



Wakandan Utopia, Blackman's Techno- Scientific Imaginaries, and the Complexities of Pseudoscience in *Black Panther*

RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT

The stereotypical representation of the Black world in Western cultural repositories has often been of great concern to scholars in African studies. This prejudicial delineation fosters dystopian sensibility on the unconscious mind of the Blackman who involuntarily internalises the myths of his sub-humanity. Stephen Hopkins' *The Ghost and the Darkness* (1996), Antoine Fuqua's *Tears of the Sun* (2003), Terry George's *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), Fernando Meirelles' *The Constant Gardener* (2005), Kevin Macdonald's *The Last King of Scotland* (2006), Cary Fukunaga's *Beasts of No Nation* (2015), and Mira Nair's *Queen of Katwe* (2016), for instance, project the Black world as a locus horridus. Though this stereotype has been invalidated in many scholarly writings, the Hollywood superhero movie, *Black Panther* (2018), further intensifies the repudiation, affirming the Blackman's contributions to humanity, albeit with a touch of narcissism. Using sci-fi genre, the movie provides a fictional truth, abstracted reality averring the cargo cult thinking of the Blackman. This is because the movie envisions Black hegemony and a world that pays homage to the wealth and imagined techno-scientific prowess of the Blackman. In this article, I examine the underlying subtexts in the movie, interrogating its Afrofuturist or Africanfuturist agenda. I argue that the agenda is steeped in illusionism, fringe science, esoteric spirituality, and cargo cult mentation. I contend that the failure of the Black world to catch up with the rest of the world may have necessitated its love for esoteric and infantile desires, rather than exploring the material, empirical realities around it to effectuate tangible development.

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Ever since its release in January 2018 to the applause of members of the public, the Ryan Coogler's superhero movie, *Black Panther*, has not stopped receiving overwhelming plaudits. The success of the blockbuster has even necessitated the production of a sequel, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, scheduled to be released in November 2022. On the one hand, the movie (*Black Panther*) has been widely praised for challenging Western stereotypes of Africa, its people, and people of African descent globally. On the other hand, it has been condemned for accentuating the “colonial tropes’ of African tribalism, violence, gender relations, and hierarchy” (Death 2021: 4). Besides this, it is accused of perpetuating the same regressive Eurocentric myths about the Blackman and his history (Sianghio 2018; Gathara 2018). Notwithstanding the criticism, the movie offers an ontic representation of Black cultural patrimony and futurist technological advancement using speculative genre to foreground the scientific and technological imaginaries of the Black world. It is also a countercultural production subverting the ethos of White supremacism in science fiction, while it approbates Black aesthetics and the Blackman's imagined techno-scientific prowess. Sci-fi is sometimes viewed as the exclusive domain of Western thought system, considering its validation of Eurocentric epistemological tendency and imagination (Kim 2017). The genre operates at the instance of White-dominated film industry (Staples 2018), privileges White supremacist culture and encourages the representation of non-White racial categories as exotic. Within the politics of representation, *Black Panther* challenges the contrived misrepresentations of the Black world. It also contests the hegemonic Western assumptions about Black racial identity, just as it raises the technological awareness and consciousness of people of African descent in the 21st century (Elia 2014). This consciousness provides the people an intellectual platform to interrogate “the Western stereotype of African backwardness and the notion of Africa as a dystopia [as well as] the exclusion of people of African descent from discourses regarding technology” (Elia 2014: 85).

The movie also celebrates Black aesthetics and revisits African chequered history archived in the unconscious mind of the Blackman. It affirms the preponderance of Black tropes and its simulated future, which is a terra incognita to conventional reality. The affirmation is premised on the need to project a utopian futurity for the Blackman whose history of sub-humanity and rejection nurtures his desire for a world that ceases to exist at the whim of White people, but locates Black themes and interest at the centre of world's social and political orders. Being an African American magnum opus projecting Black cultural values and proclivity for greatness, it creates a cast of Afrocentric superheroes to construct a parallel counterhegemonic discourse interrogating White supremacy. The heroes project a utopian future solely owned and controlled by the Blackman through the instrumentality of his mythical metal and superior techno-scientific discoveries. Consequently, *Black Panther* succeeds in ingeminating William Edward Burghardt Du Bois' and George Samuel Schuyler's Afrocentric projects. The projects, as espoused in Du Bois' *The Comet*¹ and Schuyler's *The Black Empire*,² create an alternate history (*alloghistory*) envisioning a future and socio-political space that inserts Black subjectivity and White marginality. Yaszek Lisa submits that Schuler ideates in his serials “a future in which diasporic blacks join forces to conquer the world” (2006: 53). He argues that this desire (which I term *wish fulfilment*) is reinforced by “the experience of slavery and racial discrimination that has prepared Afrodiasporic people for world domination” (2006: 53). The Blackman's quest for reordering racial hierarchy and provoking reversal of world order is foregrounded by Schuyler's authorial intrusion in *The Black Empire*:

All laws here are the laws of the white man, designed to keep us in subjugation and perpetuate his rule. All the means of education and information, from nursery to college, from newspaper to book, are mobilized to perpetuate white supremacy; to enslave and degrade the darker peoples. [...] But white people haven't got all the brains. We are going to out-think and out-scheme the white people [...] I have the organization already [...] scattered all over the world; young Negroes like yourself: intellectuals, scientists, engineers. They are mentally the equals of whites. They possess superior energy, superior vitality, they have superior, or perhaps I should say

1 A short story.

2 A serialised speculative fiction originally published in the *Pittsburgh Courier* between 1937 and 1938, after his other story, “Black Internationale”, had been serialised in the same paper between 1936 and 1937.

more intense, hatred and resentment, that fuel which operates the juggernaut of conquest. [...] You will see in your time a great Negro nation in Africa, all powerful, dictating to the white world. (14)³

The above conversation between Schuyler's fictional characters (Bellarius and Slater) underlies the resolve of the Blackman to explore and challenge inequities, racialisation and historical oppression against him (Vereen et al 2017). It emphasises the need to work out political agency for the liberation of a people historically disempowered and misrepresented by White hegemony (Vereen et al 2017). I employ "Africa" and "Black" racial labels interchangeably and designedly in this article. This enables me to *homogenise* people of African descent globally with regard to their racialised bodies, lived experience, and their status as a subaltern counter-public in a world that is Western-biased. I understand the politics of racial terminology and the ethnophaulist arguments attending the "Black" racial label, as well as the call to discontinue using the label for non-White population of African descent (Agyemang et al 2015). I have adopted the labels purposively to enable me to locate Africanity in the Black world and vice versa and, most importantly, reflect on Africa or Blackness "as the site of racial *otherness*" (Pierre 2013: xii). In racial politics, Africa or Black is synonymous with inferiority or what Zakiyyah Jackson calls the "process of imagining black people as an empty vessel, a nonbeing, a nothing, an ontological zero" (2020: 1). I therefore consider it imperative to revisit this debate with a view to refreshing our memory about racial injustice and the sameness of lived experience shared by the Blackman globally.

Black Panther presents an alternate history and narrates the stories of Black people for Black people (Faithful 2018). It revisits and re-writes Black history and rejects Whites' hegemonic thought subjugating the people of African descent all over the world. Interestingly, the movie starts with a quest for (hi)story as the young Erik Killmonger (Seth Carr, later Michael Jordan) asks his Wakandan father, Prince N'jobu (Sterling Brown), to "tell [him] a story [...] the story of home" (*Black Panther*). The *story of home* is the story of Black archetypal utopia or what Manohla Dargis calls the "African Eden" (2018: par 1) and its projected futurity or Golden Age. The movie "fosters utopian speculation" (Johnson 1968: xi) on the Black mind and reveals its capacity to recast or interface the past and the future, bearing in mind the unsavoury ontological trajectories of the Blackman's history. It conceives the Black life "as it *ought* to be, as it *might* have been in the distant past or *may* be in the far future" (Johnson 1968: xii). This is why I regard the movie in the present article as a psychoanalytic project exuding utopian sensibility. The sensibility is invigorated by the pent-up wounds, emotional tensions, frustrations and anxieties, past failures, painful memories that invade the Blackman's psyche and disrupt his momentary happiness. To escape from his disrupted, ruptured happiness, he has to tune off his mind from the dissatisfied present conditions and launch into a habitual thinking mode that permits and "produces nostalgia for 'The Good Old Days' on the one hand and a 'Tomorrow Will Be Better' hopefulness on the other" (Johnson 1968: xii).

The reality of the foregoing is compellingly obvious and helps to generate critical questions: Where were/are the Blackman's "Good Old Days", since history has arguably been unfavourable to him? How plausible is the imagined future promising a correlate of Jewish mythical paradise for the Blackman? The debate further throws up the paradox of Black world in text and Black world in reality. The Black world in text (*Black Panther*, for instance) is an idyllic deception, an abstraction or a convoluted expression of reality. It is a simulated world, a mere desire, a comical toponymy that reminds one of the Greek etymological roots of utopia – "ou" (no, or not) and "topos" (place), meaning "no place" or "nowhere in the physical world" (Johnson 1968: xi). Black world in *Black Panther* is an imaginative fantasy, a wish fulfilment or a blatant propagandist project of the Blackman in the global post-politics underpinning what Frederick Joseph calls a "place of Afro-futurism, of what African nations can be or what they could have been and still be had colonialism not taken place" (see Tillet 2018: par 9). Its narrative seeks a rewrite and reconstruction of Black history in order to expunge its sordid past and amplify the strengths of its future. This agenda is well represented in *Black Panther* through the actions of its cast. For instance, as an archetypal Black superhero who envisions reordering the world, King T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) interconnects the past with the present and weaves the two into a tapestry to construct Afrocentric futurity. The futurity privileges African cultural ethos,

3 This is quoted from Lisa Yaszek's article.

Afro-technology and scientific inventions using African-Wakandan vibranium-laden meteor and home-grown epistemology.

The major argument in this article toes William Johnson's line of thought. It attempts to interrogate "why the archetypal myths of a Garden of Eden and Golden Age hold such appeal" (Johnson 1968: xii) for the Blackman, as demonstrated in *Black Panther*. It challenges the African-Wakandan political, economic and technological utopias, which I interpret as a parallelism of cargo cult mentation or Black illusionism, considering the fact that the post-ideological world is still Western-biased and anti-Black. Besides this, the present reality does not favour the realisation of the mythical African world that *Black Panther* constructs. With the exception of one or two African countries or few African Diaspora communities, the Black world is still tethered to underdevelopment, poverty, religious fundamentalism, war, corruption and other hindering factors to social wellbeing. The Blackman exists at the mercy of two extremes – poverty and wealth, but the long hand of poverty *claws into him* menacingly and unendingly. Despite the enormous wealth around him, his life is a paradox of sort, as he is sunk into the "very bottom of hardships" (Du Bois 1982: 50).

This article is not blind to the reality of movie not giving accurate depictions of social happenings. Being an audio-visual medium, it may not offer appropriate developmental blueprints for the Black world either, since its narratives are sometimes fictional. However, it reflects human society, mirrors social dynamics guiding society, and often serves as a means of communicating thoughts, emotions, and ideas to the audience (Karakartal 2021). Consequently, the present article leverages the intrinsic power of motion picture to provide nominal representation of reality. It employs the epistemic directness of film to engage audience in imaginative construction of fictional world and foster perceptual understanding of fictional truths (Fiorelli 2016). This is exactly what *Black Panther* does to the Black world. It, however, distorts reality and offers a false techno-scientific projection for the Black world.

Since sci-fi is obviously fictional exploring the limits of technology and advocating self-expression (Womack 2013), it "presents ideas that can influence public opinion" (Menadue and Cheer 2017: 2). The film genre also helps to shape and determine individual's worldviews through the modification of attitudes to both the current and future science and technology (Menadue and Cheer 2017). With regard to *Black Panther* serving as a tool for envisioning or accomplishing Blackman's developmental yearnings, my major argument is on the Euro-western politics of removing Blackman and his world from the imaginary future and the need to address it. The effort to subvert the politics, according to Ytasha Womack, could arguably qualify as Afrofuturistic, because doing so encourages the interrogation of "why black people are minimized in pop culture depictions of the future, conspicuously absent from the history of science, or marginalized in the roster of past inventors" (2013: 7).

The ideological subtext in *Black Panther* is Black essentialism and the struggle of Blackman with inequity, racialization and his quest for liberation from historical oppression (Vereen et al 2017). Using sci-fi genre, the film provides a fictional truth, abstracted reality indicating cargo cult thinking of the Blackman that does not aid his developmental process probably beyond the stage of ideation. The genre of speculative film used for communicating this truth further widens the depth of unreality and impossibility of role reversion or the wishful thinking of disrupting racial hierarchy which *Black Panther* arguably advocates. Julia Hoydis even believes that sci-fi is often contested in Black communities to be "inappropriate, white, and escapist" (Hoydis 2015: 72) and unsuitable for the liberation project of the Blackman. Hoydis' assertion further strengthens my argument that *Black Panther* enacts the logic of cargo cult mentation and abstracted reality in our unconscious mind.

AFROFUTURISM, BLACKNESS AND COUNTERHEGEMONIC POLITICS

Afrofuturism is a theoretical model within African American literary criticism, even though its acceptability and application go beyond the literary criticism. The criticism itself, just like postcolonial literary theory, discusses politics and cultural psychology of subjugation in relation to race issues and peculiar race tensions in the United States of America against African Americans (Tyson 1999: 398–400). Coined by Mark Dery, it is a "Speculative fiction that

treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture – and, more generally, African-American signification that appropriates images of technology and a prosthetically enhanced future” (1994: 180). Yaszek defines it as a “speculative fiction or science fiction written by both Afrodiasporic and African authors [and] a global aesthetic movement that encompasses art, film, literature, music, and scholarship” (2006: 1). It is “an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation’ [through which] ‘Afrofuturists redefine culture and notions of blackness for today and the future’ by combining ‘elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs’” (Veen 2014: 45). It is also a “coherent code of critical enquiry” (Yaszek 2006: 42) serving as an “extension of the historical recovery projects that black Atlantic intellectuals have engaged in for well over 200 years” (Yaszek 2006: 47) with the aim of reclaiming the history of the past and the future. The foregoing possibly answers Dery’s “troubling antimony [sic]” (1994: 180), arising from his concern about “a community whose past has been deliberately rubbed out, and whose energies have subsequently been consumed by the search for legible traces of its history, [and imagined] possible futures” (1994: 180). In essence, the model aims to project African American themes significantly and far above any other ones.

Dery’s antinomy is re-echoed by Adriano Elia who believes that the concept of Afrofuturism may sound oxymoronic, because “‘Afro’ and ‘Futurism’ are likely to be considered as terms in opposition, the former [evokes] images of primitivism and backwardness, the latter [celebrates] speed and modernity – itself a peripheral literary genre, the ‘golden ghetto’” (1994: 83–84). The concept brings together the “marginality of allegedly ‘primitive’ people of the African diaspora and ‘modern’ technology and science fiction” (Elia 1994: 83). Afrofuturism is, therefore, a “cultural project of discovery” (Eshun 2003: 287) that affords African American thinkers the opportunity to use history to interrogate their past and project into their imagined future. This is why Kodwo Eshun conceives it as a “program for recovering the histories of counter-futures created in a century hostile to Afro-diasporic projection and as a space within which the critical work of manufacturing tools capable of intervention within the current political dispensation may be undertaken” (2003: 301). Eshun also believes that Afrofuturism project is ensconced in “the proleptic as much as the retrospective” (2003: 289). Yaszek corroborates this view arguing that the two central political goals of Afrofuturism include interest in “recovering lost black histories and thinking about how those histories inform a whole range of black culture today [coupled with] how these histories and cultures might inspire new visions of tomorrow” (2006: 2). In other words, history is central to Afrofuturist project. To construct the image of the past and visions of future, science fiction becomes a particularly useful tool available to Afrofuturists, since it possesses the logic that allows the narration of Black experiences and the Blackman’s future imaginaries. This is due to the fact that “[s]tories about travel through time and space and stories about encounters with the alien other are ideal ways to bring those historical experiences to life for new audiences” (Yaszek 2006: 2). The implication of this submission is that Afrofuturist writers or filmmakers possess what Johnson calls “hindsight and foresight: the ability to remember the past and to anticipate the future” (1968: xi). It is also an indication that “no human lives solely in the present, in his sensations and emotions of the moment. Our recollections, accurate or inaccurate, mingle with our thoughts of the present and our presentiments of what is to come; we naturally compare and evaluate the present in terms of yesterday and tomorrow” (Johnson 1968: xi).

The genre is distinguished by the privileging of Black tropes or experiences occupying the periphery of Western literature. It seeks to bring these experiences to the centre of imagined futures nuanced by unparalleled technological discoveries (Huddleston 2016). The genre enables Afrofuturists to approach the “conceptual transformation of humanity with a race-specific scope, locating the presence of black culture in a high-tech world” (Kim 2017: 6). It also demystifies “mythical beliefs and deterministic views of race” (Kim 2017: 6), while, at the same time, “imagining the subjugation of white people” (Kim 2017: 8).⁴ The trope of European subjugation in Afrofuturism reiterates the subtext of colonialism and imperialism on which the genre fixates. The motif ingeminates vengeance and retribution against the West for its imperialist projects in the Black world. Though a fantasy, the genre imagines a reversal

⁴ This is a reference to Noah Berlatsky’s article, “Why Sci-Fi Keeps Imagining the Subjugation of White People”.

of world order in which the centre becomes marginal or what Noah Berlatsky calls “colonial inversion, a dream of Western imperial violence inflicted upon Westerners” (2014: par 10). The theory challenges and rejects the dystopic vision created for people of African descent globally. It projects a Black subject and White object, leveraging the same racial politics to collapse the Western hegemony over non-European races who, in the collective unconscious of the imperialists, are “*humanoid* but not fully *human*” (Kim 2017: 10). The genre helps to “generate counter-histories that reweave connections between past, present, and future in a new practice of technoscientific storytelling” (Yaszek 2006: 299). In this regard, it envisages a complete liberation of people of African descent from the stranglehold of the West through fantastical technological innovations that place them ahead of their erstwhile oppressors. It also “disrupts the idea of [...] ‘digital-divide’” (Elia 2014: 84) and underscores the “tech inequities that exist between blacks and whites” (Elia 2014: 84). In fact, Tobias Veen analyses the genre positing that it “views subjectivity, temporality, and the world itself as unreal constructs – fictive but enforced ‘mythsystems’ – and thus, subject to intervention, to MythSciences wrought by any means impossible: becomings, counter-realities, historical revisionings, futurist topias and temporal interventions” (2014: 6–7).

AFROFUTURIST AND AFROCENTRIC THEMES IN *BLACK PANTHER*

The Afrofuturist underpinning of *Black Panther* is not in doubt, as the film employs the genre to interconnect the past and future of the Black world. It accentuates the racial injustice meted out to the Blackman and the imperativeness of inscribing him at the centre of world history or global techno-scientific future imaginaries. As an Afrofuturistic cultural production, *Black Panther* validates the spirit of Afrofuturism through its insertion of Afrocentric ideology into the consciousness of post-ideological world. It interrogates Western universalism and redefines Black history by constructing *Black Self*, *White Other*. It emphasises perceived African technological superiority and, most importantly, the leitmotif of Black revenge, just as it envisions the emergence of a futurist Black power with a redoubtable foothold on the global socio-political, cultural and economic sub-structures. In the recent time, scholars have begun to contest the adoption of Afrofuturism as a theoretical label to describe speculative cultural productions in Africa (Death 2021; Hodapp 2021; Pilling 2021; Hanchey 2020; Vääätänen 2019; Okoroafor 2019, 2009; Hoydis 2015). They believe that the label is not rooted in African culture, but treats mainly African American themes and African American technoculture. Nnedi Okoroafor, for instance, coined Africanfuturism as a theoretical correlate of Afrofuturism “to represent science fiction writing emerging from the contexts, cosmologies, and complexities of African continental life” (see Hanchey 2020: 119).

Okoroafor’s Organic Fantasy model relating to the fantasy that grew from the soil of the real (see Egbunike 2013) and her Africanjujuism concept similarly validate the need to appropriate and locate African mythology, spirituality, and cosmology at the techno-scientific imaginaries (see Egoro 2021). Okoroafor’s position raises a serious question on whether *Black Panther* should be regarded as Afrofuturist or Africanfuturist. Obviously, the movie is an Afrofuturist cultural production, but I conceive it as both Afrofuturist and Africanfuturist (or Afrocentric), because it treats both African American and African tropes uniquely. Rendering it purely as Afrofuturist may be misleading considering its engagement with various Afrocentric subtexts, settings, characterisation, costumes, props, and other filmic components that bring Africanity into a Hollywood blockbuster film. It is conceived Afrocentric because it serves as the “vehicle for the cultural recuperation for deracinated [Blackman] living outside of [his] historic African culture” (Walker 2001: xxvi). As argued earlier, I conceive Black people as sharing the same lived experience of discrimination, marginalisation, racism and the subhuman status assigned to them by the pro-White world. I claim that, irrespective of their location in Europe, Asia, the Americas, or Africa, it is imperative they project a pan-Africanist consciousness and avoid divisive politics emphasising the heterogeneity of their blackness.

Black Panther is then conceived as a pan-Africanist project calling for the unity of people of African descent globally. This conviction is also buttressed by Womack who defines Afrofuturism as the combination of “elements of science fiction, historical fiction, speculative fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity, and magic realism with non-Western beliefs” (see Hoydis 2015: 74). As a matter of fact, Clarence Walker (2001) contests the use of “African American” in his book, opting for

“negro” or “black” as a way to express the homogeneity of lived experience of Black people as a suppressed category. *Black Panther* addresses this condition by employing techno-scientific imaginaries to deliver liberation for the Blackman. Most importantly, the political and ideological subtexts of the blockbuster are primarily woven around Black propagandist project, which like a wish fulfilment, exists as an abstraction in the imagination of the global Black population. I shall return to the Black propaganda agenda of *Black Panther* later so as to espouse the antinomy of narcissism and illusionism as well as the aggressive spirits that push African Americans and diasporic Africans into the imaginary, illusionary plane. I argue that they probably resorted to this approach in order to challenge their marginality or let out their bottled-up angst against forces that locate them on the margins of world history and techno-scientific advancement.

One specific Afrofuturist theme in *Black Panther* is its “essentialist fantasies” (Paradies 2006: 355) through which the film writers project and assert Black identity. Identity issue is a complex one that addresses the question of self-representation, personal characteristics, and perception. Black identity, therefore, imposes the signature of blackness on the description, identification, definition, and perception of the Black Self. Black identity is premised on the mantra *Black is beautiful*. The mantra is an epistemological thought pointing up the beauty of African culture and cosmology as a counteraction to the misguided stereotypical representation and identification of Black identity with dystopia. *Black Panther* succeeds in advancing the Black-is-beautiful campaign by essentialising its culture, flora and fauna, inventions, cultural diversity, religion, mysticism and other socio-cultural identifiers that reject the portrayal of Black body as a site of sub-humanity. Rather than reducing the body to nothingness, the movie conceives it as the hub of humanity – a toponymy where human life derives its existence. To Brent Staples, the Afrofuturist theme of the film is made possible through its “Afrocentric point of view; [and its] breaks with the spirit of derision that has always saturated Hollywood films about Africans” (2018: par 3).

With the representation of Africa and its people as *Others*, Barbarians, Savages or People of Colour (see Staszak 2009) who are often confined to the margins of humanity in Western films,⁵ *Black Panther* counteracts this Western tradition by projecting a futurist African superpower that has superior military might as well as cultural and techno-scientific ability to conquer the world. The imagined Wakandan-African utopia forecloses the possibility of Euro-western superpowers or seeks an end to their hegemony. The political subtext of the film and its campaign for what Eshun calls “the United States of Africa (USAF)” (2003: 287) are foregrounded by its remixing of different African cultural elements to create Black subjectivity and cultural recovery project of a race considered by racial chauvinists as being sub-human. Some of the African signatures in the movie include the traditional songs and dances rendered during the ritual combats, masks worn by warriors and other artefacts in the Museum of Great Britain. Others are the Wakandan-African home-grown democracy that forbids the Wakandan monarch from taking decisions alone, social inclusiveness giving women a voice in the running of the Wakandan nation state, and other cultural practices that project Black aesthetics. The film is Afrocentric, and its Afrocentric subtext is underscored by its stance against Eurocentric biases used for defining the Blackman. The Afrocentric trope in the film also reinforces its indigeneity providing an abstracted, illusionist roadmap for the development of the Black world.

What many African nations have failed to do in charting a way out of their underdevelopment and providing sound direction for their people, Coogler and his team have successfully done it through cinematic medium. They have helped to create awareness and affirm the use of indigenous knowledge, cultural values, technology as the possible solution to bring Africa out of its backwater state. They seem to say that enduring development often comes from within.

⁵ According to Natasha Callender, Hollywood “cinema has functioned as both a tool for portraying Africa as the ‘Dark Continent’ and for reshaping narratives about the nature of African identities, history, politics and cultures” (2013: ii). Some of the negative cinematic representations of Africa and its people globally are prevalent in Mira Nair-directed *Queen of Katwe* (2016) that glamorises poverty in Uganda and, by extension, Africa, Kevin Macdonald-directed *The Last King of Scotland* (2006) that projects the infamy and ruthlessness of Idi Amin Dada dictatorship in Uganda, with a parallel message depicting Africa or the Black world as a space under the stranglehold of buffoons and peopled by savages, Edward Zwick-directed *Blood Diamond* (2006), and Terry George-directed *Hotel Rwanda* (2004) which narrate the civil war and genocide in Sierra Leone and Rwanda, respectively. These films present the Black world as a dystopia. One of the lead actors in *Blood Diamond*, Danny Archer (Leonardo DiCaprio), expresses this view when he informs Maddy Bowen (Jennifer Connelly), the journalist reporting civil war in Sierra Leone, that “God left this place a long time ago”. He is apparently referring to wanton killings in Sierra Leone and other flashpoints of war in Africa.

To them there is always the need for inwardness and the possibility of tapping into abundant human and natural resources of any society before breaking the barrier of underdevelopment. Commenting on the relevance of Afrocentricity as a counter discourse to Eurocentricity, Molefi Asante describes the conception as a cultural project that has “a wholistic plan to reconstruct and develop every dimension of the African world from the standpoint of Africa as subject rather than object” (1998: 105). He posits that “Such a project [...] means that no one anywhere in the world would be allowed to abuse, exploit or harm African people without our collective wrath” (1998: 105). *Black Panther* seems to achieve this Afrocentric project through its construction of Black Subject and celebration of African cultural values and indigenous technology. It stands in the gap for Africa as a revolutionary piece to prevent the wanton abuse, exploitation and epistemic violence done against the Black world by the marauding colonialists/imperialists. Using history to construct Black subjectivity, the film begins with a dialogue between Prince N’jobu and his son, Erik, after the latter asks for the story of his (N’jobu’s) home. Narrated in a manner reminiscent of an African oral society with a father-raconteur telling African folktales to (his) children, N’jobu tells the story of a utopian Africa that merely exists in the collective unconscious of the global Black population.

Apart from its Afrocentric point of view, another Afrofuturist theme in *Black Panther* is the validation and preservation of the history of African Americans “whose history had been obscured by slavery and racism [or] were in danger of being written out of the future [...] unless they engaged the areas of art, literature and technology through which that future was being envisioned” (2018: par 1). There is a well-orchestrated agenda to bastardise Africa, its people and their history and the agenda predates the present moment. To be written out of future is to be confined to the urn of history. It is to be rendered *historyless* and deprived of an opportunity to partake in future human endeavours. To racial chauvinists, the Blackman is a marginal being, he offers nothing positive to the future of humanity. The chauvinists believe that putting him at the periphery of humanity is a confirmation and not a violation of natural order. This view constitutes what Adiele Afigbo calls “the dominant discourse in the construction of African or the Blackman’s history [that] has been an unmitigated disaster, which if not checked and indeed replaced, will also make the new millennium one of unmitigated disaster for the Blackman” (2006: 554). Afigbo further stresses that there is an “unprecedented villainy of the West in this matter of the destruction of black civilization and in the frustration of all efforts at regeneration [...] indisputably established by a chain of conspiracies against black Africa going back to the 15th century” (2006: 565).

Joseph Harris contextualises Black inferiority and the agenda to degrade Black history by tracing the phenomenal inferiorisation of the Blackman to the age of antiquity. He submits that Christian literature, misleading Western geography and denigrating myths about Black savagery and sub-humanity imagined by the earliest European travellers, missionaries, historians, and anthropologists contributed a great deal to the warped European perception of the Blackman. Consequently, they internalised blackness as “a badge of primitiveness” (Harris 1987: 16), “traded moral consciousness for racial consciousness and abandoned the vision of racial equality for identity politics” (Mohler 2008: 146).

Black history is that of enslavement and brutal commodification of the African body. The history of Black enslavement in Europe may have been birthed or invigorated by the Papal Bull or Doctrine of Discovery of 1452 in which Pope Nicholas V (1397–1455) homologated slavery (see Miller 2019; Adeniyi 2018; Davenport 2004). It is also traceable to the 1768 David Hume’s misguided thought that disparaged Africans, the Arthur de Gobineau’s *Essay on Inequality*,⁶ or Houston Chamberlain’s and Francis Galton’s treatises explaining the inferiority of the Blackman scientifically, and a number of other racist literatures churned out by Western philosophers. These racist literatures have the same focus: “All great men [are] white [...] and all uncivilized, weak, backward peoples [are] black” (Phizacklea and Miles 1979: 94). In *Black Panther*, Erik Killmonger (Michael Jordan) hints on this historical memory after his last fight with T’Challa. Having sustained a fatal wound in the fight and the reality of his death dawns on him, he tells his challenger: “Just bury me at the bottom of the sea with my ancestors who jumped from the ship. They knew that death was much more better than bondage” (*Black Panther*).

6 The Haitian Joseph Antenor Firmin’s book, *The Equality of the Human Races*, however, rejects de Gobineau’s racial hierarchy, positing that there is no scientific validity for his claims.

Erik's deathbed statement is revealing; it is indicative of pent-up anger in a man who retains in his unconscious mind the atrocity and inhumanity perpetrated against the Blackman for four centuries. At the moment of his death, his unconscious mind is laid bare revealing the knowledge of his people's history. What possibly propels his anger is the content of the history – oppression, enslavement, and sub-humanity. His angst against the oppressors of his people is the propelling force goading him to seek redress against them.

Ulysses Klaue (Andy Serkis) typifies theft. He is a metaphor for European colonialism and imperialism in Africa. His theft of Wakandan vibranium is reminiscent of the plundering of Africa by the colonialists. To put it in the words of Aime Césaire, Klaue belongs to the category of people he refers to as “the adventurer and the pirate, the wholesale grocer and the ship owner, the gold digger and the merchant, [propelled by their] appetite” (1972: 2) to steal and expropriate Africa and its people. Coupled with the quest to right the wrong created by the Metropolitan history against African history is the theme of vengeance which many critics of Afrofuturism have identified as one of the kernels of the theory. The desire for retributive justice against the oppressors of the Blackman is typecast through Erik after defeating King T'Challa and becoming the new Wakandan monarch. He makes spirited effort to unleash Wakandan sophisticated military weapons on the nations of the world, especially nations unfriendly to the Blackman or unsympathetic to their plight. He wants vengeance; he desires to avenge the murder of his father and their abandonment in the US. He also seeks vengeance against the West for its deliberate conspiracy against the Blackman and his relegation to the periphery of the world history. Erik's temper is fuelled by his vision for global revolution and a desire to end the exclusion of Wakanda from the global power relations and politics. He perceives himself as a change agent ready to inspire the revolutionary spirit in the global black population and galvanise them into breaking free from the stranglehold of their oppressors:

You know where I'm from; when black folks started a revolution, they never had the fire power – the only resource they needed to fight the oppressors. Where was Wakanda? All that ended today. You got spies embedded in every nation on earth already in place. That didn't come as a mistake so we gonna use the old strategy. We gonna send our vibranium weapons outside to our watchdogs. They are to influence people all over the world so they can fire and kill those in power, their children and anyone else who takes their side and tell them the truth about us. We are warriors, the war is gonna start over and this time we will win. The sun will never set on the Wakandan Empire. (*Black Panther*)

Breaking the dystopian toga that Western media and literature have cast on Africa and Black people in general further marks an enduring landmark that the film covers. Besides this, its portrayal of Black subjectivity begins a watershed in Western cinematography that disrupts the culture of derision against people of African descent in Hollywood films. Kodwo Eshun, Adia Brooks, and Toyin Falola, for instance, call attention to the stereotypical representations of Africa and its future in Western literature. Eshun believes that the literature is demoralising, just as it commands Black people “to bury our heads in our hands, to groan with sadness” (2003: 292). Eshun argues that “African social reality is overdetermined by intimidating global scenarios, doomsday economic projections, weather predictions, medical reports on AIDS, and life-expectancy forecasts, all of which predict decades of immiserization” (2003: 291–292) for people of African descent globally. According to Brooks, “The lack of AIDS treatment and prevention programs, the absence of healthy food [...], the continuation of female sterilization, the encouragement of widespread abortion of black fetuses, and the persistence of police violence in black communities worldwide” (2012: 1) are complots against the Blackman. The underhand plans are deplored by the Metropolises to ensure a coordinated marginalisation of the Blackman in almost every sphere of human endeavour.

Commenting on Frantz Fanon's *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), Brooks notes that “Fanon observed that the European practice of attributing negative characteristics to black people and things had a negative effect on blacks, and that their exposure both to this and to colonialism itself caused them to internalize negative ideas about blacks and objectify themselves” (2012: 1). Falola also submits that there exists a neo-liberal agenda from which Africa must break free. The agenda, he argues, inserts subaltern mentality in the unconscious of Africans, upholds their conditions of backwardness, and “replaces imperialism with globalization, the ‘Dark Continent’ with ‘good

governance', and malaria with HIV and/or Ebola" (2016: 270). It is, therefore, imperative for Africa and its people to have the consciousness of or possibly reject names and labels (Falola 2016) that derogate and relegate them to the margins of humanity. He believes that Africa, in the collective unconscious of Euro-American hegemonists, is constructed as a "problem", and it continues to exist as a 'problem', in fact in the vein of what Conrad saw as the heart of darkness: the problem of poverty, the problem of politics, and the problem of environmental degradation" (Falola 2016: 276). To overcome Western prejudices, Falola believes that Africa needs to develop home-grown epistemologies, theories, methodologies, processes that can reposition it, and make it "become the center of knowledge, not its periphery" (2016: 265).

AFROFUTURISM AND ILLUSIONISM

Despite its lofty ideals, subjecting Afrofuturism to interrogation is imperative in order to identify some areas where it glamorises African cultural values without providing any basis for rationality that should underpin such romanticisation. Afrofuturism raises false hope and further opens up the Black world to the prying eyes of its conquerors – the very forces that stand against Black civilisation and its development, ensuring it does not rise beyond its pigeonholed subaltern status. Besides this, Africa or the Black world is thrown open to ridicule as it justifies the racist bias held against it as a space peopled by humanoids that still negotiate development through the infantile mechanisms of unconscious phantasies. One needs to pose a question as to the sensibility or logicity of throwing oneself into illusion, daydream, wish fulfilment and other unconscious phantasies, and the plausibility of using these mechanisms to deliver the much-needed development that the Black world desires. No nation attains development by merely day-dreaming it or wishing it; it is borne out of passionate desire and determination. Development in different fields of human endeavours requires rigorous planning and careful execution of ideas and plans. The narrative of unbounded growth recorded by the Asian Tigers should stimulate interest in any nation desirous of developmental strides and bothered by the spate of underdevelopment in Africa. The Asian Tigers desired development, reinforced their desire with discipline and careful planning. They initiated socio-economic policies and looked inwards to appropriate their indigenous epistemologies as a start-off point for engendering their development. Their sudden rise to stardom is not a product of illusion. This is why it is expedient to raise the consciousness of Africans and the entire Black world towards breaking free from phantasy and mere wishes.

Is Afrofuturism illusionist? Is the theoretical model unrealistic or possibly a phantasy? The answers to these posers seem to be in the affirmative, considering its realisation through the sci-fi genre. Science fiction is overtly speculative; it is imaginative, and fixates on illusion. However, most developmental efforts are products of imagination. In fact, Hsuan Yi Wu and Vic Callaghan posit that development paths emerge from the process of imagining and doing, "iterating around in evolutionary cycles until a satisfactory innovation emerges" (2016: 514). Writing about the architect of modern Singapore; Henry Kissinger, in his foreword to Lee Kuan Yew's *From Third World to First* (2000), also affirms the importance of envisioning, determination and careful planning in nation building. He submits that "Every great achievement is a dream before it becomes a reality" (2000: x). The implication of the foregoing pertains to the fact that if painstaking efforts are taken, African scholars, policy formulators, political class can explore those futuristic innovative ideas and plans to grow the Black world. The Black world is in dire need of canonised epistemologies and methodologies capable of speaking to "the pains and aspirations of [Black people all over the world], offer roadmaps to progress and unity, and provide the ways to check imperialistic encroachments" (Falola 2016: 280). As portrayed in *Black Panther*, Afrofuturism is constructed as a tool to project Afrocentricity. This is achieved through the placement of Africa at the centre of humanity and world history. Whether the construct emerged from the metropolises of the Global North or realised as Africanfuturism is immaterial, the most important concern is that it provides a theoretical basis to discuss and redefine the status of the Blackman. Afrofuturism glamorises Africa, projects its values, and imagines a world at the beck and call of Black people. It reads like an imaginative expression enabling the Blackman to let out the painful desires and frustrations shaping his sub-human conditions.

The question of futurity brings to the fore the philosophical debate on the metaphysics of time (presentism and eternalism) and its relations to the sci-fi genre (Pelczar 2010). The temporal phenomena in the movie (presentism and eternalism) provide a basis for interrogating the concept of futurity constructed in *Black Panther* and help to identify the ontological chasm noticed in the temporality of events affecting the Black race. It can be argued that there is a marked distortion to the temporal experience portrayed about and for the Black race in *Black Panther*. Instead of the experience to be “compatible with every self-consistent theory of time” (Pelczar 2010: 1), it is rather contrary to the experience people have about the race or realities of the race. The movie indexes the history of the race, its present, and an idealised future steeped in fringe or cargo cult science. This twist possibly provides the basis for the interpretation of the movie as a reification of cargo cult mentality or Black illusionism. Considering the groundswell of encomiums and goodwill that *Black Panther* has received among the people of African descent in particular, it may be helpful to consider it as a reflection of the collective mind-set of the Black race whose acceptance of the film reveals its cargo cult mentation. The mentation captures its illusion, dreams, desires for scientific and technological utopia despite the race’s lack of empirical mechanisms needed for the realisation of its projected superluminal, neo-futurist development.

In his explanation of the philosophy of time, Jerzy Golosz submits that presentism is the view that “only the present things exist, or that only the present things are real; and denied by eternalism, the view saying that the past, present, and future things exist in the same way (or are ontologically on a par, or are equally real)” (2018: 396). To align with the spirit of Afrofuturism, it is convenient to submit that Afrofuturists are eternalists due to their ontological affirmation of historical trajectories that shape the past, their recognition of present realities, and their penchant for idealised future which is built on the vision and strength of past and present realities. Following the foregoing eternalist temporal theory, *Black Panther* can be dichotomised into three time zones: the past, the present, and the future, just as all the temporal parameters are ontologically at par with one another maintaining interconnections (Golosz 2018; Torrenco 2013). In other words, the present time and realities are a corollary of past events and experiences, the way future events are naturally derived from the present events (Adeniyi 2021). John McTaggart’s statement, “the series of positions which runs from the far past through the near past to the present, and then from the present through the near future to the far future, or conversely” (see Zimmerman 2005: 401) sums up the position supporting the temporal interconnections in the movie, such that it is difficult to separate one from the other.

The past of the movie is clearly cast in the mythical account of Wakandan-Black aetiology. This is revealed in the origin of the Wakandan tribes and the emergence of a mythical superhuman among them who received preternatural powers from a deity (Bust) as well as the discovery of vibranium that the people explored to develop their techno-scientific prowess. Though not as pronounced as the series of events that refer to the past in the movie, its present can be represented by a chain of events, including the 1992 encounter between King T’Chaka and his younger brother in America and other numerous recent actions in the movie. Future events in the film are indicated by neo-futurist medical, technological and scientific inventions presenting Wakanda as a technological marvel. This neo-futurist trope in the film is revealed through the magical healing of Everett Ross (Martin Freeman) at Princess Shuri’s (Letitia Wright’s) lab. He is healed of the bullet wounds which he sustained at Bushan, South Korea, just as Ross expresses his disbelief: “I don’t believe. Bullets wounds don’t just magically heal overnight” (*Black Panther*). Shuri’s response to Ross’ comment further reveals the unending world of possibilities abounding in Wakanda: “Here they do but not by magic [but] by technology” (*Black Panther*). Her response is revealing and underlies my position that techno-scientific breakthrough is not built on esoteric spirituality, but on empirical scientific principles. The temporal setting in Wakanda is linear, even though its narrative structure is interspersed with pockets of analepsis and prolepsis.

The temporal mechanisms of past, present, and future maintain polychronic linearity in such a way that several events interconnect in a cause-and-effect chain to strengthen the narrative

drive and emotional appeal of the movie. Using analepsis and prolepsis to infer temporal hermeneutics in the film, *Black Panther* can be said to have fixated on Black history and future, respectively. However, it does not mean the present of the race is jettisoned for its past and future – the dual temporal parameters only point to the starting point and projection of a race that seeks an end to racial asymmetry and desires to take over the centre of humanity through its techno-scientific prowess. Analepsis is used in the present article as a flashback and temporal mechanism indexing the past of a people whose aetiology is steeped in mysticism and its history is degraded by colonialism and Western skulduggery. As a flashback, key actors – such as King T'Challa and Erik – have recollections as they involuntarily recollect and connect to their ancestral planes. In the process, they are transported to the liminal consciousness where they find themselves at a threshold between the dead and the living to receive vital information housed in their ancestral memory. To intensify its narrative plot, the movie director employed perceptual subjectivity to grant audience access to the liminal memory of King T'Challa who converses with his dead father (John Kani) on how to become a great king:

T'Challa: Baba (both embracing each other) [...] I'm sorry.

T'Chaka: Stand up. You're a king.

T'Challa: That's not what I'm talking about. I'm not ready to be without you.

T'Chaka: A man who has not prepared his children for his own death has failed as a father. Have I ever failed you?

T'Challa: Never. Tell me how to best protect Wakanda. I want to be a great king, Baba, just like you.

T'Chaka: You're going to struggle, so you need to surround yourself with people you trust. You're a good man with a good heart, and it's hard for a good man to be king.
(*Black Panther*)

Erik, similarly, travels unconsciously to the ancestral plane of his forbears to involuntarily connect and access the ancestral archives of his forbears. At the point of his soul's transportation to his ancestral plane, he involuntarily recollects the death of his father (N'jobu) in America and other vital information he (N'jobu) tells him (Erik) about Wakanda before his untimely death. In the scenes of liminal dreaming, changes in temporality of events spanning several years are revealed through changes in Erik's age at the time of rummaging through N'jobu's documents:

N'jobu: What did I tell you about going into my things, hmnnn? What did you find?

Erik: Your home.

N'jobu: I gave you a key hoping you'd see it someday. Yes. The sunsets there are the most beautiful in the world, but I fear you still may not be welcome.

Erik: Why?

N'jobu: They will say you're lost

Erik: I'm here.

N'jobu: No tears for me.

Erik: Everybody dies [...]

N'jobu: Look at what I've done. I should have taken you back long ago; instead we are both abandoned here.

Erik: May be your home is the one that is lost; that's why they can't find us. (*Black Panther*)

The use of analepsis as a narrative device in the movie, as demonstrated in the above excerpts, facilitates seamless connection of interjected scenes with main scenes. Apart from enhancing the narrative depth of the movie, the device also helps to weave related events together, thus aiding the delivery of a well-coordinated *mise-en-scène* for *Black Panther*. The hermeneutics inferable from the blend of interjected events is possibly to use *Black Panther* as a tool to symbolise the inseparability of myriad of the Blackman's historical trajectories. The dialogue between the two monarchs also reflects the contested notion of home to African Americans, some of whom sometimes feel unwelcome in Africa. The second strand of analepsis is its use as a temporal parameter indexing the epochs of colonial bastardisation of the African-Wakandan history, Western chicanery and its stereotype of the Black race. In the film, the Museum of Great Britain, London, for instance, indexes the institution of colonialism and imperialism and wanton depredations of Africa before and during the colonial occupation of the continent. The museum houses many African artifacts that were stolen when European colonialists invaded the continent. Erik rightly alludes to this fact when he corrects the curator who misinforms him about a vibranium-laden axe which she claims came from the Fula tribe in the 7th century:

Erik: And what about this one?

The Curator: It's from Edo people of Benin 16th century.

Erik: Now, tell me about this one.

The Curator: Also from Benin, 7th century, Fula tribe, I believe.

Erik: No.

The Curator: I beg your pardon!

Erik: It was taken by the British soldiers in Benin, but it's from Wakanda, and is made out of vibranium.

The Curator: These items are not for sale.

Erik: How do you think they got these? Do you think they paid their price, or take it like they took everything else? (*Black Panther*)

The foregoing helps to affirm the concern of this article that *Black Panther* fixates on the history of the Black race, with specific emphasis on its contact with Europeans who expropriated the continent of its human and natural resources. This is further proved through Klaue who makes fortunes selling Wakandan vibranium to American arms dealers. Of importance is the stereotypical view of Wakandans and, by extension, the Blackman by Europeans. Klaue in his encounter with King T'Challa at Busan, South Korea, describes them as *savages* unworthy of using vibranium, let alone using the precious metal to develop their science and technology. Wakanda (Africa) to Klaue sits on top of vast natural resources, but lacks thinkers and advanced tech to transform and make effective use of its God-given resources (Gathara 2018). While interrogating Klaue after his arrest in South Korea, Ross also re-echoes the European stereotype against Black people whom he believes are incapable of achieving the feat that Klaue narrates to him about them. To Ross, Africa is a fairy tale, a locus horrendous peopled by humanoids; hence the belief that the news of their technological advancement is mythical. The BBC Global News anchor in the movie also confirms the negative representation of Africa in the Western media when she reports the news of the death of King T'Chaka during a terrorist attack on the United Nations headquarters. According to her, Wakanda "remains one of the poorest nations in the world fortified by mountain ranges and impenetrable rain forest" (*Black Panther*). To Europeans, it is also inconceivable that people who lack creative capacity for technological breakthrough can develop hi-tech that can solve human problems.

The prolepsis of the film is represented by a number of scenes portraying the simulated future or vision of a people for a world that pays homage to the Blackman. The neo-futurist vision of the movie is delivered through a number of inventions made possible by vibranium. In *Black Panther*, the future of the Black race is foregrounded. In reality, however, the future delivered for the Black world in the film text is far from the grasp of the race. It is an assumption, a

deliberately simulated vision for a race that possibly reflects its generic mind-set. This is why I argue that the movie should be read as an illusionist project containing pseudo-science, cargo cult mentation, and wish fulfilment that jointly find expression in a creative production. Cargo cult mentality is a Melanesian conception describing how the people of the Pacific Ocean (South Seas) made attempts to obtain Western goods through magic by imitating or building dummies of Western hi-techs that would assist their ancestors in speedy delivery of goods to them through dummies they built. The modern usage of the concept has a deep psychological implication validating the mental preparedness of a people for innovations without putting in place basic scientific structures that can deliver such innovations. This explains why Richard Feynman describes those who suffer cargo cult mentality as people who “follow all the apparent precepts and forms of scientific investigation, but [...] missing something essential [...] what they’re missing [...] is a kind of scientific integrity, a principle of scientific thought that corresponds to a kind of utter honesty” (see Foster and Huber 1999: 89).

The foregoing submission possibly describes the mentality of the Black race. Cargo cult mentation is not limited to the Pacific islands, it replicates itself in different dimensions around the world, and one of its manifestations in the Black world may be Afrofuturism. The theory helps to expound the generic mind-set of the Blackman to prove his lack of scientific prowess and difficulty in developing his indigenous epistemology into cutting-edge inventions that can set him on the path of greatness. He rather prefers to slip into an idealised world to realise his wish fulfilment. *Black Panther* as an Afrofuturist movie is anchored in cargo cult theory; it creates hope that is stillborn and further accentuates the historical demise of the Black world. The demise is recorded following the “golden age of the Blackman’s history [that] lasted some 4,000 years but came to an inglorious end because the leaders of this black civilization started depending more on black magic and occultism than on conventional science and secular politics” (Afigbo 2006: 552).

In the movie, King T’Challa’s sister, Princess Shuri, believes her inventions are not magical, but products of proven scientific and technological researches. However, her utterance counteracts the prevailing pseudo-magical realities that characterise her inventions. Even if the inventions are borne out of empirical researches, translating them into reality for the benefit of humanity is a major problem for the Blackman.⁷ It calls for concern when there is a chasm between knowledge production and its realisation or utilisation for the good of humanity. Transiting from idea generation to realisation of the generated ideas may be one of the hindrances to the development of the Black world. Besides, inability to translate scientific knowledge to reality may have led to the realisation of such knowledge in comics, films, literature, myths. Just as the old Black world suffered from this mentality by veering off conventional science and embracing *paranormality*, the present Black world seems to be toeing the same path by latching onto day-dreaming and other psychic mechanisms to negotiate development. Various simulated techno-scientific inventions, Black essentialism, and the desire to disrupt racial asymmetry by locating the Blackman at the centre and White people on the margins are arguably mere conjectures that hold no validity. In fact, most of the hi-techs in the film are filmic dummies or stunts that have no scientific basis, hence they are merely pseudoscience. Besides this, the real Black world is completely different from the one projected in *Black Panther*. In reality, the Black world is still tottering; it is a study in underdevelopment and currently grapples with numerous problems, whereas the Black world in the film text has the entire world paying homage to its wealth and splendour.

Wakanda is a Black utopia that plays host to many techno-scientific inventions powered by its precious metal, though the nation-state is merely an illusion. It is a fantasy created to impugn the idea of isolating the Black world from the rest of the world in order to solely use its resources to engender development, because no nation thrives in isolation. The technological marvels in *Black Panther* lack scientific basis and integrity; therefore, believing in them is tantamount to self-delusion. I have used *believe* in the foregoing sentence deliberately, because movie has a way of creating illusion of reality in audience. Black people crave Western cutting-edge technologies, but lack the productive capacity and willingness to ensure its realisation. Erik hints on this when he declares that the Blackman lacks the firepower to drive, sustain revolution and transform its productive resources using empirical principles and critical insights.

⁷ It is contestable to claim that Black people are not involved in scientific inventions. My position is that the Blackman has not done enough. He has refused to galvanise his creative potentials to initiate his own unique developmental strides.

The implication of this is that the development plan of the Black world is often mouthed, it does not exceed the present dependence on the Global North for the supply of its techno-scientific needs. This is why the desire of the Blackman to rule over the world and make Europeans pay for the wrongs done to him, as portrayed in the film, appears a tall dream. The desire is a mere delusion of grandeur, because there is no plan in place to match and surpass those intimidating records of the West which remains the manufacturing and economic hub of the world.

CREATING A PROSPEROUS POWERFUL BLACK WORLD

It is a possibility that a prosperous powerful Black world can emerge, as Schuyler envisioned in his speculative fiction. However, adequate measures need to be put in place to systematically theorise the process of its emergence. The probability of having this wealthy, developed Black world is tied to the optimism of Martin Luther King, Jr. who believes that the “Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever [because] the yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself” (2009: 260).⁸ The yearning of the Black world to break out of objectification has to go beyond wish fulfilment and delusion; it must be backed up by carefully formulated action plan. Perhaps, one of the action plans should be for the Black world to rediscover itself as the cradle of civilisation. Afigbo corroborates this view by submitting that the freedom of Africa or the Blackman from underdevelopment is only realisable if it/he unfolds its/his own development agenda:

My message is simply this that the Blackman’s desire to attain his full humanity cannot be achieved until it breaks free from the stranglehold of sister civilizations, especially from the Western and Eastern civilizations, and accepts the responsibility for the consequences of this freedom of action because both go together like a man and his shadow or like tortoise and its shell. Only by doing so can he establish that he too has a stake in the making of the culture and civilization of man on this globe. (2016: 551–552)

Africa or the Black world needs to (re)discover itself and recreate its glorious past when “the Blackman led the procession in the march of human civilization or development” (Afigbo 2016: 552). For the Blackman to have a semblance of surrealistic image constructed for him in *Black Panther*, he should begin to remind himself of his great stories (Adeniyi 2021), because great nations (people) tell themselves great stories, this is why Afigbo posits that the empowerment of the Blackman should be anchored in writing for him “the kind of history which the leading races of the world have all along written for themselves, that is, the history that brings them into the main stream of causation in human affairs” (2016: 554). His history must be constructed in a way that it connects its glorious past with a projected but realistic future, and not like the false image portrayed in *Black Panther*. The Blackman should define reality within the context of peculiarities that surround him and devise means of exploring it for his development. One way of doing this is for him to tell his own stories, and stop parodying the narratives of his conquerors. He should also learn to put his mind to use in order to overcome his present challenges. No great nation tells itself defeatist narrative and expects to emerge victorious. The Blackman should necessarily invest in empirical science and intellectual reasoning, rather than depending on jujuism or occultism as a means to engender development. This is why I call Okoroafor’s Africanjujuism into question in view of the fact that techno-science inventions operate the logic of materiality, empirical science and not spirituality. As a matter of fact, no nation or race can emerge a global leader in science and technology if it plays up its “esoteric phenomena” (Afigbo 2016: 568) and downplays its “material phenomena” (Afigbo 2016: 568) or its intellectual resources which have always formed the bedrock of development in any given human society. Development is not propelled by esotericism nor does it thrive on mere spiritual or mystical conjectures; it is largely propelled by the principles of logic and reality.

CONCLUSION

This article has discussed the emerging literary convention that constructs African subjectivity in cultural productions. Drawing on scholarly views, it stresses the imperativeness of having a Black world that looks inwards and taps from its numerous resources to effectuate

⁸ The quote is taken from his essay, “The World House”, which is a section in his book, *Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community* (1967), published before his assassination in 1968.

development, rather than leveraging illusionism, jujuism, esotericism and cargo cult mentation as mechanisms of development. The envisioned world in *Black Panther* is utopian. The world is an illusionist sci-fi creation mediated by emotional technologies of desire and expectation. The world also draws on temporality and the collective imagination of Blackman to break the threshold of history for the (re)definition of Blackman's futurity. In *Black Panther*, history and mnemonics are weaponised to undo injustices and recast the Black world conceived in the unconscious mind of the Blackman. However, the utopian futurity projected in *Black Panther* is in sharp contrast with the current dystopian image of the Black world and its representation in Western cultural productions. The existential realities surrounding the Blackman and his world still earn him ignominy in the larger world dominated by forces that cohere to stymie his dreams. This is where the film genre used for building hope and reconstructing futurity for the Blackman possibly fails as a project. Every cultural production is a political project. However, the project of reconstructing a glorious future for the Black world in the film text rests heavily on daydreaming and other emotional mechanisms. *Black Panther* project obscures (Black) reality. It unfurls the psyche of an average Blackman desirous of technological breakthrough, but negotiates it using the Melanesian technology of illusionism and superstition. The Black world is in dire need of development; it needs to catch up with the rest of the world. The way to climb up the ladder of development is not through esotericism, but through critical engagement and application of logic and empirical realities. This is what is missing in *Black Panther*. The text rather points to the mundanity of the Blackman, and it is more of an indictment on the strength of his psyche to accommodate actuality.


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