

Vibranium and Technological Hybridity: Neo-Colonial Anxiety in *Black Panther***Anggy Rahayu Larasati¹ ✉, E. Ngestirosa Endang Woro Kasih²**^{1,2}Universitas Teknokrat Indonesia, Lampung, Indonesia**Article Info***Article History:*

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This study aims to analyze the film *Black Panther* (2018) through Homi K. Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and the Third Space to explore the negotiation of identity, technology, and power within an African context. Using a qualitative-descriptive method, this research examines selected dialogues and narrative scenes to reveal how the film constructs ideological tensions between T'Challa and Killmonger as two responses to colonial trauma reform and radical resistance. Vibranium functions not only as a source of technological advancement but also as a symbolic site of neo-colonial anxiety. Furthermore, Wakanda emerges as a hybrid state that embodies both cultural heritage and modern progress, while exposing the vulnerabilities of postcolonial nations to global exploitation. The findings suggest that *Black Panther* transcends the conventional boundaries of the superhero genre, offering a critical reflection on technological hybridity, racial identity, and postcolonial futures in the era of globalization.

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INTRODUCTION

Hollywood has long been the epicenter of global popular culture, with the United States shaping narratives that extend far beyond entertainment. As a powerful cultural institution, Hollywood not only reflects but also constructs global ideologies of race, identity, and power (Malik et al., 2022). Its globalization has transformed storytelling into a commercial and political enterprise that seeks to appeal to transnational audiences. One manifestation of this trend is the growing presence of racial and cultural diversity within major franchises such as Marvel, Disney, and DC. The inclusion of characters of color is often celebrated as progress, yet it remains embedded in Western structures of meaning. While these films outwardly promote representation, they also reinforce systems of cultural capitalism, white supremacy, and

symbolic colonialism (Hatchett, 2020; Jenkins, 2024). Thus, inclusivity in Hollywood must be understood not merely as empowerment but as part of a larger ideological negotiation between representation and control.

Within this dynamic, minority identities in film are often depicted as hybrid, oscillating between ancestral tradition and Western modernity. Such hybrid portrayals reflect what Bhabha (1994) describes as cultural interstices the spaces where meaning and identity are constantly negotiated. Ryan Coogler's *Black Panther* (2018) exemplifies this negotiation. As one of the first mainstream superhero films to center African identity, *Black Panther* celebrates Black culture and empowerment through its depiction of Wakanda, a technologically advanced yet culturally rooted African nation. However, as a product of Marvel Studios and Disney, it also functions within the capitalist framework of the Western entertainment

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industry. This duality makes *Black Panther* a rich text for postcolonial analysis.

Previous studies have explored the film's political and cultural dimensions from various perspectives. Bucciferro (2021) examines how the film reshapes representations of Black masculinity and femininity, while Faramelli (2019) situates *Black Panther* within broader Black political discourse. Sere et al. (2020) focus on how African cultural identity is represented in relation to lived realities, revealing the film's attempt to balance authenticity and global accessibility. Tavana and Santosa (2022) analyze the concept of Black heroism as a marginalized narrative in Hollywood, Jacobus et al. (2022) investigate the symbolism of vibranium and its connection to power and knowledge in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Despite this growing body of scholarship, limited attention has been given to vibranium itself as a central metaphor of postcolonial negotiation. Existing analyses often treat it merely as a plot mechanism rather than as a symbolic construct that embodies Africa's historical and contemporary anxieties over resource exploitation.

Vibranium, the fictional metal that underpins Wakanda's technological supremacy, functions as more than a narrative device. It can be read as a metaphor for technological hybridity and neo-colonial anxiety (Collins & Appleby, 2018). As both a source of power and a potential threat, vibranium mirrors the real-world conditions of African nations whose natural resources gold, oil, and rare earth elements, have long been subjects of imperial competition. The paradox of vibranium encapsulates a core postcolonial tension: it secures Wakanda's sovereignty while simultaneously inviting the possibility of foreign domination. This duality aligns with Bhabha's notions of ambivalence and hybridity, in which empowerment and vulnerability coexist within the same cultural formation.

Furthermore, the ideological opposition between T'Challa and Killmonger represents two divergent responses to colonial trauma. T'Challa embodies reformist hybridity seeking cooperation and controlled engagement with the global world while Killmonger signifies radical resistance, using

violence and global redistribution as strategies of liberation. Both positions reveal ambivalent postcolonial desires: the will to resist domination and the compulsion to adopt colonial instruments of power. Within this tension, vibranium becomes a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994), a site of cultural translation where identities and ideologies collide to produce new meanings.

While many articles have investigated themes of race, identity, and representation in *Black Panther*, few have examined how the film constructs vibranium as a symbolic site of postcolonial negotiation. Most studies emphasize identity politics or cultural representation without addressing how technological hybridity reflects deeper anxieties about neo-colonial control.

Therefore, this study aims to analyze how *Black Panther* constructs vibranium as a symbolic site of postcolonial negotiation, using Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity, ambivalence, and the Third Space to reveal the film's engagement with neo-colonial anxiety. Through a qualitative-descriptive analysis of selected dialogues and narrative scenes, the paper argues that vibranium represents a technological and ideological intersection where cultural identity, resistance, and power are continuously redefined in the postcolonial world.

METHODS

This research employs a descriptive qualitative approach using narrative and symbolic analysis of *Black Panther* (2018). This approach is appropriate for exploring meaning, structure, and representation in cultural texts, providing insight into the socio-political and postcolonial dimensions embedded in film narratives (Creswell & Creswell, 2003).

The primary data of this research are drawn from the movie *Black Panther*, including character dialogues, narrative structure, visual composition, and the symbolism surrounding vibranium. The secondary data consist of theoretical and scholarly sources such as Homi K. Bhabha's concepts of hybridity and ambivalence, as well as related

journals, articles, and online materials discussing postcolonial criticism and film studies.

The researcher serves as the primary instrument in data collection and interpretation. The process involved repeatedly watching the film, identifying and highlighting relevant dialogues or visual scenes, and taking analytical notes on symbolic and narrative elements. The collected data were then organized and classified according to the research focus to address the formulated research questions.

Data were analyzed through close reading and symbolic interpretation. The narrative and visual aspects of the film were examined through close reading, while symbolic interpretation was used to uncover the cultural and political meanings of vibranium. As Greenham (2018) notes, close reading extends beyond textual comprehension to reveal metaphorical and ideological layers that disclose deeper meanings within the text.

The analysis is framed within Bhabha's postcolonial theory, particularly the concepts of hybridity and ambivalence, which serve to explain how vibranium operates as a site of postcolonial negotiation between cultural sovereignty and global domination. Bhabha's postcolonial framework enables a contextual interpretation of filmic representations as negotiations between global power and local identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Hybridity of T'Challa's Identity: Negotiating Culture and Technology

According to Homi K. Bhabha (1994), hybridity refers to an ongoing process through which cultural identities are negotiated within the "in-between" or Third Space, where new meanings emerge beyond binary oppositions such as colonizer/colonized or tradition/modernity. Hybridity, therefore, is not a passive mixture but an active, creative rearticulation of culture.

This concept is embodied in T'Challa, whose leadership represents a balance between ancestral heritage and global modernity. As king of Wakanda, he remains rooted in spiritual and traditional values but must also confront global

political pressures and colonial remnants. Vibranium symbolizes this duality: a local sacred resource that enables technological innovation beyond Western epistemology (Collins, 2018). It unites the local and the global, the spiritual and the scientific.

The tension of hybridity appears in the ancestral scene when T'Challa confides, *"I want to be a great king, baba... just like you,"* and T'Chaka replies, *"You're a good man with a good heart. And it's hard for a good man to be king"* (Coogler, 2018, 00:32:28). This dialogue implies that leadership requires not only moral virtue but adaptability. T'Challa must reinterpret ancestral wisdom within modern realities, neither rejecting tradition nor wholly embracing Western modernity.

This negotiation aligns with the findings of Triatmodjo et al. (2023), who observed cultural hybridity in Lasem's Gie Yong Bio Temple local symbols reimagined through Chinese religious frameworks to sustain identity through symbolic adaptation. Similarly, Wakanda exemplifies survival through transformation rather than assimilation.

T'Challa's statement, *"Just because something works doesn't mean it can't be improved"* (Coogler, 2018, 00:23:57), reveals that both tradition and technology are open to innovation. Vibranium thus becomes a creative force linking cultural preservation with progress. Later, T'Challa tells Nakia, *"Wakanda is strong enough to help others and protect itself"* (00:48:12), signaling that hybridity extends into global solidarity.

As Kraidy (2002) notes, hybridity allows new cultures to emerge without erasing locality. Yet, Bhandari (2022) cautions that hybridity must remain aware of material inequalities; otherwise, it risks becoming symbolic idealism. In Wakanda, hybridity operates across cultural, political, and material levels enabling autonomy, global diplomacy, and resistance against colonial exploitation. By opening Wakanda to the world, T'Challa redefines hybridity as transformative, not defensive uniting tradition with global collaboration and using vibranium as a metaphor of postcolonial creativity rather than dominance.

Vibranium as a Symbol of Neo-Colonial Ambivalence and Anxiety

In *Black Panther*, vibranium embodies the core of postcolonial ambivalence a material that heals and protects but also threatens and destroys. As Jacobus et al. (2022) argue, vibranium mirrors global anxieties over resource conflicts and the historical exploitation of African minerals. It transforms fictional fantasy into a commentary on neo-colonial resource politics.

The ideological clash between T'Challa and Killmonger dramatizes this ambivalence. Killmonger urges the use of vibranium as a tool of global liberation "*Wakanda has the tools to liberate them all*" while T'Challa resists weaponization: "*Our weapons will not be used to wage war on the world*" (Coogler, 2018, 1:14:22–1:14:49). This confrontation reflects two modes of hybridity: T'Challa's integrative approach versus Killmonger's militant resistance.

Killmonger embodies the diasporic hybrid, shaped by oppression and exile. His revolutionary stance exposes both empowerment and mimicry echoing Bhabha's (1994) idea that hybridity can subvert colonial authority yet risk reproducing its violence. As Tavana and Santosa (2022) observe, Killmonger's radicalism challenges Hollywood's stereotypical portrayals of Black heroism while revealing the dangers of reclaiming identity through domination.

This tension resonates with Albarrán-Torres and Burke (2025), who found that cultural symbols can both empower and destabilize racial politics. Vibranium, in this sense, mirrors the "resource curse" paradox wealth generating instability and moral ambiguity.

T'Challa's eventual decision to share Wakanda's knowledge marks his movement from defensive nationalism to transformative hybridity, turning vibranium from an instrument of control into one of cooperation and solidarity. As Güven and Aldemir (2025) and Inkiriwang & Inkiriwang (2014) argues, hybridity becomes a strategic tool to renegotiate power and identity within postcolonial settings.

Thus, vibranium stands as an ambivalent symbol both an archive of colonial trauma and a blueprint for global unity. The ideological opposition between T'Challa and Killmonger ultimately re-stages the postcolonial condition: the simultaneous longing for liberation and the risk of repeating domination.

Wakanda's Third Space: Tradition, Modernity, and Global Solidarity

The Third Space, as articulated by Bhabha (1994), is an interstitial site where cultural meanings are negotiated and hybrid identities take form. *Black Panther* visualizes this through Wakanda's coexistence of ancestral tradition and futuristic technology.

The opening narrative reveals this ambivalence: while most tribes embrace the vibranium-based monarchy, the Jabari reject it, isolating themselves to preserve tradition. Under M'Baku, they represent resistance to cultural homogenization, reflecting Easthope's (1998) argument that the Third Space acknowledges ongoing identity construction through difference and negotiation.

T'Chaka's early narration reinforces this duality: "As Wakanda thrived, the world around it descended into chaos... To keep vibranium safe, the Wakandans vowed to hide in plain sight." This paradox concealment as protection illustrates the tension between sovereignty and visibility, empowerment and fear of exploitation (Jacobus et al., 2022).

Killmonger, embodying the diaspora, represents Bhabha's mimicry with slippage (1994, pp. 85–87): he imitates colonial logic while resisting it, weaponizing hybridity into violence. Yet, the film ultimately proposes a Third Space resolution through T'Challa's declaration: "*Wakanda will no longer watch from the shadows... We cannot, we must not*" (Coogler, 2018, 2:05:36–2:05:56). This act symbolizes openness and dialogue hybrid solidarity rather than isolation or domination.

As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (2003) suggest, Third Space allows new discourses that transcend colonial dichotomies. Wakanda's

identity, therefore, is not fixed but continuously negotiated, echoing Bhandari (2022) and Tavana & Santosa (2022), who view *Black Panther* as a redefinition of Black heroism through the interplay of tradition and modernity.

In this framework, Wakanda's Third Space becomes a dynamic arena where modernity, spirituality, and global ethics converge. Vibranium, once hidden, evolves into a metaphor for cultural dialogue bridging Africa's historical wounds and its imagined postcolonial futures.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that *Black Panther* (2018) is a representation of hybrid identity in the terms of hybridity, Third Space, and ambivalence proposed by Homi K. Bhabha, and that a central metaphor of the movie is vibranium that has both positive and negative sides: healing and destroying, protecting, and threatening, and turned the symbol of neo-colonial anxieties with the struggle over resources. The identity negotiation of T'Challa demonstrates that the conservative hybridity, based on the traditional values, was changed into the transformative hybridity that opens Wakanda to the solidarity of the world, and Killmonger introduces the subversive hybridity that demands radical emancipation. This ideological conflict is focused on the point that hybridity in the movie is not a constant, but is constantly negotiated in the interplay of tradition, technology, and world power. Therefore, *Black Panther* introduces vibranium as a symbolic field where postcolonial identity and neo-colonial anxieties are fought and redefined within the framework of the modern global culture.

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