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**The Revision of Hollywood's Ideological, Racial, and Cultural  
Conventions in Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* (2018)**

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## **Dedications**

In the memory of my beloved grandfather.

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## Abstract

*The Revision of Hollywood's Ideological, Racial, and Cultural Conventions in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther (2018)* is a media study that deals with the changing representations of Africa within Hollywood. The selected film embodies this change through its peculiar way of representing Africa and people of African descent in American cinema. Broadly speaking, this piece of research takes some steps toward scrutinizing the unprecedented depiction of Africa and Africans on screen. It attempts to study the way *Black Panther* contradicts the monocentric attitudes with regard to colored people and their origins. For this purpose, I resorted to Ella Shohat and Robert Stam's theoretical book *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (2014) which enabled me to analyse the film from a postcolonial approach. The dissertation is divided into three main parts. Part one deals with the way the film contributed in revealing the West's false assumptions about Africa and the way it consolidated its presence through knowledge. Second, the study takes further interest in analyzing the nature of colored people's presence in the mainstream cinema and the way the film diverges from the notions of Hollywood cinematic norms. At last, the research gives due attention to the film's unique portrayal of African history and culture. After a thorough examination, it is revealed that *Black Panther* bears anti-racist and anti-Eurocentric tendencies as far as the cinematic representation of Africa and people of African descent are concerned.

**Key Words:** Colonialism, Eurocentrism, Hollywoodcentrism, Racism, Multiculturalism, Oral African Traditions.

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## I. General Introduction

Africa, this part of the world, has long been associated with savagery, barbarism, pre-industrialization, primitivism, and other pejorative attributes. The colonial legacy of Europe paved the way for a trend of thought in which Africa is perceived as an ‘eccentric’ place where to exercise European power. African nations are, from this standpoint, remote areas waiting for the white race to be enlightened and civilized. Today, whenever mentioning Africa, there are biased ideas that the European colonizer has already inserted in the minds of some people which push them to picture it as a primitive continent and its peoples as sub-human creatures.

This *hegemony* operates approximately in all the fields of art in order to spread a certain ideology including knowledge about Africa. *State apparatuses*<sup>1</sup> were deployed by Westerners to extend their field of power and manipulate people’s points of view toward people of African descent and their origins i.e. Africa. In the highly developed societies, the seventh art is a prominent tool which circulates and promotes specific ideologies: it has enough power to control the masses’ perspectives toward a specific topic.<sup>2</sup> In the United States of America, Hollywood film industry plays a vital role in emphasizing and encouraging Western thinking.<sup>3</sup> During its beginnings, it was completely ingrained in the Western Eurocentric philosophy. In classical Hollywood cinema, Eurocentrism “*is naturalized as ‘common sense’*.”<sup>4</sup> It produced films and documentaries that reinforce prejudiced attitudes toward the US minorities and its overseas ‘others.’ Media has; in fact, nurtured ideas of racism and otherness. People from African descent were humiliated in films either through their actual presence or the derogatory portrayals of their lands. These products have contributed a great deal in shaping fixed attitudes toward this continent as a heart of an eternal darkness. The logo-centrism of the Western societies dictates upon people what and how to think of Africa and Africans; it has completely distorted the image of Africa as a land of poverty and chaos.

With the emergence of a new discipline in literary criticism, these predominant assumptions have been questioned. Africa and other parts of the world, which were previously grouped in the so called ‘peripheries,’<sup>5</sup> are brought to the center of interest. In the postcolonial discourse, the main goal is to ‘decenter’, if we are to use Jack Derrida’s terms, the Eurocentric philosophy which establishes the difference between the ‘metropolitan’ Europe and the ‘provincial’ Africa.<sup>6</sup> It goes beyond this one dimensional world, where these ‘peripheries’ orbit the privileged ‘West’, to focus on marginalized cultures. If Eurocentrism is characterized by an ideology of exclusion, postcolonialism opted for the policy of inclusion. In this respect, African traditions, among others, are brought to the center and correcting the image of Africa is the major concern.

Postcolonialism is not just a body of narratives that disapprove the Western *hegemony* but a discourse affecting all the fields of art including cinema. While classical films emphasized the gap between the West (‘self’) and the non-West (‘other’), the notion of postcolonialism in recent cinema is manifested through the opposition to Western premises. It aims at liberating the minds of the audience from the influence of the Eurocentric philosophy. This postcolonial character of cinema has even infiltrated the American cinema. It is adopted by filmmakers when dealing with minority representations and the portrayal of the non-West. Within Hollywood, these recent years have witnessed a crucial step in the field of representations. Minorities, now, have the access to project their own stories in the mainstream cinema.<sup>7</sup> Hence, the aim of these filmmakers is double-edged: the correction of their distorted images and the celebration of their origins.

One of the outstanding films which promoted a positive vision toward the African continent is the recently released science fiction and adventure film *Black Panther*. Based on the adventures of Marvel’s superhero of the same appellation, created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby, director Ryan Coogler developed a successful film which emancipates Africans,

African-Americans, and all the Africans around the diaspora. In addition to this, the film celebrates the origin of these communities which is the African continent evidently. Coogler has received much praise for transforming the story of this first black superhero into a postcolonial masterpiece. *Black Panther* is a Hollywood blockbuster which gained much credit for its accurate representation of Africa. It has shown a new and different facet of Africa and restored the glory of the continent by uplifting its history, cultures, and traditions. To this end, *Black Panther* is selected as the primary source for studying the reforms that occurred in Hollywood in terms of non-Westerners' representations.

### **Review of the Literature**

Following its first release in Los Angeles, United States of America, *Black Panther* enjoyed a great success in the American box office and attracted the attention of many critics. Its peculiar way of dealing with the Africans, both on the continent and in the diaspora, earned it a big reception among the audience, especially the black communities all over the world. The film has soon become the center of many debates among scholars and critics. It is now approached from a myriad of perspectives depending on the nature of the arguments each part is advancing.

*Postcolonial Discourse in Coogler's Black Panther: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis* (2020) is an article which studies the film from a postcolonial perspective by relying on Fairclough's *Critical Discourse Analysis* (1989), *Functional Linguistics* (2004) by Halliday, and most importantly Homi K. Bhabha's notions of postcolonialism. Because the present research is limited to a cultural and media study of the material, the linguistic approach will not be included. Unlike other scholars who praised the film as a celebration of blackness, Albert Tallapessy, Indah Wahyuningsih, and Riska Ayu Anjasari claim that the Wakandans "are influenced ideologically and culturally by the white supremacy."<sup>8</sup> The authors fuse Bhabha's concepts of ambivalence, mimicry, and hybridity to bring into light the



effects of colonialism on the colonized people. They analyse the characters' behaviors and identity issue in the film through the film's visual and linguistic elements.<sup>9</sup> They have also applied the notion of 'unhomeliness' to approach Killmonger's character; they state: "*Erick, the one who represents diaspora subject in this movie, experience estrangement between America and Africa, between him and T'Challa.*"<sup>10</sup> In sum, it is a study that combines linguist concepts with postcolonial issues of identity and culture.

In *Dark of the Word Shine on Us: The Redemption of Blackness in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther* (2018), George Faithfull studies the godlike traits of the characters to render visible the notion of blackness in the film. He claims that these character traits stand in stark contrast with the image of African-Americans promoted by the mainstream cinema.<sup>11</sup> His article offers an analysis of different elements in the film, including: the representation of African-Americans, the interpretation of the characters' roles in the film, and religion. According to him, the appearance of black actors, both male and female, was stereotyped by Hollywood cinema.<sup>12</sup> Hence, *Black Panther* introduces strong black characters to the audience and stress their blackness. For him, the film presented unique black characters; his stance can be summarized in his sentence: "*in terms of representing blackness (es), it redeems.*"<sup>13</sup>

Monika Swamipersad's *The Contribution of Marvel Studio's Black Panther to the Portrayal of Americans on Screen* (2018) surveys the issue of African-American representation in Hollywood. The dissertation deals particularly with the audio-visual aspects to denote the historical and cultural framework of the film.<sup>14</sup> The history of African-American presence within Hollywood and the racial representation of this community are granted much attention in her thesis. According to her, "*the cinematic representations of African Americans are a reflection of the social climate in America.*"<sup>15</sup> Her research proves that *Black Panther* has changed the nature of people of color's participation and depiction in Hollywood.

In her thesis entitled *An Afrofuturistic Reading of Mythology and Heroism in 'Black Panther, Sundiata an Epic of Old Mali and Waiting for the Rain* (2018), Elizabeth Sakamandi explores the representation of the African belief system in the three texts. It is important to note that in this review, I am particularly interested in her analysis of *Black Panther*. Relying on an Afro-futuristic approach, Sakamandi focuses on the concept of myth to analyse the film's setting, the fictional Wakanda, and the Wakandan cosmology. The major concern of her research is to introduce the readers to the African belief system and its futuristic depiction in the film.<sup>16</sup> In her dissertation, she highlights the peculiarity of the African worldview by emphasizing on the notions of 'spiritualism' and 'myth.' According to her Wakanda is based on the principle of myth which fulfils two functions in *Black Panther*: the Eurocentric myths about Africa and the cultural diversity of Wakanda.<sup>17</sup> She deals with African religion and cosmology as presented in the film.

### **Issues and Working Hypotheses**

As it has been previously argued, many of the earlier works have approached the film from different perspectives. To my best knowledge, they have overlooked some crucial aspects of the film that I intend to expand in the present paper. Indeed, these studies failed to account for the centrality of Eurocentrism in the representation of the West's 'others' in early Hollywood cinema. Instead, they focused on the representation of African-Americans in cinema stressing on the nature of roles they interpreted in mainstream films. Hence, my intention for this research is to carry on what these critics have already initiated and to scrutinize the film in terms of a rejection of the Western philosophy that has for so long discriminated Africa and presented it as the 'inferior other.' Besides, I am exclusively interested in the representations of Africa and Africans. It is, in other words, a study of some of the criteria Marvel's *Black Panther* relied on to contradict the Eurocentric conventional norms of Hollywood.

Throughout this dissertation, I shall examine the peculiar way through which *Black Panther* has dealt with the African continent and the major issues facing it today. My attention is also directed to the changing stance of Hollywood's representation of African people and cultures. The discussion aims to take some steps toward exploring the dialectical pattern within Hollywood film industry in relation to the depiction of the colonial history of Africa, the representation of the people of African descent, and the portrayal of African culture. To fulfill this aim, I selected Shohat and Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* as a theoretical guide to my analysis of the aforementioned points. The theory provides enlightening information as far the origins of Eurocentrism and its incorporation into media are concerned. Both theorists trace the notion of Eurocentrism in Western media and the different techniques through which its presence is manifested. Besides, their concept of *multiculturalism* is a stepping-stone notion in the frame of the discussion. The choice of this theory is motivated by the felicitousness of its claims with the material under examination. *Black Panther* is indeed an instance of *multiculturalism* in Hollywood cinema. In addition, I am going to contrast it to some of the aspects of colonial/imperial films, (the readers can take the example of *Blood Diamond* (2006), *Trader Horn* (1931), *Stanley and Livingstone* (1939)...etc.), which promote the image of the West seen as the 'self.' This is done with the aim of denoting *Black Panther*'s change of Africa and Africans' cinematic representations.

Methodologically, the discussion of this research is divided into three chapters; each dealing with a specific aspect through which Eurocentrism is battered in the film. The first chapter deals with the divulgence of the nature of the colonial presence in Africa. Light is shed on the film's condemnation of three major concepts which shaped the history of Africa: colonialism, imperialism, and neocolonialism. There are echoes of these three in the film; therefore, I shall proceed by analyzing each one of them always by making references to what

corresponds to them in the film. The aim is not to scrutinize them *per se* but to show the way the film denounces their consolidation of the colonial discourse and encouragement of colonialist practices. The second chapter is devoted to underpinning the reversion of racial roles in *Black Panther*. To achieve the desired result, this part investigates the notion of inversion in the two areas of community representations and casting. Additionally, it calls attention to the empowerment of colored people's presence in cinema. The third and last chapter examines the film's commemoration of African cultures and traditions. It analyzes *Black Panther's* reinstatement of the African heritage and its rebuttal of Eurocentric assumptions.

### **Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Louis Althusser, *Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses* (New York and London: Verso, 2014), 157-159.
- <sup>2</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man* (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1964), 3-20.
- <sup>3</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 92.
- <sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 1.
- <sup>5</sup> Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 8.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 11.
- <sup>7</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 190.
- <sup>8</sup> Albert Tallapessy, Indah Wahyuningsih, and Anjasari Riska Ayu, "Postcolonial Discourse in Coogler's *Black Panther*: A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis," *Humaniora* 32, no. 1 (2020): 75.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, 75.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid*, 81.
- <sup>12</sup> George Faithfull, "Dark of the World, Shine on Us: The Redemption of Blackness in Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*," *Religions* 9, no. 304 (2018): 12.
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 10.
- <sup>14</sup> Monika Swamipersad, "The Contribution of Marvel Studios' *Black Panther* to the Portrayal of African Americans on Screen" (BA thesis, American Studies, Radboud University, Nijmegen, 2018), 5.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 10.
- <sup>16</sup> Elizabeth Sakamandi, "An Afrofuturistic Reading of Mythology and Heroism in *Black Panther*, *Sundiata an Epic of Old Mali* and *Waiting for the Rain*" (Master thesis, University of Zimbabwe, 2018), 3-8.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

## II. Methods and Materials

### 1. Methods

In order to elaborate on the aforementioned issue, the need for a critical element which would enable me to approach the film from an analytical lens rises itself. For this purpose, I have resorted to Shohat and Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. The book provides an insight on the filmic (mis) representations of the non-West along with their origins. It supplies media researches with a new approach toward critical analyses with its concept of *multiculturalism*.

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, critics Shohat and Stam trace the ideological origins of the white 'superiority' and black 'inferiority'. The book begins with a thorough study of the controversial concept of Eurocentrism. For them, the latter has permeated the contemporary world; they assert: "*endemic in present-day thought and education, Eurocentrism is naturalized as 'common sense'*".<sup>1</sup> In this respect, the West spread its ideology of superiority and assimilated people into it. In addition, the theory stresses the nature of the Eurocentric philosophy. Based on an anti-Eurocentric approach, the critics bring into light the Western misnomers. According to Shohat and Stam, "*anti-Eurocentric multiculturalism [...] relativizes Europe, seeing it as a geographical fiction that flattens the cultural diversity even of Europe itself*".<sup>2</sup> The Western *hegemony* has infiltrated the world and altered its rules. It has even qualified the West as the center and assigned it the role of the judge of humanity. It consists of putting the West in the light while obscuring the non-West in the shadows. As maintained by the critics, Eurocentrism has blocked people's diversity and that is what makes it "*fundamentally unrepresentative of a world which has long been multicultural*".<sup>3</sup> Media representations of the non-West, then, are at the heart of the Western philosophy. In this sense, Western cinema is but a mere reflection of the colonial legacy with visual aids.<sup>4</sup>

Consequently, they proposed the concept of *multiculturalism* to call for dialog among cultures and to create a space for coexistence.<sup>5</sup> This is a move from discriminating other cultures to acknowledging the cultural diversity which characterizes the world. Multiculturalism can also be found in Hollywood, which was once Eurocentric, when new communities are given the chance to document their stories and struggles with Western hegemonic rules. It suggests a move from *Hollywoodcentrism*<sup>6</sup> to finally acknowledging people's heterogeneity. The critics specify the aim of the concept which is the adjustment of the power relations among these different cultural backgrounds not the creation of other centers.<sup>7</sup> It suppresses the privileged position of the West by "*benevolently, 'allow [ing]' other voices to add themselves to the mainstream.*"<sup>8</sup> Multiculturalism suggests "*thinking from the margin*"<sup>9</sup> and "*empowering the disempowered.*"<sup>10</sup>

Thus, a multiculturalist approach suggests moving beyond "*media imperialism*"<sup>11</sup> to fight marginalization and racism in cinema. On the authority of Shohat and Stam, it is to "*demand change not just in images but in power relations.*"<sup>12</sup> In the field of media studies, this approach is used to prove that "*just like the media can 'otherize' cultures, they can also promote multicultural coalitions.*"<sup>13</sup> In sum, it is an anti-Eurocentric stratagem that aspires to deconstruct the Western philosophy and underline the multicultural aspect of media.

In the context of this dissertation, the present theoretical book raises awareness of Hollywood's cinematic conventions while dealing with non-Western communities. The ideological writing of history, the racist treatment of these people, and the misrepresentation of their cultural backgrounds are at the heart of the mainstream cinema. It is only after being fully aware of these late traits that I can detect the elements which make *Black Panther* stand in contrast to the values cherished by Hollywood filmmakers. The book provides me with the right procedure of scrutinizing the film and digging up its rebuttal of the conventional representation of Africa.

## **2. Materials**

*Black Panther* revolves around the fictional African nation called Wakanda. This nation has grown and developed without encounter with the white race. Wakanda is a very powerful African nation which can compete with the First World nations technologically and economically. The secret of this nation's strength consists in its natural resources mainly its possession of vibranium. The latter is considered, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), as the strongest and most precious substance in the universe. For this reason, Wakanda is one of the wealthiest and most technologically advanced countries in the world. However, Wakanda's development and technological progress has been hidden from the rest of the world due to the fear of the barbaric practices on Africa. In the eyes of several countries, especially the USA, Wakanda is a poor Third World nation unable to manage its own internal affairs.

Wakanda is a very organized African nation; its political, economic, technological, and military institutions are based on the pre-colonial African way of life. Its monarch is called T'Challa who like previous monarchs extends the Wakandan policy of isolationism until he was faced by his antagonist, Killmonger. Because African communities all over the world were suffering and experiencing harsh situations, Killmonger was fighting to help them by violating Wakanda's foreign policy to offer them weapons with what to fight back their oppressors and assist them in their quest for emancipation.

Despite the fact that it is a highly developed nation, the Wakandans cherish their traditions and culture. The civilization and culture of the continent form an important part of their lives. Everything from architecture to garments is inspired by the African spirit. In terms of religion as well, the Wakandans did not give up on their own beliefs, they follow the same pre-colonial belief systems common to most African states. Their nation is a place where tradition coexists with the new technological innovations in a harmonious way.

**Endnotes:**

- <sup>1</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 1.
- <sup>2</sup>. Ibid, 4.
- <sup>3</sup>. Ibid, 4.
- <sup>4</sup>. Ibid, 106.
- <sup>5</sup>. Ibid, 49.
- <sup>6</sup>. Ibid, 29.
- <sup>7</sup>. Ibid, 48.
- <sup>8</sup>. Ibid, 48.
- <sup>9</sup>. Ibid, 48.
- <sup>10</sup>. Ibid, 48.
- <sup>11</sup>. Ibid, 31.
- <sup>12</sup>. Ibid, 48.
- <sup>13</sup>. Ibid, 7.



### III. Results

Throughout this dissertation, I endeavored to approach *Black Panther* in the light of Shohat and Stam's *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*. The major concern of the research is uncovering the film's implicit opposition to the Eurocentric philosophy via its representation of Africa with its fictional nation: Wakanda. Studying *Black Panther* in the light of the abovementioned theory has enabled me to dig up the film's commitment to the restoration of the dignity of the African continent and its cultures without overlooking that of the people of African descent.

The present research entails a thorough analysis of the principle of inversion in the film's narrative, its cast, and setting. At the outset, I engaged in underpinning the Western misconception of African history and its subsequent transformation into praxis as seen in *Black Panther*. In fact, the correction of the colonial history of Africa in the film has been one of the major concerns of this dissertation. It is not only about revealing the dark side of colonialism but also raising awareness of its effects during the post-colonial era.

Additionally, part of the discussion is devoted to examine the issue of representation as far as the depiction of colored people in mainstream cinema is concerned. It brings into light the affiliation of racism with cinema. In fact, Hollywood cinema has once displayed racist treatments with regard to non-Westerners, including both the people and their respective lands. Highlighting the media racism is particularly done to contrast it with *Black Panther's* revolutionary black cast. The aim was to use this blockbuster in order to denote the changes that occurred within Hollywood in terms of representing the non-West. After a careful inspection of the film it has been revealed to the reader that the Africans, represented by the Wakandans, are portrayed with positive images.

The portrayal of African cultures and traditions in the film is granted a spot in this research as well. *Black Panther* diverges from previous Hollywood films with its

multicultural character. Indeed, the film has accurately dealt with the African culture and conveyed the diversity of the continent. By relying on African history, mythology, and natural setting to develop its fictional nation, the film has rebuked several stereotypes about the African continent. Besides, the orality of African traditions is included in the present research. After in-depth inspection of the film, I considered an unprecedented emphasis on African cultural elements.

From all of this, I came to realize that *Black Panther* has altered the norms of Hollywood's depiction of the African continent and its peoples. It challenges the misrepresentations of people of African descent and empowers their presence in this cinematic giant.

## IV. Discussion

### Chapter One: Unveiling the Eurocentric Constructedness of the West

#### 1. The Anti-colonial Conception of African History

Africa has a long history with colonialism that it becomes almost inevitable for us not to speak about the continent without making any references to its experience with it; the two are historically intertwined. Colonialism in the context of Africa refers to decades of damnation, exploitation, and coercive domination over the continent and its peoples. Director Ryan Coogler realized that a film targeting the African communities cannot overlook dealing with an issue whose effects stretch to present day. The film broke the ground with its depiction of the colonial history of Africa by positing the colonized perspective at the center of the narrative.

I have chosen to start analyzing this part of the discussion with the concept of ‘imperialism’, which I intend to use to refer to the period predating modern European colonialism. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, the scholars argue that imperialism corresponds to the period of time between 1870 and 1914.<sup>1</sup> As an ally to colonialism, imperialism refers to an early stage of the former which refers mainly to a “*systematic search for markets and an expansionist exporting of capital.*”<sup>2</sup> In the wake of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, many European powers were in competition to have the lion’s share of Africa. Africa, in the context of the ‘Scramble for Africa’, is seen by the major imperial forces as a piece of cake that needs to be partitioned. The *Berlin Conference* (1884) marked a turning point in the history of Africa and accentuated the colonialist presence there. The latter was mainly motivated by the *Industrial Revolution* (1760-1840) and the urgent need for raw materials. Africa presented a plan to get wealthy the easy way; it owns the most precious substances on earth and human resources as well.

Narrating a story primarily about Africa and the struggles of the Africans in the diaspora, *Black Panther* draws closer attention to the issue of imperialism, its danger, and its

effect on the continent. If in colonial-style cinema, the Europeans provided their own narratives about imperialism in which they naturalized its practice, in *Black Panther* we are provided with another version of the same coin. In this film, Africans and African-Americans are no longer silenced; they are speaking for themselves and denouncing the cruel and evil side of imperialism.

The richness of Africa is one of the major ideas developed in *Black Panther*. The concept of creating a fictional African nation which owns one of the most valuable substances in the universe supports the idea that the continent is one of the richest places on earth. Vibranium is, from my own standpoint, an allegory of the super abundant wealth of the African countries. In other words, it symbolizes the raw materials that the West has been interested in taking away and this is the very reason of the West being an economic and industrial giant now. In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, critics Shohat and Stam argue that the West sees itself as the “mind” while the “non-West” is regarded as an “unrefined raw material.”<sup>3</sup> Starting from this, the Wakandan vibranium can be said to testify the real motif behind imperialism: greed for raw materials. Therefore, the West’s projection of itself as the creator of civilization and the origins of science and advancement overlooks the fact that their development would never see the day without cross-cultural exchanges and borrowing.<sup>4</sup> Because the white man is the creator of civilization, he created with it a world of white supremacy and black subordination.

Projecting the non-West which corresponds to Africa, represented by Wakanda, in the film as a source of raw materials is done with the aim of revealing the true nature of imperialism. If the West is highly developed now, it was mainly due to the imperial exploitation of African natural resources.<sup>5</sup> Without imperialism, the destiny of the West which holds the monopoly of the world in the contemporary global scene would have been quite

different. Due to this interconnectedness between the West and the East, the two cannot and should not be viewed as antonyms as it is argued by the authors.<sup>6</sup>

Because the West believes itself to be the spirit of science, they perceived the natives as unfit and incapable of using their raw materials. In *Black Panther*, this vision is being elucidated. The film stages this groundless attitude through the character of Ulysses Klaue, who embodies the imperialist gaze toward Africa in my opinion. Klaue's character embodies the white man's deceit. Director Ryan Coogler, himself, has once cited in one of his interviews that he made Klaue wear the blue color because "*it's the color of colonialism.*"<sup>7</sup> Klaue is an arms dealer whose greatest goal is to get possession over Wakandan vibranium. The latter attracted the attention of Klaue the way the raw materials amazed the imperialists and invited them to settle in Africa.

In addition, Klaue has the major feature which connects him with imperialists. He views the Wakandans as unfit to use their vibranium. He expressed his purely monocentric perspective by arguing that the Wakandans are not worthy enough to possess such a natural gift. He did not hesitate to show this view by describing the Wakandans as 'savages.' Indeed, Klaue's imperialism is visible in one of his utterances which is "*you savages didn't deserve it.*"<sup>8</sup> This sentence summarizes the imperialist attitude toward Africa perfectly. In this respect, *Black Panther* satirizes *Social Darwinism* which made the Africans sink to the level of sub-human species who ignore the way to use what is their own possession. As a result, the role of the imperialists has come, take the wealth and make the best use of it evidently.

Furthermore, Ulysses Klaue is convinced that Wakanda is the true El Dorado; he contends: "*it's all a front [Wakanda's poverty]. Searchers looked for it for centuries. El Dorado: the Golden City. They thought they could find it in South America but it was in Africa the whole time.*"<sup>9</sup> Linking Wakanda with the South American myth of El Dorado is important. The latter refers to the beginnings of imperialism with Christopher Columbus'

voyage to the New World in 1492.<sup>10</sup> Besides, it proves the greediness of the European explorers who invaded both the southern and northern parts of America in search for the so-considered Garden of Eden. For Klaue, those adventurers were mistaken because the real El Dorado was in Africa, specifically in Wakanda. Consequently, Klaue seems to continue what his ancestors have already begun; storm Wakanda and confiscate its vibranium. In this sense, Klaue shares some character traits with Kurtz (Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*), especially the greed for wealth and the mistreatment of the locals.

In *Black Panther*, King T'Chaka mentioned that Klaue has attempted to pass the borders of Wakanda and steal the vibranium; he says: "*this man, Ulysses Klaue, stole a quarter ton of vibranium and triggered a bomb at the border to escape. Many lives were lost.*"<sup>11</sup> As it can be understood, Klaue did not only try to steal the vibranium but also killed many Wakandans to obtain it. Klaue's crimes are similar to those of the imperialists who murdered innocent people who did not surrender to their needs. The lives of Africans are not considered that important by the imperialists. In fact, the devalorization and dehumanization of the lives of people of color are a common standpoint among them.<sup>12</sup> However, in case the Africans defended themselves and responded to the violence of the imperialists, they are depicted as being barbaric by their oppressors. When the Wakandans caught Klaue they made him pay for his crimes, but it seems that his suffering made him believe more in the trope of savageness. In a short dialogue with Killmonger, Klaue professes: "*you really wanna go to Wakanda? They're savages. This is what they do to people like us [showing him a scar on his neck].*"<sup>13</sup> Taking Klaue's case into consideration, we can presume that *Black Panther* counters imperialist films by showing that the Europeans are the real menace to the Africans. In this case, Klaue is a threat to the Wakandans not the contrary.

The history which links Africa and Europe does not stop here for *Black Panther* has given us the necessary material to see the moment colonialism began in the continent. Prior to

the colonial practices in Africa, the white colonizer has possessed a certain authority over the continent through its imperial legacy. Colonialism is; therefore, an extension of imperialism with a more brutal control over Africa economically, politically, and militarily.<sup>14</sup>



**Capture One:** The Colonizers' Destruction of Africa and Enslavement of Africans.<sup>15</sup>

In the opening scene, the camera places us face to face with the clash between colonizer/colonized from which vantage point we see the reality of Europe's deeds in its overseas colonies. Apart from the colonial discourse which rendered the stealing of land legitimate and pacific, the film documents the reality of colonialism in Africa. In fact, the short scene introduces us to the armed conflicts characteristic of colonialism; it encapsulates the confrontations between Europe and the various lands they colonized. Outside the borders of Wakanda, wars and violent conflicts are widespread. In this sequence, the viewers are introduced to the brutalities committed in foreign lands in the name of civilization. With the aid of visual effects, as shown above, the main methods of colonialism are revealed. Shohat and Stam cited the main premises of colonialism but the only one which best suits my arguments is "*the destruction of indigenous peoples and cultures; [and] the enslavement of Africans.*"<sup>16</sup> The battlefield has indeed mirrored these issues. It shows the different military tactics adopted by the European powers to seize control over Africa, including: military

invasion and the transatlantic slave trade. *Black Panther* directed attention to the atrocity of slavery and also to the hardships faced by the African-Americans in the USA as well.

This last point is documented through the story of Killmonger and his African-American community which is deprived of a decent place in the mainstream society. In fact, the geographical displacement of Africans was a major outcome of colonialism.<sup>17</sup> The Africans who were spread around the diaspora, as a result of the transatlantic slave trade, became minorities in those new societies. They were marginalized and repressed due to their different skin color. Prince N'Jobu, who is a war dog and a Wakandan spy in the USA, is confronted with the inequalities and ill-treatment of his brothers and sisters. He revealed the truth to his brother by saying: *"I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated, communities flooded with drugs and weapons, they are overly policed and incarcerated. All over the planet our people suffer because they don't have the tool to fight back."*<sup>18</sup> In the light of this, one can recall the harsh conditions of the Afro-Americans in their path to emancipation. N'Jobu has indeed summarized the hardships encountered by the African-Americans in the USA due to some irrational notions of racism.

Moreover, recounting the story of Wakanda and the area surrounding it to his son, Prince N'Jobu uttered a sentence which invites the audience to reflect upon the nature the colonizer's arrival in Africa. He said: *'as Wakanda thrived, the world around it descended further into chaos.'*<sup>19</sup> He associated the arrival of the white man with 'chaos.' Away from the *'European primitivist fantasy'*<sup>20</sup> which legitimizes the colonial presence by claiming that they are the messengers of light and enlightenment, N'Jobu offers a different version of the same story. Here, Africa is the victim and Europe is the one responsible for the disorder. As it can be noticed, there is a shift of perspectives from the colonizer to the colonized. The West always claims that disorder is a major feature of Africa while their civilization is based on order.<sup>21</sup> However, *Black Panther* inverts this logic and shows the truth that Europe has hidden



under the guise of its holy mission. Europe, as it is shown in the film, did not bring peace and order but rather massive destruction of both the fauna and the flora. Using military force, they destroyed everything which stands in their way.

Another strategy of colonialism adopted by the colonial powers, according to Shohat and Stam, is “*the expropriation of territory on a massive scale.*”<sup>22</sup> Toward the end of the film, and exactly during the final battle between T’Challa and his rival Killmonger, the king of Wakanda has indirectly criticized the institution of colonialism and its practices through the following sentence “*you want to see us become just like the people you hate so much? Divide and conquer the land as they did?*”<sup>23</sup> The two words ‘divide’ and ‘conquer’ are very significant here. They correspond to the strategic method of ‘*Divide and Conquer*’ adopted by the imperialist/colonialist powers to strengthen their presence in their colonies. Before the coming of the colonizer, Africa was united and there were neither frontiers nor ethnic tensions among its people.<sup>24</sup> This strategy was first initiated during the era of imperialism to form colonies. It was then carried further to create borders between African lands which were eventually transformed into countries after independence. *Black Panther* raised awareness about the dangers of this policy of ‘*Divide and Conquer*’ which secured the subjugation of Africa and its exploitation.<sup>25</sup>

*Black Panther* calls attention to what the media critics termed as “*the museological fetishizing of cultures.*”<sup>26</sup> The spirit of enlightenment associated with the West gave it the mission of rescuing the civilizations of Africa from oblivion through taking their artifacts to the service of Western knowledge.<sup>27</sup> With the European occupation of African territories, many African archeological treasures were transported to European museums to stand as evidence for the progress of Western reason. The sequence of the film shot in the Museum of Great Britain deals with this point. The West African Exhibit, as it can be noticed in the following image, displays a wide variety of African artifacts.



**Capture Two:** African Artifacts in the London Museum.<sup>28</sup>

From my point of view, the scene condemns one of the results of colonialism which consists in transporting cultural artifacts as part of the West's philanthropic mission in Africa. This interpretation is based on the explanations provided by the museum director to Killmonger. She cited that the artifacts Killmonger was curious about belong to tribes like *"the Bobo Ashanti people"*, *"the Edo people"*, and *"the Fula tribe."*<sup>29</sup> These artifacts belong to two African countries that are Benin and Ghana, respectively. By having a closer study, one can easily deduce that these nations have been colonized by the British Empire for quite a long time. Hence, Britain as a European force which is believed to spread civilization in Africa has robbed from these peoples the peculiarities of their own civilizations.

In this context, critics Shohat and Stam relied on Sally Price's words when arguing that *"much of the historical archive of what we now call the "Third" and "Fourth" World was "discovered", "seized", commodified, moved to Western institutions."*<sup>30</sup> Starting from this point, I can openly contend that there is a paradox between what the Empire pretends to accomplish and what it does in reality for one cannot help construct a nation through dispossessing it from its cultural heritage. In addition, Killmonger was not passive during his interaction with the museum director. The former wanted to take back a misidentified

Wakandan artifact but the director of the museum was astonished. The conversation of these two characters implies some of the colonial practices in Africa.

Museum Director: These items aren't for sell.

Killmonger: How do you think your ancestors got these? You think they paid a fair price? Or did they take it like they took everything?<sup>31</sup>

Considering the above conversation, Killmonger has explicitly referred to the cruelties practiced by the European soldiers on Africans. His utterance develops three crucial ideas: the European occupation of African lands, the slaughter of those people, and the stealing of their cultural artifacts.

Moreover, colonialism, through *Black Panther's* anti-colonial depiction, has proved to be a threat to the stability of Africa. Due to the traumatic experience of Africa with it, Wakanda protected itself from the rest of the world. This fear is mirrored in the film through T'Challa's words: "*if the world found out what we truly are, what we possess, we could lose our way of life.*"<sup>32</sup> It alludes to the danger of colonialism and its consequences on Africa. If the world discovers the secret of the Wakandans, the return of colonialism would be likely possible because it possesses what the West needs the most.

The formal end of colonialism paved the way for a more dangerous form of it which Kwame Nkrumah labeled 'neocolonialism.' The latter term is seen by its coiner as "*the last [and worst] stage of imperialism*"<sup>33</sup> in which nations are not controlled by direct presence or confrontation but by indirect means of domination including: media, political organizations, economic drains, etc. This idea is supported by Shohat and Stam for whom neocolonialism stands as a direct result of colonialism. As an aspect of neocolonialism, for the critics, "*the contemporary global scene is now dominated by a coterie of powerful nation states, consisting basically of Western Europe, the US, and Japan.*"<sup>34</sup> From a political standpoint, the United Nations General Assembly at the end of *Black Panther* is an instance of this claim. It is dominated by a white majority presented by the most powerful nations in the world. It symbolizes the political domination which is a lively component of neocolonialism and

arraigns the West on it. These Western nations were mocking and laughing at T'Challa's speech by arguing that a nation of farmers, like Wakanda, cannot contribute in technological or economic exchanges. One of them was the French Ambassador who states: "*with all due respect King T'Challa, what can a nation of farmers offer to the rest of the world?*"<sup>35</sup>

In addition, the techno-informational apparatus also contributes in spreading information that suit the Eurocentric fable.<sup>36</sup> The BBC news report that T'Challa was watching at the beginning of the film pictured Wakanda as a typical African nation state which suffers from famine and underdevelopment. However, it failed in accounting for the reasons of the latter. Basically, these issues are the direct outcome of the practice of neocolonialism in Africa because the poverty of Africa stands in opposition to the wealth of its '*colonial master*.'<sup>37</sup> Based on this, the critics declare that one of the corollaries of neocolonialism is the '*widespread of poverty*.'<sup>38</sup> Neocolonialism impoverished the continent which was once one of the richest places in the world and made sink to the level of a 'Third World'.

Africa has been completely underdeveloped by the West with its economic draining. This is a point referred to by Shohat and Stam as the principle of '*austerity programs*'<sup>39</sup> offered by the West to help boost the economy of the Third World. For the critics, it part of a neocolonial plan to widen the gap between the West and the East for it stands as an "*economic form of control*."<sup>40</sup> In the same BBC report, the news anchor states that "*Wakanda does not engage in international trade or accept aid*."<sup>41</sup> The main aspects of neocolonialism are hinted at in the sentence. It provides us with enlightening information as far as the issue of neocolonialism and its strategies are concerned. Foreign aid and loans are given to the African nations which cannot bear them. Consequently, they engender '*a debt trap*'<sup>42</sup> that serves the West's special place in the world, viz. the center.

Unlike traditional Hollywood films, *Black Panther* commits itself to the condemnation of the colonial legacy in Africa. It exposes the mendacity of the colonizers' presence in the African lands and their mistreatment of its peoples. The film reveals that Africa and its population have been victims of a system which has always pretended justice and philanthropy as a means of hiding its evil side.

## **2. The Amalgamation of History with Discourse**

The institution of colonialism does not function by its own; it is always accompanied by a body of knowledge generated to fortify it. This is what critic Edward Said termed as '*the Colonialist discourse*' which helped the Europeans in confirming the necessity and nobility of occupying foreign lands. In the preceding pages, I tackled the issue of colonialism as a praxis which destroyed Africa: nations and peoples. For the time being, much emphasis is going to be put on its discursive framework.

The expression and implementation of Eurocentrism prevails the contemporary world. *Black Panther* did not overlook denouncing the Western *hegemony* which otherizes non-Westerners. In *Black Panther*, traces of Eurocentrism are still present to show the hypocrisy of the supposedly superior race. The Wakandan policy of isolationism grants the Orientalist vision toward Wakanda and its people a continuation. Because Wakanda presents itself as a conventional African nation, the world around it is still using the Eurocentric lens to perceive it. These attitudes are staged through verbal and non-verbal means, that is to say linguistic language and body language, respectively.

In *Black Panther*, the Wakandans and their country are victims of the philosophical traditions of the West. The latter, in the film, believes itself to be the archetype of progress and the nations which do not conform to its imaginary norms are cast to the margin. Because Wakanda diverges from the notions of Western development, it is seen as a Third World nation. From a Eurocentric lens, the world is divided into two hemispheres: the Western and

the Eastern.<sup>43</sup> This division which seems geographical at the surface is indeed allegorical and loaded with meaning. *Black Panther* attempted to explicate the arbitrariness of this antagonism via the Western characters' logic. In the film, the misrepresentation of Wakanda and the ill-treatment of its people by Westerners testifies the improbity of the Eurocentric discourse which posits West at the top and Africa at the bottom. For the white characters, Wakanda is underdeveloped and its citizens are savages.

The BBC news report, in the film, assigned the image of a poor nation to Wakanda. In this context, Louis Althusser contends that ideology is a set of illusive and *'false representations'* of the exterior world.<sup>44</sup> Having said that, it is clear that the image attributed to Wakanda is at the service of the Western ideology. It helps maintain and spread the idea that Wakanda is underdeveloped. The landscapes chosen by BBC to refer to Wakanda are very stereotypical. They reduce this nation to a very primitive nation comparing to the Western criteria of development. Critics Shohat and Stam tackled the issue of representing Oriental lands; they say: *"the portrayal of a "Third World" region as underdeveloped is often reinforced by a topological reductionism that figures the orient as desert and, metaphorically, as dreariness."*<sup>45</sup> The images selected by BBC feature Wakanda as a desert where there is no infrastructure; just Man and nature. The point here is that the representation of the Wakandan territories does not mirror reality but distorts it. The population also is completely misrepresented. They were depicted as suffering from poverty and lacking the basic conditions of life. BBC, as a *state apparatus*, is committed to Eurocentrism *"which has systematically degraded Africa as deficient according to Europe's own arbitrary criteria and hierarchies."*<sup>46</sup> As it is seen, many clichés are deployed by the Western media to intensify the gap between the West and the East. Thus, *Black Panther* decries the media apparatus's allegiance to Eurocentrism and the circulation of its inconsistent claims.

One of the major outcomes of colonialism, according to Shohat and Stam, is racism. For them, it stands as *“both an ally and the partial product of colonialism.”*<sup>47</sup> Racism suggests a social hierarchy between the Westerners who view themselves as the spirit of enlightenment and the people of color who are still trapped in a dark abyss with zero chances of escaping. *Black Panther* denounces racism through the Westerners’ treatment of the Wakandans. The audience is provided with an insight on the unreasonable ill-treatment of the Africans which is the gist of racism by its turn. Its victims in the film are the Wakandans and the Afro-Americans. To put it circumspectly, they symbolize the people whose history was once linked to colonialism and displacement, respectively.<sup>48</sup> According to the scholars, its practice is not limited to the African soil but it is felt in the Western lands as well; an idea that we can clearly recognize in *Black Panther*.<sup>49</sup> The sequence illustrating it, in the film, is the one shot in the Museum of Great Britain. As a black man who entered the West African Exhibit, Killmonger was put under surveillance by the security guards. He describes their alert toward him by saying: *“you got all this security watching me ever since I walked in.”*<sup>50</sup> Killmonger is taken for as an intruder and a source of destabilization only because of his skin color. He is an outsider for whom the British did not show respect but suspicion.

The lack of trust toward colored people is a dominant feature in Western societies; they consider them as being dangerous and untrustworthy. Within this framework, Said asserts that for the West, *“[the] Orientals are inveterate liars, they are “lethargic and suspicious.”*<sup>51</sup> The Wakandans in *Black Panther* are given no credence by the Westerners. The whites’ racist beliefs dictate upon them that people of color do not deserve to be trusted. Even a delinquent person like Klaue argues that he deserves to be trusted more than the Wakandans. He tells Agent Ross: *“you know, you really shouldn’t trust the Wakandans. I’m much more your speed.”*<sup>52</sup> What is more surprising is the fact that Everett Ross believed Klaue’s words, a thing which can be deduced from what he said to T’Challa: *“how much*

*more are you hiding?*”<sup>53</sup> Starting from this, it is an abuse from the part of Ross to believe an arms dealer and doubt about the honesty of a king. Depending on arbitrary notions of race, Ross chose to put his confidence in a criminal while suspecting the credibility of the Wakandans.

The idea of whiteness as compared to blackness is nothing more than a racist belief to justify aggressions and injustices because *“racial categories are not real but constructs.”*<sup>54</sup> Another instance of racism is the look of disgust that the women gave to King T’Challa and Okoye in the police station. As is can be seen in the selected image, the woman’s look communicates the belittlement of the black race.



**Capture Three:** A Non-Verbal Racist Attitude toward the King and his Guard.<sup>55</sup>

In this framework, Shohat and Stam claim that *“the “subtle humiliations” and “gross arrogance” [...] accompany taken for granted privilege.”*<sup>56</sup> The woman was pointing at T’Challa and his guard and was muttering something behind their backs. Through her mimics, it is stark clear that what she was saying was very negative. Her skin color gave her the right to mistreat others. In fact, her downward view is the quintessence of the Western *hegemony*; it symbolizes the racist attitudes ingrained in some Eurocentric individuals.



Shohat and Stam analyzed the linguistic manifestations of Eurocentrism; they contend that “*metaphors, tropes, and allegorical motifs played a constitutive role in “figuring” European superiority.*”<sup>57</sup> In fact, the Europeans have always considered the non-Westerners as unequal, subhuman, and backward species. Their thoughts are circulated with the use of language. This fact is exposed through making the white characters use a purely racist vocabulary. A word such as ‘savages,’ which is used several times to refer to the Wakandans in the film, recalls racism in its pure states. It is part of what the critics termed as “*the animalizing trope*” which “*renders the colonized as wild beasts.*”<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, sentences like “*a king of a Third World nation*”<sup>59</sup>, “*a nation of farmers*”<sup>60</sup> and “*the tiny nation of Wakanda [...] remains one of the poorest countries in the world*”<sup>61</sup> do mirror the Western vision of Africa as a land of poverty.

Another important scene which evokes the Eurocentric philosophy is the interrogation which took place between Ulysses Klaue and agent Ross. When Klaue asked the CIA agent about his knowledge concerning Wakanda, he responded with an answer full of stereotypes and clichés. For him, Wakanda suggests “*shepherds, textiles, cool outfits...*”<sup>62</sup> an answer one can anticipate from Americans. All this words serve the goal of ‘otherizing’ the Africans because they do not conform to the arbitrary rules of the whites.

As it has been analyzed in this chapter, the ideological conventions adopted by classical Hollywood cinema have undergone a harsh criticism in *Black Panther*. The film uses these same Eurocentric consumptions in order to disapprove this defective discourse. The audience is confronted with the truth which has been blurred by the spirit of civilization and reason. The Eurocentric ideology, which normalizes the unfair treatment toward Africans, is depicted as invalid in the film. Through *Black Panther*’s lens, the audience can finally detect this unfounded ideology which is grounded on intolerance. The film satirizes the values that the West and its people have been cherishing toward the Africans.

## Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 15.
- <sup>2</sup>. *Ibid*, 15.
- <sup>3</sup>. *Ibid*, 14.
- <sup>4</sup>. *Ibid*, 14.
- <sup>5</sup>. *Ibid*, 15.
- <sup>6</sup>. *Ibid*, 15.
- <sup>7</sup>. Vanity Fair, “Black Panther’s Director Ryan Coogler Breaks Down a Fight Scene.”
- <sup>8</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:53:22.
- <sup>9</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:56:11.
- <sup>10</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 61.
- <sup>11</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:04:53.
- <sup>12</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 24.
- <sup>13</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 01:03:11.
- <sup>14</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 15.
- <sup>15</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:01:20.
- <sup>16</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 16.
- <sup>17</sup>. *Ibid*, 16.
- <sup>18</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 01:05:53.
- <sup>19</sup>. *Ibid*, 00:01:19.
- <sup>20</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 59.
- <sup>21</sup>. Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 38.
- <sup>22</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 16.
- <sup>23</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 01:50:32.
- <sup>24</sup>. Richard Morrock, “The Effects of Colonialist “Divide and Rule” Strategy upon the Colonized People,” *Science and Society* 37, no. 2 (1973): 130.
- <sup>25</sup>. *Ibid*, 129.
- <sup>26</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 153.
- <sup>27</sup>. *Ibid*, 153.
- <sup>28</sup>. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:15:29.
- <sup>29</sup>. *Ibid*, 00:15:52.
- <sup>30</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 153.

31. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:16:36.
32. *Ibid*, 00:34:16.
33. Nkrumah Kwame, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: International Publisher Co, Inc., 1996), 1.
34. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
35. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 02:06:29.
36. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
37. Nkrumah Kwame, *Neocolonialism: The Last Stage of Imperialism* (London: International Publisher Co, Inc., 1996), 2.
38. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
39. *Ibid*, 17.
40. *Ibid*, 17.
41. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:07:19.
42. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
43. Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.
44. Louis Althusser, *Ideology and ideological State Apparatuses* (New York and London: Verso, 2014), 183.
45. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 148.
46. *Ibid*, 57.
47. *Ibid*, 18.
48. *Ibid*, 18.
49. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 16.
50. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:16:48.
51. Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 39.
52. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:55:35.
53. *Ibid*, 00:58:34.
54. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 19.
55. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:57:20.
56. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 19.
57. *Ibid*, 137.
58. *Ibid*, 137.
59. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:44:10.
60. *Ibid*, 02:06:32.
61. *Ibid*, 00:06:59.
62. *Ibid*, 00:05:09

## Chapter Two: The Demystification of the Eurocentric Cinematic Conventions

### 1. Liberating Self-Representation

Critics Shohat and Stam argue that the emergence of cinema coincided with a period of time during which imperialism reached its apogee.<sup>1</sup> To quote their words, it is “*an epoch where Europe held sway over vast tracts of alien territory and hosts of subjugated peoples.*”<sup>2</sup> Therefore, cinema, as a *state apparatus*, adopted the colonialist discourse and intensified it. The peculiarity of cinema lies in its ability to not only introduce the West to its ‘others’ but also to show their conditions of ‘otherness.’<sup>3</sup> The dominant cinema has stereotypically represented Africa as ‘a dark continent’ and its people as dangerous beasts. These representations are merely political and serve the colonialist discourse *par excellence*. They have their origins in the reality of the mistreatment of colored people. The black communities, among others in the USA, were not allowed to represent themselves in the screen. At the outset, they were completely forbidden from taking part in cinema. After that, they were given roles as mere shadows for the heroism of the white characters. These roles correspond to a set of stereotypes and distortions that aim at shattering the image of blackness. These representations are based on the West’s “*subjective interpretations [which] were deeply embedded in the discourses of their respective empires.*”<sup>4</sup>

A brief point about the presence of people of color in Hollywood needs to be made for *Black Panther* calls back the notion of Black Cinema. The black communities, as I have cited earlier, were disenfranchised in cinema through stereotyped representations. It is worth noting that representations go hand in hand with the issue of identity. The colored people in the USA embody the notion of the ‘other’ as compared to that of the ‘self’. Their different skin color determined their status in society. Because the ‘other’ always diverges from the norms set by the West, colored people in the USA are cast to the margins. Dominant cinema marginalized African-Americans due to their status as outsiders. It targets black communities and

stereotypes them. Black Cinema thrived in opposition to the racist dealings with the experiences of colored people. Susan Hayward defines it as “*a cinema emanating from Black diasporic communities in the USA [...] to a cinema written from within (but not for as in ‘on behalf of’) those communities and which is made by individuals who come from those communities.*”<sup>5</sup> This is a revolutionary step in the history of African-American representations. After being disempowered through media portrayals and being victims of the racial politics of the mainstream cinema, colored people finally have a great opportunity to project their own story told from their own perspective. In this respect, I argue that *Black Panther* retains features which connect it to Black Cinema. The film is made by people of color to and for colored audiences. Besides, their voices are put at the center of the narrative. The African-Americans in the film went back to the origins of their ancestors that is Africa. They provided positive images about their origins or their ‘home’ as they call it in the film. Their projection includes also their own experiences as colored people whether in Africa or after their displacement around the diaspora.

By saying this, I do not aim at accusing Hollywood or Westerners of being totally racist in their treatment of minorities. Critics Shohat and Stam agree that not all Westerners are racist and “*not all European writers have been uncritical or Eurocentric.*”<sup>6</sup> In fact, the creators of this superhero are two white Americans, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby. Besides, Hollywood, as the critics point out, is not “*monolithically reactionary.*”<sup>7</sup> Recent years have witnessed a change in Hollywood’s representations of minorities. The critics believe that it “*has made gestures towards “correct” casting; African-American [...] performers have been allowed to “represent” their communities.*”<sup>8</sup> *Black Panther* combines both the notion of Black Cinema and mainstream cinema. It transcends *Hollywoodcentrism*<sup>9</sup> by integrating African-American participation. It is a film where Africa is represented by players of African origins speaking an African language (IsiXhosa).

Currently, Black Cinema forms a lively part of Hollywood and *Black Panther* can be taken as an instance. The film is one of the biggest blockbusters in Hollywood. In terms of total gross, it surpasses all solo superhero films both within and outside the MCU.<sup>10</sup> An African-American blockbuster is a huge advancement for black communities in relation to filmic representations. It stands as evidence that their voices have reached people around the globe and altered their visions. Further, the critics maintain that “*Oscar ceremonies constitute a powerful form of advertizing.*”<sup>11</sup> During the beginnings of cinema, African-Americans were generally deprived from participating in film awards because “*the nomination process appears to reflect institutional bias.*”<sup>12</sup> However, *Black Panther* illustrates a slow progress within the Oscars. The present film has been nominated for seven Academy Awards and won three of them. Ruth Carter and Hannah Beachler became the first two African-Americans to win Academy Awards in the categories of Best Costume Design and Best Production Design, respectively.<sup>13</sup> In the MCU, *Black Panther* is the only film to be nominated in the category of Best Picture at the 91<sup>st</sup> Academy Awards and the first to win an Academy Award as well.<sup>14</sup>

*Black Panther* signals a return of the oppressed and a corrective move toward African and African-Americans’ presence in Hollywood. It embodies the changing situation within Hollywood film industry. From a postmodernist perspective, it suggests the decline of ‘metanarratives’ and their replacement by ‘macro-narratives.’<sup>15</sup> Within Hollywood, the equivalent of this is the move from speaking on behalf of African-American communities to finally giving them the right to speak for themselves.<sup>16</sup>

The film under scrutiny revolutionized the conventions of mainstream cinema in a myriad of ways. It has subverted the logic of the Eurocentric consumptions of cinema by changing the norms of colored people’s presence in films. One striking fact about *Black Panther* is its nearly all colored cast. In fact, this is a big advancement in the area of community representation. The latter are not just a set of images, they are political,

allegorical, and serve a specific discourse. Blacks' representation in imperial films, for instance, was based on the principle of race; consequently, they were misrepresented. In this film, a nearly total colored cast adds to the notion of empowerment.

*Black Panther* relied on a cast composed of a majority of black actors with a small minority of white actors. This is in reality a challenge to 'the racial politics of casting' prevailing classical Hollywood cinema. In such films, the Westerners interpret the principle roles while colored people are reduced to the role of extras or villains in some cases.<sup>17</sup> It is in a way an embodiment of the notion of the Westerners as the 'self' and colored people as the 'other.' This distinction is manifested through their positions and behaviors in films. While white actors have always played the role of heroes who save the world, no colored man was seen as a hero protecting humanity. These white heroes display the main characteristics of the 'self'; they are cunning, strong, humanitarian, etc. On the other hand, colored actors are used to reinforce the myth of blackness. They are generally portrayed as criminals, rapists...etc.

What makes *Black Panther* very peculiar is the fact that it destabilized this philosophy by introducing the first black superhero in the screen. The blacks, who were just side kicks in blockbusters, are performing the central roles in this film. The colored cast overshadows the presence of the whites in the film. It broke Hollywood filmmaking traditions by positing colored people in prestigious roles. The Wakandans in the film are the 'self' who stand in contrast to the values of the West. The superhero Black Panther (Chadwick Boseman) emancipated colored people and improved their presence in Hollywood. The film reinforces its divergence with its peculiar celebration of blackness. By placing a colored man as a hero and a principle character in the film, it suggests a powerful delineation of colored people. As a result, new paths are made visible concerning their presence in the mainstream cinema.

Over and above, the use of white actors, in the film, is unconventional. It diverges from the dominant roles they were accustomed with. I assume that, in *Black Panther*, they

embody the hypocrite side of their race. Klaue, for instance, is a white man who is considered as a danger and threat to the Africans. His role goes at odds with the old conventional roles of whites in the mainstream cinema. The character traits of Klaue, which make him a violent malicious cruel murderer who leads criminal plots, were generally attributed to black performers. The trope of savageness, as it can be seen, is inverted on its creator. In the film, T'Challa called Klaue a “murderer”<sup>18</sup>, a moment of inversion of roles between blacks and whites. A black man calling a white man a murderer is an outstanding move in dismantling the racial cinematic norms in Hollywood.

Another essential detail to take into consideration is the portrayal of African lands in the film. Wakanda epitomizes the splendor of the African continent. By having a closer look at the film, I noticed revisions in relation to the image of African lands.



**Capture Four:** A Beautiful Wakandan Landscape.<sup>19</sup>

*Black Panther* improved the depiction of these Oriental lands in Hollywood. Before entering the plain sight, we see the magnificent nature and beautiful landscapes of Wakanda as it is shown in the screenshot above. This image stands in opposition to those chosen by the BBC news report or even those circulated in mainstream cinema, where Africa is seen as a dangerous jungle and an impenetrable wilderness. It reveals the bias of Western media. Critic Michel Foucault has referred to this issue as ‘the regime of truth’ which regulates the



circulation of information.<sup>20</sup> Each society has its own ‘regime of truth’ and what is shown on TV is not the reality but what the institutions intended the audience to see. Hence, I consider this change in the image of African lands as a direct attack on the Western institutions. Wakandan territories are not exotic or mysterious lands but beautiful and gorgeous nature.

Besides, the analyses of lightning are deemed rudimentary in this part of the discussion. As Piazzolla and Gribaudo suggested, “*light has the ability to create a wide range of emotional states and moods, and it can completely change the feeling of a shot.*”<sup>21</sup> In colonial style cinema, the images of African territories were manipulated so as to create a negative effect on the audience. This device was used to create a gloomy atmosphere, an eerie tone, and a dark mood. It is also related to what Shohat and Stam termed as the trope of light/darkness where the idea of Africa seen as ‘a dark continent’ is originated.<sup>22</sup> In imperial films, directors rely mainly on ‘low-key lightning’ to create shadows and fog to intensify the fear and suspense in the audience.<sup>23</sup> Their aim was to support Eurocentrism by showing that Africa is a dangerous and mysterious continent. Hence, films about the African continent can easily be confounded with horror films.



**Capture Five:** A Spectacular View From a Wakandan Countryside.<sup>24</sup>

In contrast, *Black Panther* depended on ‘high-key lightning’<sup>25</sup> for the scenes related to the Wakandan nature. As shown in the screenshot above, the lightning is bright and

communicates peace and an optimistic vision toward Africa. It enhances the fascinating beauty of African countries and their natural wonders. *Black Panther* vouchsafes Africa's nature a positive presence in Hollywood. The audience is more relaxed when confronted with the scenes involving African landscapes. They are even allowed to see the magnificence of African territories. The use of lightning assists the breaking away from Eurocentrism by consolidating the bright side of Africa as compared to the previously circulated tendencies.

## **2. The Dissolution of the White Supremacy in Wakanda**

In *Unthinking Eurocentrism*, the authors argue that "*the "West" is a fictional construct embroidered with myths and fantasies.*"<sup>26</sup> Qualifying the West as a myth invites us to question the *hegemony* which favored whiteness over blackness for a myth has neither a scientific rationale nor a logical basis. In *Black Panther*, we are moving beyond this myth toward a reality which has been shattered by the West. The film interrogates the validity of the Western ideology with the aim of undermining it.

In *Black Panther*, Ryan Coogler brought the delusion of the West's grandeur to its near end. The film destroyed biological determinism and altered the racial hierarchies by uplifting the image of blackness above expectations. It can be considered as an epic of black supremacy which counters the common white image. The first point that I would like to call into attention is the nation of Wakanda *per se*. The film introduces an African nation where blacks reign. The Wakandans can stand by themselves without the intervention of the white race. The latter, as we have seen in chapter one, has brought nothing more than destruction and slaughter. It stimulates our imagination and pushes us to speculate on the future of African nations if colonialism did not take place. In an interview, director Ryan Coogler appreciated the work done by Stan Lee and Kirby in the comics. He states:

What if that never happened to a place? What if a place had something really cool, had a cool mineral, you know, had a coltan, had a gold, had a diamond and they never were conquered and they found a way to manipulate it, and stay separate from the world and grow and become great?" And ... found a way to maintain that, what kind of conflict would that bring about? You

know, it was Afro-futurism. It was all these great things that amazing writers have built on, and built on, and built on, in the 60 years since they did that.<sup>27</sup>

The director has based his film on the comics to develop a nation where white supremacy has disappeared. It is worth noting that Eurocentrism does not affect Wakanda or its people; they are aware that white supremacy is a construct. Critic Edward Said claims that the distinction between 'them' and 'us' is 'man-made.'<sup>28</sup> In the light of this, I argue that the Wakandans are conscious that racial differences are textual conglomeration. The complex of superiority intrinsic to Western societies is reversed against them. In the world of *Black Panther*, there is no difference between blackness and whiteness. The privileging of the white race is completely destroyed. The result is liberating the black communities who were previously set at the peripheries.

In *Black Panther*, the Wakandans are living in an African nation which governs itself by itself. They are politically, economically, and socially independent. In fact, by presenting an archetype nation like Wakanda as completely independent and in no need for sustainment by the white race, the film breaks away from the supremacist tendencies of the West seen as the engine of development in the world. Wakanda is hidden from the rest of the world and the white race is specifically not welcome there. They are not seen as civilized men but as mere oppressors. The population of Wakanda is made very proud of its African heritage and of its skin color to the extent that Eurocentrism does not exercise any effect on it.

This reversal of the racial roles is manifested through the Wakandans' attitudes toward the few white characters. It is through their behaviors that we can discern the shift of power relations between these two races. The latter are being revised through a series of deconstructions in what concerns the interaction between the Wakandans and the whites. The relationship between whites and blacks is a relation of dominating/dominated.<sup>29</sup> In *Black Panther*; however, a transposition occurred making of colored people the ones in control. Everett Ross is the only white man who discovered the truth that lies behind Wakanda's

invisibility cloak. The communication between the Wakandans and him sustains my arguments. This relation unveils the configuration of power relations between the blacks and the whites. By analyzing the character of Ross and his role in the narrative, I found out that his place in Wakanda resembles much to that of the unwelcome colored people in the USA. This time, we see a white man as an outsider in a nation of blacks.

Before that, I would like to proceed with the circumstances of his coming to Wakanda. Ross was severely injured and only Wakanda can save him; my deduction is primarily based on Nakia and T'Challa's short dialogue:

Nakia: I don't think he'll make here, it hit his spine.  
T'Challa: give him to us, we can heal him.<sup>30</sup>

Previously, it was the West which was performing the role of the savior in the world. However, *Black Panther* divested it from this privilege. Wakanda has the potential to become its fierce competitor in terms of technology. Thanks to the highly sophisticated technological system, Shuri was able to cure Ross in a very short period of time. Healing a spinal injury within one day would be impossible in the West but not in Wakanda.

From all the Wakandans, the inversion of these racial relations is conspicuous in Shuri and Okoye's social intercourse with Ross. When she met him for the first time in her laboratory, Shuri enthusiastically said: "*great, another broken white boy for us to fix. This is going to be fun.*"<sup>31</sup> What we can notice, at the level of this sentence, is that Shuri does not consider him as an equal human being but more like a broken toy in need for some reparation. The use of the verb 'to fix' instead of 'to heal' denotes that Shuri perceives Ross as an object. As a literary device, objectification is used to disparage human beings and deprive them from their essence as humans. We were accustomed to colored people treated as non-humans, and Shuri turned their weapon against them.

Always in the same sentence, white supremacy has been vitiated by what Shohat and Stam term as '*the infantilizing trope*'<sup>32</sup>; to quote their words: "*the racist habit of calling*

*colonized men “boys” is an infantilizing trope.*”<sup>33</sup> It was used by the West to underestimate the moral abilities of colored people and project them as lacking both in intelligence and order. However, in *Black Panther* this trope is used by colored people to defame the white race. By calling a grown man ‘a boy’, Shuri disestablishes the racist tendencies intrinsic of whites. Because the privilege that the West has for long been enjoying is destroyed in Wakanda, this racist logic is turned upside down. Shuri is expressing her superiority in front of agent Ross. The sequences which involve these two characters evoke the abatement of white ascendancy. In her treatment of Ross, Shuri communicates an air of sarcasm and a tone of belittlement. The dialogue shared by the two characters in Shuri’s Laboratory sustains my argument.

Ross: Alright, where am I?

Shuri: Don’t scare me like that colonizer.

Ross: Colon-who? My name is Everett Ross.

Ross: Ok, is this Wakanda?

Shuri: No, it’s Kansas.

Ross: How long was Korea?

Shuri: Yesterday.

Ross: I don’t think so. Bullet wounds don’t just magically heal overnight.

Shuri: They do here but not by magic, by technology. Don’t touch anything my brother will return soon.<sup>34</sup>

Throughout the selected dialogue, Shuri does not show full respect to Ross. She treats him the way Westerners used to behave toward colored people by not taking them seriously and vaunting their superiority in front of them.

Another character who shows anti-white tendencies in the film is general Okoye, the head of the Dora Milaje in Wakanda. She despises the whites and perceives them as corrupt men. As a result, she does not trust them. When the king decided to bring Ross to Wakanda, she opposed by arguing: *“let us consider that we heal him. It is his duty to report back to his country.”*<sup>35</sup> I have dealt with the lack of trust in relation to colored people as part of the Eurocentric discourse; however, in the case of *Black Panther* the whites are the targets of

distrust. Okoye doubts him and believes that he will reveal everything he knows about Wakanda to the USA.

Additionally, Okoye displays her distrust and hate ostentatiously. She is a brave African woman who believes in the power of her nation. Okoye dislikes the superiority complex inherent in the Westerners. Consequently, she flaunts her superiority in front of them. I selected the image below to illustrate Okoye's bad temper with regard to Ross.



**Capture Six:** Okoye's Bad Temper toward Ross.<sup>36</sup>

Her sharp look communicates anger and self-confidence at once. She despises the way Everett Ross talked to T'Challa with total contempt. He did not consider the difference of rank between him and T'Challa; consequently, she wanted to remind him of his actual position comparing to the latter. Using IsiXhosa, she says: *"if he touches you again, I am going to impale him to this desk."*<sup>37</sup> She adds: *"Eh, Americans."*<sup>38</sup> Her last utterance stands as an epithet for it is obviously not a reference to nationality. Her mimics do not show appreciation for him but total abhorrence.

Okoye's stance is carried further in the sequence filmed in South Korea. Wearing a wig is for her *'a disgrace.'*<sup>39</sup> Even as a disguise, Okoye resists concealing her true identity. She says about that: *"Bast willing this goes quickly and I can get this ridiculous thing off my*

head.”<sup>40</sup> Into the bargain, she contends that the Westerners are still primitive due to their use of guns. She declares: “guns, so primitive”<sup>41</sup> during the confrontation between the Wakandans and Ulysses Klaue. Okoye fights back the racial tropes by using them to describe their coiners. Wakanda secures a space-age control of arms to its citizens that guns become archaic for them. In the more radicalized view of the blacks, the whites assume that colored people are primitive. This attitude bears its seeds in the racist scientific thoughts developed during the age of Enlightenment. Howbeit, *Black Panther* teared down the West’s racial hierarchies by placing the colored people’s technology beyond expectations.

The cinematic mise-en-scène of the decline of white supremacy is further developed in the sequence following the assumed death of King T’Challa in the hands of Killmonger. The reaction of Queen Ramonda when she saw Klaue for the first time is very significant. With the help of the following screenshot, we can clearly perceive her alert toward him.



**Capture Seven:** Queen Mother’s Distrust with regard to Ross.<sup>42</sup>

Queen Ramonda directly sheltered her daughter and was in a defense position against him. Ross seems to pose a danger and threat to her, she directly asks: “who is this man?”<sup>43</sup> Her fear can be said to bear its origins in the destructive actions of the white colonizer on Africans. In other words, it is the outcome of the barbaric practices on the African

populations. Mainstream cinema put much emphasis on the alarming nature of colored people and their distrust by Westerners. However, Ramonda's behavior shows the opposite; she reflects the fear that the Africans felt when confronted by a white man. The Wakandans have learned not to trust the Westerners due to Africans' traumatic experiences with them.

The avant-gardist perspective toward the relation between blacks and whites is also seen in the character of M'Baku, the leader of the Jabari tribe in Wakanda. By his turn, M'Baku sharpened the dismantling of the white supremacy. His deportment with regard to Ross denotes his higher position comparing to him. He did not accept Ross interfering in the internal affairs of Wakanda. When the latter attempted to speak and give his opinion concerning a Wakandan issue, he shouted: "*You cannot talk.*"<sup>44</sup> He deprived Everett Ross from speech the exact way Africans were silenced by their oppressors. Ross has no word in Wakanda. The field had changed and so is his place in it; he is no longer the superior. M'Baku seizes the discussion and forces him to conform to his power. Colored people are the dominating part in the racial relations in *Black Panther*.

*Black Panther* altered the norms of the mainstream cinema through its peculiar representation of colored people. The racial conventions ingrained in Hollywood cinema are destabilized with the introduction of the first black superhero. The success of this film in the American box-office and the fact that it earned many accolades denote a progress for colored people's position in the mainstream cinema. In addition, the film's accommodation of the power relations between these two races and its empowerment of the colored characters suggest a change in the treatment of colored actors within American cinema.

#### **Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup>. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 100.

<sup>2</sup>. *Ibid*, 100.

<sup>3</sup>. *Ibid*, 106.

<sup>4</sup>. *Ibid*, 104.



5. Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 34.
6. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 82.
7. *Ibid*, 352.
8. *Ibid*, 190.
9. *Ibid*, 29.
10. Jacob Stol, "Black Panther Surpasses Titanic to become Third Biggest Film in the US box Office History," *Independent*, accessed June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/news/black-panther-marvel-film-titanic-avatar-box-office-highest-grossing-a8294791.html>.
11. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 185.
12. Jawad Syed, "Oscars So White: Institutional Racism Perspective" *Counter Punch*, accessed September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2016/01/29/oscar-so-white-an-institutional-racism-perspective/>
13. "Oscars 2019: Black Panther winners make Academy Awards history," *BBC News*, accessed June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-47353021>
14. "List of accolades received by Black Panther (film)," *Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia*, accessed June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2020, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List\\_of\\_accolades\\_received\\_by\\_Black\\_Panther\\_%28film%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_accolades_received_by_Black_Panther_%28film%29)
15. Jean François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984).
16. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 190.
17. *Ibid*, 156/189.
18. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:48:08.
19. *Ibid*, 00:12:39.
20. Sara Mills, Michel Foucault (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 74.
21. Pietro Piazzolla and Marco Gribaudo, "Teaching the Aesthetics of Lightning in Cinema," in *International Conference on Teaching and Learning* (2008), 1.
22. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 140.
23. "Film 101: Understanding Film Lighting." *Master Class*, accessed June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/film-101-understanding-film-lighting#how-to-create-a-simple-but-effective-lighting-setup-in-3-easy-steps>
24. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 01:11:42.
25. "Film 101: Understanding Film Lighting." *Master Class*, accessed June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://www.masterclass.com/articles/film-101-understanding-film-lighting#how-to-create-a-simple-but-effective-lighting-setup-in-3-easy-steps>
26. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 25.
27. "Director Ryan Coogler Says 'Black Panther' Brought Him Closer To His Roots," *NPR*, accessed June 12<sup>th</sup>, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2018/02/15/585702642/director-ryan-coogler-says-black-panther-brought-him-closer-to-his-roots>
28. Edward W Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), 5.
29. *Ibid*, 5.

- <sup>30.</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:59:36.
- <sup>31.</sup> Ibid, 01:00:57.
- <sup>32.</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 140.
- <sup>33.</sup> Ibid, 139.
- <sup>34.</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 01:09:22.
- <sup>35.</sup> Ibid, 01:00:29.
- <sup>36.</sup> Ibid, 00:54:49.
- <sup>37.</sup> Ibid, 00:54:51.
- <sup>38.</sup> Ibid, 00:55:20.
- <sup>39.</sup> Ibid, 00:41:32.
- <sup>40.</sup> Ibid, 00:41:22.
- <sup>41.</sup> Ibid, 00:50:29.
- <sup>42.</sup> Ibid, 01:24:34.
- <sup>43.</sup> Ibid, 01:24:34.
- <sup>44.</sup> Ibid, 01:33:35.

## Chapter Three: Toward a New Image of Africa

### 1. On the Creation of Wakanda

Africa is, from the West's Eurocentric lens, a 'dark continent' devoid of history and civilization. This is an issue critics Shohat and Stam raised awareness about. They believe that *"the notion of the indigenous people as "prehistoric" or "people without history" \_ in the double sense of lacking in both textual historic records and meaningful development towards a goal\_ is another Eurocentric misnomer."*<sup>1</sup> This view has been a rudimentary ingredient in nurturing the imperial style cinema. It has presented the African, including all the people from African descent like the Afro-Americans, as lacking a sense of history. With the help of Eurocentrism, *"history was recast to conform to colonialist norms, in the name of an eternal "West" unique since its moment of conception."*<sup>2</sup> In its anti-colonial mission to liberate Africa from Eurocentric accusations, *Black Panther* debunks the Western myths with the aim of restoring the dignity of Africa as a deep-rooted continent. To fulfil its goal, the film presents to the audience a symbol of the grandeur of African history that is the nation of Wakanda *per se*. The origins of this fictional nation stretch back to pre-colonial Africa with its rich historical background. *Black Panther* is a complete departure from viewing the continent as a dark and foggy space to more authentic and historically rich area.

I begin scrutinizing this part of the work with the historical setting of the fictional nation of Wakanda. Indeed, the film depended much on African history to design the most advanced and wealthiest nation in the MCU being Wakanda itself. African audiences can spot details and notions that bind the fictional nation to indelible historical facts in Africa. The point here is that Wakanda is founded on the history of the continent to which it belongs. By so doing, the film contradicts the Eurocentric fable which considers Africa as a blank space. By the same token, *Black Panther* came to honor the African continent and prove that *"some of history's oldest and most advanced civilizations developed in Africa."*<sup>3</sup> In fact, what

constitute Wakanda as a whole are elements taken from the divergent parts of the rich continent.

Extensive reading and research in the domain of African civilization proved a connection between the Wakandans and the Bantu-speaking people who inhabited and still inhabit Africa south of the equator. Perhaps one of the striking similarities between the two people is the mastery of metal working. The Bantu-speaking people are acknowledged for being among the first human beings to master iron technology. In this context, critics Shohat and Stam relied on John Thornton's claim: "*Africa had [...] strong metallurgical and textile industries. Africans developed ironworking and blast furnace technology even before 600 BC prefiguring techniques used in Europe, only in the nineteenth century.*"<sup>4</sup> *Black Panther* aims to grant Africans' achievements, once blurred by the West's narcissism, a reflection. The Wakandans are made to possess a resilient substance: the vibranium. In the film, the Wakandans utilized vibranium to forge a technology more sophisticated than that of the First World. N'Jobu says in this context: "*the Wakandans used vibranium to develop technology more advanced than any other nation.*"<sup>5</sup> Instead of iron, we have a fictional counterpart of it that is vibranium; and in the place of iron technology, in the film we discover the vibranium technology.

To extend on the topic, Wakanda is particularly related to the Bantu-speaking people of present-day Uganda. An attempt to compare the two countries, the fictional and the real, would allow strong similarities to float to the surface making it quite obvious that the former is embedded in the history of the latter. The analogies that reside between Wakanda and Uganda can be found at different levels that I am going to account for in the following lines.

As a point of departure, Uganda and Wakanda do share in common the non-intervention foreign policy for a certain period of time in their history. Backward the 19<sup>th</sup> century, "*Uganda remained relatively isolated from the outside world.*"<sup>6</sup> Similarly and in

*Black Panther*, Wakanda's foreign policy is characterized by isolationism with regard to international politics and economy. The news anchor says about Wakanda's external policy: "*Wakanda does not engage in international trade.*"<sup>7</sup> Like Uganda, Wakanda has a nonaligned foreign policy. The Wakandan monarchs prior to T'Challa separated their nation from the remainder of the world. This isolationism was a driving factor in the plot of the film and one of the main reasons between T'Challa and Killmonger's rivalry.

Moreover, Wakanda is profoundly built on the past of Uganda's largest Bantu-speaking people: the Baganda. *Black Panther* evokes the might of Africa in a rare occasion within Hollywood. To bind Wakanda with the famous Kingdom of Buganda signifies the existence of a well-built civilization in the African continent long before the coming of the European colonizer. Actually, Buganda was Uganda's highly developed kingdom during its pre-colonial past.<sup>8</sup> Its people were one of the wittiest African races. Even the British missionaries admitted their moral capacities in acquiring the European civilization by calling them 'the Japanese of Africa.'<sup>9</sup> *Black Panther* gave the intelligence of the African a spot in its storyline. The greatness of the Baganda is mirrored through the film's fictional African people who retain the particularities of this Bantu race. As shown in the film, the Wakandans are one of the smartest races in the world. They succeeded in building a huge nation by relying on their high IQs only.

For the West, the African is an ignorant creature with limited intellectual abilities. Hence, *Black Panther* reminds the audience of the existence of intelligent life in Africa. Within this framework, critics Shohat and Stam assert that "*the inferiority of Africa and the African [is just] an ideological invention.*"<sup>10</sup> Like elsewhere, the African continent owns brilliant minds among its diverse peoples. The film stands as evidence that the African could have created his African version of development if he was not interrupted by the West. The Kingdom of Buganda was an area of huge advancement in pre-colonial Uganda. From all its

four kingdoms, “*the focus of modernization was [...] in Buganda.*”<sup>11</sup> The Marvel film invites us to think whether Wakanda is a duplicate of Buganda along with a possible future for it because it is clear that such likenesses cannot be a mere coincidence.



**Capture Eight:** The Metropolitan Capital City of Wakanda.<sup>12</sup>

Wakanda flourished to become a progressive nation. The above capture shows that Wakanda is a place that balances between modernization and tradition. Like its originator, Wakanda in the film is an advanced and modern African nation. The Wakandan capital, the Golden City, is a metropolitan city *par excellence*. Every detail in it is purely African. The architecture, as it can be seen, is inspired by traditional African styles of building. Thanks to *Black Panther*, the viewers have an opportunity to see a futuristic African version of skyscrapers.

Another crucial element in Marvel’s *Black Panther* is the use of the physical setting. The film offers to foreign audiences an insight on the natural beauty and prosperity of Africa. It should be recognized for succeeding in creating a completely African setting for its fictional nation. Once again, Wakanda displays resemblances with Uganda. For this reason, this point is divided into two parts: the geographical location and the topography of both of them.

One of the questions which confronted me as a viewer is the following ‘where can Wakanda be situated in the real map of Africa?’ The opening scene of *Black Panther* made it

visible that Wakanda is situated in Central Africa, precisely in the South-East. The fictional map and the real one overlap in the area corresponding to the Republic of Uganda. It locates Wakanda in the South of Uganda which was covered by the Kingdom of Buganda in the past. The present detail opens the path for more interesting analogies between the film and reality.

Topographically, Wakanda's ecosystem resembles to that of Uganda. The latter was very rich in terms of natural resources hence the appellation 'the pearl of Africa.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly, Wakanda's natural setting reflects natural treasures including: mountains, forests, lake, planes, etc. As it is argued by the news anchor, Wakanda "[is] fortified by mountain ranges and an impenetrable rainforest."<sup>14</sup> Rainforests and lakes are huge assets in both the Wakandan and Ugandan ecosystems. These similar climates shaped a similar economy for both countries which is agricultural. Wakanda in the film is referred to as '*a nation of farmers*.'<sup>15</sup>

The Wakandan mythology is another point to which I shall direct my attention. The film's depiction of the African belief system is revolutionary. It freed the continent from several stereotypes and clichés. Western scholars misconceived the nature of African religions and never assigned the status of proper religions to them; thereby, "*they were institutionally denounced as superstitions and 'devil worship'*."<sup>16</sup> *Black Panther* has finally given the African worldview the recognition it deserves in Hollywood film industry. As pointed out previously, the Wakandans are from a historical perspective a Bantu race; therefore, the Wakandan mythology shares some affinities with the mythology of the Bantu-speaking people as well.

The Wakandans share with the Bantu race the belief in the immortality of human beings. For them, death is not the end of human existence but an extension of it. As Alice Werner has rightly suggested, "*the belief in the continued existence of human beings after death, and their influence on the affairs of the survivors is really the bed-rock fact in Bantu*

and Negro religion.”<sup>17</sup> During his first appearance in *Captain America: Civil War* (2016), T’Challa summarized the Wakandan beliefs in the following sentence “*in my culture, death is not the end. It’s more of a stepping-off point you reach out with both hands. And Bast and Sekhmet, they lead you into the green veldt where you can run forever.*”<sup>18</sup> T’Challa succeeded in giving an overview on the essence of the African belief system common to almost all African communities south of the continent. Death does not mark the extremity of life; it is rather a beginning of a new chapter.

In the film, the presence of the deceased is still felt by the living ones. Although dead in *Captain America: Civil War*, King T’Chaka reappears in *Black Panther* to support “the cult of ancestors” ingrained in African cultures and religions. For the Africans, “*the family is made up of both the living members and the ancestors.*”<sup>19</sup> The living characters, in the film, sense the presence of King T’Chaka. The Queen says to T’Challa: “*your father and I would talk about this day all the time. He is with us.*”<sup>20</sup> Additionally, in his study of African religion, Ushe Mike Ushe used John Mbiti’s quote in which he claims:

All the dead departed who are physically dead but are still believed to be alive in the memory of those who remember them when they were in the community. They are regarded as integral members of the family in Africa. They are seen as always present and have interests in the affairs of their families. This however, makes their family members to venerate them and to offer sacrifices to seek for their protection, blessing and intervention in times of wars and difficulties.<sup>21</sup>

T’Chaka is; therefore, a living dead. Though not present in the physical sense, he is spiritually among his family. *Black Panther* evokes the connection between two different worlds: the world of the living and that of the dead. The City of the Dead, in the film, is an area which connects the two realms. It is a place where the living can communicate with their dead ancestors. With the help of the heart shaped herb, the Wakandans travel to the Ancestral Plane, a world of the deceased, where they temporarily reunite with the departed. The herb can be considered as a sort of bridge that transcends between the two worlds.



As stated previously, the ancestors can influence the lives of the living. They offer guidance and protection to their community. In the light of the image below, the Ancestral Plane delineates the relationship between the dead and the living. The scene encapsulates the interaction between the two worlds and the impact of the ancestors on the matters of the living.



**Capture Nine:** The Ancestral Plane: the World of Deceased in Wakanda.<sup>23</sup>

T'Challa shared a discussion with his dead father and asked him for advice, he says: *“tell me how to best protect Wakanda?”*<sup>22</sup> The viewers, especially non-African ones, make the acquaintance with the role of the ancestors in African cultures and realize that it is not a form of witchcraft as it was claimed by the West.

The healing powers of the ancestors are also brought into attention. In *Black Panther*, the Wakandans invoke the spiritual beings using the word *“Damaku”*, which means praise the ancestors. The sequence of the film which illustrates the point is the one set in the Jabari land. After his lethargic encounter with Killmonger, T'Challa was in a critical situation. In order to heal her son, the Queen invokes the ancestors; she says: *“I call upon the ancestors. I call upon Bast. I am here with my son T'Challa. Heal him.”*<sup>24</sup> Then, the audience sees the effects of ancestors with T'Challa coming back to life and restoring his strength.

The creation of the fictional nation of Wakanda is indeed inspired by African history and mythology. The film counters the West's pejorative claims about Africa and its demonization of African religions as well. It provides the audience with more accurate documentation of the African continent and the particularities of their belief systems. Building Wakanda on Africa's civilization and the incorporation of African belief systems testifies the film's revision of Hollywood's traditional ways of dealing with non-western cultures.

## **2. Praising the Orality of the African Culture**

One of the striking contributions of *Black Panther* is the positive portrayal of African culture and tradition. The film illuminates the cultural diversity and the richness of the African continent. It is a kind of a cultural show that revives interest in the African culture. The old conventional cinema adopted the Western *hegemony* which dictates that the African has no traditions. It has defamed those cultures and exalted the Western ones.<sup>25</sup> Africa was seen as an illiterate society due to the rejection of cultural differences. To naturalize the occupation of Africa's cultural space, the West has totally misrepresented it via media. Through *Black Panther*, the arbitrariness of the West's rules is exposed. The audience gets a glimpse of the cultural diversity of the continent. Because Wakanda did not experience colonialism, there is a continuation of the ancient past's culture. The film celebrates the true side of the African culture heritage with all its peculiarities.

The film rehabilitates the richness of African traditions. In fact, there is an unprecedented focus on the oral traditions of Africa. Colonial cinema has set the task of attacking the cultural reputation of Africa. Because African cultures exist mainly under the oral form, the West used it as an argument to testify the ignorance of these people. *Black Panther*; on the other hand, restores the grandeur of the oral character of African traditions. The film deploys storytelling overture in a way that celebrates African cultural values. The story of Wakanda recited by Prince N'Jobu to his son is probably the best opening that a

postcolonial film can offer. It forms the nucleus of the cultural revival in the film. It sets the record straight and sustains the fascinating traditions of the continent. The scene introduces the audience to the particularities of the African culture. It stresses the orality of the African traditions as compared to the Western written forms. It disconfirms some of the West's myth including the denial of the existence of humanities in Africa. The latter was one of the Western techniques that secured their prestigious position in Africa. Immaculate N. Kizza admits:

Since one cannot deny the presence of a people with a culture, a history, and so on, one embarks on marginalizing those attributes, and after successfully marginalizing them, one can concentrate on manufacturing and aggressively publicizing extensive lists of what those people didn't have, including, of course, history, culture, and religion.<sup>26</sup>

*Black Panther* discloses the fallacies of the West. Storytelling is one of the central pillars in the African traditions. Indeed, "*the benchmark of the African oral tradition is storytelling, and these stories come in various forms, the most popular being epigrams, songs, myths, legends and folktales.*"<sup>27</sup> The importance of storytelling could not be overlooked in *Black Panther*. Albeit being a modern society, the Wakandans cherish the pre-colonial cultural activities. They knew how to preserve their identity from external influence. Indeed, orality is part of the African cultural identity and a tremendous segment of it. As an oral form of art, storytelling is a crucial part in the life of the African. Its peculiarity lies in the spoken words of the performer. According to Finnegan, performance is the *sine qua non* of the African literature. She asserts: "*the actual delivery is a significant aspect of the whole.*"<sup>28</sup>

N'Jobu's story is not just a recital but a whole process requiring several techniques. It encapsulates the art of performance characteristic to storytelling. Because performance shapes the nature of the oral piece, the latter should not be regarded as only a matter of rendition. He began his story with a formula typical of the art of storytelling to catch his audience's attention which is "*millions of years ago.*"<sup>29</sup> Through this sentence, he succeeded in establishing a connection with his audience being his son in the film. This leads us to another

fundamental characteristic which is the involvement of the community. The audience during the act of storytelling “*is often directly involved in the actualization and creation of a piece of oral literature.*”<sup>30</sup> The film shows the relationship performer /audience through the interaction between N’Jobu and his son which is as follows

N’Jadaka: Baba?  
N’Jobu: Yes my son.  
N’Jadaka: Tell me a story.  
N’Jobu: Which one?  
N’Jadaka: The story of home.  
N’Jobu: Millions of years ago, a meteorite made of vibranium, etc.  
N’Jadaka: And we still hide Baba?  
N’Jobu: Yes.  
N’Jadaka: Why? <sup>31</sup>

The scene plunges the audience into an aesthetic experience of the vibrant oral traditions in Africa. N’Jobu made recourse to a number of assets to have this fascinating final product. He adapted his accent and the tone of his voice to suit the atmosphere of the story. The accommodation of these ones is; in fact, the gist of storytelling for they play a significant role in the delivery of this piece of art.<sup>32</sup> The scene involves a musical setting specific to the story being recited as well. The narration of the story is followed by a background music that generates specific feelings in the audience. It is the equivalent of the chorus in drama.

Storytelling in Africa has multiple functions, for instance they can teach the youth about their origins and history. In reality, “*the African oral tradition is also an encyclopedia of the various peoples’ histories.*”<sup>33</sup> The story of Wakanda could stand as a myth which gives insight onto the history of this nation. It introduces the audience to the mythological traditions of Wakanda by explaining the origins of the vibranium, the tribes which constitute Wakanda, the wars and causes of mythological rivalry, how Bashenga became the first Black Panther, and the mythological importance of heart-shaped herb. It answers all the questions about the origins of Wakanda and how it was created. These myths are used in approximately all African cultures to “*explain the creation of man, the universe and other creatures.*”<sup>34</sup>

In addition, songs have a special place in the African oral tradition. They stand as a *'valuable source of current information in various countries because most lyrics accurately express whatever is going on at the time in the political, social, religious and other arenas.'*<sup>35</sup> *Black Panther* relied on this form of art to show its full support of the oral traditions of Africa. Indeed, the representation of African music in the film goes at odds with the racist and Eurocentric assumptions of early ethnomusicologists.<sup>36</sup> Studying all the songs of the film would be a theoretical impossibility in the present study. For this reason, I selected the Senegalese Baaba Maal's song.<sup>37</sup> The latter entails a crucial aspect of African oral tradition because it is occasional. It reflects the current situation in Wakanda. The lyrics of the song suit the context and describe the Wakandan situation after the death of King T'Chaka and the succession of the throne to his son, T'Challa. The magnificence of the African musical background and its incorporation to *Black Panther's* score made the composer, Ludwig Göransson, win the Academy Award for Best Original Music Score (2019). After travelling to Africa, Göransson himself acknowledged the resplendence of African music; he says:

I came back with a totally different idea of music, a different knowledge. The music that I discovered was so unique and special. [The challenge] was how do I use that as the foundation of the entire score, but with an orchestra and modern production techniques—infuse it in a way that it doesn't lose its authenticity.<sup>38</sup>

*Black Panther* gives due attention to a very special form of African instrumental music: "the talking drum." In fact, drums have an exceptional spot in the African culture. There is even a genre in the oral African literature called 'drum literature.' The latter has been overlooked because of its unusual form; it necessitates great knowledge of African language for its interpretation.<sup>39</sup> This is mainly due to the fact that "the talking drum" is linked to the highly tonal nature of Africa languages.<sup>40</sup> *Black Panther's* composer expressed his admiration for "the talking drum" by arguing that the instrument *"does what no other percussion instruments does – it breathes."*<sup>41</sup> Hence, the introduction of African music in the film is one of the factors that gained the film a great reception among critics and audiences.

*Black Panther*'s multicultural approach to the African cultural heritage is highlighted in this chapter. Because cultural diversity is a recurring debate within Hollywood film industry, it is inevitable not to scrutinize the present film's positive documentation of the crucial elements that characterize African cultures. The emphasis on the orality and the social significance of African art forms, such as storytelling, suggest the film's promotion of African traditions within American cinema.

### Endnotes:

- <sup>1</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 59.
- <sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 57.
- <sup>3</sup> Patricia Ann Lynch, *African Mythology A to Z* (London and New York: Chelsea House, 2010), x.
- <sup>4</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 58.
- <sup>5</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:01:12.
- <sup>6</sup> Rita. M Byrnes, ed, *Uganda: A Case Study* (Washington DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992), 9.
- <sup>7</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:07:19.
- <sup>8</sup> Rita. M Byrnes, ed, *Uganda: A Case Study* (Washington DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992), 51-54.
- <sup>9</sup> S. M Molema, *The Bantu Past and Present: An Ethnographical & Historical Study of the Native Races of South Africa* (Edinburgh W. Green & Son, 1920), 19.
- <sup>10</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 58.
- <sup>11</sup> Rita. M Byrnes, ed, *Uganda: A Case Study* (Washington DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992), 41.
- <sup>12</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:13:14.
- <sup>13</sup> Rita. M Byrnes, ed, *Uganda: A Case Study* (Washington DC: Federal Research Division, Library of Congress, 1992), 13.
- <sup>14</sup> *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:07:15.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, 02:06:32.
- <sup>16</sup> Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 17.
- <sup>17</sup> Alice Werner, "African Mythology" in *The Mythology of All Races Volume VII* (Boston: Marshall Jones Company, 1925), 179.
- <sup>18</sup> *Captain America: Civil War*, directors. Joe Russo and Anthony Russo, DVD. Unites States: Marvel Studios, 2016, 00:39:54.
- <sup>19</sup> Ige Simon Abiodun, "The Cult of Ancestors in African Traditional Religion," *An Encyclopaedia of the Arts* 10, no. 1 (2006): 27.

20. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:15:07.
21. Ushe Mike Ushe, "God, Divinities and Ancestors in African Traditional Religious Thought," *An African Journal of Arts and Humanities* 3, no. 4 (2017): 170.
22. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:32:27.
23. *Ibid*, 01:36:43.
24. *Ibid*, 01:35:33.
25. Ella Shohat and Robert Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 16/17.
26. Immaculate. N Kizza, *The Oral Tradition of the Baganda of Uganda: A Study and Anthology of Legends, Myths, Epigrams and Folktales* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 8.
27. *Ibid*, 11.
28. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 5.
29. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:00:16.
30. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 12.
31. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:00:06.
32. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 6.
33. Immaculate. N Kizza, *The Oral Tradition of the Baganda of Uganda: A Study and Anthology of Legends, Myths, Epigrams and Folktales* (North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2010), 7.
34. *Ibid*, 13.
35. *Ibid*, 13.
36. Bennet Zon, "Representing Non-Western Music in Nineteenth Century Britain," *Music and Letters* 91, no. 1 (2010): 115.
37. *Black Panther*, director. Ryan Coogler, DVD. United States: Marvel Studios, 2018, 00:12:09.
38. Jon Burlingame, "Black Panther' Composer Infuses Score With Trove of African Sounds," *Variety*, accessed June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://variety.com/2018/artisans/production/black-panther-score-1202697385/>
39. Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2012), 467.
40. *Ibid*, 468.
41. Jon Burlingame, "Black Panther' Composer Infuses Score With Trove of African Sounds," *Variety*, accessed June 11<sup>th</sup>, 2020, <https://variety.com/2018/artisans/production/black-panther-score-1202697385/>

## V. General Conclusion

To conclude with, this research paper remains a humble survey of *Black Panther's* unrivalled destabilization of the Eurocentric norms of Hollywood cinema. The theoretical framework of the discussion is guided by E. Shohat and R. Stam's book: *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media* (2014). This research paper is a study of the multiculturalization of American mainstream cinema with the use of the film as a primary corpus. The main purpose is to uncover *Black Panther's* contribution in debunking the West's erroneous conclusion as far as Africa and people of African descent are concerned.

All through the discussion, my attention was directed to the film's celebration of Africa and the repudiation of Western *hegemony*. The film has undergone a deep analysis to unfold the constructedness and arbitrariness of the Eurocentric philosophy on Africa. It starts with an interpretation of the anti-colonial documentation of history. I was cautious in unravelling the colonized perception of colonialism and the effect of colonialism on the African continent. It includes a close examination of *Black Panther's* visual and linguistic elements that counter the Eurocentric writing of the world's history. I raised attention to the effects of the colonial discourse on Africans in the film as well. Moreover, the research investigates the media discrimination of non-Westerners and the film's opposition to these practices. I rendered visible the way *Black Panther* battered the racial standards of Hollywood cinema through its cast and the provided representations of Africa. The film is a challenge to media racism with its reliance on people of African descent to present the story of their origins and the struggles of their ancestors with the white race. The film has countered the white supremacy in attempt to project a world devoid of racism by giving the Africans a respectable place in it. Finally, the discussion deals with *Black Panther's* rehabilitation of the African heritage. Because African cultures and traditions are completely stereotyped and marginalized by Western media, it is inevitable for me not to tackle the film's avant-gardist



projection of the African cultural background. I put much emphasis on digging up the African origins of the fictional nation of Wakanda as a means to contradict Western conception of Africa. Additionally, the uniqueness and beauty of African music, orality, and religion is underlined.

Hitherto, the present study proves *Black Panther*'s detachment from conventional Hollywood cinema. It demonstrates the film's opposition to the Eurocentric philosophy. I have come to the conclusion that *Black Panther* is a revisionist film which testifies the fallacy of the West in contrast to the diversity of Africa. An in-depth study of *Black Panther* can be carried by students interested in the area of film studies. For instance, it can be explored in a rich comparative study that centers on the move in the portrayal of non-Western cultures in Hollywood cinema. In addition to the African culture featured in the present film, the inclusion of films that deal with other Oriental cultures would form the nucleus of an interesting media research.

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