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RELIGION AS IDEOLOGY IN BLACK PANTHER:
A DECOLONIAL IDEOLOGICAL CRITIQUE OF 'RELIGIO-POLITICAL
PROBLEM' IN WAKANDA

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Abstract: This article advances a decolonial ideological critique of religion as a state ideological apparatus for advancing political authority and control of strategic resources in Black Panther movie. It argues that the kind of religious matrix which informs Wakanda begs critical interrogation as to how the fictitious nation portrays the role of African religious heritage in contemporary neo-colonial politics. On the one hand, Black Panther sought to overcome the dichotomy between modern scientific and African spiritual technologies by presenting religious heritage as decidedly adaptable and integrate-able with emerging scientific ideas. On the other hand, the movie failed to rethink problematic elements of African religious heritage which are perpetuated in most contemporary African democratic dictator regimes. Black Panther's uncritical retrieval and indiscriminate utilisation of African religious systems undermined its potential to reimage and alternatively demonstrate how African religio-cultural heritage could be reinterpreted and critically reconstructed in order to respond effectively to the challenges emerging from the fourth industrial revolution. It remains that Black Panther did not engage adequately with African religions as a resource for promoting African agency to give Africans impetus for social and political transformation and development in postcolonial Africa.

Key words: Black Panther, Wakanda, African Religious Heritage, Decolonial Ideological Criticism, Ideological State Apparatus, Neo-colonial Politics.

1. Introduction

The portrayal and utilisation of African traditional religio-cultural imaginations in Black Panther, presents what Leo Strauss (1997) classified as a “theologico-political problem”. The problem is primarily one about how religion is represented and utilised as state apparatus in Wakandan politics and history. The ways in which religion is utilised as a system of ideas for justifying and legitimatising monarchical authority of the Panther clan. How religion is connected to controlling critical technological resources and political history in Wakanda. What that says about the function of religion in Black Panther’s Wakandan politics. Can Black Panther’s presentation of African religions promote alternative role of religion as life-giving for promotion of the common good? In what ways can a decolonial ideological analytical tool help to unmask hidden religious texts within which religion serves as Wakanda’s ideological apparatus, for the sake of monarchical legitimization?

These critical concerns animate much of the discussion of Black Panther as *locus* for struggle over meaning and knowledge formation and formulation informed by what is depicted as African religio-cultural heritage. African religions are portrayed as basis of Wakandan framework for organization of its identity, actions, aims, norms and values, and resources. African religions are expressed and reproduced as a basis for social practices and scientific innovations in Wakanda. Hence, Black Panther could be regarded as an artistic genre for engaging hegemonic religio-cultural contestations, popular cultural creation and bearing a profound role in representing contemporary Africa’s search for decolonising ideas about social, cultural, religion, political and economic issues. This means that Black Panther cannot be conceived as neutral. It is rather an attempt to construct a particular reality of Africa, as Dwayne McDuffie (no date) describes, with “sudden possibility of flight” or Scott Bukatman (2003, xiii) classifies, “worlds of renewed possibility”. It is within such “creative escapisms” that Black Panther movie, as Casey Alt (no date) argues, seems to have attracted undivided attention of most African and African diaspora viewers “to experience imaginative heights that” colonial/modern global designs never allow them to reach.

Significantly, one key defining character of Black Panther is its postmodern fictional search to produce an alternative image of Africa which most African elites have failed to construct throughout post-colonial period. Linda Hutcheon (1988, 4) defines postmodern fiction as “fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical, and inescapably political.” Black Panther like most postmodern sci-fi movies, is embroiled in a paradox “of complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the

dominant cultural and social forces” (Hutcheon 1989, 11). Indeed, it has been observed that: “Filmic fictions inevitably bring into play real-life assumptions not only about space and time but also about social and cultural relationships. Films which represent marginalized cultures in a realistic mode, even when they do not claim to represent specific historical incidents, still implicitly make factual claims” (Shohat and Stam 1995, 179).

Thus, Black Panther’s representation of African religions calls for critical interrogation of the movie beyond regarding it as mere entertainment. There is a need to question whether Black Panther’s portrayal of African religious systems can effectively overcome the current abuse religious systems as apparatus for legitimisation in neo-colonial African politics (Kaunda 2019). Scholars argue that movies are not only produced for entertainment and to earn profits (though this is a major aspect of it), but also seek to represent some complex issues from a particular perspective or based upon specific assumptions (Happer and Philo 2013; Park 2014). Indeed, there have been movies that have functioned as colonial sites for reproduction and reinforcing Western stereotypes and as well as its religio-cultural hegemony (Shohat and Stam 1995; Ayres 2003). There has been an outcry among some scholars that certain groups of people, especially non-West and women are often misrepresented in Hollywood movies (see, Artel and Wengraf 1976; Erens 1990).

This article employs decolonial discourse analysis in order to understand how African religions are portrayed and utilised in Black Panther’s *Wakanda*. Decolonial ideological analysis examines the ideology, ideas and images, theoretical positions and myths that underpin specific movie genre (Kaunda 2015, 2019). It seeks to articulate the function of ideology within the state apparatuses and how they produce and reproduce relations of power necessary for dominating the masses (social groups). Thus, it makes sense to employ decolonial ideological analysis to explore and critique Black Panther’s African religious heritage by exploring whether it has potential to contribute constructively to the process of re-envisioning an alternative Africa. The question is how might a decolonial ideological analysis function as a theoretical tool to analyze, to take away the mask and reject the neo-colonial religious legitimations of the status quo in Black Panther? How might this task be carried out with reference to the representations of African religions in Black Panther? In what follows, I summarize some theoretical assumptions on which the critique of religion in Black Panther is grounded.

2. Intentionality of Decolonial Ideological Criticism

Decolonial ideological analysis is one specific type of religio-political analysis of discourse. Such an analysis, among other things, attempts to relate structures of discourse with structures of a particular society (Blom-

maert and Bulcaen 2000; Van Dijk 2006, 2016). Decolonial ideological analysis sets out to critique dominant ideologies which privilege a sector of society at the expense of majority of its members. It is informed by critical theories that offer interrogation of particular ideologies as material legacies of colonial structural power (For detailed discussion see Grosfoguel 2009). Such decolonial ideological analysis unmasks and subverts the use of religion in ways that reproduces and perpetuates neo-colonial ideology (Kaunda 2018, 2019). Nico Koopman (2017, 151) argues that ideologies “form an idea, a picture, a way of looking at and of understanding reality and human beings ... Those in power could erect these structures and thereby institutionalize their power and privilege at the expense of the other.” Decolonial ideological analysis is a disruptive technique which troubles or unsettles the commonly held assumptions of religion as an instrument that neutrally shapes socio-political sphere towards the common good (Kaunda 2019). It is a critical method that interrogates nationalist ideologies in such a way as to show how their function in African politics is anything but neutral: they indeed mask neocolonial ideology of power (Wasserman 2007). African religions in many African countries have often functioned to sacralised ideological perversion of the ruling government (Kaunda 2018, 2019).

Decoloniality affirms the inseparability or indivisibility of historical colonialism and modern global design. Colonialism was informed by the idea of redesigning the world in European image. It was not merely colonisation of geopolitical spaces and cultural ideals, rather a process of redesigning the world at its fundamental level to become a reflection of European interpretation and understanding of reality. This is classified as coloniality of global interpretation of reality – a world “entangled, woven, trapped in the colonial matrix of power” (Mignolo 2007, 1555) emerged with colonisation as a way of organising social relationships, religious imaginations, interacting with the world and interpretation of reality. The modern world is not a neutral space. Hence, the concept of Global South is more of a metaphor that represents regions of the world at the receiving end and suffering the harsh consequences of geopolitical and virtual coloniality. Nelson Maldonado-Torres (2007, 243) delineates coloniality as “long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, [religion], intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations.” Coloniality is everywhere and in everything, masked and reproduced in human relationships, cultures, religions and knowledge construction (Maldonado-Torres 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015; Kaunda 2015).

This makes it imperative to probe how Black Panther utilises religion as a state apparatus. Decolonial ideological analysis as an analytical tool helps us to unmask and dismantle relations of power and conceptions of knowledge that foment the reproduction of socio-political hierarchies that under-develop sectors of the same countries (Maldonado-Torres 2011, 1).

It examines fictional, fantasy and folk-narrative genres of legend and folktale that envisage other forms of civilizations and futures from the vantage point of ever evolving indigenous knowledge systems. Indigenous knowledge systems are not monolithic, static and timeless, or frozen in time, but dynamic, fluid and ever evolving through interaction with global knowledge and cultural systems. The next section interrogates Black Panther's portrayal and utilisation of African religions as a monarchical apparatus.

3. Black Panther's Wakandan Religious Ideology

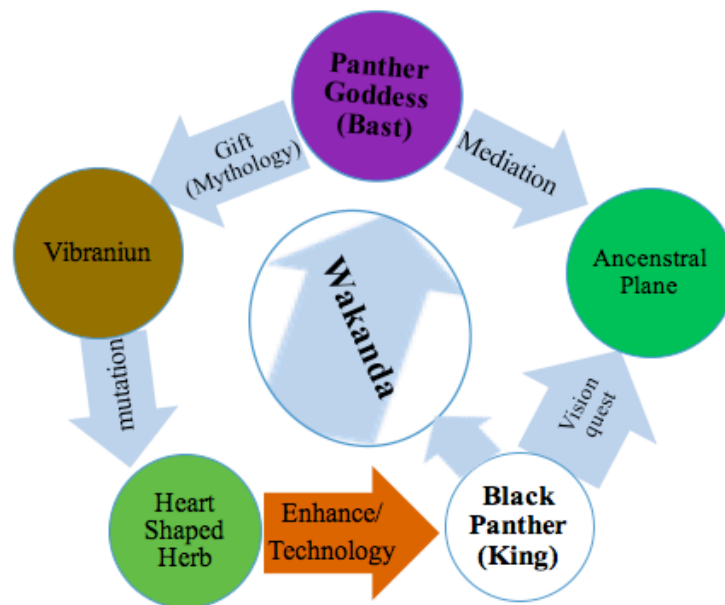
Since release in 2018, Black Panther has received enormous reviews around the world by both scholars and non-scholars (see CIHA Blog 2018 for various reviews). It is perceived by some as "a game changer for the film industry" (Relaxnews 2018), and "a redemptive counter-mythology" (Cobb 2018) that challenges the dominant Hollywood representations of Africa. Reviewers have argued that Black Panther "breaks with the spirit of derision that has always saturated Hollywood films about Africa" (Staples cited in Gathara 2018). Amy Frearson (2018), for instance, perceives the movie as "creating a different narrative for Africa" in that it is "really about blending things that were existing in a lot of different African cultures, then creating them as if they had evolved over time and inserting that into our fictional nation." Manohla Dargis (2018) argues, "In its emphasis on black imagination, creation and liberation, the movie becomes an emblem of a past that was denied and a future that feels very present. And in doing so opens up its world, and yours, beautifully." However, not everyone offers a hyper positive outlook of Black Panther, some such as Patrick Gathara (2018) are more critical and think that the movie "offers a regressive, neocolonial vision of Africa." He believes the movie is informed by a racialized discourse of Africa (see also, Truthunedited 2018).

Black Panther is an American superhero movie based on the Marvel Comics character of the same name. The movie with 90 percent of the cast who are either African or African-American, was directed by Ryan Coogler (the film was co-written with Joe Robert Cole), an African-American film writer and director. It was inspired by one of the best-selling African-American authors, Ta-Nehisi Coates, which takes place in a fictional African country called Wakanda (The fictitious concepts of Black Panther, Vibranium and Wakanda were created by Stan Lee and Jack Kirby in 1960s - see Lund 2016). Coogler regards Black Panther as not merely a media phenomenon, but rather a cultural, sociological, anthropological, historical, religious and science fiction phenomenon. He argues that Black Panther was created as a response to personal struggle to understand his African identity. He stresses, "I was grappling with something I've kind of

been scraping at my whole life ... which is my cultural identity, and what it means to be African.” Thus, Black Panther is an exploration of “what it means to be African” beyond colonial imageries and representation (Eells 2018). Judging from the responses of the audience, Coogler appears to have succeeded in promoting a Wakanda version of Africa.

The Black Panther, also known as T’Challa, is a fictional character who rules the hidden fictional kingdom called Wakanda in the heart of equatorial Africa. Wakanda is the most religiously and technologically advanced nation in the world but chooses to hide its innovations under the guise of developing African nation status. It is positioned as a never colonised nation that is neither defined by colonialism nor by its relationship with the Global North. Thus, it has retained much of its unadulterated and pure African-ness, if such a thing exists. Wakanda is portrayed as a melting point of scientific technologies and religious creativity as shown in the diagram below.

The Diagram below shows Wakandan religion:



Wakanda appears to be a critique of secularisation theory based on the assumption that there is a necessarily connection between disenchantment (modernisation) of the world and national development. In Wakanda, science and religious mythology “as mutually supportive in the case of reverence for [the ancestral traditions and the goddess of scientific technology], as mutually validating in the case of respect for objective observation and verifiable models of practical reality, and as mutually expansive in the case of concern for the extent of human knowledge”

(Shawl 2016, 227). In short, Wakanda is a sci-religio-nation deeply entrenched in religious mythological imaginations and simultaneously shaped by scientific technological innovations in everyday life. It is a nation which seems to live in perpetually integrated modernity and tradition where there is no sharp dichotomy between these systems of human knowledge.

The secret of Wakanda's technological prowess, power, and prestige is found in the rare and sacred metal called vibranium. As the diagram above shows, the massive meteoric deposit of the sacred element vibranium is intertwined with Wakanda religious system. Vibranium is believed to have divine origin. It is claimed to have descended from the sky as a divine gift to Wakanda people from the Panther goddess called Bast (Sargent 2003). Unfortunately, Bast is the ancient Egyptian goddess. It is not clear as to the intentions of choosing a goddess from Egyptian mythology rather than a goddess within sub-Saharan religious traditions. African-American fixation with Egyptian civilisation as root of Africa's civilisation remains problematic. Nearly all of their arguments have tended to be embedded in the Egyptian civilization (Asenta 1989, 1990; Nehusi 2016). It appears that most of them lack intellectual resources to envision African religious systems of sub-Sahara Africa without some form of escapist correlation with Egyptian civilization. It is problematic to seek to demonstrate that civilizational impetus for sub-Saharan Africa should evolve from the Egyptian civilization. This perspective is not revivalist but also a colonial reductionist and homogenisation of African past (Mafuta and Kaunda undated).

Nevertheless, Wakanda is the sole global source of this invaluable metal which is believed to have mystical properties. Vibranium absorbs vibrations—a quality that makes it invaluable for technological development (Lee and Kirby 1966, 5, see also, Alt undated, 32). The result of possessing this unusual metal advances Wakanda in all spheres of life such as technology, culture, social, religious and human progress beyond any nation on earth. Vibranium is also a powerful mutagen (Booker 2010, 63). It is scientifically proved to grant superhuman strength and brain's cognitive enhancement to anyone exposed to its radiation. It contains a form of radiation that causes irreversible and heritable mutations at a cellular genetic (deoxyribonucleic acid - DNA) level makeup of anything exposed to it (Schrader 2003). The Wakanda's exposure to vibranium radiation upon its landing caused super-powered mutations in much of its flora and fauna (including the heart-shaped herb) and among many Wakandan people. It is this discovery of vibranium meteoric that transforms Wakanda into a super-powered and super-intelligent society (McDuffie not data). The people moved from invisible to inevitable; from poverty to affluence; from underdeveloped to the most developed nation in the world.

The discovery of vibranium was also masked in religious mythology. This becomes a meeting point between mythology and technology which

is also central to national history, Black Panther's political authority and superpowers. The royal family is regarded as possessing a divine mandate to preserve Wakanda identity and protect its resources from outsiders. Only the kings have rights to drink from the concoction made from the sacred heart-shaped herb which gives them superhuman strength of enhanced speed, agility, strength, endurance, healing, and sensory perception; it also grants them ability to see in the dark, hear heartbeats, and track by scent. This herb is protected and planted only in the king's palace. The overemphasis on sacred origin of vibranium appears to help Black Panther to appeal to traditional magico-spirituality with its underpinnings that human beings have ability to transcend their natural limitations through access to secret spiritual knowledge. Implicit in Wakanda's political ideology is the use of religion to legitimize political authority - a practice that dates back to precolonial African monarchies (Willoughby 1928; Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Gluckman 1940; Wilson 1959; 1971; Mbiti 1969). Black Panther leverages religion to justify the monarchy and control of strategic technological resources.

In precolonial African politics, the king was ritualistically strengthened, cleansed and fortified in the name of the nation and the ancestors who were believed to be the custodians of morality (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940). The king was believed to possess superhuman strength through magical objects which were inherited from the predecessors. He was in charge of and responsible for all strategic kingdom magico-technological resources which like Wakanda, were masked in religious mythologies (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Mbiti 1969). Thus, the welfare of the kingdom was believed to be totally dependent on the king (Willoughby 1928; Gluckman 1940; Wilson 1959; 1971). Jacob Olupona (2014, 38) observes, "Kings are said to possess mystical-sustaining powers, with their own well-being intimately entwined with the well-being of their people, lands, and institutions." This uncritical integration of the throne and religion has been critiqued in African scholarship that it has tended to promote a religio-political problem classified as ontocracy (Bediako 1995; 2004). Kwame Bediako (2004, 102) particularly stresses that "by the close association of religious (sacred) authority and political power in the person of the traditional ruler, African traditional societies were 'ontocracies', sacralizing authority and power with the effectual integration of altar and throne." It has been argued that it is a failure to desacralize political realm that remains at the root of dictatorial and absolutist claims inherent in contemporary African politics (Bediako 1993, 1995).

Unfortunately, Wakanda is uncritically entrenched in the mythological imaginations of traditional African religious heritage. This unquestioning and uncritical impassionate appeal to African religions has potential to promote absolutization of the king and sacralisation of the realm of politics. This perhaps, is Black Panther's undoing. Like Wakanda, many an-

cient Africans have utilised religious mythologies to justify the ruling dynasties and to embroil nation prosperity and failure to sacred mysteries. These mythologies have served a purpose of justifying the ruling elites and authority and relegating the rest of the people to powerless subjects (Ifversen 2010; Kaunda 2018, 2019). And sometimes have functioned as state apparatus for the ruling class and promotion of patriarchy and control of strategic resources by the kings. Zorodzai Dube (2016, 6) argues that “Patriarchy replicates itself through religious myths found within the African worldview... building a canopy of conformity.” History has shown how powerful goddesses such as Bast have been domesticated in patriarchal contexts to promote male interests (Amadiume 1987). In fact, in Black Panther, the Bast goddess cult appears to be domesticated and subordinated to the king as a system of political power. The goddess appears to give the institution of the Black Panther “a particular sacral status, which separates it from the profane present” (Ifversen 2010, 454). Hence, African women have rejected uncritical retrieval of African religious mythologies as too often have subordinate women and the powerless socially, religiously, and politically to protect male interests and privileges (Amadiume 1987; Oduyoye 1995).

Through domestication of the goddess cult, Black Panther succeeded in monopolising vibranium and every aspect of it such as growing and drinking the juice from heart-shaped herb, and the running of the vibranium laboratory. He manipulated Wakanda people into believing that the supernatural powers are received from goddess Bast through ancestral mediation when in essence, it is produced from vibranium. This ensured that power remained in the hands of the elite rulers from specific ethnic groups, the king and the royal family. Interestingly, in the movie, there is only one visible scientist, Shuri – the teenage sister of Black Panther. It is reasonable to conjecture that her seemingly super-intellectual capabilities are as a result of ingestion of or exposure to vibranium. Are there no other Wakandans who have interest in various branches of sciences? Shuri is everything - the biologist, the engineer, medical doctor, the physicist, the chemist and so on. This is one clear example of nepotism, identified as one key obstacles to economic and political development in many neo-colonial African nations. The concentration of power in Black Panther is a perfection of neo-colonial system of big man (or rather, superman) syndrome, a product of recent African history. In actual fact, African political elites such Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia, Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, Julius Kambarage Nyerere of Tanzania, Hastings Kamuzu Bandawere of Malawi to name a few, were all referred as Moseses, liberators, divine heroes taking Africans from colonial bondage into the promised land. It is important to be suspicion of individuals who position themselves as superheroes in Africa.

It is also within this context that we have to interrogate the ritual combat as a political process for inhering the vacancy royal throne among

legitimate royal candidates (competitors) is a highly problematic religious element. The Wakanda ritual is based on a barbaric principle of winning either by death or surrender. The shame and derogatory of surrendering could make one resort to fight to death. This approach could also potentially create enmity, animosity, jealousy, hatred and competition between two rival ethnic groups. However, in a symbolic way, Black Panther gladiatorial approach to choosing kings is a perfect reproduction of contemporary African 'undemocratic' elections in which the winner takes it all. This tendency creates unconstructive political engagement among various political parties. The ritual combat is regarded as a locus for power struggle for kingship. This is similar to general elections in most African countries which is perceived as locus for power struggle among political parties. The ruling parties are ready to do anything possible even rigging elections in order to continue in power. In such an atmosphere, the opposition political party positions itself as the archenemy. The elections are not about the common good but a space of rivalry and competition for control of limited national resources and struggle for power (Gifford 1995). In this all process of political power struggle, religion is always used as one of the key ideological tools to justify political candidacy and authority (Kaunda 2018, 2019). This religio-political approach to choosing leaders makes those who win elections untouchables and easily abuse authority as they increasingly perceive themselves as chosen by God and not by the people. As this approach tend to present African leadership in religious terms, with its source of power suspended in mystical realms (Bediako 1993; Kaunda 2018).

Thus, the ritual combat system was unstable and together with the mythology, potentially promoted nearly an absolute monarchy. For example, it allowed an unworthy individual such as Erik Killmonger, whose birth name in Wakandan is N'jadaka, a cousin and archenemy of Black Panther who grew up in North America, to easily take over the throne. It was by strength rather than by character and ability that one became the king of Wakanda. Killmonger was an authoritarian who saw no future of Wakanda beyond himself and ensured to destroy anything that could facilitate the rise of the new king by burning the heart-shaped herbs used in legitimating the king's power. His emancipatory narrative is based on mobilisation of Wakandan weapons into a giant resource for building a totalitarian empire. This is similar to African neo-colonial system which is easily manipulated by power hungry political leaders who do not care how they get into power or even to resolve their opponents' grievances concerning rigging of elections. This makes Black Panther's depiction of religion as a dangerous and retrogressive tool of subjugation and oppression in Africa.

The movie also reproduces and perpetuates subtle social relations of power and marginalisation shaped by specific religious beliefs and practices. It presents religion in triumphant manner as if religion is neutral. It

certainly does not serve as a challenge to normative construction of gender and power as there are many African countries in which women have served as chiefs, priests, and warriors, albeit, within the boundaries of hegemonic male-created ideological religious framework. For instance, Okoye, the General of Wakanda, framing her worldview within religious ideology, argued “*I am loyal to the throne.*” There is a failure to distinguish between the throne as institution and the king as an individual with potential to abuse power. This is because in many African societies, the throne and the king are mystically intertwined. As Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940, 18) argue, “the social system is, as it were, removed to a mystical plane, where it figures as a system of sacred values beyond criticism and revision.” This is a worldview that has promoted abuse of power in most African nations. Okoye is using religious frame of reference to legitimate monarchy as extensions of divine rule and whoever sits on it becomes legitimate by default (Bediako 1993).

The power dynamics between the privileged ruling class in Wakanda and the poor masses is evident – the poor do not matter (MsAfropolitan 2018). It is regrettable that religion is used to fortify the centre which is portrayed in an almost triumphalist and romanticised way. Similarly, African political and economic elite have used religion in their intense competition for diminishing resources of wealth, political power and prestige. It appears that Black Panther covertly used religion as an instrument of political triumph. Hence, despite religion entrenchment in the socio-political and economic life of Wakanda, it does not seem to play any critical role in engaging poverty. Viewed from this prism, Black Panther reproduces Western assumptions based on an understanding that a developed nation is a country without poverty and without the poor. This failure of utilising religion for poverty alleviation in Black Panther “underlines the need to critically reevaluate the power of religion in society and to develop new forms of the relations between religion and politics” (Raiser 2013, 4) and the ways in which they can be utilised for poverty alleviation. There is no evidence that Wakandan religion is used to promote the rights of the marginalised citizens, including contributing to promoting their right to be treated with respect and dignity. The kind of relationship that Wakanda formed between the poor masses and the rich could have been a brilliant political satire against neo-colonial African politics and the western nations where the poor are alienated, treated as second class citizens and are stereotyped. Scholars argue that “the greater the degree of inequality in society, the less the privileged are likely to care about either poverty or inequality” (Baker and O'Brien 2013, 18). Regrettably, this appears to be the case in Wakanda (for a detailed critique on invisibility of poverty in Black Panther, see MsAfropolitan 2018).

4. Religion as Wakanda's Ideological Apparatus - A Critical Analysis

It becomes clear that getting rid of the literalistic and romanticised approach to African religions as a whole can guard against religio-political fundamentalism in order to promote a decolonial critical and life-giving approach to religions which are fundamental to human development and nourishing of all life. A lack of critical engagement with religion in Black Panther meant that religious discourse was employed as neo-colonial ideology to “perpetuate values, practices, and interests that serve the state in ways which become so taken for granted that they form the citizens’ very subjective systems of values and presupposition, and hence inform their thoughts and behaviour in subtle and penetrating ways” (Hackley 2007, 147). Black Panther needed to apply decolonial hermeneutics of suspicion in its reclamation of African religious systems in order to “profoundly rethinking and unsettling” (Shohat and Stam 1995, 359) religious claims that promote elitism and abuse of religion as a state apparatus for political authority and control of national resources. This is important as could be seen from Black Panther, religion is an effective tool of legitimation used to maintain control over technological resources. It is clear from Black Panther that once religion loses its prophetic voice, it easily falls into the clutches of the ruling elites who are likely to use it as an ideological tool for manipulation, exploitation and oppression of the masses. It can be therefore argued that religion in Wakanda reproduced a neo-colonial political vision of Africa which is likely to perpetuate politics of poverty, marginalisation, rivalry and vicious competition of limited resources and struggle for political power.

5. Conclusion

The paper argues that Black Panther clan’s covertly utilised religion to legitimatise unitary access to the throne and control of critical technological resources, reproduces the ambiguous role religion has played in African politics. While Black Panther sought to overcome the dichotomy between scientific and spiritual technologies by presenting African religious heritage as highly adaptable and easily synthesised with scientific knowledge, it nevertheless, failed to rethink problematic elements of inherent within African religions which are reproduced and perpetuated in most contemporary African politics. Black Panther’s vulgar portrayal and uncritical utilisation of religion robbed its potential to reimage an alternatively Africa and how African religio-cultural heritage could be critically engaged as inevitable resource in promoting African agency that could give Africans impetus for social and political transformation and development.

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