

Decentering Whiteness in *Black Panther*

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American films have an important position in American culture as a source of entertainment or as a media to transfer particular messages from the movie makers to society as the market. The market also influences how and why a film is made. Many times, the issues explored in a film are closely related to what happened in society. Filmmakers seek to offer a social critique or represent a society's dream vision of themselves. The history of moving pictures is a living record of performances of Whiteness, class, gender, and myriad identity markers, including sexuality, nationality and ethnicity (Foster 1). A significant issue in U.S. films today deals with power relations between Blacks and Whites. As Andrew Hacker states, "America is inherently a 'white' country: in character, structure, and culture. Black Americans create lives of their own. Yet, as a people, they face boundaries and constrictions set by the white majority. America's version of apartheid, while lacking overt legal sanction, comes closest to the system even now [...] reformed in the land of its invention" (4). In relation, superhero films, a popular genre in the U.S., always portray binary opposition based on the power relation. In this case, the binary opposition is often about white and black, strong and weak, smart and stupid, good and bad, hero and villain, civilized and uncivilized.

For many years, U.S. superheroes like Superman, Batman, or Spiderman are identically portrayed as Whites and males. Those justifications in the U.S. film industry promotes an ideology of White patriarchal capitalism (Benshoff and Griffin 28). Richard Dyer, in his book *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, questioned the norm of Whiteness which is everywhere and in which all that does not fit into white pattern are considered as the Other (3). It leaves blacks and the other ethnic groups as the periphery of the story or inferior position, never become the center of the story or superior status. The position of the Whites leads to the hegemonic representations of Whiteness in the mass media, including movies. Further, Foster mentions that although Whiteness is a cultural construct, it defines and limits people (2). It underlines the powerful impact of Whiteness into society in terms of constructing perception on the image of people based on color.

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For years, critics have concerned by the scant opportunities for Black actors and behind-the-scenes workers in the U.S. film industry, their lower pay relative to Whites, and the stereotypical ways the industry represents Blacks. A report on diversity in U.S. films 2014-2015 conducted by Annenberg labelled U.S. films a “White, boys’ club” (Smith et al.) because there are only a few opportunities for Blacks to participate in the industry. Harry Benshoff and Sean Griffin find that film represents Blacks stereotypically as lazy, greedy, criminal, hypersexual, immoral and inferior, whereas Whites are described as the opposite (64). Similarly, Norman Denzin mentions that White persons were rational, virtuous, mature, and normal; the ethnic other was irrational, depraved, fallen, childlike, immature, a danger to society (9). This concept of Whiteness strongly influences the representation of other ethnic groups, including Blacks in American movies.

U.S. film industry portrayals of Blacks have always been debated, not only in the U.S. itself but also across the globe. Today, Blacks have progressed in their roles and positions in the U.S. film industry, both behind the scenes and as actors in less stereotyped roles. Nowadays, there are more numbers of Blacks people participating in U.S. movie production. In the past, it was rare for actors from ethnic minority groups to be cast as “hero” and “heroine,” from 2016-2018 more actors from ethnic minority groups have gained essential roles in U.S. popular films, especially in the MCU. *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) focused on several Black characters, such as Black Panther, Falcon, War Machine, and Nick Fury, and in *Guardians of the Galaxy* (2014), Gamora is portrayed by Black actress Zoe Saldana. Outside the MCU, other important Black characters in recent films include Finn and Maz Kanata in *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (2015).

Many times, ethnic minorities play a “side-kick” to the White protagonist. However, the release of the MCU film, *Black Panther* (Coogler), is different because it is about a hero who comes from a kingdom in a seemingly third-world African country, Wakanda. This kingdom is untouched by European and U.S. colonialism. They are portrayed as a rich, civilized, technologically advanced kingdom. The movie is an anomaly in the MCU because of its predominantly Black cast and its director, Ryan Coogler, the first African-American director of a big-budget MCU film (Theodore-Vachon). *Black Panther* was hugely financially successful, particularly in the U.S. The film grossed over \$700 million domestically, more than the same year’s instalment of the most popular MCU subseries, *Avengers: Infinity War* (boxofficemojo.com). *Black Panther* refuted the assumption that a big-budget movie featuring a primarily minority cast couldn't be

financially successful in the U.S. This article concerns how *Black Panther* portrays Blackness and Whiteness and question the reason why this film became very popular in the time of President Trump, in which discourses of racial differences become exceedingly sensitive.

Blacks in the U.S. and U.S. Film

The U.S. and racism are two things that can hardly be separated. The long history of racism in the U.S. began with the arrival of Europeans during Columbus's exploration period. Ethnic minority groups in the U.S., including Blacks, have encountered prejudice and discrimination as a result of racism. This condition is proven by the length of Blacks' struggle in gaining recognition as the U.S. citizens who have equal rights and positions with Whites. Daniel Thompson stated in his book entitled *Sociology of the Black Experience*:

The story of the Blacks' struggle for survival and equal citizenship began in 1619, when the first people of African descent were brought to Jamestown, Virginia, by a Dutch man-of-war. Since then, they have had many unique experiences endemic to their changing status. At first, they were indentured servants but eventually were forced into legal slavery (1661); they were emancipated more than 200 years later (1863) and have lived ever since in a biracial society established on the doctrine of "White supremacy." (3)

This quotation shows the relation between Blacks and White in the U.S. rooted back from the history of the arrival of Blacks in America. Having a historical background as slaves limits their choices, while living under the doctrine of "White Supremacy" frames the norm of Whiteness as the expected norm.

The conflict between Blacks and Whites played out in the U.S. film industry. The first film images of Black people were the culture of segregation, enforced in law from 1877 to the 1960s and culturally through concordant stereotypes, such as Black minstrels who love to dance and sing. In early film, Edward Map describes the development of an image of Black people as devoted slaves who knew their place. These filmic characters were easily controlled, impotent and powerless (Simpson 20). Peter Noble argues that Blacks were depicted with regularity as "bloodthirsty, eye-rolling, demented creatures with thick lips, almost demented with hate and yelling for White blood" (Simpson 20). He also describes filmic images of black people as hate-filled barbarians, savages, head hunters or cannibals, only one degree removed from the wild animals of the jungle. According to him,

these negative images underline how Blacks are depicted as being different from Whites, both physically and culturally (Simpson 20).

Similarly, Donald Bogle categorizes the development of Blacks' representation in American movies since the 1900s to 2010s through images of Black people in the U.S. cinema, such as "Toms," "coons," "mulattos," "Mammies," and "Bucks." These five images keep appearing, although in a different way. "Toms" refer to an obedient and friendly servant figure, dating back to *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1903); "coons" refer to funny clown characters that will do anything to entertain others; "mulattos" refer to sexual, exotic and available sex objects; "Mammies" refer to a dark-skinned female servant who cooks, cleans the house and nurses babies; and "Bucks" are portrayed as muscular and threatening men (Bogle).

In the 1940s, the images of Black people in the film industry began to change, with several factors influencing the changing notions of Black people. The first one is Blacks' protests to the government to end the discrimination toward them as part of the burgeoning Civil Rights Movement. This racial awareness triggered a second factor, with negotiation opened by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) with Hollywood studios on the way films portrayed Black people and the amount of Blacks' participation in the film industry. The third factor was the development of the television industry, which deteriorated public interest in cinema; studios suffered significant financial losses due to increasing film production cost and decreasing audience numbers (Bourne 12). Donald Simpson mentions that from 1946 to the 1960s, Hollywood began to attempt to portray Blacks with positive human characteristics, although White supremacy still organizes the film narratives and characters (12). For example, Black characters are sacrificed to redeem a White heroic figure, or Black characters are framed as happy, subservient inhabitants of the glorious Old South. Simpson argues that such stories allow Hollywood to appeal to Black as well as White viewers.

The last factor changing Blacks' image in Hollywood film is the appearance of independently-produced Blaxploitation cinema in the 1970s, which continues to shape Black images as a response to Black stereotypes created by mainstream Whites (Bourne 13; Simpson 12). The emergence of Blaxploitation drove Hollywood to find a way to produce movies that will satisfy the Black community of viewers. During this period, Hollywood starts to portray Black males as individualistic, hard-hitting tough guys who could attract any woman, regardless of race, with a mere glance. Meanwhile, "Black women characters were glamorously dressed private detectives or cops with the biggest gun in the world usually pointed

at the crotch of a leering villain” (Bourne 13). Whites are villains in Blaxploitation films. Nevertheless, the White male villains are those who are accepted as bad guys by other Whites, such as drug dealers, mafiosos or Whites driven crazy by an overzealous hatred of black people (Bourne 14-5). Problematically, Bourne argues that these Blaxploitation characters were also modern-day “mulatto” figures, updated “coon” roles, or up-tempo “Toms” (15).

The making of Marvel’s *Black Panther* in 2018 as the first big-budget Black majority film was important to the Black community, not only in the United States but around the world. “*Black Panther* has been lauded for its diversity as a big-budget superhero tentpole with a nearly all-Black cast” (Rubin). The film stars Chadwick Boseman alongside Angela Bassett, Forest Whitaker, Lupita Nyong’o, Danai Gurira and Michael B. Jordan. Not only was the cast majority Black, but the director was an up-and-coming Black director, Ryan Coogler, who also wrote the film with Joe Robert Cole. *Black Panther* is set in the fictional African nation of Wakanda, a rich and advanced kingdom that is untouched by colonialism. The film recounts a story, the king of Wakanda who desires to protect his people from the corrupt outside world. According to imdb.com, *Black Panther*’s production cost \$200 million, and it earned \$700 million in the U.S. and over \$1.3 billion worldwide, making it a financial success for the studio. This movie presents a different point of view on Black and White relations with its characters, cast, crew, storyline, and box office popularity.

Deconstruction and Film Analysis

The United States, a multicultural country, has experienced many ethnic-related conflicts and still have such conflicts, most specifically between White and Black citizens. This research applied Derrida’s concept of deconstruction to read the binary oppositions that emerge in Marvel’s new superhero film, *Black Panther*. Jacques Derrida developed his theory of deconstruction in opposition to structuralism. He locates binary oppositions and proposes critical elements in deconstruction. He describes key elements of the method of deconstruction:

The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and

economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work. (24)

Derrida argues a new meaning of a text from within the text itself. This definition is then often misunderstood that the purpose of deconstruction is to destroy a text. Deconstruction comes from the French term *deconstruire* which means dismantling the structure to be reconstructed. Therefore, deconstruction is positive because deconstruction breaks up and overturns the meaning of the text not only to disassemble it but to then rearrange it by constructing new texts or discourses to discover the new interpretation of the text.

Jonathan Culler states there are four main principles in Derrida's method, namely; difference, hierarchy reversal, marginality and centrality, and iterability to meaning. It means that in conducting deconstruction, the previous four steps can be used to arrange the analysis. Culler underlines "presence and absence," binary opposition and its reversal, the periphery and the center, as well as the diversification of meaning from a word as central ideas to consider when performing a deconstruction.

Method of Research

This research is intended to see American society through a product of its popular culture, a film. It is conducted inductively since it started from an issue portrayed in the movie, and not to test any hypothesis. This research applies qualitative one because it deals with the data in the form of words, pictures and sound, not in the form of numbers; it is descriptive; it focuses on process rather than the result, and it emphasizes interpretation (Bogdan and Biklen 29-32). By emphasizing interpretation, Denzin and Lincoln state that this kind of research is suitable to be used in investigating social problems (2). Additionally, Creswell formulates several perspectives that can be used in qualitative research. One of them is a postmodern perspective, which is used in this research, concerning social problems derived from the differences based on race, ethnicity, class and gender (Creswell 16). Since this paper focuses on ethnic minorities, it is suitable to conduct this research with qualitative and postmodern perspectives.

Data collection was based on data collection techniques, according to Creswell (276-84). The first step is to process and prepare data. Then, a close reading of the

film is undertaken to find data that is related to the topic, which means film scenes related to the representation of ethnic minorities in the case of this essay. *Black Panther* is used as primary data source, while also relying on secondary data in the form of other films, news, articles, books and other sources related to the topic of discussion. In this essay, data analysis is done based on Derrida's method of deconstruction: this method suggests analyzing data by finding binary oppositions in the text, then reversing binary oppositions to diversify meanings of the text.

Blackness and Whiteness

This research will read the relation of Blackness and Whiteness in *Black Panther* by using deconstruction. Further discussion is divided into two parts: Blackness versus Whiteness and diversification of meaning. The first part describes the way this film portrays Blackness and Whiteness by finding binary oppositions related to race and reversing these binary oppositions. The second part of the analysis explains the different meanings of this film to audiences that contribute to its popularity. Data analysis of *Black Panther* found three binary oppositions related to the movie's representation of Black and White. Those are good versus bad, civilized versus uncivilized, and strong versus weak.

Good versus Bad. The film shows the personal competition between Black (T'Challa) and White (Ulysses Klaue), as well as the broader conflict between Black people and White people throughout the world. In this film, we have seen how T'Challa tries to protect his people and land and how Klaue tries to destruct Wakanda by stealing vibranium for his personal enrichment. This echoes the larger conflict: Black Wakandans try to preserve their homeland, while White people attempt to invade that space; therefore, this binary opposition also represents colonized and colonizer. The Black people who try to protect their land do not want to be exploited by the White colonizer, while, the White colonizer only wants to take advantage of Black people.

In several scenes in the film, Klaue said "savages don't deserve it" regarding the natural resource of vibranium, with "savages" here referring to Black people (53.20-53.24). Klaue's framework of thinking represents White prejudice toward Black people. Meanwhile, statements made by T'Challa, Shuri and Okoye show Black people's opinion concerning White people. These characters understand that Whites came to Africa to enslave the people and exploit the natural resources, and in order to enrich their home countries. When T'Challa asks her to be nice to Agent

Ross, Okoye said: “Americans!” (55.00-55.04) with a gesture telling she has had enough with the Americans, and later when Shuri meets Agent Ross, she calls him “colonizer”(01.09.35-01.09.40). At the climax of the film, T’Challa criticizes Killmonger’s thirst for revenge, arguing that Killmonger is corrupted by the White framework, which is always divided and attack. T’Challa regrets the way Killmonger envisions how Wakanda should be.

Uniquely in *Black Panther*, the right side is represented by the Black Wakanda people. They are portrayed to be the ones that do positive acts to save the world. They hide themselves to protect their vibranium. They stop Klaue from stealing the vibranium and revealing the real power of Wakanda to the outside world. Meanwhile, the evil side is represented by White characters, who are responsible for all destruction in the world.

Civilized versus Uncivilized. The fictional country of Wakanda is portrayed as an advanced civilization with sophisticated technology. In the film narrative, the outside world identifies Wakanda as the destitute kingdom in the Third World, which insists on not taking any aid from other countries. This country applies ruse to conceal vibranium and the advanced technology and society. Vibranium makes their lives exceptionally good. For example, Shuri saved Agent Ross by using medical technology enabled by vibranium, healing a life-threatening injury in only two days.

On the other hands, the film presents the outside world, including the United States, as uncivilized. All wars in the world are portrayed as stemming greediness for power and domination. The film opens with the narrator, N’Jobu’s voice over: “but as Wakanda thrived, the world around it descended further into chaos. To keep vibranium safe, the Wakandans vowed to hide in plain sight, keeping the truth of their power from the outside world.” (00:01:15-00:01:35) They do not want vibranium used to make weapons, and they do not want to be involved with the world that has already become chaotic.

Strong versus Weak. This binary opposition is related to the position of women and men in Wakanda. Black women experience a double burden since they become the object of discrimination not only by White men but also by Black men (Beal). In *Black Panther*, however, Black women are the warriors that protect the Wakandan king and their kingdom. They are physically healthy and smart. Three strong Black women characters in the film are Nakia, Okoye and Shuri. They have essential roles in the plot of the story. Okoye is the lead bodyguard for the king: she goes wherever the king goes and is skilled in battle. Together with Nakia and

T'Challa, she apprehends and defeats Klaue in Busan. Throughout the film, she adamantly will not betray her king and will always be ready to protect Wakanda. The “weak” in the film is Okoye’s lover W’Kabi, who betrays her and T’Challa to side with Killmonger, but he surrenders to Okoye after having a duel:

W’Kabi: You would kill me, my love?

Okoye: For Wakanda? Without question. (01:55:03-01:56:17)

Okoye is tough and loyal. Her love for W’Kabi cannot overshadow her love for Wakanda.

The second Black woman character is Nakia as T’Challa's ex-girlfriend. Nakia leaves him because of her vision of helping others. She goes to other countries to be Wakanda's spy. She has performed several rescue missions in other countries. She learns that outside Wakanda, many people suffer because of war and poverty. She believes that Wakanda can accommodate them by using their natural resources and advanced technology. She proposes some foreign aid and refugee programs to be undertaken by Wakanda. But T’Challa does not want to risk Wakanda’s resources being discovered by the world and prefers to continue their masquerade as the world’s poorest country. Besides her smart and open-minded personality, Nakia also denotes an excellent fighter, joining in the battles in Busan and Wakanda.

The last character is Shuri, T’Challa's little sister. She is characterized as an intelligent scientist who leads Wakanda’s research laboratories. She is in charge of any invention made by Wakanda from vibranium, including T’Challa's black panther costume and medical equipment. She treats Agent Ross to recover from a severe injury more quickly than he could anywhere else in the world. Her quick thinking stops the vibranium from being taken outside Wakanda.

Black Panther offers a different point of view on the relation between Blacks and Whites. Commonly, Hollywood commercial films construct binary oppositions that confirm the superiority of Whites and the dominance of men. Even when Hollywood started to give more positive traits to Black film characters, Black people were still often unable to construct a positive image of their own. Therefore, the making of *Black Panther* is moving because it has reversed the typical binary representation of Blacks and Whites as well as men and women in Hollywood.

Centering the Blacks and Decentering the Whites

Previously, all movies with a majority Black cast were regarded as Black movies no matter how successful the film was; previous examples include: *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), *Get Out* (2016) and *Girl's Trip* (2017), each of which grossed over \$100 million domestically, yet were still regarded as Black movies instead of entirely musical, horror or comedy movies. On the other hand, as part of the MCU, *Black Panther* was the first big-budget superhero film with a majority black cast, and it was able to break out of the stereotype of being defined as a Black movie.

Being one of the MCU superheroes, Black Panther moves from the periphery to center of the story. Previously in the MCU, Black superheroes, like Falcon, War Machine, Heimdall, and Nick Fury were side-kicks to the White superheroes. Black Panther is the first Black superhero character that has his own movie. Meanwhile, White characters are less central, making the story progress, but not functioning as the protagonists. The director, Ryan Coogler, as the first African American director of a big budget MCU film, has already succeeded to take the movie to the top. It broke box office records as a both a superhero film and an African-American film, while also breaking several Hollywood myths of Whiteness.

Since the movie is set in Africa, it becomes the center of the story. Meanwhile, the United States becomes the periphery. The way this movie portrays Africa and the United States is different from the Hollywood stereotypes to both countries. Previously, the United States is represented in Hollywood film as the country that is responsible for world peace and prosperity. This movie pictures the United States on the contrary position that is responsible for the wars and chaos happening in the world. Africa in Hollywood movies is usually depicted as a place with poverty, hunger, traditional rituals, animals and a need for foreign aid. *Black Panther* portrays Wakanda as a prosperous and technologically advanced kingdom. Wakanda also displays a hope for the world, the country that can halt the injustice and chaos in the world.

The Diversification of Meaning

Although Black characters and the majority Black African nation of Wakanda is promoted as the dominant power in the world in *Black Panther*, there are still some classic stereotypes in the film. Those are Black males who obtain power hunger and thirst for the blood of White people, White saviours, and Africa as a savage place.

Black Panther film associates Black with goodness, while the typical Black in Hollywood film refers to badness. Two opposed characters as the binary are found in T'Challa and T'Challa's father, T'Chaka. T'Challa represents "goodness" and T'Chaka is "badness." His father slays his brother, N'Jobu for betraying Wakanda and selling vibranium. Living in the United States, N'Jobu witnessed the severe life experienced by Black people because of racial prejudice. He remains angry with T'Chaka's decision by hiding vibranium. He believes Wakanda can release them from suffering by utilizing vibranium as a weapon to accommodate revenge on Whites. N'Jobu explains:

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 tools to fight back. With vibranium weapons, they can overthrow all countries, and Wakanda can rule them all, the right way! (01:06:07-01:06:29)

T'Chaka finally decides to treat N'Jobu as a traitor and kills him. This friction leads to Killmonger's loneliness and hatred.

Eric Killmonger is N'Jobu's son, who witnesses his father's death in his uncle's hand. He is characterized as a man full of anger and neglected person in the United States.

The world took everything away from me! Everything I ever loved! But I'ma make sure we're even. I'ma track down anyone who would even think of being loyal to you! And I'ma put their ass in the dirt, right next to Zuri! (01:50:53-01:51:04)

Killmonger's anger is worsened by the fact that Wakanda has more than enough resources to assist other Black people around the world, but has chosen to hide those resources and only use them to benefit Wakanda. It becomes reason when he succeeds to take the throne from T'Challa and persuades all the governing board to send vibranium and weapons outside Wakanda.

Killmonger used to be U.S. military. Joining the U.S. military, then participating in elite special forces, trained him to annihilate and destroy the country. He shifts a power-hungry man and exterminates many people, including Black people, when he sought a mission in Africa. As he stated to T'Challa,

I lived my entire life waiting for this moment. I trained, I lied, I killed just to get here. I killed in America, Afghanistan, Iraq... I took life from my own

brothers and sisters right here on this continent! And all this death just so I could kill you. (01:18:25-01:20:35)

Killmonger's hatred and anger lead him to be what he stands now. He has the desire to kill T'Challa and destroy Wakanda from what he has already learned from living in the U.S. and working for the U.S. military. As T'Challa said, "you've become one of them" (01:50:52) to reveal his experience as a trained person to kill and use overpower.

This film tells Klaue, a White man, as the villain. However, the film also delineates White as 'good' person in Agent Everett K. Ross character. Although he is not the main protagonist, he plays an essential role. He stops all the ships taking vibranium and weapons out of Wakanda and saves Wakanda from being revealed to the world. As the U.S. intelligence, he appears as a White saviour that stops the chance of a decisive war and plays a vital role in the positive conclusion of the narrative.

Wakanda is depicted as a civilized kingdom by having sophisticated technology but believing in nature and supernatural power. The way they apply "brutal fight" for the throne position in front of citizens seems uncivilized. This ritual involves when these public brawls are called when there is someone from the other tribe challenging the successor of the previous king. T'Challa wins two hand-to-hand battles to get his throne from M'Baku and defeats Killmonger who claims for the throne.

The film also performs utilization of sophisticated military planes to transport weapons and fight while portraying armoured rhinoceros in the battle. In the traditional ritual in the king election, people have to drink a potion taken from a blue heart-shaped flower that can give the new king the power of black panther. After drinking the potion, the new king is buried in sand and has a vision in which he meets his ancestors.

The way the film represented Blacks is complicated. On one side, Blacks are central to a dominant portion of the film, but on the other side, they cannot escape from the ideology of White patriarchal capitalism. We can still find a Black character that exhibits some old stereotypes (Killmonger) and a White saviour (Agent Ross). Both Killmonger and Agent Ross play ambiguous roles. As T'Challa's cousin, Killmonger has to live a very different life, growing up with harsh life in the United States leads him to grow in anger and hatred. He sees that there are many Blacks who are suffering from oppression and discrimination, and feeling helpless at this drives his violence and his taking of the throne of Wakanda.

In a way, Killmonger can be regarded as a good guy since he wants to help Black people, but at the same time as a bad guy because he takes over the throne from T'Challa and creates chaos in Wakanda. He burns the heart-shaped herbs that are the source of Black Panther's power so that no one can succeed him as the Black Panther that rules Wakanda. When he begins to transport weapons to support Black people outside Wakanda, T'Challa criticizes Killmonger, saying that he has already become the same as those persons he seeks to take revenge against: "you want to see us become just like people you hate so much" (01:50:45-01:50:48) and "you have become them" (01:50:52). Killmonger does not only aim for Blacks' liberation, but more to conquer the world and be the most powerful person in the world. He does seek not only freedom but also power. As W. E. B. Du Bois mentions in his book, "But what on earth is Whiteness that one should desire it? Then always, somehow, somehow, silently but clearly, I am given to understand that Whiteness is the ownership of the earth forever and ever, Amen" (30). In his statement, Du Bois gives justification why many people desire to gain Whiteness, because of the power attached to this discourse. He refers to the ability as the ownership of the Earth. Thus, having trained in the (White) United States Military, Killmonger learns that power can provide privilege for the one who owned it. Therefore, he tries to use the energy from vibranium not only to liberate the Blacks but also to conquer the world.

The same thing happened to Agent Ross. As a representative of the United States, he is labelled a "colonizer" by other characters, particularly Shuri. Whites are claimed to be the reason for all war and chaos in the world. Therefore Okoye is worried when T'Challa takes Agent Ross to Wakanda to be healed because of what has been done by the Whites in Africa previously, taking what they need for their benefit. At the same time, Agent Ross also appears as White saviour who helps stop the ships that are loaded with vibranium and weapons to be sent outside Wakanda. The concept of White savior has already appeared many times in American films. It becomes a genre in which a White messianic character saves a lower-or working-class, usually urban or isolated, the non-White character from a sad fate (Hughey 12) or render the people of colour as "incapable of helping themselves (Cammarota 243-4). It functions as a means to satisfy the White audiences, to compensate for the side-kick roles that owned by the Whites (Vera and Gordon 33). Therefore, although the film is minority centered, the Whites still accept it because of the White savior concept. From the explanation above, it can be seen that both

Killmonger and Agent Ross play ambiguous characters that cannot be simply defined as good or bad characters.

The different angle offered by this film is one of the reasons that this film becomes a success. The data from statistica.com shows that 37% of the ticket buyers on opening weekend were African American. It is three times their share of the overall population in the U.S. The representation of a Black superhero attracted many people to watch the film, especially those who are African American. *Black Panther* turns out to be a significant point in people of color's struggle in creating their image, which is different from the Whiteness concept. The need for creating a positive image has already been a concern several years ago. bell hooks explains that, since slavery, White supremacy has recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial discrimination (2). The fact that these images bring a great effect on how the people of color see themselves becomes very crucial. Therefore, many Black intellectuals and artists are looking for a new way to write and talk about race and representation and working to transform the image. These images affect how Black people see themselves, and *Black Panther* is a crucial media text that transforms the negative images of Blacks.

Answering the need for creating positive images of Blacks in the period of Trump as the United States president becomes very urgent. Because of the White nationalist ideology that is reflected in Trump's speech, many Black people feel offended and threatened. His slogan "Make America Great Again" translated into his intention to reenact White supremacy in the United States. He reinforces old stereotypes of Blacks to maintain the superiority of Whites. When Black people are being attacked verbally through Trump's speeches, *Black Panther* offers a different angle for Blacks on how to see themselves through the portrayal of Black characters and Africa as the setting of the story. Fan comments demonstrate that this movie created new hope for many Blacks in the way they see themselves. Some children said that watching this movie opened their mind to believe in themselves, and think that they can also be a hero and save the world (Maillard). Children who were interviewed said that seeing a Black person control a whole country and creating all this technology made him feel he can do more with his brain and that the movie "will show people of the world how much more Blacks can do." (Maillard)

Another positive point from this film is how the film portrays Wakanda as an independent and prosperous kingdom in Africa. One of the children said "I want to see the things they have to offer (in Africa). After all, the media does not show the good. We see Africa as a third-world country, but it is probably so much more"

(Maillard). The film raises their curiosity about their homeland since the media usually portray Africa from the opposing side only as another child said that this film inspires him to explore Africa and makes him want to build his own Black Panther suit (Maillard). *Black Panther* also provides a picture of the people of Wakanda solving problems together and even their willingness to help others. One child reacted to the movie, saying “for Blacks, it shows us that we get through any obstacles that are thrown at us if we work together. We can also help the world by sharing our resources” (Maillard). This film also shows a healthy relationship between men and women in Wakanda, in which the men respect the women and the women are there to fight and support the men equally.

However, besides those positive images provide in the movie, two characters cannot be quickly determined as good or bad: Killmonger and Agent Ross both play ambiguous roles, illustrating the complex representations of Blackness and Whiteness, as the commodification of the Other still happens (Hooks). The representation of Blackness and Whiteness is portrayed to strengthen the difference between Black and White. Instead of looking at T'Challa as a new positive image of the black male, Killmonger is regarded as degrading the image of the African-American male. Looking at him, it reminds the audiences that only Nobel from Africa that can have a chance to be a hero, meanwhile, the blacks who were born and grew in America always become bad guys, just like Killmonger (Lebron). On the other hands, Agent Ross represents the old stereotype, White as a hite saviour. Although he is not the center of the story, he plays a crucial role in saving not only Wakanda but also the world by stopping the weapons from being transported outside Wakanda.

Nevertheless, some people regard the film as a racist film. *Black Panther* still portrays one group as dominant over the other. Here, Wakanda is the dominant group with more favourable characteristics. Meanwhile, the Whites become the subversive group; instead of looking at T'Challa as a new positive image of Black men, Killmonger is viewed as degrading the image of Black men. Looking at him tells the audience that only a Nobel from Africa can have a chance to be a hero, while those who grew up in the U.S. become bad guys, just like Killmonger (Lebron). However, as Mueller et all mentions that targeted racial groups often resist, protest and engage in protracted organizing over controlling racist images (78), Killmonger's bad side can also be assumed as a form of resistance made by Blacks movie makers. This intentionally argues that that the Whites have to be responsible for the hatred and anger that grow out of American racist society.

Killmonger is the product of American culture which is dominated by White supremacy.

Conclusion

Through *Black Panther*, Ryan Coogler succeeded in creating an alternative image of Black people. It frames the relationship between Blacks and Whites from a different perspective. Its box office success indicates that it met market demands for diversity in Hollywood. By portraying Blacks as contrary to old stereotypes, this film has created a festive atmosphere for Blacks, since it makes hope and change in the way the Blacks see themselves. However, this film cannot wholly escape old stereotypes: it still portrays a White saviour and also a violent Black character, even though Killmonger's violence is the result of living in the racist American society and also the influence of the U.S. Military's hunger for power.

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