

# Afrofuturism and Cultural Imperialism: Examining the Representation and Preservation of African Heritage in Film Abstract

Noah Ochieng' **Otiende** & Vimala **Perumal**

Faculty of Creative Multimedia, Multimedia University,  
63100 Cyberjaya, Selangor, Malaysia

\*Corresponding Author: [vimala.perumal@mmu.edu.my](mailto:vimala.perumal@mmu.edu.my)

## Abstract

This study investigates Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic that combines science fiction, history, and fantasy in order to envision the African diaspora's experiences and possible futures. While Afrofuturism is intended to reflect global Black culture, it often centers on African- American connections to speculative narratives, thereby narrowing its broader cultural scope. Focusing on Black Panther as a case study, this study analyzes the impact of cultural imperialism in Afrofuturistic film. This study explores the preservation, representation, and commodification of authentic African heritage in Afrofuturistic movies founded on Afrofuturist and Pan-Africanist theories by researchers like Eshun (2003), Dery (1994), Anderson and Jones (2015), and Mudimbe (1988), as well as futurist scholarship, such as Inayatullah (2008) and Sardar (2010). The study conducts a comparative thematic analysis of music, visual appeal, social and cultural framing, and language in Black Panther to examine how they contribute to the film's representation of an African identity. It tries to ascertain whether the representations adhere to or deviate from hegemonic discourses on Africa, hence asserting the tension between cultural preservation and commercialisation of identity fueled by Western forces. This analytic narrative suggests Afrofuturism serves a double function; It is both a means of

cultural recovery and a commercially viable genre which commands a wider global influence. This study, therefore, reflects on the wider significance of Afrofuturism for popular African cultural understandings outside Black Panther and in global contexts.

**Keywords:** Afrofuturism, film, Black Panther, cultural imperialism, ethnomusicology, Afrocentric, African diaspora

---

## Introduction

Hollywood has continued to dominate world cinema over the years with major production houses such as Warner Brothers, Fox, Universal, Walt Disney, Paramount and MGM among others at the forefront. (Kaur & Dobhal, 2022). In the years 2018 and 2022, the popular and captivating box office film, Black Panther, and its sequel, Black Panther 2, were released by the writer and director, Ryan Coogler. The story was set in the fictional African nation of Wakanda. (Coogler, 2018, 2022). A critical look at the film, Black Panther, highlights unique aesthetics that classify the film as an Afrofuturistic film, as it introduces Afrofuturism as a cultural aesthetic that seeks to address issues around black identity by connecting Africans to their forgotten ancestry by incorporating science fiction, history and fantasy. This genre has had a great impact in

Hollywood, as seen in the success of Black Panther (Sabu, 2023). More so, Black Panther set a record as the box office film with the highest gross income in 2018. Black Panther has been the most significant Afrofuturistic film of the decade for a long time. Since the day it was released, the phrases 'Wakanda Forever' has become a globally recognized slogan that represents African identity and pride (Faloyin, 2022)

(McGee & White, 2021). Issues around the interpretation and representation of African culture in Afrofuturistic films, continue to guide discussions within the film industry and among film critics around the world. The success of Black Panther was greatly drawn from Afrofuturism, a genre that features a range of artistic expressions including music, film, religion and literature. Therefore, in this study Black Panther is

reviewed based on its representation of African culture depicted in the film in different forms such as its visual form, symbols and signs, plot, music and regional dialects (Nbane, 2022).

### Literature review

Afrofuturism as art and cultural expression unites history, science fiction, and Africanity in an attempt to recreate Black identity and call forth other potential futures (Dery, 1994; Eshun, 2003). Black Panther has been the most influential Afrofuturistic film from the day it was produced recreating people's perception of African identity globally and restating the true identity of Africa (Faloyin, 2022). The film has generated controversy in cultural representation, most especially on the authenticity of its depiction of African culture, music, and language representation (Ngubane, 2022). Despite being a celebration of African culture, Black Panther has been criticized and labelled a Hollywood film based on Western interests for economic purposes (McGee & White, 2021). It has generated controversy regarding cultural imperialism and who owns African narratives in global media.

Faloyin (2022) criticizes Black Panther's influence on African identity in the

continent and diaspora, while.

Washington (2020) examines how the film is symptomatic of Pan-Africanism and African American identity crises. Furthermore, Razak (2021) examines the intersection of the film with decolonial imaginaries and also tries to ascertain whether the film presents a revolutionary or reaffirming imagining of African identity. Assumptions form the premise for an argument regarding the representation of African culture through its musicality, language practice, and social space in the film.

In addition, music and language are utilized by artists in constructing the Afrofuturistic world of Black Panther. The film appropriates various African languages, including isiXhosa, in its construction of authenticity, though others suggest that such an appropriation is an aesthetic matter rather than a qualitative engagement with the linguistic richness of Africa (Ngubane, 2022). Similarly, its soundtrack incorporates African sound and Western sensibilities to spark controversy surrounding the commodification of African soundscapes within international media (Sabu, 2023). Grounded on these arguments, this research utilizes comparative thematic analysis to explore

how Black Panther's linguistic and musical mobilization builds its African identity and Hollywood's larger narrative of Afrofuturism.

Afrofuturism, cultural imperialism, and ethnomusicology are the theories of context supporting the Afrofuturistic film debate. Afrofuturism is a movement that uses science fiction, fantasy, and history to describe Black identity and reappropriate African heritage (Sinha, 2023). Afrofuturism is an interdisciplinary field encompassing literature, film, photography, music, performing arts, and visual arts. It serves as a space for Black liberation, empowered by science and technology and deeply rooted in African cultural elements. Black Panther (2018), Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022), and The Woman King (2022) are also Afrofuturistic works based on unfulfilled African society and concepts of kingship, heritage, language, and music (Bythewood, 2022; Coogler, 2018, 2022).

Ethnomusicology, which examines music within its social and cultural context, is committed to the authenticity of sound studies in African traditions.

Ethnomusicology examines music making, performing, and listening within the African community and is central to

Afrofuturism as it examines how African musical thinking forms identity and counter-narratives (Nettl, 2015). Black Panther is ethnomusicological in its music and sound, in that the African instruments are combined with contemporary soundscapes, in an attempt to strike a balance between the issues of commodification and authenticity of African music in Hollywood.

Cultural imperialism, one of the theories, explains the prevalence of Western values above non-Western worlds due to its ability to stagnate the native culture. Western cultures have infiltrated Africa and all other minority cultures across centuries via colonization, globalization, and media distribution (Chen & Shen, 2021). Afrofuturist films, like Black Panther, are counter-hegemonic cultural imperialist given their commitment to cultural reclamation of African racial heritage and prefiguring other futures beyond Western hegemony. Others suggest that Black Panther does not subvert the Hollywood market framework, and is incapable of resisting Western hegemony effectively (McGee & White, 2021).

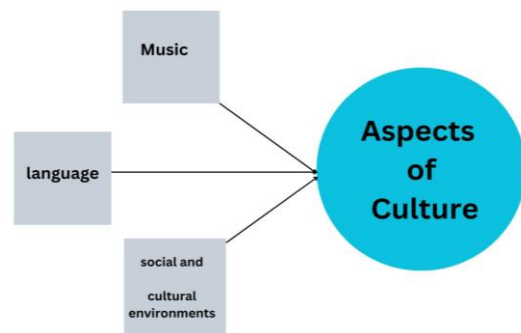
Afrofuturist cinema is a vehicle for African and African diaspora publics to envision a future that is respectful of

their culture, and on the other hand, provide them the platform to challenge cultural imperialism, and hegemonic resistant representation. Ethnomusicology finds voice through the examination of ideas and practices whereby music operates in cultural identity and resistance. The both of them (Afrofuturist cinema and ethnomusicology) contribute to the existing literature on representation, empowerment, and preservation of culture as regards the lives of Africans and the African diaspora and makes Black Panther an apt case study to further scrutinize elements of Afrofuturism, and representation of African identities in the global context (Chen & Shen, 2021; Nettl, 2015; Sabu, 2023; Sinha, 2023)

### Methodology

This study employs comparative thematic analysis in its comparison between the Black Panther (2018), Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022), and The Woman King (2022) based on the representation of African identity within Afrofuturistic cinema. This study deals with three broad lines of culture: music, language, and social and cultural contexts [Fig. 1]. With this, this article challenges the authenticity of the representation of African culture in Black Panther or tries

to ascertain whether Westernized mentality is the real. There is a map of themes that categorizes cultural objectification imported on screen in the movie and how African processes of music, language, and visibility create, or potentially deconstruct African identity. This question relies a bit more on recent scholarship in Afrofuturism, cultural imperialism, and ethnomusicology to situate the film.



**Fig 1. Afrofuturistic Cultural Representation Framework**

For conducting balanced research, comparative secondary resources and content analysis are carried out. Black Panther has been employed as the case study as it is immensely popular and is globally recognized as an extremely powerful, successful Afrofuturistic world film of African origin in speculative fiction.

### 3.1 Data analysis

This research explores specific representations in the use of African sound and indigenous languages, such as isiXhosa, and how effectively they capture culture. From academic works such as: *Africa Is Not a Country* (Faloyin, 2022); *You Act Like a Th'owed Away Child: Black Panther, Killmonger, and Pan-Africanist African American Identity* (Washington, 2020); *Decolonial Imaginings in Black Panther* (Razak, 2021), this study examines the amount of scholarly attention devoted to the representation of African identity in some capacity in the film project. Based on the gap found from the existing literature on film studies, this study offers an in-depth examination of Black Panther within the Afrofuturistic online intellectual and cultural space.

### Discussions

#### African culture and values in Afrofuturistic films

Culture is regarded as a fundamental concept by anthropologists that involves the social learning of human society. Human behaviour, social norms, types of expressive culture like art, music, rituals,

dance and religion, and the ways in which technology is used, e.g. use of tools, housing, cooking and clothing, are cultural universals which are found in all human societies. Culture has two forms: material and immaterial. Material culture (material components) is the physical expression through which a society identifies its culture: for example, schools, religious institutions, neighbourhoods, buildings, and art. Immaterial culture (immaterial components), as it is referred to as the intangible cultural heritage of a society, includes moral codes, music, beliefs, languages, values, principles of social organization, philosophy, literature and science (Macionis et al., 2020). The aforementioned Black Panther and its sequel, Black Panther 2, by writer/director Ryan Coogler, specifically illustrate the inclusion of intangible aspects of African culture in film production processes. They place the narrative within the confines of an imaginary African nation called Wakanda, taking aspects of a myriad of rich African cultural forms like music, language, and attire to represent the entirety of the African cultural values [Fig.2] (Coogler, 2018, 2022).



**Figure 2. Visual aesthetics (Becker, D., 2019).**

African culture today is an amalgamation of tradition and modernity as well as communalism, oral culture, spirituality, and multiculturalism. Folk drumming of Afrobeats is part of African cultural identity, and more than 2,000 spoken languages also reflect the richness of its cultural heritage. Indigenous religions are also part of the values that shape African identity (Izu, 2024). In an attempt to embrace African heritage, Black Panther loses the depth and richness of its existence. Wakanda synthesizes a sequence of African looks without historical particularity. Making isiXhosa its national language ignores Africa's linguistic diversity, hence advancing monolithic representation of Africa. The soundtrack, which is a blend of African tunes and Western orchestral music, also

contributes to its unauthenticity. However, the film prioritizes futuristic spectacle over the philosophical and communal aspirations of inherent African cultures. Hence, it imagines a vision more Western than full on true representation (Babayi et al., 2020).

According to Faloyin (2022), Black Panther has been praised for using African languages, namely isiXhosa, in making Wakanda's identity authentic. The film's refusal to compromise on African accents was also appreciated for a departure from Hollywood's centuries long tradition of suppressing indigenous speech patterns. Critics argue that the representation in language is not comprehensive enough since labelling Wakanda's national language as merely



isiXhosa overlooks Africa's own breathtaking linguistic diversity (McGee & White, 2021). Besides, even with such a huge amount of money spent on the movie, less time was spent on more specific language research and development, hence exploiting instead the broader, pan-African gaze than culturally specific imagery (Razak, 2021). This speaks well to existing frictions between commerciality and authenticity in Afrofuturistic narrative (Babayi et al., 2020).

### **Afrofuturism and Afrofuturistic films**

In 1994, Mark Dery coined the term "Afrofuturism" in his essay "Black to the Future." He defines the philosophy as "speculative fiction that addresses African American themes and concerns within the context of twentieth-century techno-culture. More broadly, it encompasses African-American cultural expression that appropriates images of

technology and envisions a future enhanced by prosthetics. For lack of a better term, this can be called Afrofuturism" (Dery, 1994). Dery's framework prepared the stage for later theorists like Kodwo Eshun. In his 2003

work, the Afrofuturist conversation was expanded by emphasizing the radical potential of rethinking African identity within the context of futuristic aesthetics and narratives. Eshun in 2003, viewed Afrofuturism as a means of challenging Western-dominated perspectives on history and progress, offering an alternative, African-centric vision of the future. He argued that African peoples, historically excluded from dominant narratives of progress, could reclaim their futures by embracing new technologies, space, and digital culture. When it comes to the genre of Afrofuturism, European societies use science, fiction and fantasy to build their thoughts and feelings around the race of others' culture[Fig 3]. This contributed to the creation of the Afrofuturism genre that focuses on past and present challenges at the same time reimagining futures created from African cultural experiences (Sabu, 2023).

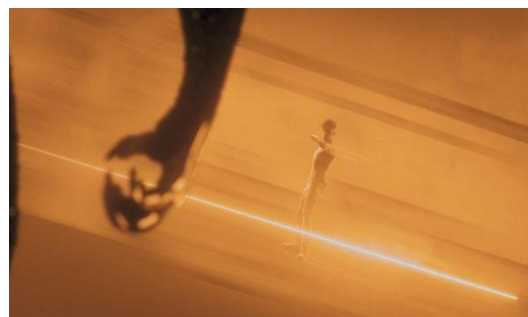




Figure 3. Cultural symbols (Cheisserer, 2018)

Key thinkers in this space, such as Mudimbe (1988), have explored how colonial legacies have shaped African consciousness and identity. Mudimbe's work, particularly "The Invention of Africa", questions how the West has historically constructed African identities and proposes a decolonization of African knowledge systems. His critique aligns with the broader Pan-Africanist goal of reclaiming African agency and self-determination in the global sphere.

In more contemporary discussions, Anderson and Jones (2015) extend the Pan-Africanist discourse by exploring how new global dynamics, for example, the rise of digital economies, the spread of neoliberal ideologies, and how shifting geopolitical power structures affect African nations. They suggested that Pan-Africanism must adapt to these changes by embracing more inclusive and flexible frameworks that account for the diversity and complexity of African experiences globally. While Afrofuturism and Pan-Africanism offer distinct perspectives, both share a common interest in reclaiming African identity and reshaping African futures. Moreso, futurists such as

Inayatullah (2008), Sardar (2009), and Gatune (2010; 2011) provide useful frameworks for integrating these two ideologies into a cohesive vision for the future of Africa and its global diaspora. Inayatullah's approach to future studies emphasizes the importance of decolonizing the future and imagining alternative futures for non-Western societies and resonates strongly with both Afrofuturist and Pan-Africanist thought. He advocates for pluralistic futures, where diverse cultures, knowledge systems, and ways of being coexist and flourish. For African nations, this involves shifting away from Western-centric models of progress and development, and embracing futures grounded in African values, history, and aspirations. Afrofuturism often explores the relationship between black people and technology, challenging the exclusion of black voices from technological and futuristic narratives. Films like 'Sorry to Bother You' (2018) and 'Fast Color' (2018) explore speculative futures where technology and supernatural elements intersect with black experiences. These films challenge conventional representations of blackness in science fiction and open up new possibilities for imagining the future. It also explores the

incorporation of black culture and history into narratives that have, over the years, been dominated by a white centered approach. This has enabled music, literature and other forms of art to be used as transformative tools. (Wallace & Schwartz, 2022).

Afrofuturism is therefore a movement composed of musicians, authors and artists of African American, African and Black diasporic race. Afrofuturism covers a wide range of creative arts, including music, photography, literature, performance and visual art that contribute to black liberation, identity and aspirations (Sinha, 2023). The movie *Black Panther* plays a significant role in functioning as a cultural monument by highlighting the idea of Afrofuturism. It, however, introduces another perspective within Afrofuturism on how representation through music and language may either succeed or fail. (Robinson et al., 2018).

It must be mentioned that *Black Panther*, as an Afrofuturistic Film, has gained a lot of recognition for a futuristic representation of Africa for Africans, at the same time presenting an opportunity for the director to prioritize the black narrative. Even though the director of

*Black Panther* visited Kenya, South Africa and the Kingdom of Lesotho, the greatest challenge within the Afrofuturistic film *Black Panther* is its limited connection to the African content (Pietilä, 2022). It instead focuses on global black culture, particularly African American ties to science, fiction and fantasy. (Golubits, 2020). It is therefore crucial to recognize that the conservation and advancement of Africa's cultural continuity has to be an African endeavor. Diasporic Africans contribute significantly to literature, music, cinema, and activism, where they occasionally collaborate with individuals on the continent in trying to bridge the historical divides created by slavery and colonialism. While African storytellers are occupied with creating stories that reflect present realities, heritage, and expectations, Afrofuturistic fiction stands out as an exception (Thondhlana & Garwe, 2021). Obstacles in the form of poor technology infrastructure, financial constraints, and undeveloped creative and film industries stand in the way of embracing new technologies as a method of telling stories. Nonetheless, African creatives will not be deterred, redefining representation and claiming ownership of their stories. If this will be resisted or not pursued, cultural imperialism will further

dominate the film industry in the future (Kala 2023). This decision seems like the perfect first step for Africans to represent themselves as history tellers by not only being assertive but also being part of the input rather than considering themselves as spectators and thus marginalized throughout existence (Smith & Asante, 2023). In conclusion, Afrofuturism was created from the feelings of oppression, thereby causing the African diaspora to reimagine its future. It can be described as a deliberate movement for black liberation (Brooks, 2018). Afrofuturistic films over the years have had a notable influence on both popular culture and academic discourse. They have provided a platform for black creators to tell their stories in unique and innovative ways. These films challenge dominant cultural narratives and offer new perspectives on the future, often presenting alternative histories and speculative futures that center on black experiences. By doing so, they expand the possibilities for what blackness can look like in the realm of science fiction and fantasy (Womack, 2013).

### **Cultural imperialism**

Cultural imperialism refers to the domination of one culture over another. It most often occurs through cultural

product and practice diffusion. It has been one of the primary drivers of globalization where dominant nations and cultures overpower weaker cultures. Year by year, gradual domination on the cultural front has been felt. The Hollywood majors, or the "majors" have been one of the primary drivers of cultural imperialism processes (Chen & Shen 2021). This has resulted in non-Western cultures, especially from developing continents in Africa, experiencing a loss of traditional values and cultural identities (Chen & Shen, 2021). The average Black Panther viewer may not know that the language spoken in the film is isiXhosa, which is a South African language, or that some of the garments, such as the Kente cloth, are Ghanaian (Ray, 2024). Although the continent of Africa contains more than 50 geographically or culturally different countries, the representation could imply that their cultures are universal and can be exchanged. Profit-driven emphasis at the cost of direct engagement with African socio-political issues is a colossal problem with the real representation of African cultures from the Western point of view (Viljoen, 2023). The history of cultural imperialism and past colonial expansion has contributed to debasing

and eventually erasing the cultures and heritage of Africa. However, in this research, it is shown that Africans in their homeland as well as diaspora communities are actively engaging to reconnect and relearn African heritage and identity via creative media modes such as literature, music, film, and visual arts. Writing of their own contributes to transnationally recording and remembering African identities. Original African identities in relational values, religion, music, food, dress, language, and communal living still find themselves being less and less valued and brought to a lower level in the current world in comparison to European and Western culture, and thus are slowly going extinct (Oko & Ogbodo, 2022).

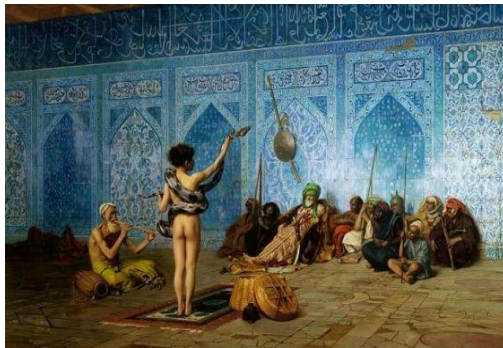


Figure. 4. Cultural imperialism pictorial view (Kazemzadeh, 2020)

According to one study of Nollywood, Africa's largest movie industry, foreign films were more popular than locally produced films (Akpabio & Mustapha, 2008). The reason given by the locals as the primary reason was that they did not like the local films. Nollywood has also come under fire in its portrayal of African society amid claims that the industry perpetuates stereotypes or creates sensationalized and, in some ways, fictionalized accounts of tradition and societal ills (Adesokan, 2011). Now, over a decade later, the implications of cultural imperialism are still relevant to filmmakers and third-world audiences who are still second-class. Globalization has upped the ante, enabling this battle to/invest in all possible vehicles –

business interests, the internet, and film. A globalized world implies a faster rate of transmission of culture across regions, nations, and societies. Yet adaptation of Afrofuturistic films from African culture and recreation within the framework of American cultural imperialism and transforming the artwork into destruction present in the original artwork of the native African culture[Fig. 3] (Chen & Shen, 2021).

### Influence of cultural imperialism

The origins of cultural imperialism date back to the period of colonialism and the expansion of European empires. In the colonial era, European powers enforced their languages, religions, and cultural norms on the populations they colonized, frequently eroding and displacing indigenous cultures and traditions. This cultural dominance was not only a means of control but also a way of asserting the superiority of the colonizers' culture (Stuchtey, 2011). In the 20th century, the concept of cultural imperialism evolved to include the influence of global media and the cultural industries. The cinema, television, and later, the internet, emergence allowed for the widespread dissemination of cultural products. Hollywood films, American television shows, and Western music became global phenomena, often overshadowing local cultural productions. This phenomenon raised concerns about the erosion of local cultures and the loss of cultural diversity. Cultural imperialism operates through various mechanisms, including media, consumerism, and language (Thompson, 2022). These mechanisms facilitate the spread of dominant cultural values and practices, often at the expense of local traditions. For example, the global media and entertainment industry is dominated

by Western companies, and these play a crucial role in cultural imperialism. Hollywood films, American television shows and Western music are consumed globally, which has thus become a standard for entertainment. This dominance has led to the marginalization of local media productions and the adoption of Western norms and values. As a result, the impacts of cultural imperialism are complex and multifaceted. While it can lead to the spread of new ideas and innovations, it can also result in cultural homogenization and the marginalization of local cultures as cultural imperialism often manifests in the representation of African culture through a Western lens, leading to the exoticization and commodification of African elements, thereby stripping of their original context and repackaged for Western consumption (Thomas, 2024). For instance, Afrofuturist films like *African spirituality in Black Panther* (2018 & 2022) in 'the Ancestral Plane', is a vision of African ancestor worship. *The Woman King* (2022) portrays Vodun rituals of Dahomey, and *Neptune Frost* (2021); it combines technology and African spirituality, e.g., ancestral energy and symbolic numerology. Nnedi Okorafor's Africanfuturist novels, e.g.,

'Who Fears Death?', also explore how divination and magical powers of African culture can sometimes be sensationalized, aligning with Western notions of mysticism rather than accurately reflecting cultural significance (Williams, 2023; Jackson, 2022).

### **Ethnomusicology**

The discourse on ethnomusicological accuracy, initiated by Black Panther, emerged for analysis in the context of how an original music score, typical of Hollywood practice, was employed in a film that incorporated various cultural aesthetic elements (Aynalem, 2018). The fictional setting of Wakanda is supported by a Western orchestral score, which immediately highlights the contrast and imbalance in cultural representation (Ngubane, 2022). Black Panther consists of both traditional African music written by Kendrick Lamar, as well as an orchestral score composed by Ludwig Goransson. According to Slobin (2009), it is termed as 'superculture', the dominant, mainstream use of music in film.

The Black Panther replicates this by adopting orchestral music, which is also a wrong depiction of the African cultures. Globalization is also responsible for this in that it exposes African artists to other

cultural milieu which results in their adopting foreign elements such as orchestral, jazz and pop into native music. This is facilitated by cross-cultural conversation, marketability, and, coincidentally, the popularity of the music sector, with the Western genres taking the lead (Ngubane, 2022). A very apt example of this was the Beyoncé Black Is King album that featured African artists like Burna Boy, Shatta Wale, and Wizkid.

The album harmonized Afrobeat, African traditional percussion, and contemporary global sound in the best way possible, representing a truer African genre of musical storytelling (Abumere, 2019). "Africa is a Continent, not a Country", a book published in 2013 by Okoro, mentions that the Western world sees Africa as one large country despite the fact that it is a continent made up of 54 independent countries, with unique cultural backgrounds. This mindset encourages super cultural film music practice as seen in Goransson's approach in the film Black Panther. There is no effort to achieve ethnomusicological accuracy as the music is not in any way related to the actual music of the represented cultures in the film. The soundtracks replace, displace and erase

the ethnomusicology of the individuals and groups they try to represent in the film (Genius, 2019). Based on the theory documentation paradigm within ethnomusicology, film and video are treated as a form of documentation in support of culture and heritage. It states that original musical performance and sounds carry a fundamental value for the audience, regardless of the technical challenges encountered during recording. The approach discourages the manipulation of field-recorded sounds during the filmmaking process, emphasizing the importance of preserving the authenticity and integrity of the original soundscapes. This perspective values the raw, unaltered qualities of music and sound, which are seen as essential in conveying cultural authenticity to the audience (Norton, 2021). Authorship and collaborations between the Western music composers and local experts from Africa who participate in improvisation and composition of the music are other underlying issues within Afrofuturistic films. The films project the Western music composers as the sole composers, which constitutes a hindrance to ethnomusicological accuracy (Ngubane, 2022). Ludwig Goransson, the music

composer in the film *Black Panther*, did a spectacular job, leading to an Academy Award. He had a great intention of traveling to Africa to study the native African music and instruments. However, his compositions reflect the popular blockbuster film's depiction of Africa based on Western ideologies. Adaptation of traditional materials and practices into a new context needs one to be intentional, otherwise issues around representation and ethics may arise (Coogler, 2018, 2022).

Baaba Maal's work on *Black Panther* is heard on some of the most intense scenes of the film, and further so when T'Challa shows up in Wakanda. He is featured on *Wakanda*, which is the first official *Black Panther* single by Ludwig Göransson. It is one of the songs, along with a number of others from within the score, that serves to identify Wakanda's sound persona. However, the introduction of a disjointed Western orchestra or choir singing in isiXhosa presents issues of misrepresentation (Ngubane, 2022).

### **Preservation of African cultural heritage**

Afrofuturistic films draw rapidly from African cultural heritage, including traditional music, folklore, fashion, and spiritual practices. Preserving these



elements is significant to maintaining the originality in order to honor the diverse cultures of the continent (Okafor, 2024). For example, films like Black Panther showcase a rich tapestry of African aesthetics, from the use of isiXhosa as the main Wakanda language to the incorporation of African traditional attire and jewellery. Such depictions not only serve as an African heritage celebration but also as a method of preserving these elements within a modern context (Smith, 2021). Preservation of African cultural heritage in Afrofuturistic films is strongly contested. The general critique of the "aesthetic of the poor-stricken African child" of foreign media is an example of the issue of misrepresentation. Additionally, the need to attract an international audience tends to result in dilution or oversimplification of Africa's complex and varied cultural narratives.

This can result in a "Hollywoodization" of African culture, where elements are adapted to suit Western sensibilities, thereby risking the loss of cultural authenticity. In addition, the scarcity of African filmmakers in mainstream Afrofuturistic cinema can further complicate authentic representation, as non-African directors may lack the

nuanced understanding required to accurately depict these cultures (Brown, 2023).

### **Representation in Afrofuturistic films**

Representation in Afrofuturistic films is known to be diverse and captures a wide array of African identities and experiences. The genre challenges conventional narratives and offers a platform to question and reshape the stereotypical portrayals of Africa commonly seen in mainstream media. These portrayals typically depict Africa as a homogeneous entity plagued by poverty, conflict and underdevelopment. Afrofuturism, however, reimagines Africa and its diaspora, offering narratives that celebrate technological innovation, cultural richness, and complex histories. Films like 'Sorry to Bother You' and 'Get Out' extend this representation to African American experiences, blending Afrofuturistic themes with contemporary social issues (Green, 2024).

### **Marketability of African cultural heritage**

The marketability of Afrofuturistic films is closely tied to their ability to resonate with both Africans in Africa, the Africans in diaspora and international audiences. The commercial success of Black Panther highlighted the global appetite for stories

centered on African heritage. This success has led to a growing interest in Afrofuturistic narratives, encouraging more filmmakers to explore the genre (Davis, 2023). However, the need to ensure commercial viability can conflict with the goal of preserving cultural authenticity. Filmmakers often face the dilemma of representing African values accurately or distorting them to attract a broader audience. Individuals and institutions such as film studios, producers, and distributors play a significant role in shaping the representation and marketability of African cultural heritage in Afrofuturistic films. These gatekeepers often have the power to decide which stories get told and how they are presented, thus influencing the extent to which cultural imperialism permeates the genre (Jones, 2022; Thomas, 2023). The prioritization of profit over cultural integrity can lead to a homogenization of Afrofuturistic narratives, undermining the diversity of African experiences. While these gatekeepers can facilitate the spread and success of these films, they also exert influence over the content and portrayal of African cultural elements, aligning them with Western expectations and market demands. But, independent

productions and the rise of digital platforms are creating new opportunities for diverse and authentic Afrofuturistic storytelling, challenging the dominance of cultural imperialism in the genre (Lewis, 2023).

### Conclusion

Projecting the Black identity within Afrofuturistic film, like we are doing here, is an opportunity to introduce the real core elements of culture into the commercial film. Although films like Black Panther try to truly represent the African cultures – language, music, and appearance – they can't escape the limitation of including all the complexity, vibrancy and variety of African cultures. A Western-dominating body of literature offers space for misrepresentations of culture because stereotypes dominate, rather than open up to a multicultural view of African societies. If there is any hope of correcting such imbalances, it lies with the producers of the films who will have to re-appropriate their histories. Particularly, it will mean prioritizing the chronological history of Africa, the African indigenous languages, and the African indigenous music in the filmmaking process. This can be achieved through the collective efforts of African global co-venture and investment, as well

as knowledge sharing of filmmaking, in order to maintain the core depiction of African identity in their film production. To achieve this, Afrofuturistic movies must truly portray African identity. The adage, "If something is lost, we first look for it at home," resonates with the reality

that preservation of culture has to start with Africans. Hence, Afrofuturistic movies can be a means through which Africans can recreate their futures by foregrounding their historical facts and, projecting respect for their cultures, and artistic dignity.

## ORCID

Noah Ochieng' Otiende: Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/0009-0007-9044-5212>

Vimala Perumal: Orcid number: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9263-8049>

## References

- Abumere, P. I. (2019, July 29). Beyoncé champions African music stars with Lion King soundtrack. BBC Africa.
- Adesokan, A. (2011). *Postcolonial artists and global aesthetics: Nollywood, popular culture, and the African identity*. Indiana University Press.
- Akpabio, E., & Mustapha, L. K. (2008). Nollywood films and the cultural imperialism hypothesis. *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, 7(3-4), 259-270.
- Anderson, R. & Jones, C. (2015). *Introduction: Afrofuturism 2.0: The rise of Afro-Blackness*. Lexington Books.
- Aynalem, W. (2018). *Ethnomusicological accuracy in Black Panther: An analysis of film scoring and cultural representation*.

- Babayi, I., Dowling, T., & Possa-Mogoera, R. (2020). The language of Wakanda: An analysis of the use of isiXhosa in the Hollywood science-fiction film Black Panther. South African. *Journal of African Languages*, 40(3), 249-256.
- Brooks, K. (2018). Afrofuturism and the struggle for black liberation: Reimagining the future through speculative narratives. *Journal of Black Studies*, 49(6), 567-584.
- Brown, T. (2023). *The challenges of authentic representation in Afrofuturistic Cinema*.
- Bythewood, G. P. (Producer: Cathy Schulman, Viola Davis, Julius Tennon, and Maria Bello), (2022). *The woman king* [Video recording]. TriStar Pictures, eOne, JuVee Productions.
- Cheisserer, L. (2018). Cultural symbols in Afrofuturism: Representation and meaning. *The Journal of African Aesthetics*, 12(3), 78-91.
- Chen, X., & Shen, S. (January , 2021). Review of the impact of cultural imperialism in the context of globalization to the film industry [Conference session]. 2nd International Conference on Language, Art and Cultural Exchange (ICLACE 2021). <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210609.041>
- Feige, K. & Grant D.J. (Producer). (2018). *Black panther* [Video recording]. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Feige, K. & Grant D.J.(Producer). (2022). *Black panther* [Video recording]. Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures.
- Davis, L. (2023). Afrofuturism in cinema: Market trends and audience reception. *Journal of Contemporary Film*, 12(2), 78-92.
- Dery, M. (1994). Black to the future: Interviews with Samuel R. Delany, Greg Tate, and Tricia Rose. Flame wars: *The discourse of cyberculture*, 179-222. Duke University Press.ISBN: 0822315408
- Faloyin, D. (2022). *Africa is not a country: Breaking stereotypes of modern Africa*. W. W. Norton & Company.

- Gatune, J., & Najam, A. (2011). Africa 2060: What could be driving the good news from Africa? *Foresight*, 13(3), 100-110.
- Genius. (2019). *The impact of film soundtracks on cultural representation and ethnomusicology*.
- Golubics, E. (2020). Popular media and its ability to (re)form perceptions about Africa and blackness: Black Panther. *Hungarian Journal of African Studies*, 14(6), 76–87.
- Green, M. (2024). Afrofuturism and its impact on film: A study of representation and identity. *Film Studies Quarterly*, 58(1), 112-130.
- Green, M. (2024). Afrofuturism in contemporary cinema: Social commentary in 'sorry to bother you' and 'get out'.
- Inayatullah, S. (2008). Six pillars: Futures thinking for transforming. *Foresight*, 10(1), 4-21.
- Izu, B. (2024). *The impact of oral traditions on African indigenous musical practices: A systematic literature review*. Nelson Mandela University
- Jones, A. (2022). Cultural authenticity vs. commercial viability in Afrofuturistic cinema. *Journal of Global Media Studies*, 15(3), 45-60.
- Kala, E. S. M. (2023). Challenges of technology in African countries: A case study of Zambia. *Open Journal of Safety Science and Technology*, 13(04):202-230
- Kaur, B., & Dobhal, S. (2022). "Factors influencing the success of Hollywood movies: An analysis of profitability and gross income ". *Effulgence-A Management Journal*, 20(2), 32-41.
- Lewis, A. (2023). Cultural imperialism and Afrofuturism: The battle for authentic narratives. *Global Media Review*, 21(2), 56-72.
- Lewis, A. (2023). *Independent Afrofuturistic storytelling and the disruption of cultural imperialism*.

- Macionis, J. J., Gerber, L. M., & Johnstone, J. (2020). *Sociology*. Pearson Canada.
- McGee, P., & White, J. (2021). Black Panther and the limits of Afrofuturism: Representation, identity, and Western influence. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 13(2), 145-162.
- McGee, P., & White, T. (2021). *Hollywood's Africa: Representation, identity, and global influence*. Oxford University Press.
- Mudimbe, V. Y. (1988). *The invention of Africa: Gnosis, philosophy, and the order of knowledge*. Indiana University Press.
- Nettl, B. (2015). *The study of ethnomusicology: Thirty-three discussions*. University of Illinois Press.
- Ngubane, N. (2022). Killmonger: scoring modes and representation in Black Panther. *Image & Text*, 36, 1-14.
- Ngubane, T. (2022). *Orchestral contrasts: The cultural imbalance in Black Panther's score*.
- Norton, P. (2021). *The role of authentic sound in cultural representation through music*.
- Okafor, A. Y. (2024). A journey through time: Exploring Afro-futurism and Igbo cultural heritage in elementary education. *Forum for Education Studies* 2(4):1552 <https://doi.org/10.59400/fes.v2i4.1552>.
- Oko, S., & Ogbodo, C. (2022). *Cultural imperialism and the decline of African heritage*.
- Pietilä, T. (2022). Basotho blankets: Ownership and appropriation. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*.
- Ray, S. (2024). *Representation of African culture in Black Panther: A critical analysis*.
- Razak, A. (2021). *Panther, killmonger, and Pan-Africanist African American identity*.
- Robinson, M. R., Neumann, C., Coogler, R., & Robert, J. (2018). Introduction: On Coogler and Cole's Black Panther Film: Global perspectives, reflections and

- 
- contexts for educators. *In Africology: The Journal of Pan African Studies*.  
<http://www.jpanafrican.org/docs/vol11no9/11.9-special-1-Robinson.pdf>
- Sabu, L. (2023). Hollywood and the advent of Afrofuturism: A critical study of Black Power and cultural aesthetics in Black Panther. *International Journal For Multidisciplinary Research*. (Vol. 5, No. 2)  
<https://doi.org/10.36948/ijfmr.2023.v05i02.1759>
- Sardar, Z. (2010). Welcome to postnormal times. *Futures*, 42(5), 435-444.
- Sinha, R. (2023). *Afrofuturism: Reclaiming Black Identity Through Science Fiction and Fantasy*.
- Smith, J. (2021). Afrofuturism in film: Cultural heritage and modern contexts. *Film Studies Journal*, 45(2), 123-145.
- Smith, J., & Asante, M. K. (2023). Decolonizing African narratives: The role of self-representation in film and media. *Journal of African Media Studies*, 15(1), 78-94.
- Stuchtey, B (24, Jan 2011) Colonialism and imperialism, 1450–1950. [://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/colonialism-and-imperialism](http://www.ieg-ego.eu/en/threads/backgrounds/colonialism-and-imperialism)
- Thomas, R. (2023). Cultural gatekeepers and Afrofuturism: Navigating authenticity and marketability. *Cultural Studies Journal*, 27(1), 113-127.
- Thomas, R. (2024). *Africa through the lens of Western media: A call for genuine representation*. University of Ibadan.
- Thompson, L. (2022). *The mechanisms of cultural imperialism: Media, consumerism, and language*.
- Thondhlana, J., & Garwe, E. C. (Eds.). (2021). Repositioning of Africa in knowledge production: Shaking off historical stigmas. *Journal of the British Academy*, 9(1). 17(pp. 1-17) Viljoen, J. (2023). *The commercialization of African identity in Western media*.



- Wallace, B. D., & Schwartz, J. W. (2022). Afrofuturism: Race, erasure, and COVID. *Radical Teacher*, Volume 122, Issue 1, pp. 1–12.
- Washington, D. (2020). *Africa is not a country: Breaking stereotypes of modern Africa*. PublicAffairs.
- Washington, H. (2020). *You act like a th'owed away child: Black Panther, Killmonger, and Pan-Africanist African America*. The South African Journal of African Languages.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336090566\\_You\\_act\\_like\\_a\\_th'owed\\_away\\_child\\_Black\\_Panther\\_Killmonger\\_and\\_Pan-Africanist\\_African-American\\_identity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/336090566_You_act_like_a_th'owed_away_child_Black_Panther_Killmonger_and_Pan-Africanist_African-American_identity). <https://doi.org/10.17159/2617-3255/2018/n33a6>
- Williams, D. (2023). *Africanfuturism vs. Afrofuturism: Authenticity in Representation of African Spirituality*.
- Ytasha L. W. (2013). *Afrofuturism: The World of Black Sci-Fi and Fantasy Culture*: Lawrence Hill Books