April 2022

Gender, Race, and Religion in an African Enlightenment

Jonathan D. Lyonhart
Lincoln Christian University, jonathanlyonhart@gmail.com

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Africana Studies Commons, African History Commons, American Film Studies Commons, American Popular Culture Commons, European History Commons, Feminist, Gender, and Sexuality Studies Commons, Film and Media Studies Commons, History of Gender Commons, History of Religion Commons, History of Science, Technology, and Medicine Commons, Philosophy Commons, and the Women's History Commons

Gender, Race, and Religion in an African Enlightenment

Abstract

Black Panther (2018) not only heralded a new future for representation in big-budget films but also gave an alternative vision of the past, one which recasts the Enlightenment within an African context. By going through its technological enlightenment in isolation from Western ideals and dominance, Wakanda opens a space for reflecting on alternate ways progress can—and still might—unfold. More specifically, this alternative history creates room for reimagining how modernity—with its myriad social, scientific, and religious paradigm shifts—could have negotiated questions of race, and, in turn, how race could have informed and redirected some of the lesser impulses of modernity. Similar to genetic critiques, such alternative genealogies are not primarily about history but about the future, providing an almost eschatological vision of how society could be restructured.

Keywords

Creative Commons License

Author Notes

Jonathan Lyonhart (PhD, Cambridge) is an assistant professor of Theology and Philosophy at Lincoln Christian University and a Fellow at the Cambridge Centre for the Study of Platonism.

The first slaves were taken to America in the same year that Kepler published his final law of planetary motion (1619). By the time Newton capitalized on these laws in his *Principia* (1687), the slave trade had exploded throughout the British empire and was still ongoing in America when Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* (1859) centuries later. In turn, the role of women in modern science was often uncredited or non-existent, while the photon was discovered a decade and a half before women even had the right to vote (USA and UK). Religious institutions, often complicit in these social failures of Western progress, were also one of its victims, with the Secularization thesis of Weber and others seemingly becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy (at least, in Europe). Progress seemed to become synonymous with the skeptical, 'objective', white man of science, who overcomes religious repression and dogma on route to enlightenment. Yet a captivating and alternative vision of modernity has recently been provided by Marvel's massively popular film, *Black Panther* (2018).

Black Panther not only heralded a new future for representation in big-budget films but also gave an alternative vision of the past, one which recasts the Enlightenment within an African context. By going through its technological enlightenment in isolation from Western ideals and dominance, Wakanda opens a space for reflecting on alternate ways progress can—and still might—unfold. More specifically, this alternative history creates room for reimagining how modernity—with its myriad social, scientific, and religious paradigm shifts—could have negotiated questions of race, and, in turn, how race could have informed and redirected some of the lesser impulses of modernity. Similar to genetic critiques,[1] such alternative genealogies are not primarily about history but about the future, providing an almost eschatological vision of ow society could be restructured.[2] This paper will thus explore how *Black Panther* rewrites the

Western narrative of modernity and its culturally specific structuring of the relationships between race, power, gender, science, and religion.[3]

By envisioning an African population that was never "subjected to the decimating forces of colonialism, slavery, lynching, Jim Crow, mass incarceration, second-class citizenship, and racial segregation,"[4] *Black Panther* provides an idealized vision of 'blackness' that is not defined—or, at least, not primarily defined—by the dialectic of dominance or oppositional narratives of power versus powerlessness.[5] This frees Wakanda (as much as it is possible to be free) from the imperialistic will to power that dominated Western modernity and which later necessitated the deconstructions of postmodernity. Indeed, while Wakanda maintains a royal hierarchy, it is often defined by its subversions, with King T'Challa (Chadwick Boseman) responding, "We do not do that here," when Bruce Banner (Mark Ruffalo) attempts to bow before him in *Infinity War* (2018).[6] Also notable is the mutuality of the 'Wakanda Forever' salute, with royalty and commoner reciprocating toward each other with the same gesture, in contrast to, say, the one-sided salute of a subordinate in the American army to a commanding officer.[7] Even the broader narrative refuses to define blackness as the struggle to regain power from the West, revealing halfway through that the Caucasian Klaue (Andy Serkis) is not the true antagonist of the film. King T'Challa's personality further echoes this subversion of traditional power tropes when, as Michael D'Agostino states, he

> freezes in the presence of his childhood sweetheart, Nakia. He mourns his father, T'Chaka, whom he does not just love and respect but openly adores. For all his superhuman power and royal authority, Coogler's T'Challa is sympathetic, accessible, and easy to identify with.[8]

T'Challa also emphasizes diplomacy and relationship over force of numbers,[9] saying in Civil War that "two people in a room can get more done than a hundred." He embodies a "regal coolness

devoid of rage or resentment, thus signalling that he is outside of any patriarchy rooted in the experiences of slavery (see Hooks, 2004)."[10]

In stark and deliberate contrast, Erik Killmonger represents an African-American perspective that has become defined—for better or worse—in opposition to Western power. Killmonger was born and raised in Oakland,[11] where the Black Panther Party was founded less than a year after the comic debuted, and where the opening scene of the film begins in 1992, the same year as the Los Angeles riots after white police officers were pardoned for beating Rodney King.[12] (It is also of note that Coogler and Jordan's first film together, *Fruitvale Station* (2013), documented the brutal killing of Oscar Grant by Oakland police.) Erik soon earned his nickname, Killmonger, as an American black-ops soldier, and goes by it instead of his African birth name, N'Jadaka. In many ways, Killmonger reacts against and adopts the powerplays of the Western oppressors of his youth: in this sense he is not merely the villain of the story but also its first victim, as an orphaned child thrust into and molded by an oppressive framework. He knows "how colonizers think," and wishes to use "their own strategy against them." Appropriating an old adage of the British empire, Killmonger claims that "the sun is never gonna set on the Wakanda empire." The comparison is made all the more explicit in a London heist scene, when he steals back artefacts that the British once stole from Africa, repaying tit for tat. This stands in contrast to T'Challa, who allows vengeance to go unreturned, ending the cycle of power plays when he states: "Vengeance has consumed you. It has consumed them. I am done letting it consume me."

Indeed, the camera angle literally flips upside down when Killmonger takes the throne from T'Challa, signifying their inverse approaches to power: note also the contrast between Killmonger's urban American accent and T'Challas formal isiXhosa.[13] Killmonger has been consumed by the Western dialectic between oppressor and oppressed, where he must be either one

or the other, while T'Challa seems to transcend the dialectic altogether.[14] As T'Challa says to Killmonger in their final fight, "You have become them" and so will "never be a true king." Killmonger has become the thing he hates, bearing on his body the marks of two hundred murders, many against his own brothers and sisters on "this continent." Whereas scars on an African-American male have often symbolized his oppression, here they symbolize him as oppressor. This fits in with a common diagnosis of African-American masculinity, with multiple scholars arguing that black men often "absorb and emulate white patriarchy in order to rebuild and reassert themselves as men from the trauma of slavery."[15]

Killmonger's internalization and replication of Western dominion is all the more clear in his approach to Black females. He nonchalantly shoots his girlfriend in order to defeat Klaue. He lifts the African priestess by her throat while spewing a threatening reminder of his dominance: "When I tell you to do something, I mean that shit." In the climax, he fights the all-female Dora Milaje, using one of them as a body shield before slicing her throat and discarding her after she's served her purpose. Making his gendered supremacy all the more explicit, he then beats the entire female troop in combat, almost killing Shuri. This

> is the true tragedy of Killmonger—in his trauma-fueled quest for dominance, he does not represent black liberation—rather, he symbolizes the internalization of white patriarchy —which manifests in his external violence against black women.[16]

Thus, Killmonger represents an African-American internalization of modern Western ideologies, deriving its views of power, race, and gender from a dialectical reaction against, and identity with, its colonial and patriarchal oppressors. Note that this is considered one of the more controversial aspects of the film, with some claiming it buys into "white respectability politics," dismissing justified outrage as inherently radical or extremist, while also further disempowering African-American males.[17] It also represents Western ideologies that mainland Africans have imbibed

through colonialism or contemporary media, for "Western civilization's attempt to 'modernize' and 'de-savage' the dark continent was by infusing its own ideas of masculinity and paternalism."[18]

In contrast, Wakanda represents a vision of an African nation that has socially progressed in isolation, providing an alternative vision of femininity that is not built upon centuries of Western dominance. While Wakanda is ruled by a male King, T'Challa is not guaranteed his rule by birth nor gender, for another could challenge him in ritual combat. Indeed, *Black Panther 2* will reportedly have Shuri (Letitia Wright) taking the throne. This might seem like a solely strategic move in light of Chadwick Boseman's untimely demise, but this actually occurs in the comic books as well, with Shuri becoming the Black Panther in volume 5 (2009). Nakia is also encouraged by Queen Ramonda to use the magical heart shaped herb to become Black Panther. Additionally, while some maintain that the plurality of females in the film are ultimately in service to a male protagonist,[19] it is crucial to note that they each have a will, identity, and source of value that goes beyond T'Challa. For example, Okoye (Dana Gurira) does not serve T'Challa but Wakanda, and so when he is unseated she refuses to flee with his family but instead stays to serve Wakanda's new government. In turn, she is willing to sacrifice her male beloved (Daniel Kaluuya) for her country, showing she has a purpose beyond her romantic attachment to a male ("For Wakanda? No question.") Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) also displays this independence, consistently refusing T'Challa's offer of marriage in order to pursue the global aid he disapproves of.[20] In turn, T'Challa acknowledges Nakia's independence as well as his own dependence upon her, inverting the role of male savior by saying to her: "Thank you for saving me. For saving my family."

Beyond the throne, Wakanda is seemingly run almost entirely by females.[21] The film begins with a shot of two Dora Milaje warriors holding spears, foreshadowing the all-female Wakandan army and Royal Guard. Notable among their combat scenes is the barfight with Klaue,

when Nakia and Okoye try to blend in by wearing Western female garb, including high-heels and a straightened wig. Nakia soon takes off her heels, using them to strike her enemy in the face. Okoye then rips off her straightened hair—a symbol rich in both its gendered and racialized history[22]—throwing it into the face of an oncoming enemy. They thus symbolically cast off their shackles then use them to chain whip their captors. And lest they merely become westernized versions of male warriors (similar to the internalizations of Killmonger) or sexualized caricatures of 'angry Black women,' they are depicted as tough but not mean,[23] as passionate but not hysterical, and as creatively employing self-sacrifice, empathy, and wit in combat—e.g., when Okoye places her own body in the way of her lover's charging rhino to save M'Baku (Winston Duke), or when Nakia saves one of her male kidnappers, acknowledging that he was "just a boy" himself. Furthermore, females are not only the brawn of the army but the brains as well, with Shuri inventing vibranium weapons and armor and Nakia serving as a co-vert operative before she is pulled out after T'Chaka's death.[24]

Outside of the army, females also occupy essential positions within the government and its religious structures, with a high priestess taking over the coronation ceremony after Zuri (Forest Whitaker) was killed, and the Tribal Council consisting of an equal number of male and female rulers. Queen Ramonda (Angela Bassett) is also a member of this council, countering the dearth of older female roles of consequence in Hollywood. More centrally, Shuri leads the nation's STEM industry, harnessing the land's vibranium deposits to create next-generation vehicles, weapons, armor, medicine, clothing, etc. She is essentially a female version of Q from the Bond franchise, except with public recognition and status. The film's emphasis on Shuri's intellect rather than T'Challa's is especially notable in contrast to the comics, where T'Challa is also presented as a "brilliant scientist" and one of the "eight smartest people in the world."[25] The filmmakers thus

made a very intentional choice to highlight Shuri's intellect, contrasting the Enlightenment mythology of the 'Man of Science,' which only indulged the occasional female mind—e.g., Madame Curie, Rosalind Franklin—in a manner roughly equivalent to the 'exceptional Negro.' This went beyond everyday sexism, permeating the very philosophical and epistemological foundations of modernity:

> Nowhere is the pattern of using male experience to define the human experience seen more clearly than in models of intellectual development. The mental processes that are involved in considering the abstract and the impersonal have been labelled "thinking" and are attributed primarily to men, while those that deal with the personal and interpersonal fall under the rubric of "emotions" and are largely relegated to women.[26]

The Cartesian mythology of modernity emphasized a "lone ranger" pursuit of "separation, autonomy, mastery, independence, and self-sufficiency,"[27] idealizing the "agentic ethic (self-protective, assertive, individualistic, pushing toward achievement) at the expense of the communal ethic (being at one with other organisms, characterized by contact or union)."[28] While girls—in preparation for motherhood—were encouraged to be emotionally expressive and attentive to the needs of others,[29] young boys were instead socialized to be "good soldiers" or "effective competitors in a largely alienated work world" where deep interpersonal connection was perceived as weakness.[30] These examples—a few among many—contributed to a modern definition of masculinity that was "emptied of the dress of the self,"[31] forcing reality onto a procrustean bed and hacking off subjectivity, emotion, and interpersonal relating and knowing. This enabled a male-dominated academia to define thinking itself as abstract, impersonal, and objective, as epitomized by the Cartesian mind that is allegedly impervious to all outside influence. By then defining masculinity itself as cold, calculating,[32] and objective (and femininity as warm, unsystematic, and subjective), females were inherently excluded from the scientific and technological project of modernity.

Shuri, of course, presents a powerful counter to this enlightenment epistemology. She developed a high-speed train system. From the comfort of her lab, she can drive a car located thousands of miles away. She continues to improve already-cutting-edge technologies, designing a new Black Panther suit able to absorb kinetic energy. The other advanced weapons of the nation owe their latest iterations to her engineering.[33]

Furthermore, Shuri does not have to shed her subjectivity or 'traditional femininity' in order to do science (though there is still a gendered binary assumed here which is arguably colonial, even if the definitions of one side of that binary have been allowed to expand somewhat).[34] While "Technical expertise is her specialty… she [nonetheless] shares a spirit of self-sacrifice with her Wakandan sisters. She shoulders the burden of caring for a white fugitive in their midst…."[35] Shuri is playful (e.g., when she tricks T'Challa into kicking his suit, or jokes at the coronation), embedded relationally in her family and community, and emotive (e.g., she cries out and openly weeps when T'Challa is defeated by Killmonger). She stands as a nuanced contrast to the narrow definitions of gendered rationality inherent to the Enlightenment, which is made clear when she heals CIA agent Everett Ross (Martin Freeman) using Wakandan technology unavailable in the West. When he wakes, he is stunned to discover that this female and her African nation have such advanced technology. He is further shocked that she knows more about him than he knows about her and that his bullet wounds have already healed (Everett: "Bullet wounds do not just magically heal overnight." Shuri: "They do here. But not by magic. By technology.") Shuri treats him like a boy, laughing at how perplexed he is by her lab and telling him not "to touch anything." This contrast between her technology and the West is further crystallized when she enjoyably refers to him as "Colonizer," mockingly calls him "Genius," and laughs that America doesn't have "hover bikes" yet.[36]

In sum, Wakandan females are consistently contrasted with Western femininity, being portrayed as highly skilled and integral to Wakanda's government, military, and scientific progress. The film's empowerment of Black females in an advanced society provides an alternative vision of the future, one that counters the popular adage that 'every great nation is built on the backs of slaves' and that every great woman stands (politely) behind her great man. Now, a number of commentators have insisted that this egalitarian picture of social progress is not merely what could happen in the future but what *could have happened in the past*, without the intervention of Western colonialism:

> This was commonplace in pre-colonial African communities—throughout West Africa, women were known to have controlled their own worlds, speaking on matters of taxation, and the maintenance of public facilities including markets, roads, wells and streams (Sudarkasa, 1986, p. 99)… Aidoo underlines the privileges and rights women possessed which included the right to own land, to participate in council meetings, refusing to take her husband's name, right to property. In these communities, "A woman's status was determined more by her own achievements than the achievements of her husband" (Van Allen, 1972, p. 168)… They took active part in decision-making concerning chieftaincy and were consulted on most governmental affairs (Sudarkasa, 1986, p. 100).

Additionally, the

> strongest empires in Africa have been variations of African matriarchy wherein the king rules with the female triad of the Queen Mother who can depose him, the Queen Sister who manages the economy and owns title to the nation's land, and the Queen-Wife who is consort and advisor. This is the triad who brought T'Challa back from near death… African matriarchy is not about gender dominance. *Black Panther* is a rare film because it shows that African matriarchy is about vibrant gender synergy…[37]

Thus, *Black Panther* paints an optimistic picture for the gendered trajectory of an African enlightenment removed from the past and future interventions of Western powerplays.[38] In contrast, the film's only African-American woman (Nabiyah Be) is given less than fifteen words to speak and is swiftly killed off by her African-American lover,[39] rendering explicit the contrast between those located in the unfolding history of the West and those raised in isolation from it.

However, it should be noted that even as women are portrayed in more expansive roles, the film nonetheless assumes a consistent dichotomy between recognizably male and female characters, which may itself be a colonial binary. For example, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí has argued that historical Yoruba society used gender-fluid language and names, divided social groups by age rather than biological sex, and were less visual as a culture and thus less concerned with external differences between male and female garb and biology.[40]

In addition to the film's renegotiation of the relationship between race, gender, and science, it also provides a powerful alternative to the secularization thesis of modernity, wherein scientific and social progress compete with religion for territory as mutually exclusive options. This thesis has often been exemplified by other 'futurisms' in science-fiction:

> For example, during filming for 2017's prequel series Star Trek: Discovery, when actor Jason Isaacs ad-libbed the phrase "for God's sakes," writer Kirsten Beyer corrected him: "Star Trek is creator Gene Roddenberry's vision of a science-driven twenty-third-century future where religion basically no longer exists" (Hibberd). The Orville (2017-) suggests a similar theme in "Krill" (season one, episode six), when Captain Ed Mercer (Seth MacFarlane) describes the normal trajectory of species: "Generally, when a civilization becomes more technologically advanced, their adherence to religion declines."[41]

This secular future is often depicted as arising out of the natural trajectory of modernity, and thereby the past is used to predict the future, and the future to cyclically impose an assumed vision of our secularizing past.[42]

In contrast, Wakanda found a way to go through its scientific and technological enlightenment without abandoning its religiosity or spiritualistic cosmology.[43] For example, the high priest is central to society and performs government rituals and royal inaugurations. These inaugurations are themselves steeped in religious imagery of death, resurrection, and baptism, with the would-be King buried in dirt. During burial, his folded-arms are modelled after Egyptian Pharoahs, displaying a relinquishing of control in death.[44] While in the afterlife, the King visits the

ancestral plain, meeting with his dead ancestors. In one of those rare moments where reality and the film reel collide, Coogler's eulogy for Boseman gives us an insight to their mutual understanding of the scene when they shot it, as well as the additional significance it now has in hindsight. Referring to Boseman as a "man of faith," the director writes:

> I had the privilege of directing scenes of Chad's character, T'Challa, communicating with the ancestors of Wakanda. We were in Atlanta, in an abandoned warehouse, with bluescreens, and massive movie lights, but Chad's performance made it feel real. I think it was because from the time that I met him, the ancestors spoke through him. It's no secret to me now how he was able to skillfully portray some of our most notable ones. I had no doubt that he would live on and continue to bless us with more. But it is with a heavy heart and a sense of deep gratitude to have ever been in his presence, that I have to reckon with the fact that Chad is an ancestor now. And I know that he will watch over us, until we meet again.[45]

In order to undergo the ancestral ritual and seize the throne, one must first defeat the reigning panther in battle, with M'Baku (Winston Duke), the leader of the Jabari tribe, challenging T'Challa early in the film. The Jabari long ago retreated into the mountains out of fear of vibranium technology, and such reclusivism would normally be associated with religious conservatism in the face of progress. Images might come to mind of Mennonite communities, monasteries in the mountain, or the Essenes at Qumran, as well as more popular streams of anti-scientific and anti-progressive thinking found in fundamentalist Christianity, Judaism, or Islam. However, in the film, both sides of the battle for the throne are portrayed as equally religious. It is not a clash between religious conservatism and the progressive future of Wakanda, but rather, between two equally religious tribes and their rival gods. M'Baku says, "Praise to Hanuman" when T'Challa accepts his challenge, then puts on his wooden gorilla mask representing the Jabari's ape god (note that this is in the original script, and not just an aesthetic flourish of the costume designer). In contrast, T'Challa is a part of the Panther tribe, who worship the Panther goddess and derive the strength of the Black Panther from her. After initially thrashing T'Challa, M'Baku cries out: "Where is your

God now!?" T'Challa's visit to the ancestral plain after his eventual victory then reiterates the equal religiosity of both sides. As such, the Jabari/panther struggle represents an alternative modernity which still has its objectors and defenders but where both are equally religious, and so God is not the dividing line between progress and regress. The Jabari are not afraid of secularism but technology, for everyone still assumes a religious imaginary in this land. In contrast to Western modernity, religion is no longer cast as the enemy of progress.

In the comics, this contrast between Wakanda and Western secularism is more explicitly addressed. In one volume, T'Chaka refuses to share Wakanda's discoveries, stating: "Until the spiritual advancement of the West catches up to their technological prowess, it would be irresponsible to share our scientific discoveries with you…."[46] In another volume set during the Second World War, Nazi Colonel Fritz Klaue (father of Ulysses Klaue) crash lands in Wakanda, where he is taken in and befriended by Chanda (father of T'Chaka). Klaue attempts to convince Chanda that Wakanda's religion should pivot to Deism (the belief that reason rather than revelation should serve as the grounds of religion), and the resulting conflict leads to Klaue's expulsion from Wakanda.[47] Deism is often considered a first unknowing step toward secularism, moving from faith in God, to reasonable faith in God, to reason without God. Deism is usually associated with quintessential Enlightenment figures such as Rousseau, Voltaire, Paine, and Jefferson. Thus, the rejection of Deism is in many ways a rejection of the process of secular modernity, enabling Wakanda to preserve an alternate reality in which its rational enlightenment coexists with its traditional religiosity.

Crucially, Wakanda's religious and scientific progress are built upon the same foundation: vibranium. Landing in Africa on a meteorite, vibranium is a literal *deus ex machina*, providing an explanation for every technological and spiritual marvel of Wakanda. Vibranium "is shown to

absorb energy, deflect bullets, short-circuit electrical devices, heal wounds," and allow essentially "God-like acts."[48] Radiating the soil, vibranium thereby produces the heart-shaped herb, which enables the Black Panther to visit the ancestral realm. As Marvel Studios President Kevin Feige stated, Wakanda is "partially spiritual. We certainly don't call it magic, but there's Vibranium that has been interwoven within that soil and that land for thousands of years, so there are other things going on with it."[49] In turn, the heavenly vision of the ancestral realm is very much embodied in the African land, merging the ordinary with the extra-ordinary.[50] This

> symbolism reminds those of us who are of African descent in a post-colonial diaspora of possible parts of our pre-Western Christian anthropologies. These moments reveal not a sacred/secular dichotomy, a thing that in many ways was the convention of Western Christian compartmentalization in the service of separating the spiritual from the social and demarcation of non-European "religious" others, but a mode of becoming in which the sacred ancestors are perpetually a part and parcel of the holistic functioning of the society.[51]

In this sense, Wakanda does not buy into the common Western dichotomy of nature and spirit, where the two are mutually exclusive (e.g., scientific explanation excludes miraculous explanation, and vice versa) and where every scientific advance leads to a loss for faith. (Note that not all Western nor even all Christian theologies adopt this dichotomy either and that many theologians consider this version of faith that science allegedly debunked to be a strawmen).

This not only allows for an alternative account of the relationship between God and science but between humanity and nature. In the Western creation narrative, humanity seems to be given authority over creation by a creator who stands above and beyond it. A common—albeit controversial—interpretation of Genesis 1:28 is that this entitled "modern man" to abuse the world as he pleased, utilizing and stripping nature during the Industrial Revolution and setting the scene for the contemporary environmental crisis. Now, most contemporary scholars insist that Genesis 1:28 actually refers to caretaking and stewardship over creation, rather than ownership and

dominance. This tension has even been played out on the big screen in Aronofsky's *Noah* (2014), in which Noah (Russell Crowe) and Tubal-Cain (Ray Winstone) present contrasting interpretations of Genesis 1:28, one of dominance and one of stewarding care. Regardless, Western modernity was often quite satisfied to run with a potentially false and one-sided interpretation, using and abusing nature to build the technological temples of our age.

In contrast to humanity's natural right over nature bestowed by a transcendent creator, Wakanda's gods are within nature itself. The Panther goddess Bast, as well as the Jabari's ape-god Hanuman (a Hindu deity),[52] are both made in the image of creatures, and in the waterfall scene, we also see Nakia's father "praising what might possibly be a water deity."[53] The very name 'Wakanda' may even derive from a Native American term which refers to God and the worship of nature.[54] Thus, nature is not depicted as property nor as an amoral playground but as imbued with divine energy and value. This is reflected in Wakanda's green city planning and architecture, with hanging gardens and a verdant skyline which blends into the countryside (in both a figurative and literal sense, given the force field that makes the city look like a forest from the outside). It is even more explicit in the comics:

> Black Panther embraces advanced technology while taking on foes ripped from the headlines, but still depicts "a world where black people [are] in harmony with nature and with one another," … new black characters would also be overdetermined by either their connection to nature (Storm, Falcon) or blackness, like male characters Black Lightning and Black Goliath.[55]

Wakanda has thus progressed via its natural resources and vibranium technology while managing to remain one with the planet and the gods that dwell within it, working *with* nature rather than dominating *over* it. This represents an alternative account of the relationship between religion, nature, and scientific progress, one which also has its parallels in the counter-modernity of Romanticism. Of course, a common Western critique of this would be that once you collapse the

distinction between spirit and nature, it is hard to distinguish this from atheistic materialism—e.g., Spinoza's God who is indistinguishable from nature or Feuerbach and Marx's atheistic inversion of Hegel. In this sense, such a collapse could itself be a force for secularization. However, it is sufficient for our point to show that Wakanda presents an interesting and alternative vision of the relationship between religion and scientific progress, regardless of whether this vision is inherently superior or not (a question well beyond the remit of this article).

Critically, these unique configurations of religion, science, and nature are not presented in isolation from *Black Panther*'s other insights regarding race and gender but as flowing naturally out of them. Without the powerplays of the West, Black women were given prominent positions in STEM as well as in Wakanda's spiritual hierarchies. A female replaces the deceased Zuri as high priest, then handles the heart-shaped herb in order to perform the sacred coronation ceremony, suggesting the transfer of political authority and the mediation of divine power can be made through a female (note that the United Kingdom's coronations have yet to be led by a female clergy member). Former female rulers are shown with T'Chaka in the ancestral plain, suggesting that women continue to have prominence in the spirit world. Furthermore, while the religious side of Shuri is not emphasized in the film,[56] the comics merge her scientific prowess with her spiritual acumen:

> D'Jalia is a spiritual plane that represents Wakanda's collective memory. When T'Challa's sister, Shuri, is killed in the comics, her soul travels through the astral plane and eventually to the D'Jalia. She trains there with spirits until T'Challa finds a way to rescue her soul and she's revived.[57]

> Shuri, trapped in a spiritual plane with the memories of Wakanda's elders, becomes the caretaker of her people's lore and ancient history. Through Shuri, Coates [the author of the comics] expands on the religious beliefs of Wakanda.[58]

Now, this connection between females, science, and religion is not coincidental but derived from the mythological foundations of Wakanda itself, for the panther god, Bast, is female.

Wakandan "women are highly respected because of Bast."[59] As "metaphorical daughters of the goddess, the well-developed female characters of *Black Panther* illustrate the multi-faceted nature of Wakandans' godlikeness."[60] This gendered religiosity is also connected to Wakandan scientific and military progress, for Bast instructed them in the use of vibranium and the heart shaped herb, while imbuing the first Black Panther with her divine power. Bast thus weaves together and makes sense of Wakanda's unique web of religion, science, and female empowerment. This configuration may also be quite interesting sociologically, for a growing body of literature suggests that women are consistently more religious (at least, in terms of daily activities and church attendance) than men.[61] Perhaps if women had been in charge—or at least, equal partners—during the enlightenment, religion and progress would not have been so readily opposed. Sadly, while the West had the resources to capitalize on divine femininity—e.g., Jesus as Sophia, or the embodiment of feminine wisdom—these resources were often ignored, with women, faith, and science often occupying mutually exclusive terrain.

Black Panther thus provides an alternative vision of how progress could—and still can—unfold. Such visions give breathing room from the real, perpetuating an ideal realm that contrasts the present and calls it unto repentance. This is the role that heaven often played in the imaginary and revolutions of the past[62] and which science-fiction has attempted to co-opt. *Black Panther*, however, refuses to choose between the two genres, forging science-fiction as religious vision. Far from merely giving black audiences momentary "mass psychic relief,"[63] *Black Panther* has the power to bring its heaven to earth. It has already inspired hashtags and fashion trends,[64] architecture[65] and philanthropy,[66] culture and mythmaking,[67] athletics and protests,[68] and led to a testable increase in identity and empowerment in non-white youths who watch it.[69] Yet, as we have argued, the merits of the film expand these racial insights into an alternative vision of gender,

power, progress, science, nature, and religion—in sum, an alternative Enlightenment. Such a

vision should give us pause to reflect on systemic racism in its truest sense as something that does

not occur in isolation, but which permeates and structures entire *systems* and histories.

---

[1] Genetic critiques evaluate the 'genesis' of an idea in order to reveal its historical and cultural contingency.

[2] Claudia Bucciferro, "Representations of Gender and Race in Ryan Coogler's Film *Black Panther*: Disrupting Hollywood Tropes," *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, March 1, 2021, 5.

[3] These are alternative visions that Wakanda can offer to Western civilization as a whole—reminiscent of the climactic scene, when T'Challa is asked what Wakanda can "offer the world" and he responds with a knowing smile. As a cis gender white male, I thus approach this not as one who teaches but as one hoping to be taught by the film itself. One can only hope for a time when Black films are no longer inspiring and instructive solely for Black people, in the same way that Daredevil is not just for "white, poor Irish-American People." Robert Ito, "Beyond 'Black Panther': Afrofuturism Is Booming in Comics," NY Times, February 7, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/07/books/afrofuturism-comics-graphic-novels.html.

[4] Brentin Mock, "Wakanda: The Chocolatest City," Bloomberg CityLab, February 16, 2018, https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-16/wakanda-the-prototype-chocolate-city.

[5] Wakanda is ideologically and literally shielded from Western imperialism, both by its secrecy and by an actual, physical forcefield of invisibility.

[6] One might retort by pointing to the ritual combat that decides who rules the country, which is a fairly stereotypical show of male power. However, at least in the comics, "a test of physical strength alone does not qualify a contender to become the next Black Panther; she must also pass a 'literacy requirement' and a spiritual test involving a hallucinogenic encounter with the Panther God." Tim Posada, "Afrofuturism, Power, and Marvel Comics's *Black Panther*," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 52, no. 3 (June 2019): 634.

[7] Mike Fleming, "'Black Panther' Director Ryan Coogler On Chadwick Boseman," Deadline, August 30, 2020, https://deadline.com/2020/08/black-panther-director-ryan-coogler-on-chadwick-boseman-black-panther-caretaker-a-leader-and-a-man-of-faith-dignity-and-pride-he-shielded-his-collaborators-from-his-suffering-1203027062/.

[8] Anthony Michael D'Agostino, "'Who Are You?': Representation, Identification, and Self-Definition in *Black Panther*," *Safundi* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 3. In contrast, when Killmonger visits his dead father in the ancestral realm, "The father asks 'No tears for me?' but the child remains composed. T'Challa appears more sensitive and thoughtful, as he mourns his father's death and seeks council from his ancestors." Bucciferro, 8.

[9] However, one might note here at the tail-end of this section that, precisely because Wakanda has been so privileged in being sheltered from Western colonialism, it often seems to speak into the suffering of others from a non-understanding place of power and privilege. Indeed, Wakanda actually recapitulates capitalistic narratives in its own approach to Black Americans—e.g., indifferently refusing to help for centuries, then showing up in Oakland at the climax of the film in order to perpetuate a fairly Western trope of 'saving' the oppressed through donations and the financing of black spaces.

[10] Robert A. Saunders, "(Profitable) Imaginaries of Black Power: The Popular and Political Geographies of Black Panther," *Political Geography* 69 (March 2019): 146.

[11] Director Ryan Coogler is also from Oakland.

12 George Faithful, "Dark of the World, Shine on Us: The Redemption of Blackness in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther," *Religions* 9, no. 10 (October 8, 2018): 8.

13 The contrast between African-Americans and Black Panther was also brilliantly skewered in SNL's jeopardy skit with Chadwick Boseman. SNL, "Black Jeopardy with Chadwick Boseman," YouTube, April 7, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzMzFGgmQOc.

14 It is also of note that Wakanda not only avoids the Western dialectic of power, but the need for the Marxian counter-responses to this dialectic: "Wakanda's escaping the nightmare of colonialism means that it also avoids the kind of political transformations produced by anti-colonial struggle, where a traditional faith in the collectives became wedded to political ideas of a left-wing (Marxist and/or socialist) orientation. Wakanda may be a rich embodiment of African culture, but it is surprisingly removed from the reality of today's African social issues and its politics." Damian Garside, "Ryan Coogler's Film Black Panther," *South African Review of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 109.

15 Princess Weekes, "How Killmonger's Misogyny Teaches Us About Western Patriarchy," The Mary Sue, February 22, 2018, https://www.themarysue.com/how-killmongers-misogyny-teaches-us-about-western-patriarchy/.

16 Karen Attiah, "Forget Killmonger — Wakanda's Women Are 'Black Panther's' True Revolutionaries," The Washington Post, March 1, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/01/forget-the-abusive-killmonger-wakandas-women-are-black-panthers-true-black-liberators/.

17 "Negating Killmonger and black power is an uncomfortable way to go, as blacks have always been dismissed as radicals for simply wanting equality… it reaffirms neoliberal imperialism…." Ken Derry, "The Semi-Anti-Apocalypse of Black Panther," *The Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (2018). Regarding this, it may be helpful to read this film in light of Coogler's broader oeuvre, for *Creed I* (2015) is a celebration of the triumph of an African-American male. Even *Fruitvale Station,* while it certainly shows a down-trodden and oppressed figure, emphasizes that he was beginning to get his life back on track—dumping out his weed, searching for a job, and contemplating marriage. It also deliberately plays along with, only to then subvert, negative tropes about African-American males; e.g., when the audience thinks he is trying to cheat with a 'white woman' in the grocery store, only to realize he was genuinely trying to help her, with no strings attached.

18 Weekes, "How Killmonger's Misogyny Teaches Us About Western Patriarchy."

19 W. Richard Benash, "Black Panther and Blaxploitation: Intersections," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 38, no. 1 (January 18, 2021): 48.

20 "If womanist thinking is about survival and wholeness, then nowhere do we see that more clearly than in Lupita Nyongo's "Nakia." We meet the sister sitting covered among the Chibok Muslim women captured by Boko Haram. She's there as a covert operative. Her mission is to deliver these women from oppression. She feels a calling to help the marginalized and mistreated and risks her life to do so." Isaac Adams and Thabiti Anyabwile, "The Black Panther as Afrofuturist Womanist Vision," The Front Porch, February 26, 2018, https://thefrontporch.org/2018/02/the-black-panther-as-afrofuturist-womanist-vision/. As one of "Wakanda's foremost spies, Nakia (Lupita Nyong'o) navigates others' languages and cultures as if they were her own. From the world's foremost nation, she makes herself a captive among the victims of human trafficking, becoming indistinguishable from them. She speaks fluent Korean with a fish vendor and gatekeeper for an underground casino. Beneath Nakia's malleable public selves lies inner certitude. She shrewdly saves the last of the Heart-Shaped Herb, even as Killmonger has the rest destroyed, enabling T'Challa to regain his powers. When he beseeches her to take a place beside him on the throne, she reminds him how much more important is her work on behalf of the marginalized. T'Challa chides her, 'If you were not so stubborn, you would make a great queen.' She replies, 'I would make a great queen because I am so stubborn!'" Faithful, 7.

21 Some have pointed out that this presence of females has been contrasted by an absence of gay characters. One such character, Ayo (Florence Kasumba), is gay in the comics but not portrayed—overtly, at least—as such in the film. Faithful, 6.

[22] For a recent film that elaborates upon and makes explicit these implications, see *Nappily Ever After* (2018).

[23] "The film avoids another common representational trap found in movies and comics: the portrayal of strong women characters as 'tough' but also 'mean,' or formerly traumatized, bitter, and untrustworthy (Bucciferro, 2020; Cocca, 2016). Of the four women appearing in Black Panther, none fits this description." Bucciferro, 11.

[24] One might also note in this scene the contrast between the captured non-Wakandan females who are wearing headdresses and the 'liberated' Wakandan females throughout the film whose hair is never covered (and indeed, the only other scene that draws attention to hair has Oyowe casting off her "disgusting" wig). This juxtaposition may add to our point about the depiction of Wakandan liberation, though the depiction has itself garnered some criticism as Islamophobic. See Fatima Zahrae Chrifi Alaoui and Shadee Abdi, "Wakanda for Everyone: An Invitation to an African Muslim Perspective of Black Panther," *Review of Communication* 20, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 232.

[25] Posada, 636.

[26] See Mary F. Belenky, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic, 1997), 7.

[27] Judith V. Jordan, *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings from the Stone Center* (New York: Guilford, 1991), Preface V.

[28] Ibid, 28.

[29] Jordan, *Connection*, 31.

[30] Ibid, 31.

[31] Belenky, 215.

[32] One suspects that some of the weight of the expletive "Calculating Bitch," comes from the fact that a woman—as opposed to a man—is not supposed to be "calculating," and so is a perversion of womanhood.

[33] Faithful, 7.

[34] See, for example, Oyèrónkẹ́ Oyěwùmí, *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

[35] Faithful, 7.

[36] Another explicit contrast, though from the mouth of Okoye, occurs when she says: "Guns… so primitive."

[37] Marsha Robinson and Caryn Neumann, "On Coogler and Cole's Black Panther Film (2018): Global Perspectives, Reflections and Contexts for Educators," *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 11, no. 9 (August 2018): 6.

[38] "…women had to deal with general oppression from Europeans and being stripped of the many responsibilities and rights which they previously knew and were used to (Aidoo, 1985, p. 15). I suggest here that this impairment imposed on African women is reverted in Black Panther." Osei, 389.

[39] Some consider this depiction of African-American females to be problematic. See Christopher Lebron, "'Black Panther' Is Not the Movie We Deserve," Boston Review, February 17, 2018, http://bostonreview.net/race/christopher-lebron-black-panther.

[40] See Oyěwùmí.

[41] Posada, 637-8.

[42] Ibid, 637-8.

[43] Yolanda Pierce, "African Cosmologies: Spiritual Reflections on the 'Black Panther' Movie," Religion News Service, February 19, 2018, https://religionnews.com/2018/02/19/african-cosmologies-spiritual-reflections-on-the-black-panther-movie/.

[44] Eric Francesco, "'Black Panther' Director Reveals the Origins of the Wakanda Salute," Inverse, May 15, 2018, https://www.inverse.com/article/44867-black-panther-wakanda-forever-salute-meaning.

[45] Fleming, "'Black Panther' Director Ryan Coogler On Chadwick Boseman." It's worth noting that in *Fruitvale Station*, Coogler coupled Jordan's death with eschatological flashes of a heavenly reunion with his daughter, while his family can be heard praying in the background to "see him again."

[46] Reginald Hudlin et al., *Who Is the Black Panther?*, 2015, 55.

[47] *Fantastic Four Unlimited* 1.1 (March 1993).

[48] Benash, 47, 57.

[49] Chris Cabin, "'Black Panther': Ryan Coogler and Kevin Feige Explain First Trailer Footage," Collider, June 10, 2017, https://collider.com/black-panther-trailer-explained-ryan-coogler-kevin-feige/.

[50] Lleuella Morris, "To the Ancestral Plane: African Spiritism in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther (Marvel Studios, 2018) and the Desensitization to Spiritualism in Hollywood," *Africology: The Journal of Pan-African Studies* 11, no. 9 (August 2018).

[51] Jon Ivan Gill, "Ancestors Change Constantly: Subversive Religious Colonial Deconstruction in the Religion of Black Panther," *Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (April 2018), 2.

[52] Robinson and Neumann, 7.

[53] Morris, 73.

[54] Ibid, 73.

[55] Posada, 627.

[56] One might even think Shuri represents a skeptical, rationalistic dismissiveness of religion, for during the coronation ceremony she says, "This corset is really uncomfortable so can we all wrap it up and go home?" However, this may be because of her youthful immaturity, rather than her gender or intelligence. Furthermore, the fact that a teenage female felt safe to even interrupt a religious ceremony, when that might have been severely punished throughout many periods of Western history, might itself speak to the progressive and female friendly nature of religion in Wakanda.

[57] Phil Hornshaw and Phil Owen, "'Black Panther': Could the Wakandan Ancestral Plane Have Something to Do With a Hidden Infinity Stone?," The Wrap, February 15, 2018, https://www.thewrap.com/black-panther-ancestral-plane/.

[58] Posada, 64.

[59] Krystal Kara, "Why Black Panther Matters," Green Left, March 22, 2018, https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/why-black-panther-matters.

[60] Faithful, 6.

---

[61] E.g., Marta Trzebiatowska and Steve Bruce, *Why Are Women More Religious than Men?*, 1st ed (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

[62] Laurel Zwissler, "Black Panther as Spirit Trip," *Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (April 2018), 2.

[63] Renée T. White, "I Dream a World: *Black Panther* and the Re-Making of Blackness," *New Political Science* 40, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 427.

[64] Dania Yamout, "The Cultural Impact of 'Black Panther,'" Medium, April 6, 2018, https://medium.com/@DaniaAtHome/the-cultural-impact-of-black-panther-80ad3afdea66.

[65] Aisha Salaudeen, "R&B Singer Akon Is Building a 'real-Life Wakanda' Worth $6 Billion in Senegal," CNN, September 2, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/akon-city-senegal-wakanda-intl/index.html.

[66] Abigail Johnson, "Cast of 'Black Panther' Announces $250,000 College Scholarship," CNBC Make It, December 8, 2018, https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/07/cast-of-black-panther-announces-250000-college-scholarship.html.

[67] Bruce Haring, "'Black Panther' Items To Be Displayed At Smithsonian African-American Museum," Deadline, June 21, 2018, https://deadline.com/2018/06/black-panther-items-to-be-displayed-at-smithsonian-african-american-museum-1202415299/.

[68] Matthew Dessem, "Black Athletes Have Started Celebrating Their Victories With the 'Wakanda Forever' Salute from Black Panther," Slate, March 11, 2018, https://slate.com/culture/2018/03/black-athletes-have-started-celebrating-their-victories-with-the-wakanda-forever-salute.html.

[69] Carlos Allende González-Velázquez et al., "Watching *Black Panther* with Racially Diverse Youth: Relationships between Film Viewing, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Empowerment, and Wellbeing," *Review of Communication* 20, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 256.

REFERENCES

Adams, Isaac, and Thabiti Anyabwile. "The Black Panther as Afrofuturist Womanist Vision." The Front Porch, February 26, 2018. https://thefrontporch.org/2018/02/the-black-panther-as-afrofuturist-womanist-vision/.

Attiah, Karen. "Forget Killmonger — Wakanda's Women Are 'Black Panther's' True Revolutionaries." The Washington Post, March 1, 2018. https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2018/03/01/forget-the-abusive-killmonger-wakandas-women-are-black-panthers-true-black-liberators/.

Benash, W. Richard. "Black Panther and Blaxploitation: Intersections." *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 38, no. 1 (January 18, 2021): 45–60. https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2020.1762475.

Bucciferro, Claudia. "Representations of Gender and Race in Ryan Coogler's Film *Black Panther* : Disrupting Hollywood Tropes." *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, March 1, 2021, 1–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2021.1889012.

Cabin, Chris. "'Black Panther': Ryan Coogler and Kevin Feige Explain First Trailer Footage." Collider, June 10, 2017. https://collider.com/black-panther-trailer-explained-ryan-coogler-kevin-feige/.

Chrifi Alaoui, Fatima Zahrae, and Shadee Abdi. "Wakanda for Everyone: An Invitation to an African Muslim Perspective of Black Panther." *Review of Communication* 20, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 229–35. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2020.1778073.

D'Agostino, Anthony Michael. "'Who Are You?': Representation, Identification, and Self-Definition in *Black Panther*." *Safundi* 20, no. 1 (January 2, 2019): 1–4. https://doi.org/10.1080/17533171.2019.1552346.

Derry, Ken. "The Semi-Anti-Apocalypse of Black Panther." *The Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (2018).

Dessem, Matthew. "Black Athletes Have Started Celebrating Their Victories With the 'Wakanda Forever' Salute from Black Panther." Slate, March 11, 2018. https://slate.com/culture/2018/03/black-athletes-have-started-celebrating-their-victories-with-the-wakanda-forever-salute.html.

Faithful, George. "Dark of the World, Shine on Us: The Redemption of Blackness in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther." *Religions* 9, no. 10 (October 8, 2018): 304. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9100304.

Fleming, Mike. "'Black Panther' Director Ryan Coogler On Chadwick Boseman." Deadline, August 30, 2020. https://deadline.com/2020/08/black-panther-director-ryan-coogler-on-chadwick-boseman-black-panther-caretaker-a-leader-and-a-man-of-faith-dignity-and-pride-he-shielded-his-collaborators-from-his-suffering-1203027062/.

Francesco, Eric. "'Black Panther' Director Reveals the Origins of the Wakanda Salute." Inverse, May 15, 2018. https://www.inverse.com/article/44867-black-panther-wakanda-forever-salute-meaning.

Garside, Damian. "Ryan Coogler's Film Black Panther." *South African Review of Sociology* 49, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 107–10. https://doi.org/10.1080/21528586.2018.1532667.

Gill, Jon Ivan. "Ancestors Change Constantly: Subversive Religious Colonial Deconstruction in the Religion of Black Panther." *Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (April 2018).

González-Velázquez, Carlos Allende, Karen E. Shackleford, Lauren N. Keller, Cynthia Vinney, and Lawrence M. Drake. "Watching *Black Panther* with Racially Diverse Youth: Relationships between Film Viewing, Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, Empowerment, and Wellbeing." *Review of Communication* 20, no. 3 (July 2, 2020): 250–59. https://doi.org/10.1080/15358593.2020.1778067.

Haring, Bruce. "'Black Panther' Items To Be Displayed At Smithsonian African-American Museum." Deadline, June 21, 2018. https://deadline.com/2018/06/black-panther-items-to-be-displayed-at-smithsonian-african-american-museum-1202415299/.

Hornshaw, Phil, and Phil Owen. "'Black Panther': Could the Wakandan Ancestral Plane Have Something to Do With a Hidden Infinity Stone?" The Wrap, February 15, 2018. https://www.thewrap.com/black-panther-ancestral-plane/.

Hudlin, Reginald, John Romita, Klaus Janson, Dean White, Randy Gentile, Chris Eliopoulos, and Marvel Comics Group. *Who Is the Black Panther?*, 2015.

Ito, Robert. "Beyond 'Black Panther': Afrofuturism Is Booming in Comics." NY Times, February 7, 2021. https://www.nytimes.com/2021/02/07/books/afrofuturism-comics-graphic-novels.html.

Johnson, Abigail. "Cast of 'Black Panther' Announces $250,000 College Scholarship." CNBC Make It, December 8, 2018. https://www.cnbc.com/2018/12/07/cast-of-black-panther-announces-250000-college-scholarship.html.

Kara, Krystal. "Why Black Panther Matters." Green Left, March 22, 2018. https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/why-black-panther-matters.

Lebron, Christopher. "'Black Panther' Is Not the Movie We Deserve." Boston Review, February 17, 2018. http://bostonreview.net/race/christopher-lebron-black-panther.

Mock, Brentin. "Wakanda: The Chocolatest City." Bloomberg CityLab, February 16, 2018. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2018-02-16/wakanda-the-prototype-chocolate-city.

Morris, Lleuella. "To the Ancestral Plane: African Spiritism in Ryan Coogler's Black Panther (Marvel Studios, 2018) and the Desensitization to Spiritualism in Hollywood." *Africology: The Journal of Pan-African Studies* 11, no. 9 (August 2018).

Oyěwùmí, Oyèrónkẹ́. *The Invention of Women: Making an African Sense of Western Gender Discourses*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Pierce, Yolanda. "African Cosmologies: Spiritual Reflections on the 'Black Panther' Movie." Religion News Service, February 19, 2018. https://religionnews.com/2018/02/19/african-cosmologies-spiritual-reflections-on-the-black-panther-movie/.

Posada, Tim. "Afrofuturism, Power, and Marvel Comics's *Black Panther*." *The Journal of Popular Culture* 52, no. 3 (June 2019): 625–44. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.12805.

Robinson, Marsha, and Caryn Neumann. "On Coogler and Cole's Black Panther Film (2018): Global Perspectives, Reflections and Contexts for Educators." *The Journal of Pan African Studies* 11, no. 9 (August 2018): Introduction.

Salaudeen, Aisha. "R&B Singer Akon Is Building a 'real-Life Wakanda' Worth $6 Billion in Senegal." CNN, September 2, 2020. https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/akon-city-senegal-wakanda-intl/index.html.

Saunders, Robert A. "(Profitable) Imaginaries of Black Power: The Popular and Political Geographies of Black Panther." *Political Geography* 69 (March 2019): 139–49. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2018.12.010.

Trzebiatowska, Marta, and Steve Bruce. *Why Are Women More Religious than Men?* 1st ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.

Weekes, Princess. "How Killmonger's Misogyny Teaches Us About Western Patriarchy." The Mary Sue, February 22, 2018. https://www.themarysue.com/how-killmongers-misogyny-teaches-us-about-western-patriarchy/.

White, Renée T. "I Dream a World: *Black Panther* and the Re-Making of Blackness." *New Political Science* 40, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 421–27. https://doi.org/10.1080/07393148.2018.1449286.

Yamout, Dania. "The Cultural Impact of 'Black Panther.'" Medium, April 6, 2018. https://medium.com/@DaniaAtHome/the-cultural-impact-of-black-panther-80ad3afdea66.

Zwissler, Laurel. "Black Panther as Spirit Trip." *Journal of Religion and Film* 22, no. 1 (April 2018). 256.