

A Cautious Celebration: Interrogating Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* as a Work of Afrofuturism and Capital

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Abstract

Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* has grossed over a \$1 billion globally, making it an exceptional record for Marvel Studios. This article explores *Black Panther* against the theoretical terrain of Afrofuturism, revealing hope for new imaginations of being and caution against the over-celebration of the binary switch in representation as forms of capital and patriarchy linger in the new fabric of Afrofuturistic imaginings (Davis 2017, Bennet 2016, Callier 2018, Dery 1994, English & Kim 2013, Womack 2013). The article takes a scoping approach attempting to map the terrain of literature around Coogler's *Black Panther*. It also attempts to put in dialogue political economy and the text as a precursor to audience reception. The article takes up the problematics of Afrofuturism through literature around *Black Panther* and the political economy around production. A brief history of the conception and making of the film is pursued to suggest its coming of age as a result of the rise of *Black Twitter* and the global *#BlackLivesMatter* movement, while exploring the murkier aspects of bots influencing debate on these forums and the backlash on twitter itself. The article concludes reiterating the complexity of Afrofuturism as it looks to a utopian future. This scoping approach attempts to reveal the lacuna with regard to reception analyses of *Black Panther*. It is envisaged that a reception analysis performed against the backdrop of production and text could contribute to advancing current Afrofuturistic imaginings even as they are bound up in the problematic political economy of the present.

Keywords: *Black Panther*, Afrofuturism, Neoliberalism and Blaxploitation, Technocracy

Introduction

To date Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* has grossed over a \$1 billion globally, making it an exceptional record, one that promises to grow as audiences claim to revisit cinemas for this film. In the recent tradition of Marvel Studios remaking films based on the marvel suite of comic hero's like Iron Man, Avengers and Captain America, Coogler's *Black Panther* responded in critical ways to a global black audience.

Set in a fictitious African country, Wakanda, the story tells the tale of the coming of age of heir-apparent, T'Challa. The story begins in America in the past, with the killing of a Wakandan Royal, N'Jobu, the brother of King T'Chaka. N'Jobu's son (Erik) is left in America to observe the mystic blue light moving above in the clouds. The story moves to the present day, where T'Challa after the death of his father, returns home. *En route* he interrupts a mission of his love interest, Nakia, and asks for her support during his coronation. They return to a typical African hinterland which serves as a mirage concealing a technofuturistic space. His coronation is contested by M'Baka however T'Challa wins and a ritual communing with the ancestors is performed, where he is given technofuturistic strength. He meets his father and his coronation is sanctioned and blessed. A party then travels to Korea to capture Ulysses Klaue, believed to have murdered his father and W'Kabi's father. A battle ensues and it is here that he encounters his cousin, Erik Killmonger. Erik kills Ulysses and takes his body to Wakanda, to W'Kabi who is now validated as his father's murder is avenged, he provides access to the King. After revealing his identity, Erik contests the kingdom and wins, appearing to kill T'Challa in ritual combat. Although Erik's vision is to unite and support black people across the globe, his reign proves to be dictatorial and bloody, killing Zuri and destroying all the special plants. Nakia manages to salvage one before her escape with Shuri and the queen mother. They take refuge with M'Baka, who surprisingly reveals a weakened T'Challa. The women perform the ancestor ritual again and here T'Challa admonishes his father for leaving a young Erik behind. T'Challa returns to full strength and proceeds to take back the kingdom. The ensuing battle sees T'Challa eventually winning and taking a wounded, near death cousin to witness a Wakandan sunset. The film ends with T'Challa placing his sister in America to run an outreach program, and he attends a global forum intent on revealing Wakandan know-how for the betterment of the world.

Framing Afrofuturism: Brief Theoretical Underpinnings

A short review of literature around Afrofuturism reveals hope for new imaginations of being and caution against the over-celebration of the binary switch in representation as forms of capital and patriarchy linger in the new fabric of Afrofuturistic imaginings (Davis 2017; Bennet 2016; English & Kim 2013; Womack 2013). Although formally coined in 1994 by Dery, Afrofuturism remains sparse with a few names dominating the field. Afrofuturism attempts to move forward from decolonisation discourses which are inevitably yoked to a colonial past. It attempts to simultaneously leap forward and backward in a war of counter-memory. Khari B quoted in Samatar (2017: 187) refers to this as the ‘Sankofa effect’ metaphorically captured in the Asante image of a bird reaching to hold an egg on its back which is the egg incubating the future. The imagery lends itself to revealing the temporal and contemporary verisimilitudes, contradictions, absurdities, and the tremulous anticipation of refashioning from scratch. While Afrofuturism resides in science fiction and technology (Van Veen 2014) it remains concerned with the ‘black body’ (Callier 2018) and troubling inscriptions of the legacy of slavery as a result of the digital divide and technological exclusions.

Afrofuturistic imaginings extend to fantasy fiction, comic books and graphic novels where the cyborg is offered as a means to transcend the effects of enslavement and subjugation (Daniels 2016). Black Panther features strongly in these imaginings (Callier 2018). Rose argues for five categories of analysis in Afrofuturism, displace, interrupt, disrupt, expand and wither, as potentially generative forms of black thought which disrupt linear ideas of progression from the human to the post-human (Bennet 2016). In this vein Gibson (2016) differentiates the ‘promise of science’ from the ‘promise of science fiction’ as a means of incorporating the dissimilitude’s inherent in both. Here science fiction is offered as a way to transcend the political economic bondage inherent in science. While Afrofuturism is widely celebrated, Davis (2017) argues for caution as some Afrofuturistic readings tend to frame the restoration of patriarchy, iterations of neoliberalism and heteronormativity as preconditions of black success and progress. Understandably this framing creates some tension and uneasiness in black feminist quarters even as it does displace, interrupt and disrupt.

Scoping Approach

A scoping review was pursued in order to rapidly map the terrain inspired by Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther*. The search began on Google Scholar using the terms: *Black Panther and film*; and *Ryan Coogler's Black Panther*. The first term was not useful as it yielded 3060 outputs, mostly including references to the political party Black Panther. The second term narrowed the terrain usefully to 274 references.

The exclusion criteria applied was as follows: symposiums, public lectures and conversations, publications in languages other than English, patents, citations, and non-peer reviewed film reviews. After cross-referencing via EBSCO HOST and JSTOR 71 articles fit the inclusion criteria. Although many articles were reviews, some were included as they appeared in peer-reviewed journals. The Journal of Pan African Studies dominated in terms of film reviews of *Black Panther* and South Africa's Image and Text, in terms of full articles. The review charts the thematic concentrations of key articles and highlights the absences, providing the space for further research.

Thematic Concentrations

Generally the literature used *Black Panther* as lens or catalyst to enter into debates around decolonization (Becker 2019; Flota 2019; Bekale 2018), neoliberalism (Bozarth 2019; Tompkins 2018; Coetzee 2019; Burger 2019; Bhayroo 2019), Blaxploitation (Lozenski & Chinang 2019; Burocco 2019; Carrington 2019) Blacktopia, Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism (Bakari 2018; Nasson 2019; Karam 2019; Washington 2019), Utopian/dystopian (Chan & Ventura 2019; Sampieri 2018; Eckhardt 2018; Bunn 2019), African American identity (Prunotto 2018; González 2019; Bowles 2018), Colourism and African female identity (D'Agostino 2019; Gerard & Peopsel n.d.; Oboe 2019; Sen 2018; Dralega 2018), Africana womanism (Chikafa-Chipiro 2019; Smith 2018) African women and hair politics (Morita 2018), cosmology and religious analysis (Mosby 2019; Faithful 2018), aesthetics (Baumann 2018), and even a reference to the replication of King Shaka's spear in the film (Ivey 2019). The dominant form of the literature was theoretical articles and reviews with a marked absence of reception analysis save 'in theater reflections' (Washington 2019) and one reception analysis from Brazil, South America (Burocco 2019). In the main, the literature celebrates *Black*

Panther for the potentials it brings to the fore, while remaining cautious as it highlights a series of problematics discussed next.

Pan-Africanism, Afropolitanism, African American Identity, Blacktopia

The popularity of *Black Panther* indicated that the film went some way towards a positive representation of black people, particularly African people that did not rely on caricature and mere token presence. The binary switch of token presence and structured absence in terms of black and white characters was of particular pleasure. There was a reliance on the global cultural capital of Nelson Mandela, as his language was used (isiXhosa), including the meter of his speech being attempted by Chadwick Boseman (T'Challa). This characterisation pulls all the best ideological baggage of the global icon into the film creating wonderful potentials for leaps of intertextuality.

One of the most celebrated aspects of the film was the freedom from fan labour or narrative extraction (Merill n.d.) usually needed when consuming Hollywood products. Global audiences of colour often have to find points of interpellation in Hollywood texts that render them marginal at best or invisible at worst. *Black Panther* effectively eliminated the need for this kind of labour by inscribing powerful representations in both black and female characters. Despite deficiencies and limitations, it is perhaps this negation of narrative extraction that makes the film so very celebrated as a cultural moment for the diaspora.

While technology in the form of Twitter opened the possibility for black dialogue globally via the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement, the film has extended the possibility for a forgotten diaspora to remerge. The film inspired a lot of posts on Twitter in terms of the screening itself (cf. below).

Neoliberalism and Blaxploitation

Some scholars do highlight a discomfort though of a rather vicious representation of *Killmonger*, the dominant African American in the film. It is troubling that *Killmonger* represents the trope of the angry black man who is a killing machine (González 2019). He is orphaned, separated from his ancestry and heritage, and consumed by rage, finding his place in violence (Washington 2019). In a way, *Killmonger* serves as an uncomfortably

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enduring metaphor for the African American diaspora and his attempt at a Pan-Africanism or Blacktopia is dealt with brutally.



(Anderson 2016)



(Anderson 2016)

This characterization was most commonly criticized by scholars who signaled it as advancing the neoliberal global order where any attempt to move contrary to neoliberal globalization is punished with the harshest of sentences (Bozarth 2019; Tompkins 2018; Coetzee 2019; Burger 2019; Bhayroo 2019). T'Challa's concluding scene showing him going to an international organization to share Wakanda's technology with the world indicates the only way to maintain a peaceful co-existence is through obedient lowering of borders and barriers to international need. Killmonger's attention to the global struggles of Black people declines in visibility and his plea for Pan-Africanism is rendered unachievable.

Prunotto (2018) describes Killmonger as a Character in continual transition, never really fitting in anywhere. He quotes Mary Douglas:

Mary Douglas ([1966] 2003: 40) has theorised the ambivalence and associations with danger and impurity that such 'aberrant forms' provoke. Dirt, she famously writes, is 'matter out of place'. This 'uncleanliness or dirt is that which must not be included if a pattern is to be maintained' (Douglas [1966] 2003: 41). 'Matter out of place' must be confronted in some way that re-establishes social order.

Killmonger is seen by Prunotto as 'matter out of place, representing that which must be confronted to re-establish social order. In a way, Killmonger's characterization is stereotypical as the disconnected, angry Black man, that allows audiences to accept his violent end as legitimate. Ringer (2016: 59 - 60) analyses the film *District 9* and reveals the lack of complexity in terms of representation of race and class, and an overreliance on stereotypical images. He states:

However, curiously absent from the conversation is *District 9*'s representation of the complexities of race and class. I argue that the film performs this work by explicitly appealing to stereotypical images that operate as signifiers of class and long-standing controversies over terms such as the 'underclass' The alien as monster displays the ideologies and representations that provide justification for profound inequalities, reveals state violence and legitimated the engendering of loathing and contempt for the other.

The character of Erik Killmonger had the least investment as it were. He was

the most caricatured as a dangerous killing machine who is blood simple, with little integrity. This made his violent end acceptable but more importantly, allowed audiences to easily dismiss his set of ideologies which was to promote a militant solution to Black suffering advanced by a global African unity.

This kind of resolution extends Blaxploitation critique which inscribes Black suffering into capital as a means of cinematic entertainment. Suffering emerges only to the extent it serves an overarching neoliberal plot. Suffering is not really resolved or attended to, apart from the conventional avenues of aid (T'Challa installs Shuri in Oakland to uplift a poor Black community with technology).

It is indeed ironic that the ideology advanced by the film's namesake organisation (the Black Panther Party), was negated in the characterisation of the anti-hero, Killmonger. Given the Islamophobia that endures in American TV and film culture, the idea of a global unity of black people is far too troublesome and dangerous an idea. One that needed to be quashed in a decisive way as Hollywood does not allow all demographics the privilege of survival after waging a violent revolution. *Black Panther* allows for comfortable consumption of a coup d'état as it returns action to a new equilibrium. The film still remains a marvelous example of diversity making phenomenal profits, and *diversity travelling well* despite the Vice President's (Marvel Studios) presumptions on 'the problem of diversity' (Flota 2019: 96). To the contrary, there appears to be a global hunger for such films which do not require narrative extraction.

Africana Womanism, Colourism and Hair Politics

One of the most celebrated aspects of the film was the representation of Black women. Many authors offered lavish praise for the annihilation of hegemonic black femininity in film (Chikafa-Chipiro 2019; Morita 2018; van Twest Smith 2018; Oboe 2019; Sen 2018), as it contrasted the standard suite of Hollywood tropes: 'the mammy', 'the jezebel', 'the tragic mulatta' and the 'welfare mother' (Gerard & Peopse n.d.; Dralega 2018). D'Agostino (2019: 4) indicates the identification of Nakia as the 'ideological gem of the film' as she disrupts so many stereotypes. Lupita Nyong'o's presence at the Kenyan screening of the film was acclaimed as global cultural moment (Omanga & Mainye 2019). In addition to Nakia, the contrast of a young female (Shuri)

as the face of technology and a strong female (Okoye) as an ethical general leading an army, added to the investment of agency in black female representation. Chikafa-Chipiro (2019) used these instances of the film to argue for *Black Panther* introducing intersections of Africana womanism and Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturist scholars like Okorafor have sought to challenge traditional constructs of beauty by focusing on the politics of wigs, weaves and natural hair (Hello Moto). Marotta (2018) discusses Okorafor's works of fiction where she highlights the alienating effects of wigs and weaves, as the painful inscription to colonial norms of beauty. In this respect, a critical moment in the film occurs when General Okoye throws off her wig in preparation for a fight scene uttering, 'this ridiculous thing'. It is a powerful moment imbued with resistance at a variety of levels to tropes of black women in film. It is also acclaimed as a deeper resistance to colonial inscriptions of beauty, however a reception analysis would yield better discussion on the topic of hair and the representation of black females in film.

Closely related to the issue of hair is the colourism debate. Jackson-Lowman (2013), Glenn (2009) and McGee (2018) wrote in different contexts about discriminatory practices against darker skinned people. This is especially evident in Hollywood where lighter skinned black females are privileged with roles over darker skinned black females in an already sparse industry. This was not a dominant focus among the authors however a reception analysis would yield better discussion on the topic of colourism and the representation of black females in film.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics featured in the literature with scholars arguing for an Afrofuturistic aesthetic (also the Black aesthetic of reconstruction) evident in *Black Panther* (Coogler 2018). In terms of the mise en scene, the portrayal of the futuristic world was very organically staged where elements of dusty, rural, grassy hinterlands appeared next to Ndebele patterning and futuristic infrastructure. This provokes a powerful, wistful imagining of an African space un-touched by colonisation. An attempt was made not to over-homogenise the African image with the representation of a few recognisable peoples in some way or the other, such as the Masai, the Zulu hat, the warriors, the Swazi in the cave etc. This was also well received as it moves

away from an essentialist African identity, so often the hallmark of a north Atlantic construction.

In a different approach to the denouement, Baumann (2018; 315) explored Afrofuturist imaginings present in *Black Panther* such as the ‘movement of utopia from place to praxis’. Baumann develops this idea as a methodology to influence urban planning agendas indicating that speculative fiction may be a powerful way of involving disenfranchised communities in realizing self-determination and community potential towards better self-imagined space. This idea resonates powerfully especially in the context of disintegrating public services, where it may become critical for communities to play a stronger role in the management of their communal spaces.

Some Key Absences

After surveying the literature, some key absences emerged which needed attention. It was mentioned earlier that there were hardly any reception analyses done for this film. While many scholars focused on elements of neoliberalism, global capital and Blaxploitation in film, little has been covered on *Hollywood hegemony* and how actors are paid. In addition, there was not much focus on *heteronormativity* as a dominant feature in the film. Lastly *technocracy* could have been explored in greater depth.

Political Economy, Histories and Hollywood Hegemony

While *Black Panthers* history lies in the Marvel suite of comics, the stirring of its cinematic roots emerged as early as 1992 when Wesley Snipes indicated interest in portraying a film that could offer alternative representations of Africa in its fullest grandeur, counter to the usual stereotypes of poverty and corruption. (Parker & Couch 2018; Sharf 2018). Continuing into the mid-2000’s, the project did not come to fruition for a variety of reasons, one of which was confusion that the film is about the Black Panther Party (BPP) of the civil rights era championing black civil rights in an age of extreme police brutality in America (1960’s – 1980’s). (Parker & Couch 2018). This confusion is ironic as the film featured similar ideologies of the BPP through the anti-hero, Erik Killmonger who sought to end the subjugation of black people globally, albeit through militant means.

Snipes said of the project, ‘at the time Hollywood was a different

place and no one was jumping at the chance to make a black superhero movie' (Sharf 2018). The American context in the 2000's was dominated by 9/11 and the ideology of the 'war on terror which promoted other-ness and exclusivity, while in 2013 the *#BlackLivesMatter* movement gained tremendous momentum globally (Anderson 2016) and the explosion of Black Twitter perhaps created a more inviting climate for an African story with global appeal.

Celebrity fetishism often obscures the economic workings of Hollywood however, it is accepted that female stars earn less than their male counterparts. What is lesser acknowledged is that black stars earn significantly less than their white male and female counterparts. The argument is that famous stars (usually white and male) would draw a larger audience, while diverse actors (usually of colour) are less famous and would therefore draw a smaller audience. This is projected onto the disparity in earnings with black and female performers.

According to *The Guardian*, a study of the film industry in 2014 revealed that only 28.3% of speaking roles were performed by people of colour. This ratio of roughly 30% of speaking roles for actors of colour versus 70% of speaking roles for white actors indicates what Nama quote by Ringer (2016: 59 - 60) refers to as token presence but structured absence. He elaborates with specific reference to science fiction:

Although District 9 is populated with Black people, the film continues a trend that scholar of race and science fiction Adilifu Nama refers to as the structure absence and token presence of Blacks in science fiction. Many critiques of District 9 focus on its racial imagery as racist and reductive. However, curiously absent from the conversation is District 9's representation of the complexities of race and class. I argue that the film performs this work by explicitly appealing to stereotypical images that operate as signifiers of class and long-standing controversies over terms such as the 'underclass' The alien as monster displays the ideologies and representations that provide justification for profound inequalities, reveals state violence and legitimated the engendering of loathing and contempt for the other.

Hollywood hegemony further advances the notion that 'racially diverse films don't travel' (Mendelson 2018) meaning that a film featuring diversity in

actors would not hold global appeal. Given its global success *Black Panther* explodes this myth and the experience of Netflix also contradicts the notion as an increasingly bigger budget is allocated to diverse, original content demanded by the global audience (Mendelson 2018).

Black Panther grossed \$ 1.182.5 billion at the May 2018 count (Real Salaries 2018) and was set to overtake Iron Man 3 (\$ 1.215 billion). The film was undoubtedly a phenomenal success within the US and globally. This is in spite of the embarrassing comment from Marvel's Vice President of Sales, David Gabriel who stated in a 2017 interview, 'What we heard was that people didn't want any more diversity' (Flota 2019: 96). Flota argues that even with contestation today, the residue of white supremacy lingers in the political economic fabric of cultural production. This extends to earnings as the table below demonstrates.

Despite trends growing contrary to the Hollywood gaze, a significant disparity endures in performers' earnings:

Title of film	Box office earnings	Male lead / actors' income	Female actors' income
<i>Avengers: Infinity Wars</i>	\$ 1.965 billion	Robert Downey Jr: \$ 50 million	Scarlett Johansson: \$ 20 million
<i>Captain America</i>	\$ 1.5 billion	Chris Evans: \$ 30 million Robert Downey Jr: \$ 25 million	Scarlett Johansson: \$ 15 million Elizabeth Olsen: \$ 3 million
<i>Guardians of the Galaxy</i>	\$ 800 million	Vin Diesel: \$ 54.5 million	Karen Gillian: \$ 2 million
<i>Thor</i>	\$ 800 million	Chris Hemsworth: \$ 31.5 million	Tessa Thompson: \$ 4 million Cate Blanchett: \$ 7 million
<i>Black Panther</i>	\$ 1.182.5 Billion	Chadwick Boseman: \$ 3 million	Lupita Nyong'o: \$ 1 million

Consolidated from (Moore 2017; Conlon 2015; Hyams 2019; Nevins 2017; O'Falt 2018; *Real Salary of Thor* 2018; Mendelson 2018).

The discrepancies of earnings across race and gender, despite gross earnings of the films indicate the play of Hollywood hegemony. This manifests in subtle ways in the text of *Black Panther*, suggesting that the productive forces of Hollywood do inscribe powerful, dominant meanings into their texts. As mentioned before texts ‘may be polyvalent rather than polysemous’ (Schiappa & Wessels 2007). A notion coined by Condit (1989) who indicated that while texts articulate dominant discourses that audiences receive, audiences rearticulate these discourses because they can value messages differently. However, polyvalence may be more meaningfully evaluated with reception analyses, which remains a current lacuna.

Troubling Heteronormativity

One troubling aspect with *Black Panther* is the powerful inscription of a matrix of discourses which manufactures a token presence of black people and their structured absence at the deeper ideological level. This discursive formation refers to the play of patriarchy, heteronormativity, technocracy and neoliberal globalization. These discourses work together to sculpt what may be considered legitimate and what may be excluded from such considerations.

Heterosexual relationships were featured as the norm, and thus naturalized. There was no reference in any way to any other type of relationship. This advances a troubling heteronormativity and Africa has had a painful history in terms of tolerance for alternate orientations, with 32 countries criminalizing same sex relationships and unions of any kind. In Sudan and the northern part of Nigeria same sex relationships may carry a punishment of death.

It is an important area where Afrofuturistic imaginings must be called upon to offer alternate Blacktopia’s that can accommodate more expansive identities than a narrow heteronormativity and its constricted notions of gender.

Technocracy

In *Black Panther*, technology is presented as the promise machine. At the start of the film, technology appears magnificently as the foundation of Wakanda’s peace and prosperity, and at the end as a solution to Oakland’s

poverty and social ills. It is fitting to reiterate McKittnik's differentiation of the 'promise of science' from the 'promise of science fiction', where science fiction is offered as a way to transcend the political economic bondage inherent in science. Technocracy or 'technoscience' refers to way political, economic and social structures bind science and thereafter offer the bounded formation as legitimate normative understandings of humanity which is subsequently used to arrange society (Ringer 2016: 54). While *Black Panther* does well to try and imagine an African world never colonized, it undermines the vision by engaging with technology as neutral taking up its distribution through neoliberal models.

Ringer argues that technocracy 'rather than resolving the issue of race, advances it in troubling ways' (2016: 53). Take for instance the:

Shirley cards, named after a former Kodak studio model, were images used as the standard for color calibration in photo labs all over the world...Technicians would adjust the colour settings to match the model's skin tone. Models for Shirley cards were always white women (Bel Barco 2014; Ali 2015).

The Shirley card indicates how whiteness was set as the normative ideal, with little recognition of tones outside the norm. It is a simple example of how technology, seemingly neutral never is. This is perhaps why after all the sophistication and innovation in technology, Bowles (2018: 2 - 3) can still be amazed at how, 'the viewer cannot help but be struck by the intimacy of the scene – and by not only the beauty of the actors but also the rare sight of cinematography performed by filmmakers with an understanding of black skin tones'. Given the history of photography with its troubling normative ideals (Ali 2015) and Marvel Studios VP indicating that people didn't want diversity, *Black Panther's* celebration of technology must be received a little cautiously. However, Bowles's observation indicates that if done properly (without 'Shirley Card' assumptions), audiences could receive Afrocentric films well.

Even though the Declaration of Human Rights and the Civil Rights movements has reduced racial classification and the human genome project proves that human beings are the same regardless of race, Ringer cautions that technocracy could re-inscribe race in technological ways:

In a 2008 meeting of the National Human Genome Research Institute, members quickly realised that attempting to avoid the language of 'race' quickly created a vacuum in the scientific vocabulary. The reconfiguration of race would now hinge on two key concepts: statistical probability and geographic ancestry.... Population genomics trades the fallacy that populations that map onto races are natural formations that become biologically cohesive. As such, race is not being discovered in our genes but rather accepted racial categories are being given the scientific legitimisation (Ringer 2016: 55 - 56).

Ringer (2016: 64 - 65) goes on to examine how technology is used in the American criminal justice system where anyone arrested could be compelled to provide a DNA sample, irrespective of the severity of the crime and much before the conviction or acquittal. Ringer argues that this seems to be more about racial profiling than prevention of crime.

Finally, O'Neil, a mathematician who once worked with hedge funds raises serious concerns with what she calls, 'the big data economy' (2016: 2 - 3). Unlike the Shirley Card, O'Neil (7-8) indicates that the mathematical models of big data are invisible to everyday people and hence 'many poisonous assumptions are camouflaged by math and go largely untested and unquestioned'. This is especially dangerous as uncontestable mathematical determinism (technocracy) enters the fabric of social life, inevitably governing most aspects of it.

This is not to say that technology is to be feared or denigrated. It cannot be embraced in a solutionist way, where technological systems and programs are not subject to scrutiny. Technology must be taken up in an Afrofuturistic way, for its transcending potential as opposed to its bounded formations.

Conclusion

The success of *Black Panther* catapulted it to becoming a global cultural phenomenon. The financial success of the film defied Marvel insiders who did not expect the film to do as well, due to its *diversity*. Ironically it was diversity that created the appeal for the global diaspora, indicating a poignant yearning for more films of this nature. The reception of *Black Panther* also

exposed the critical absence of substantial Black films, which if available could allow audiences of colour freedom from fan labour and narrative extraction.

A scoping review covered literature spanning topics such as decolonisation, neoliberalism, Blaxpoitation, Blacktopia, Pan-Africanism and Afropolitanism, African American identity, Africana womanism, hair politics and aesthetics. Notable exclusions were a comparative analysis of the film in terms of actors' earnings, a focus on the dominance of heteronormativity, and finally a more in-depth discussion of technocracy.

The film delighted global audiences with Afrofuturistic mise en scene, the powerful characterizations of women, and alternative spiritual practices. However, the brutal treatment of *Erik Killmonger*, subsequent disabling of any revolutionary action and the singular solution of inclusion into global neoliberalism dampened scholarly reception. A missing element in the film is some attempt at a cohesive integration of race, class and the diaspora. Scholars indicated that the film's solution (a neoliberal model of charity) served to 'band-aid' the terrible and enduring brutality of colonialism and its progeny. Although *Black Panther* leaves far more unanswered questions, it serves as an iconic film that may be used to open global Afrocentric debate.

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