

Afrofuturism, Black Literature, and the Liberatory Vision of *Black Panther*

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Abstract

Afrofuturism reimagines Black futures by blending African traditions, speculative fiction, and technology to confront colonialism, racism, and systemic erasure. Rooted in Black literary resistance, pioneers like Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany used science fiction to critique oppression and envision liberated identities. Butler's time-travel narratives explore racial trauma, while Delany's fluid futures challenge heteronormative norms. *Black Panther* (2018) epitomizes this movement by portraying Wakanda—an uncolonized African techno-utopia—as a counter-narrative to Western stereotypes of poverty and conflict. Wakanda's vibranium-powered sovereignty and Pan-African aesthetics celebrate cultural pride and critique global anti-Blackness. Beyond film, Afrofuturism inspires music, fashion, and activism, asserting Black agency across various mediums. This paper argues that *Black Panther* crystallizes Afrofuturism's power to redefine mainstream representation, offering a blueprint for inclusive futures in which Black innovation thrives.

Keywords

Afrofuturism, *Black Panther*, Colonialism, Speculative Fiction, Black Liberation

1. Introduction

Afrofuturism is a cultural, artistic, and literary movement that reimagines the future of Black people through a blend of science fiction, technology, and African culture. This movement seeks to address the legacies of slavery, colonialism, and racism, providing an alternative vision where Black people are empowered and liberated from the constraints of history. It redefines what it means to be Black in a world that has historically marginalized and oppressed people of African descent, offering narratives where Black identity is celebrated and the possibilities

for liberation are limitless.

Central to the formation of Afrofuturism is the influence of Black literature, which has long used speculative fiction to explore themes of identity, culture, race, and resistance. For instance, Octavia Butler employed time travel and science fiction to unpack the complex dynamics of race and power (Odukamaiya, 2020). Samuel Delany, another pivotal figure, expanded on this by imagining alternative futures for Black communities, engaging critically with issues of race, sexuality, and the fluidity of identity (Rocca, 2024). Together, these writers reimagine the societal role of Black people by blending reality with speculative fiction. Their works not only critique the present but also project transformative futures, enriching Afrofuturist discourse through a dynamic interplay of critique and creativity.

Afrofuturism's influence extends beyond literature and film, reaching music, fashion, digital art, and grassroots activism. In music, artists blend futuristic themes with Black identity, while fashion designers merge African elements with contemporary styles. Digital artists use technology to reinterpret Black culture in innovative ways. This widespread impact highlights that Afrofuturism is not merely a genre; it is a cultural movement that transforms how Black people envision their futures in the present.

In this context, *Black Panther* stands as one of the most significant cultural products within the Afrofuturist movement, both as a film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU) and as a global cultural phenomenon. Released in 2018, *Black Panther* redefined the superhero genre and set a new standard for how African identity could be represented on screen. The film's depiction of Wakanda, an isolated African nation untouched by colonialism and technologically advanced beyond any other nation, is a direct manifestation of Afrofuturist ideals. Wakanda is not a land of poverty or conflict, as often portrayed in Western media, but a thriving, self-sufficient utopia that reflects an idealized vision of what Africa might have looked like without the interference of colonization. This portrayal offers a powerful counter-narrative to the stereotypical images of Africa and provides a blueprint for a future where Black people are the architects of their own destinies.

This paper argues that *Black Panther* offers a modern interpretation of Afrofuturism, visualizing a utopian African society while also engaging with the inherent tensions within that idealism. The film's narrative and aesthetics are deeply influenced by Black literature, particularly the works of Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany, whose critiques of power, technology, identity, and spatial politics resonate throughout Wakanda's conflicts and triumphs. By analyzing specific scenes and themes, this study will demonstrate how the film not only challenges but also inadvertently reinforces certain stereotypes about Africa. Furthermore, the paper explores how *Black Panther's* success has amplified Afrofuturism's visibility in both academia and popular culture, opening up new avenues for critical engagement with Black speculative fiction. At the same time, it raises unresolved ques-

tions about the movement's ability to address real-world inequalities, particularly concerning neocolonial resource extraction and the commercialization of Black utopian visions, exemplified by the commodification of Wakanda's radical message in global merchandise.

2. What Is Afrofuturism?

Afrofuturism is a dynamic cultural, artistic, and literary movement that reimagines the future through the lens of Black identity, history, and culture. The term Afrofuturism was first coined by cultural critic [Mark Dery \(1993\)](#) in "Black to the Future", which explored the intersections of science fiction and African American culture. It emerges as both a reaction to the marginalization of Black people in mainstream depictions of history and the future, as well as a way to construct new visions of Black life beyond the constraints of colonialism, racism, and slavery. Through this genre, Afrofuturism seeks to offer a path to liberation, reclaiming Black narratives and opening the door to possibilities that have long been denied due to colonial histories and systemic oppression.

Afrofuturism has historical roots in both African American culture and African diasporic experiences, and it incorporates a wide range of artistic expressions including literature, music, film, and visual art. Central to Afrofuturism is the notion that science fiction is not merely a genre about space travel and technological advancements, but also a vehicle for exploring issues of race, identity, and the future of Black people.

Octavia Butler and Samuel Delany pushed the boundaries of speculative fiction to engage with the complexities of race, power, and identity. Butler, in works like *Kindred*, explored themes of slavery and time travel to address the historical trauma that continues to affect African American identity ([Long, 2002](#)). Her works, often imbued with elements of science fiction, allowed her to imagine alternative histories and futures where Black people could redefine their relationship with power and the past. Similarly, Delany's works, such as *Dhalgren*, offered a vision of the future where race and class are fluid, and where societal collapse and personal identity are explored within dystopian settings ([Rocca, 2022](#)). These works contributed to the broader conversation about Afrofuturism, laying the foundation for a movement that would eventually cross into visual media.

2.1. Key Themes in Afrofuturism

Afrofuturism is defined by several key themes, which serve as the backbone for its critique of the present and its vision of an alternate future. These themes are central to understanding how Afrofuturism challenges historical narratives and the role of Black identity in shaping the future ([Dokotum, 2020](#)).

Technology and Innovation: At the heart of Afrofuturism is the concept of technology as a form of liberation. Historically, Black communities have often been excluded from technological advancements or have had their innovations exploited or misappropriated. Afrofuturism provides a platform to imagine a fu-

ture where technology serves as a tool for empowerment. In this vision, Black communities are not merely consumers of technology but creators and leaders in technological innovation. The idea is to envision a future where technology enables freedom and self-determination, positioning Black people as the architects of their own technological landscapes, rather than subjects of external control.

Reclaiming African Identity: A core principle of Afrofuturism is the reclamation of African identity, often in response to historical misrepresentation. For centuries, Africa has been depicted in Western media and literature as a continent of poverty, conflict, and instability. Afrofuturism challenges this narrative by constructing alternate realities where African nations are wealthy, powerful, and technologically advanced. In these reimagined worlds, African traditions harmonize with cutting-edge technology, and cultural heritage is celebrated alongside modernity. This redefinition of African identity emphasizes strength, pride, and progress, rejecting the Western portrayal of Africa as primitive or stagnant.

Resistance to Colonialism and Racism: Afrofuturism serves as a critique of colonialism and racism, using speculative fiction to imagine a world where Black people are no longer subjugated or oppressed. The present power structures, rooted in colonial exploitation and systemic racism, are upended in Afrofuturist visions. By rejecting the limitations imposed by historical oppression, Afrofuturism presents alternatives where Black people control their own destinies. *Black Panther* embodies this critique through Wakanda's resistance to outside forces, particularly colonizing powers that seek to exploit Africa's resources. In the film, the nation's decision to keep its resources hidden and shielded from the outside world is an act of defiance against centuries of colonial exploitation.

2.2. Afrofuturism in Media, Culture, and Everyday Practice

Afrofuturism's influence extends far beyond literature and film, permeating music, fashion, digital art, and grassroots activism. These cultural practices transform speculative narratives into lived resistance, embedding Afrofuturist ideals into the fabric of everyday life.

In music, Janelle Monáe's (2018) *Dirty Computer* exemplifies this interplay. Her android persona, "Cindi Mayweather", reclaims Black women's bodies as sites of technological sovereignty, echoing Octavia Butler's *Xenogenesis* trilogy, where alien DNA hybridization becomes a metaphor for Black survival in hostile systems. The album's "emotion picture" features Monáe wearing a metallic head-dress inspired by Yoruba gele crowns, a visual manifesto bridging ancestral memory and cyborg futurism. This duality enacts what cultural theorist Mark Fisher (2013) described as Afrofuturism's capacity to "unravel any linear model of the future", where time becomes "plastic, stretchable and prophetic (p. 47)".

Fashion, too, has emerged as a critical site for materializing Afrofuturist visions. Ruth E. Carter's costumes for *Black Panther*—such as the Dora Milaje's armor inspired by Basotho blankets and Ndebele neck rings—have redefined African aesthetics in global cinema, sparking a resurgence of African-inspired design.

South African designer Laduma Ngxokolo's *MaXhosa* knitwear line revitalizes Xhosa beadwork patterns through premium mohair and wool, blending tradition with contemporary luxury. His work, showcased from New York to Paris, exemplifies Afrofuturism's ethos by positioning technology (here, modern textile innovation) as an extension of cultural heritage.

In everyday cultural and social practices, Afrofuturism plays a pivotal role in shaping Black identity and resistance. One significant example is the rise of Afrofuturist-inspired beauty and hair culture, where natural Black hairstyles—such as Afros, braids, and locs—are reimagined through futuristic aesthetics and technology. Artists and stylists are merging traditional African hairstyling techniques with modern innovations, such as LED lights or metallic accessories, to create avant-garde, technologically inspired looks that challenge both colonial beauty standards and mainstream fashion. Social media platforms like Instagram and YouTube have become vital spaces for celebrating Afrofuturist beauty, offering creators a platform to share tutorials, discussions, and imagery that blend cultural heritage with speculative, futuristic visions.

These examples demonstrate that Afrofuturism is not mere escapism but a powerful methodology for world-building. By embedding speculative futures into music, wearable tech, and other cultural practices, the movement blurs the lines between art and reality, emphasizing that liberation must be actively practiced, not just imagined.

2.3. Afrofuturism's Influence in Cinema

Afrofuturism has exerted a profound influence on popular culture. In cinema, *Black Panther* represents the apex of Afrofuturism's impact on mainstream culture. The film's depiction of Wakanda as an isolated African utopia, where Black people are technologically advanced, culturally rich, and politically autonomous, marks a watershed moment in cinematic history. Unlike previous portrayals of Africa, which have often leaned on stereotypes of poverty or war-torn chaos, *Black Panther* presents a bold reimagining of African identity. The film challenges global audiences to reconsider their assumptions about Africa, offering a vision of a Black-led society where cultural pride and technological innovation coexist harmoniously.

This achievement isn't just about superhero storytelling—*Black Panther* holds major importance for the Afrofuturist movement itself. As the first Black-led superhero blockbuster, it did two revolutionary things: it shattered Hollywood's long-standing neglect of Black-centered sci-fi/fantasy stories, and it brought Afrofuturist ideas to millions who'd never heard of the concept before. Central to its message is Wakanda's identity as a nation untouched by colonialism. Its skyscrapers powered by fictional vibranium metal, its high-tech gadgets mixed with tribal designs, and its fierce protection of independence all reflect key Afrofuturist themes. Even the film's smaller details, like Shuri's lab blending traditional African patterns with holograms, reinforce this vision. Years after its release, *Black*

Panther's impact still resonates, proving that stories celebrating Black creativity and resistance can reshape global culture, and inspiring new generations to reimagine Africa's past, present, and future.

3. *Black Panther* and Black Literary Traditions: Scenes, Symbols, and Subversion

The influence of Afrofuturism on *Black Panther* extends beyond cinema, drawing deep connections with the literary traditions of Black science fiction. The narrative and visual language of *Black Panther* directly engage with themes from two seminal Black science fiction authors—Octavia Butler and Samuel R. Delany—whose speculative frameworks shape the film's storyline in profound ways.

3.1. Octavia Butler's *Kindred* and *Black Panther*

In examining the connections between *Black Panther* and Black literature, one of the most striking comparisons can be made between *Kindred* by Octavia Butler and the film's exploration of heritage and history. In *Kindred*, the protagonist, Dana, is a modern-day Black woman who is involuntarily transported back in time to the Antebellum South, where she must navigate the complexities of slavery, family, and survival. The time-travel narrative in *Kindred* serves as a vehicle for exploring the generational impact of trauma, especially the ways in which the legacy of slavery continues to shape Black identity.

Similarly, T'Challa in *Black Panther* must confront the weight of his ancestors' decisions, particularly his father's involvement in the international community and the neglect of the African diaspora. Both characters are faced with the challenge of reconciling their heritage with their responsibility to the future. Just as Dana is forced to engage with the painful legacies of slavery, T'Challa must navigate the complexities of his father's choices and decide how to lead Wakanda in a way that benefits both his people and the global community.

One of the most striking examples of this influence is seen in the ancestral plane scenes, where T'Challa confronts Wakanda's complicity in the global suffering of Black people. In a moment of anguish, T'Challa shouts to his father, "You were wrong! ... To turn your backs on the rest of the world! We let the fear of our discovery stop us from doing what is right!" This outburst echoes Butler's insistence on the necessity of confronting history in order to shape a more just and equitable future.

Octavia Butler's another Afrofuturist novel *Parable of the Sower* further illuminates the tension between tradition and innovation that defines *Black Panther's* narrative (Phillips, 2002). In *Parable*, protagonist Lauren Olamina—a visionary Black woman navigating a climate-ravaged, dystopian America—creates "Earthseed", a belief system centered on adaptation, communal resilience, and the mantra "*God is Change*". This philosophy mirrors T'Challa's arc in *Black Panther*, where he confronts the necessity of evolving Wakanda beyond isolationist traditions to combat global inequity. Both works reject nostalgic idealism, instead framing progress as

a radical reimagining of power. Wakanda's vibranium, much like Lauren's utopian enclave, symbolizes resources capable of uplifting marginalized communities—but only when guided by empathy and collective purpose. While *Kindred* interrogates the inescapability of historical trauma, *Parable* and *Black Panther* position futurism itself as resistance, contrasting sharply with Dana's role as a witness to cyclical oppression. Lauren and T'Challa emerge as architects of new worlds, dismantling oppressive systems to forge liberatory frameworks.

Through this temporal duality—reckoning with the past while constructing the future—Butler's oeuvre exemplifies the expansive potential of Black speculative storytelling.

3.2. Samuel R. Delany's Question of Identity and Spatial Politics

Samuel Delany's *Dhalgren* stands as a highly influential piece within the realm of speculative fiction. Set in a post-apocalyptic world, the novel delves deep into profound themes of identity, memory, and the arduous process of reconstructing society following a catastrophic collapse (Bray, 1984). The central character, Kid, is plagued by a lack of self-knowledge, constantly questioning who he truly is at his core. His sense of belonging is equally muddled, as the world around him has been reduced to a chaotic and unfamiliar landscape. Amidst this societal upheaval, Kid is faced with the Herculean task of piecing together his life anew.

This intense quest for identity within a disintegrating society bears a remarkable resemblance to T'Challa's odyssey in *Black Panther*. Like Kid, T'Challa grapples with fragmented loyalties and inherited trauma after ascending to the Wakandan throne. His role as king forces him to reconcile the weight of tradition with the demands of a changing world, mirroring Kid's struggle to navigate Bellona's anarchic ruins. When Killmonger, a vengeful outsider, challenges T'Challa's right to rule, the ensuing conflict destabilizes Wakanda's social order, paralleling the collapse of societal structures in *Dhalgren*. Both narratives ask whether identity can be rebuilt without repeating the failures of the past.

T'Challa's journey, much like Kid's, becomes a metaphor for postcolonial reckoning. His vision quest in the ancestral plane—a surreal landscape where he confronts his father's legacy—echoes Kid's hallucinatory encounters with memory and loss. By the film's conclusion, T'Challa rejects Wakanda's isolationism, choosing instead to engage with the global community. This act of redefinition, akin to Kid's tentative steps toward documenting Bellona's chaos in poetry, suggests that identity and society are not fixed but perpetually reconstructed through struggle.

Delany's influence is also evident in Wakanda's spatial politics. The vertical design of the Golden City, where sleek futuristic skyscrapers coexist with rolling pastoral landscapes, echoes the fractured cityscape in Delany's *Dhalgren*. In *Dhalgren*, the broken cityscape becomes a metaphor for marginalized communities navigating chaos and renewal (Rocca, 2024). Similarly, the film's depiction of Wakanda's capital features a mix of high-tech infrastructure and traditional African design elements, suggesting a balance between progress and cultural preservation. The

city itself, like the city in Dhalgren, can be seen as a metaphor for a society trying to rebuild and redefine itself in the wake of historical trauma.

Moreover, the Jabari tribe's mountain stronghold, with its wooden structures and rejection of vibranium technology, critiques the Golden City's techno-utopianism. Their isolationist stance challenges the belief that technological progress is a panacea for all of society's ills. This echoes Delany's skepticism of progress in *Triton* (Delany, 1976), where the novel explores how even utopian societies, designed to transcend exclusion, often replicate the same oppressive structures they seek to overcome. The Jabari's rejection of Wakanda's vibranium-based advancement highlights the tension between technology as a potential savior and as a force for destruction—a central theme in Delany's work. In challenging Wakanda's image as a unified African utopia, the Jabari expose internal contradictions, much like Delany's critique of "national narratives" that silence marginalized voices (Haslam, 2006).

3.3. Subversion and Ambiguity in African Representation

Black Panther challenges stereotypes of "primitive Africa" by portraying Wakanda as a technologically advanced society (Droney, 2018), but it also reclaims African symbols in ways that may oversimplify the continent's diversity. The ancestral plane's Afrofuturist design, with elements like purple skies reflecting Yoruba spirituality and panther spirits symbolizing ancestral guardians, draws from African traditions but compresses them into a pan-African visual shorthand. Similarly, the Golden City's architecture combines Zaha Hadid's futuristic style with elements reminiscent of Buckingham Palace—a design that, while aspirational, leans on globalized aesthetics and could be seen as prioritizing broader, Western-influenced design motifs over specific African architectural traditions. For example, the palace's domed roofs appear loosely inspired by Ethiopian Aksumite architecture but are blended with neoclassical features, which somewhat diminishes their historical significance in favor of creating a generalized "African" identity. This tension between reclamation and erasure reflects ongoing debates about Pan-Africanism, which often emphasizes unity at the expense of cultural diversity.

This ambivalence resonates with critiques of Butler and Delany's works. Just as Dana's trauma in *Kindred* transcends individual experience to symbolize collective Black suffering, Wakanda's struggles mirror broader debates surrounding African diasporic identity. The film's ending—where T'Challa shares resources with Oakland—echoes Butler's call for reparative justice but also underscores the limitations of symbolic gestures in addressing systemic inequities.

Moreover, While *Black Panther* critiques and reimagines many aspects of African identity and history, it does not present an unambiguously revolutionary portrayal of Africa. Although Wakanda's vibranium-powered trains and holograms defy the stereotypical "primitive Africa", some elements still play into exoticized representations. For example, Shuri's lab (00:38:09) features kinetic sculptures inspired by Zulu shields and Dogon masks, fusing tradition with innovation to sub-

vert the idea of static, outdated African culture. However, this fusion risks exoticizing African culture by presenting symbols like the Mursi people's lip plates as decorative set pieces, detached from their deeper cultural significance. This element, while challenging colonial depictions of "primitive" Africa, also reflects the selective commodification of African symbols, which can be seen as a critique of how African cultures are often appropriated and transformed into global trends.

4. Utopia's Shadows: Wakanda's Flaws and Real-World Resonances

While *Black Panther* presents Wakanda as a seemingly utopian society—untouched by colonialism, technologically advanced, and rich in resources—the internal conflicts within the nation expose the limits of its idealized vision. The film's portrayal of the tension between T'Challa, the newly crowned king, and Erik Killmonger, the antagonist, reveals a deep philosophical and political divide that mirrors real-world debates about Black global solidarity and national self-interest. Killmonger's demand to use vibranium weapons to empower the global Black diaspora, stating that "The world's gonna start over, and this time, we're on top!", reflects the radical notion of a global revolution aimed at overthrowing systems of oppression. Killmonger's vision calls for a redistribution of Wakanda's wealth and resources to those historically marginalized, particularly people of African descent across the world.

However, the tragic inevitability of Killmonger's death raises critical questions about the film's reluctance to fully endorse his revolutionary ideals. While Killmonger's radical redistribution of power is framed as an extreme response, resonating with Frantz Fanon's call for decolonial violence, who argued that "violence is a cleansing force. It frees the native from his inferiority complex and from his despair and inaction; it makes him fearless and restores his self-respect" (Fanon, 1963: p. 94), his death signals the film's hesitance to engage with truly transformative politics. This tension reflects the broader, unresolved conflict within Black liberation movements: the struggle between maintaining national autonomy and advocating for a broader, global, and radical redistribution of power. The film ultimately settles on a compromise: Wakanda decides to open its borders and share its technology, but it avoids addressing the more uncomfortable realities of global power imbalances, such as the exploitation of African nations by global imperial powers. By prioritizing symbolic inclusion over material reckoning, the film envisions a world where Blackness is synonymous with technological prowess, yet it falls short of imagining a post-capitalist future. This limitation reflects Afrofuturism's ongoing struggle to balance utopian speculation with grassroots action.

The tension within Wakanda also parallels contemporary struggles in Africa and the African diaspora. For example, countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, rich in cobalt—an essential mineral for modern technologies like cell phones and electric vehicles—remain impoverished and vulnerable due to neocolonial resource extraction (Kara, 2023). Much like Wakanda's initial isolationism,

African nations rich in resources often face exploitation rather than empowerment, with their wealth siphoned off by foreign corporations and governments. The film's depiction of Wakanda's eventual decision to open its borders and share its resources offers a utopian vision of what could be possible if power were redistributed. However, it sidesteps the complexities of global power dynamics, failing to fully engage with the harsh realities of neocolonialism and resource inequality that continue to shape the African continent (Nkrumah, 1965).

Despite its limitations, *Black Panther's* success has undeniably propelled Afrofuturism into mainstream discourse, opening new avenues for critical engagement with Black speculative fiction and its potential for social transformation. Universities across the world have begun offering courses on Afrofuturism and Black speculative fiction, helping to bring the movement into the academic fold (Nelson, 2002). In the comic book world, *Black Panther* comics written by Ta-Nehisi Coates have introduced themes of diverse gender identities, postcolonial critique, and Afrofuturist visions of the future to wider audiences. These works expand upon the film's initial exploration of Black liberation, offering deeper critiques of race, power, and the future of Black people in a globalized world.

However, the commercialization of *Black Panther* raises concerns about the co-optation of its radical message. The film's success has led to the proliferation of *Black Panther*-inspired merchandise, with products ranging from clothing to toys, many of which are produced by multinational corporations like Walmart. While this merchandising reflects the film's widespread popularity, it also commodifies the radical vision of Wakanda into marketable slogans. The phrase "Wakanda Forever", once a symbol of Black empowerment and solidarity, is now emblazoned on t-shirts and mugs, raising questions about how radical ideas can be diluted and commodified for commercial gain (Klein, 2000). This commercialization threatens to undermine the very ideals that *Black Panther* sought to promote, transforming a narrative of liberation into a consumable product.

Ultimately, *Black Panther's* portrayal of Wakanda's internal contradictions and its commercial success highlight both the potential and the limitations of Afrofuturism as a cultural and political movement. While the film's utopian vision of an uncolonized, technologically advanced Africa offers a powerful counter-narrative to the historical depictions of Blackness in mainstream media, it also grapples with the complexities of real-world politics (Eshun, 2003).

5. Conclusion: Beyond Wakanda—Afrofuturism's Unfinished Project

The legacy of *Black Panther* lies not only in its groundbreaking representation of Blackness and African culture but also in its ability to ignite critical debates about Afrofuturism's emancipatory potential and inherent contradictions. While Wakanda is often hailed as a utopian vision, it functions less as a blueprint for the future than as a speculative provocation, challenging audiences to interrogate the relationship between technology, colonialism, and liberation. As scholar Kodwo Eshun

(2003) argues, Afrofuturism “preprograms the present (p. 290)” by destabilizing linear narratives of progress *Black Panther* embodies this ethos, forcing us to confront unresolved questions: Can technological sovereignty exist outside the extractive logics of colonial violence? Can a monolithic African identity encompass the plurality of diasporic experiences?

The sequel, *Wakanda Forever* (Coogler, 2022), takes these questions further by introducing Namor’s underwater kingdom as a critique of Wakanda’s land-centric nationalism. Namor’s people, with their distinct culture and relationship to the world, challenge the singular narrative of Wakanda as the ultimate African utopia. The film opens up space for broader discussions about the tensions between national pride and global solidarity, particularly in the context of diasporic identities and the complexities of African unity. This critique invites audiences to view Afrofuturism not as a static destination, but as an evolving struggle—one that must navigate the complexities of history, identity, and power in real time.

Black Panther, like Octavia Butler’s *Kindred* and Samuel R. Delany’s *Dhalgren*, rejects the myth of liberation as a fixed endpoint. Butler’s nonlinear temporality and Delany’s fragmented urban landscapes mirror Wakanda’s unresolved tensions, reminding us that emancipation is an iterative process shaped by historical rupture and adaptive resistance. While *Black Panther* envisions African technological sovereignty, its reluctance to dismantle global power structures—a critique echoed in Achille Mbembe’s (2001) analysis of the postcolony—reveals the limits of Afrofuturism’s mainstream iterations.

Ultimately, *Black Panther* highlights that Afrofuturism is a dynamic and ever-evolving framework that challenges us to imagine a future where Black people are free from the constraints of colonialism and oppression. Yet, it also urges us to confront the limitations of such idealized futures, recognizing that true liberation requires continuous engagement with the diverse, fractured, and often difficult realities of the present. This ongoing dialogue, rooted in both imagination and activism, is at the heart of Afrofuturism’s unfinished project—a vision that must always strive to adapt, grow, and reflect the complexities of the world it seeks to transform.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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