were forced into becoming Christians through colonisation. Local religions and Christianity, which was utilised as a tool of colonial power, diverged because of the imposed Christian rule. Asante laments that "Africans have lost their memories and accepted the Gods of those who enslaved and colonised us," a complaint that resonates with my own exploration of the ways in which this imposition of religion has impacted my identity. By rejecting African Gods, Ancestors, and spiritual traditions in favour of a Europeanized, whitewashed brand of Christianity, my body of work seeks to express the great cultural and spiritual dislocation that results (Clark, 2013).

This religious tension is an important aspect of the performance piece, Figure 12 as I am developing, where I use fashion, space, lighting and myself to explore the conflict between my indigenous roots and the forced religious forms of colonialism. Afrocentric religious critique, as seen in the work of Karenga and Asante (2013: 383), provides a framework for understanding how my project serves as a form of resistance against the colonial destruction of indigenous beliefs. By expressing this conflict through my body of work, I am engaging in what Karenga calls the development and celebration of culture. A practice that sustains and introduces my identity to the world. The body of work becomes a tool to challenge the narrative of religious domination, reclaiming

spirituality in my own image and interest, rather than clinging to a white, colonial version of God (Clark, 2013).

4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, my research explores the complexity of religious dispute and multi-cultural identity, expressing these conflicts through a visual language. With the performance photographs, which are immersed with symbolism of indigenous clothing and Western artefacts, I can navigate the complex realities of my identity as a Black South African. From its early investigation of post-apartheid society, the work has developed into a more personal narrative that is based on the internal struggle I have between my ancestral traditions and the Western religious influences that were imposed during colonisation. The conflict between Christianity and indigenous spiritual beliefs, which is important to my sense of self and cultural identity, is one of the key aspects of my thesis. The body of work reflects this tension, with the use of fashion as a symbolic medium. Not just the indigenous attire and style of choice but mainly how I acted as the vessel to reminders of my ancestry and inherited culture. This opposed the colonial cultural and spiritual dominance. I am expressing the worth of my cultural narrative and background to display the conflicting identity including the clothing into a performative piece.

Karenga's theory (2013) that culture serves as a means of establishing, preserving, and celebrating identity offers a helpful foundation for understanding the more general effects of my body of work. In addition to sharing my personal narrative through the performance piece, I'm also taking part in the greater cultural endeavour of Black identity reconstruction and reclamation in the face of historical oppression. Through this project, I not only reclaim but display the tension of colonialism in the spirituality that, colonial introduced a holy being and to oppose the colonial annihilation of indigenous traditions in a negative manner.

My practical work addresses more general issues of identity, religion, and cultural conflict in a manner that makes it both extremely personal and continentally relevant. This provides a forum for the communication of a multi-cultural identity while challenging the prevalent narratives of religious and cultural dominance. My body of work is a monument to the Black identity's tenacity and the continuous fight to recover and honour my cultural and spiritual legacy as I continue to explore these issues. I hope that this collection of work will add to the ongoing conversation about religion, identity, and culture by providing a more understanding of colonialism's legacy and how it continues to affect Black South Africans like me.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

In conclusion, this far, a cohesive narrative of resiliency, cultural reclamation, and identity is revealed by the careful examination of modern black fashion within the context of South Africa's colonial and historical history. In the Literature Review Stuart Hall's research (1997) offered a massive insight and contributed to the thesis with the ideology of self-representation. The indigenous attire of the black South African community, which was first marginalised due to colonial influences, has developed into a vibrant meaning of cultural interaction that goes beyond basic styles. It has become a potent visual language of resistance and self-assertion. Through an examination of the historical evolution and current reinterpretations of contemporary black fashion, it becomes clear that present designs are powerful expressions of identity and strength, allowing a push back against western narratives.

The visual analysis of Trevor Stuurman, Thebe Magugu and Kudzanai Chiurai's artworks examines the concepts of cultural identity and representation. The artists apply their visual languages to question, express, celebrate and protect African stories. In *Arise FW 18* (Figure 1) Trevor Stuurman's vibrant and lively photographs display the beauty of the Nigerian fashion sense. Stuurman promotes the African beauty to challenge Western concepts of modern fashion by mixing traditional and modern attires. His work reflects on cultural expression of the idea finding home. Stuurman's visual narrative repair and rethink African beauty, building a strong statement about how African's must view their Identity.

Thebe Magugu's "Lobola" (Figure 2) series examined the history of black South African marriage customs via the engaging visual narratives that promotes the past and being welcomed into the future. Displaying both famous and regular women, Magugu showcase the importance of traditional practices how they are developed in a modern South Africa. The fashion designs connect an old tradition with modern times to celebrate the black South African community at large.

"We Live in Silence" (Figure 3) by Kudzanai Chiurai examined the long-term effects of colonisation on African societies. The research examines the socio-political narratives through a visual language that mixes historical elements with modern views. Chiurai's critics the manner European values were pushed on African cultures and exposes the colonial impact that silences cultures. His visual narrative showcases the importance of preserving cultures to express the power of African identity and promote cultures.

Within the subject of Inkosi Masondo's narratives outlined contemporary black fashion imaginative and defiant essence that is conjunction to the black identity. The themes provide a sense for black people to take over their stories and keep and paint their own narrative. The research outlined the high point of representation in defining the identity of black people, including their historical challenges, struggles, and the celebration of many cultural manifestations.

With mixing indigenous attires with modern design attires, contemporary black fashion becomes a powerful means of asserting and celebrating cultural identity. It didn't only restore indigenous clothing customs but also challenges false beliefs of cultural inferiority that were promoted throughout the colonial period. In post-colonial nations such as South Africa, contemporary black fashion serves as a crucial means of expressing narratives, promoting empowerment, and demonstrating cultural strength.

The thesis reflects the manner I addressed the conflicted identity as a Black South African. The body of work is expressed through a photographic series, with the application of performative elements to showcase the narrative. Throughout the development of the body of work, I focused my attention on addressing the issues I faced. The addressed concepts were our conflict, multi-cultural, personal story, religion and my emotions. This work showcases how indigenous attire can be applied as a visual language to reflect both historical effects, conflict and complex tapestry as a Black South African. By embracing indigenous fashion in creative and performative pieces, as a Black South Africans I am reclaiming narratives and disrupting imposed identities. This approach conveys my narrative within modern frameworks, investigating the conflict between inherited tradition and western traditions with religion. Towards the end of the body of work the project really grew to something more of a painting my picture on a camera. With the new found research on Afrocentric assisted the body of work to tackle the theories of colonial effects and the lost traditions of black Africans.

Appendix



Figure 1: Arise FW 18



Figure 2: Thebe Magugu, Lobola, 2024.



Figure 3: Kudzanai Chiruai, We Live In Silence I



Figure 4: Home.



Figure 5: FW 18, 2018



Figure 6: Maleté.T, 2024, Afrofuturism Post-Apocalyptic I



Figure 7: Maleté.T, 2024, Afrofuturism Post-Apocalyptic I II

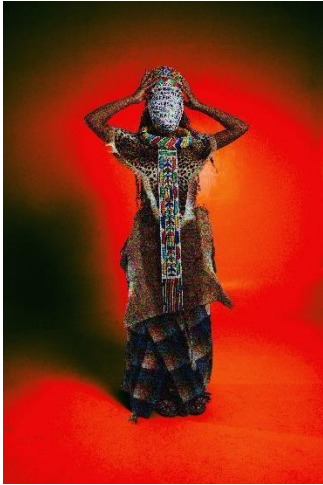


Figure 8: Maletе.T, 2024, *Afrofuturism Indlovukazi*



Figure 1: Maletе.T, 2024, *Inkosi Masondo III*

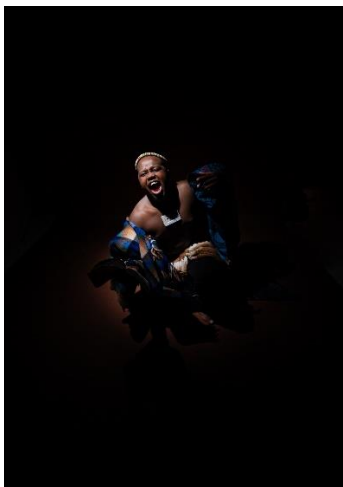


Figure 2: Maletе.T, 2024, *Inkosi Masondo I*



Figure 3: Maletse.T, 2024, Inkosi Masondo II



Figure 4: Maletse.T, 2024, Inkosi Masondo IV

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