

before cutting, wrap the scissors with yarn to spare yourself the sound of separation*

African Fashion Research Institute (AFRI)

Abstract

The continuous colonial project never cleans up after itself, after its violence. Likened to the aftermath of tailoring, colonialism produces shrapnel, detritus, cannon shells, broken cultures, cuts. Fragments get left behind. In a collaborative interdisciplinary inquiry including performance, video, sound collage and making, the AFRI_collective stitch seams of fashion languages about the past-now-and-here, seeking the regenerative intentions of recuperation after violence.

In tailoring, offcuts are things discarded and sent to the cutting-room floor. Fragments that are cut off from the whole, from peoples, from practices, from markets become the echo chambers of unclaimed memories. The offcuts are cultural oddments, a residuum, relics and vestiges of dreams. Through sonic suturing of voice, dialects, bits of time, memories and other ways of wearing – of cloth as clothes – we explore, cut, collage, stitch, overlay/overlap these off-cuttings into new remembrances. The joins or seams within – and between – the five texts offer hybrid and audacious provocations. Joining the outskirts with the centre. Stitching sentences, punctuating bodies.

Picked up, repurposed and presented as a dynamic set of decentred propositions, fashion's colonial violence creates the generative possibilities for seeking new terms and forms sufficient for reformation and re-articulation, scripted into algorithms for a decolonial glossary of fashion. In the return, fashion as we redefine its use, finds its possible future in already remembered vernaculars.

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In our collaborative interdisciplinary enquiry, the AFRI_collective presents performance, video, sound collage and making. We stitch seams of new fashion languages about the (past-)now-here, and we seek the regenerative possibilities of recuperation after violence. The continuous colonial project never cleans up after itself, after its violence. Likened to the aftermaths of tailoring, the process leaves shrapnel, detritus, cannon shells, broken

cultures, cuts.

We explore those fragments left behind, left lying around, left inside and outside of us. Things that were discarded and sent to the cutting-room floor. Offcuts. Cut off from the whole, from peoples, from practices, from markets. Cut-offs become the echo chambers of unclaimed memories; these cultural oddments become relics and vestiges of dreams. Through sonic suturing of voice, dialects, bits of time, memories and other ways of wearing—of bits of cloth *as* clothes—we explore, collect, stitch, cut and overlay these pieces into new remembrances of shape and space. We script algorithms for an otherwise, audacious glossary of terms for fashion.

The AFRI-collective, which emerged in early 2021, is loosely convened around an idea that prompts a set of (un)related responses. For “Violence”, the fourth Parse biennial research conference, the five creative practitioners-thinkers collaborated on five provocations.

*Our title draws on fashion poet Gaurav Monga’s unpublished works from 2021

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heeten bhagat is a shit stirrer by nature. His most recent work is situated in the emerging terrain of pracademics—essentially looking to expand collaborations and design experiments between academia and real-life systems. He approaches this work primarily as a methodologist—working to bring pragmatic and pertinent programming to support decolonial and diversity-related work in overlooked/underserved learning environments.

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Siviwe James is a conceptualist designer/research associate seeking out and creatively interrogating the fragments of fashion that allude to the psychologies, histories and disruptions of African fashion that have limited, but also hold potential for African creatives to materialise new ideals of modernity.

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Lesiba Mabitsela is a South African interdisciplinary artist and fashion designer based in Johannesburg. Mabitsela’s design practice incorporates critical fashion and performance studies in his exploration of fashion histories from the African continent. As an artist, Mabitsela is concerned with ideas surrounding African masculine identities. He is a founding member of the African Fashion Research Institute (AFRI).

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Erica de Greef explores the spaces of power and resistance in South African fashion, in the past as well as the

present. She works collaboratively (always) to prompt critical and creative attention for the possibilities of redress and imagination. De Greef is a curator, author and academic, and is the founding member of the African Fashion Research Institute (AFRI) and the *South African Fashion Journal*.

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Russel Hlongwane is a cultural producer based in Durban. His work obsesses over the tensions in heritage/modernity and culture/tradition as they apply to Black life. His practice includes cultural research, writing, creative producing, design, film and curatorship. Hlongwane is part of a number of working groups across Southern Africa, the African continent and internationally.

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