noir
Tharunka acknowledges the traditional custodians of this land, the Gadigal and Bedigal people of the Eora nation, on which our university now stands.

www.tharunka.arc.unsw.edu.au

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NOIR

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Welcome

“I first got involved with the SRC because I didn’t just want to study at a University – I wanted to help shape it. I grew up in a country where nothing was achieved without advocacy, change required involvement and nothing gives us more of an opportunity to do this at university than the SRC.

So if you want to learn valuable skills, help other students and make incredible friends who are passionate about the same things that you do, then the SRC is the place for you.”

Jack Solomon
SRC President
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You are welcome.

Collectives

Joining a collective is an amazing way to get involved in something you are passionate about whilst meeting a wide variety of people. Collectives generally meet weekly throughout session.

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<th>Collective / Rep(s)</th>
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You are welcome.

Equity Rooms

Need somewhere to chill out on campus, a quiet place to study, a place to connect with like-minded people? Maybe just a microwave or fridge for your lunch?

The SRC has you covered. We have equity rooms – safe spaces for you to hang out, nap, or get some readings done.

Welfare & Disability Room
A place for autonomous collectives, and also for any student to chill out in the meantime.

International & Ethno-Cultural Room
A chill place for ethnically and culturally diverse students and international students.

Women’s room
The women’s room is an autonomous space for women and women identifying students.

Queer space
An autonomous place to relax and connect with other LGBTIA/Queer students. Meetings and other activities are run by the Queer Collective on a weekly basis.

Head to the website to find out where the rooms are located and how you can use them.
letters from the editors

LUNGOL WEKINA
Managing Editor + Creatives Sub-Editor

I guess I really do make everything about race.

I chose Noir as a theme for this issue because of how complex the word itself is. Despite meaning the same thing in French, Noir in the English language is suggestive of more than just Blackness. I wanted to discuss race, but more specifically the way racism affects Black people all around the world. But this issue was made to surpass the superficial and travel beyond the surface of the issues that oversaturate our media.

Tharunka’s Noir deliberately pays homage to the mid-20th century film genre it is named for in two ways. Firstly, it embraces the concepts of darkness and divergence that dominated Noir cinema both aesthetically and thematically. Secondly, it dives into the shadows and asks questions we may be too afraid to answer.

Why do we allow others to suffer simply because of how much pigment is present in the skin they were born with? How do we convince ourselves of our own goodness when we’re complicit in the violence enacted against others? And how can we live with ourselves when our comfort comes at the expense of others?

Noir is more than just a conversation about race. It is a critical examination of the power imbalances that exist within our society, and the damage that arises as a consequence. So I hope this issue encourages you to challenge the systems that afford privilege to some at the expense of others, and empower you to actively dismantle them.

I had the pleasure of overseeing the Creatives portfolio for this particular issue. When I was looking for content, I asked for pieces that peered into the darkness often hidden in the corners of our societies and our souls. I wanted brutal honesty – painful truths and harsh realities. You hope you are just as impressed as I was.

Monsters were a significant theme in this particular issue. Matthew Bugden takes a leaf out of Frankenstein’s book and created something new from a hundred songs he didn’t write. Dani Camilet writes of monsters literally, as I was.

There is pain in darkness, but there is also good – Albert Lin knows fear lies in the shadows, but he wants you to know that hope can be found there too. Charm Sing brings a burst of colour to this issue with an homage to the indigenous people of her land, juxtaposing the darkness of colonisation and violence. Finally, Jeni Rohrer and Jordan Fleming engage with Noir head on, one with written finesse and the other with artistic flair.

I hope you enjoy the journey this issue will take you on, and do what you will with what you learn on the way.

AMY G6
Designer

Noir forces us to take the ugly in with the highly aestheticised. Instead of smoothing things into simple black and white, the high contrasts found in the genre emphasise the grittiness within the frame. In a lot of the media that you consume today, things are smoothed out to be as pleasant as possible. I hope that this issue roughens things up a touch.

Jack Mangos
Features Sub-Editor

The difficulty in planning and releasing an issue like Noir is that article quality is closely related to the gravity of the content. The theme invites thoughts about those features of our social environment that we would prefer to not have to face. Even more potently, Noir invites the consideration of those parts of ourselves that predispose us to these types of behaviour.

The articles in this issue seem to demonstrate that the further we dig, the more “violence” we can uncover. Where we now see improvements in Indigenous land rights, Caitlin Morton identifies that this is built in part on a mostly forgotten history of nuclear testing on Indigenous land. While Black Panther was lauded by many as a positive move in the representation of African and African American actors and culture on-screen, Lungol Wekina argues it in fact insidiously undercuts the call for racial equality. The non-fictional media as a site for biased reporting on race-related issues is similarly examined by Lisa Yoon and Carolyn Fernandez. And while we may think that the police and the courts form a barrier to violence, this is revealed as a simple translocation of violence from the personal to the structural by Clare Megahey.

Noir invites personal, as well as social, examination. In reading these articles, I hope the reader will take the time to reflect on what aspects of their own personality could contribute to these darker aspects of our modern world; in this regard, as well as many others, this issue has been highly instructive.

Sahana Handakumar
Digital Sub-Editor

Cynicism, fatalism, ambiguity. Noir is about predicting the dark, living the dark and revealing the dark.

Tharunka’s online platforms have seen a rapid spurt in engagement and discussion in the last couple of weeks and we aim to keep that going. Our reviews and articles will explore how noir doesn’t stop with films, but is everywhere… out in the city, right inside uni and essentially in every single soul.

Like and follow our online platforms to see how our pieces are opaque but transparent.

PS: The ones who scroll through our posts without reacting to them have the darkest souls I’ve known. Don’t be one of them.

Maggie Hill
(Incoming) Creatives Sub-Editor

To me, Noir is essentially comprised of two main things: darkly lit alleyways and the ultimate femme fatale. Better way to introduce myself as the newest member of the Tharunka team, than with two things I love and steamy jazz music playing metaphorically in the background.

My name is Maggie Hill and I am the new Creatives Sub-Editor for 2018. I am really excited to be a part of such a longstanding campus tradition and hope I can help to uphold the raw and meaningful content Tharunka is known for. What drew me to the role was my love for all things creative, with a special soft spot in my heart for poetry, and my respect for Tharunka as an outlet for students to express themselves and get their work published. I really hope that I can uphold the respected qualities the magazine is known for, but also help to bring a new and passionate voice to the table.

My first official edition of Tharunka as editor is Binary and I would love to see all of your artistic desires fulfilled. Don’t forget to submit – even if you’re feeling only just a little bit creative!
My Love,

They’ll say the monsters will protect you.

I cannot drench them in honey to melt them from your tears
I cannot douse them in light to burn them from your shadows
I cannot drown them in song to strike them from your dreams

These are no ordinary monsters.
And they will not protect you.

They protect the good and punish the vile
Their good is white, our black, hostile
They protect the good and punish the vile
Shot dead, daylight; unjudged, no trial

These are no ordinary monsters.

Bulletproof scales, bulletproof tails,
Bullets, proof, fails to put them in jail.
Protect and serve, defend the innocent,
Protect the murderer, prove him innocent.

These are no ordinary monsters.

You cannot drench them in honey
You cannot douse them in light
You cannot drown them in song

You can only raise your hands and beg for your life
For these are no ordinary monsters
beast

When I was ten there was something about the dark that made me brave.

I found light in the shadows,

Could feel the silhouette

And slivers of moonlight

Holding me.

In the dark no one watched,

And in the dark I could dream.

I dreamed of growing wings; each feather pinfully sprouting a blood-motted white,

Could feel my nails morphing into claws,

And teeth so sharp they could tear flesh,

Gouge eyes,

Make one scream with pain.

Fear of the world’s danger keeps us locked inside these four walls,

Blocking out the noise and scenes and scenes.

Yet they wonder why the lion bites,

When ration of its senses.

They fear the dark

And tip-toe,

Shirking the edges, scurrying the alleys.

Not for what lays unknown,

But for what they fear might just wake up once more.

As the lamp post flickers,

A child’s cry is heard,

Its mother’s siren echoes she wails.

I howl.

I hunt.
I wanted to illustrate pre-colonial Filipino culture and costumes to illuminate and honour our diverse and beautiful origins, most of which has been lost to history. Information on the Philippines prior to colonisation is vastly limited and incomplete. We are such a diverse nation, consisting of more than 7,000 islands, that even these two images represent only a small portion of the cultures that thrived before Spanish rule and American influence. Currently, we are living day to day with the future in our minds, but in these drawings, I wanted to go back to our roots – back to how the land shaped us and how we shaped the land. My heart will always be back home and sometimes home is something that can't be physically felt.
1. Nobody pray for me
2. Honey, it’s no secret I’ve been losing my way
3. Living on the outskirts
4. It’s not just a personality thing
5. I’m more just fumbling around in the dark for the bulk of my day
6. Thought you said you would always be in love
7. I miss the old way
8. An intelligent lady with a lot to say
9. Write it on a piece of paper, honey
10. A definitive cry in the present age
11. What do you mean, you ain’t got no cash?
12. Honey, money only buys you fake magic
13. So you’re still thinking of me
14. Seeing me rolling, showing someone else love
15. It’s okay to step away from someone long term
16. I know you feel the way I do
17. First time on the train, I was shocked
18. I don’t care for their names, or what they did
19. The other boys, I don’t give a damn
20. I cannot feel responsible for you as well as me
21. Let me forget all about it tonight
22. My eyes are getting wider with every word you say
23. And I was happy with my friends
24. Cocaine on the table, liquor pouring, don’t give a damn
25. Only on weekends
26. Till about a quarter of my life has almost passed
27. And darling, you’re looking at me with that innocent stare
28. Can’t go back now, I know that
29. Baby, I have nothing left
30. Baby, I’ve been liking this electric living
31. Chilling in the corridor
32. I was born for this
33. Trying to make it through the night
34. Drinking in the basement
35. I won’t bend to you, no – I don’t know how to
36. You’ll find somebody you can blame
37. See how she looks for trouble
38. And I was back and forth forgiveness, but I couldn’t forgive myself
39. She pops out to meet a stranger on the corner, I’m gone
40. I have to make some money, while you’re in sheets all alone
41. I’m sorry I even let you promise that you’d try
42. I blame it all on myself
43. Laying on my back again
44. Why do I have to live like this?
45. Chilling in this corridor
46. Those early days of the six-packs and stimulants
47. Drinking in the basement
48. I’ve been liking this electric living
49. Honey, it’s no secret I’ve been losing my way
50. It’s not just a personality thing
51. I’m more just fumbling around in the dark for the bulk of my day
52. Thought you said you would always be in love
53. I miss the old way
54. An intelligent lady with a lot to say
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85. She pops out to meet a stranger on the corner, I’m gone
86. I have to make some money, while you’re in sheets all alone
87. I’m sorry I even let you promise that you’d try
88. I blame it all on myself
89. In a different time, a different place
90. You’ll find somebody you can blame
91. See how she looks for trouble
92. And I was back and forth forgiveness, but I couldn’t forgive myself
93. Some things just don’t add up
94. I’m lonelier than I’ve ever been
95. Guess I’m sick of things being the same
96. Next year I’ll learn to play the guitar
97. I never thought you would be like that
98. I blame it all on myself
99. I do what I want
100. I’m addicted to no-one

*Every line is from the song on the Triple J Hottest 100 that corresponds to its number (2017): http://www.abc.net.au/triplej/hottest100/17/countdown/1-100/
In the shadows,
Evil hides from prying eyes, and conducts its business,
Taking tears as payment for sacrileges rendered.
It hides in the shadows behind our eyes, blinding us
And binding us.
It hides in the shadows in our hearts, poisoning our
Love and charity.
It hides in the shadows inside our sleeves, turning silver into steel and outstretched hands
Into fists.
Evil will not let you consider what is or is not evil,
Or whether anything is worth living,
Or how to be happy.
It grows,
A leech on our souls and a seed in our heads.
And the world shows it.

The world in which we
Survive
Is not always kind.
It’s a brutal, uncaring world
At times,
Filled with nothing but apathy
And self-centred concerns.
A world where people fight over scraps in the gutter,
While others gorge on excess.
Where hopes are hopeless
And dreams are wastes of time,
Where beauty is a commodity
And goodwill is a clerical error.
It’s a world as bleak as a coalface and just as unclean,
An obsidian soul so sharp and painful.

But the world we live in can be kind.
It can be good, and true, and faithful,
If we look for it.
If we open ourselves up to the pains of the world,
Be vulnerable and candid with the bad,
The nice can sneak in with a bandaid and aspirin afterwards.
If we look for the good,
If we look for the helpers,
The eternally optimistic,
The gentle souls,
We will find it.
We will find it hidden in soup kitchens,
In a polite conversation,
In the eyes of a parent.
Witnessing true beauty.
We will find it glimmering,
Too modest to declare itself to the world,
But too righteous to hide forever in the darkness.
You just have to wait, and see.

Evil can hide in the shadows, but so can good.
Radioactive Racism

ENVIRONMENTAL DEGRADATION OR DESTRUCTION generates risks and harms for human communities, both in the vicinity and across the globe. When air quality drops in industrialised regions, for example, multiple health risks are posed to the surrounding communities, including increased risk of mortality and risks to the cardiovascular and respiratory systems. Governments have historically been charged with protecting human society from environmental risks and harms, yet this responsibility requires compromise. The state must attempt to balance the human and economic benefits of environmentally destructive developments (such as employment opportunity, harvesting ample benefits of environmentally destructive developments) with limited contribution to non-indigenous peoples (Friends of the Earth, n.d.). While the Monto Bello Islands were uninhabited, tests in mainland Australia were conducted in areas inhabited by Indigenous Australians. In these mainland tests, the vulnerability of Aboriginal people in affected areas was not considered by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (UK) or the Safety Committee.

Radium Hill

Radium Hill, Australia’s first uranium mining project, began at what would become a trend of Aboriginal displacement for the purposes of the Australian nuclear industry. Running in two separate phases from 1906-1931, Radium Hill operated on land previously occupied by First Nations people (Friends of the Earth, n.d.). While the mine’s product was initially used for nuclear medicine and the colouring of glass and ceramics, it was recommissioned in 1954 by the United States and United Kingdom Combined Development Agency (CDA), in agreement with the Australian government, and became responsible for the procurement of uranium supplies for UK and USA nuclear weapons programs. In part, this uranium would eventually be used to test nuclear weapons on populated Aboriginal land. The Radium Hill mine produced 970,000 tonnes of ore, which constituted 850 tonnes of uranium.

In 1996, almost forty years after the mine’s second decommissioning, the site was chosen to be used as a nuclear waste repository, predominately storing contaminated soils and mining equipment labelled as ‘low-risk’. A 2003 South Australian Government report contradicts itself by assuring the safe containment of waste, and noting the facility could not store this non-adherence with modern safety standards. Research conducted in 2006 highlighted the ongoing contamination of the environment surrounding Radium Hill, confirming the failure of the site’s storage facilities. This research found lithophile uptake in vegetation, a potential means of transfer of uranium into grazing animals. As such, not only was the mine initially located on previously occupied land, but how such part of the nuclear cycle has disproportionately impacted First Nations people, and devalued their unique concerns, cultures, and identities.

ATOMIC BOMB TESTING IN AUSTRALIA

Arguably the most famous of nuclear injustices in Australian history were the bomb tests conducted in cooperation with the British Government for the Argon Range Weapons Establishment (ARWWE). In 1950, Robert Menzies consented to the use of Australian land for atomic bomb testing in a phone call with British PM Clement Attlee without even discussing the project with his cabinet. The Monto Bello Islands off the coast of Western Australia were the original site for atomic tests, but the program moved to Emu Field and finally Maralinga in the search for the most suitable site. While the Monto Bello Islands were uninhabited, tests in mainland Australia were conducted in areas inhabited by Indigenous Australians. In these mainland tests, the vulnerability of Aboriginal people in affected areas was not considered by the Atomic Weapons Research Establishment (UK) or the Safety Committee.

EMU FIELD

On October 15th, 1952, an atomic bomb was dropped in Emu Field, about 250km north-west of Cowell, in a project dubbed ‘Operation Totem’, to disastrous effect on surrounding communities. The Royal Commission into British Nuclear Tests in Australia (1985) (hence referred to as the ‘Royal Commission’) found weather conditions did not meet the safety criteria of the period for atomic testing. This was ignored by the testing group, who had waited two weeks for conditions to improve. As was predictable, the radioactive fallout combined with the suboptimal weather produced a cloud of radioactive material, named the ‘Black Mist’, which spread nuclear fallout material across a huge radius, and became responsible for higher rates of Aboriginal deaths all the way to Coober Pedy, Yami Lester, a child during the Emu Field tests, who was eventually blinded by the Black Mist, reflects on the cloud making its way through his community in Wallatinna, “It was coming through the south, black – like smoke. I was thinking it might be a dust storm, but it was quiet, just moving.” His stepfather recalls “there was... a sprinkling rain, like dropping of dew. But there had been no rain. The smell was on our clothes and bodies. We felt cold and shivery. A shiver went through the heart... Pinkiaki got sore eyes, I got sore eyes. Before that Yani had good eyes. Then my grand mother passed away”. Judy Mayawara, who grew up and worked in the Wallatinna region, remembered ‘people getting sick from the smoke. Vomiting green vomit. Passing green faeces’ and her son also developing eyeight problems.

Within days, the old and frail had passed away, with approximately 20 more deaths occurring over the next year (though, due to a lack of official record keeping, the number is believed to be higher). This was one of two atomic bombs detonated in Emu Field, before a permanent project was established in Maralinga due to the remoteness of Emu Field and Monto Bello Islands. Seeking a remote area with limited accessibility was therefore not the key criteria in the establishment of Maralinga as the new site for atomic bomb testing.
MARALINGA

Prior to British contact in 1870, the Anangu people had managed the delicate desert environment to live self-sufficiently. Contact with construction workers and the eventual establishment of the town of Maralinga, created a dependence on rations (which were to be worked for), and the rise of alcoholism amongst the Anangu. When the mission was closed in the 1940s, the desert environment had been rendered unsuitable for self-sufficient lifestyles and traditional knowledge systems were damaged by over thirty years of enforced dependency.33

In 1954, a year after the Emu Field tests began, Menzies removed the ‘Aboriginal Reserve’ status of Maralinga, labelling the region as simply ‘desert’. By the following year, with the intention of testing nuclear weapons, most of the former reserve was declared a prohibited area and signs were erected, in English, warning readers not to enter. There remained Anangu people in the region who had not yet come into contact with British settlers, and some were unable to read these warning signs. The ‘Native Patrol Officer’ tasked with locating and warning Aboriginal people in the region reported hunting fires visible from the air; a group of thirty-four Anangu living in one area, and another fourteen (including 8 children) in another, as well as over 1000 people in the general area with numbers increasing. Atomic bomb testing began in Maralinga on the 27th of September 1956, with these concerns unaddressed. Several major bomb tests and over 700 minor projects were conducted on the site until 1963. The Royal Commission found that the task of the Native Patrol Officer to remove Aboriginal people for Emu Field and Maralinga tests was impossible, processes to guarantee the safety of Aboriginal people were under resourced, and that the distinct vulnerability of Aboriginal communities to radioactive fallout was not been appropriately considered.

The British Government was contractually obliged to perform two clean-ups of the area before the contrast with the Australian Government ended, and the Australian government performed a final clean-up in the late 1960s, in no instance has the clean-up properly addressed the issue of residual contamination and the Australian government performed a final clean-up before the study to investigate the location of the new repository, public concerns regarding the lack of consultation with Indigenous communities have gone unanswered, while public comment suggesting the government address unique Indigenous concerns were met twice with the reply that “[eliminating] Aboriginal land from the process could be regarded as presumptuous”40, 41

Additionally, the process of gaining consent should be informative rather than coercive. In the case of Brewarina, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANTS0) and the local council have distributed promotional material emotively referencing the importance of处处长 nuclear medicine which is possible through ANTS0 isotopes, which fails to properly inform the community of whether the new waste repository is necessary. Nonetheless, First Nations communities across NSW and SA are still under nomination for the siting of the repository, with a postal ballot process for selection recently announced in SA.

PROPOSED NATIONAL RADIOACTIVE WASTE REPOSITORY

It would be easy to assume that discrimination through nuclear testing is a feature of Australia’s political past, and while that may be true, the evidence in the nuclear industry demonstrate that this form of inequality is very much alive. This can be seen in the unresolved issue of the construction of a new nuclear waste repository, which has both failed to amend the errors at Maralinga, and has not taken into account the unique concerns of Indigenous Australians.

The federal government has been attempting to secure a site for the development of a new nuclear waste repository for over twenty years, with past attempts, including near Woomera (a British township developed as part of the LWIR), and Muckaty in the NT, being unsuccessful due to resistance from state governments and ‘affected local and Indigenous communities’. Under the National Radioactive Waste Management Act of 2012, any new site must be voluntarily nominated by ‘landholders’. However, a number of features of the nominations process are dismissive of the concerns of Indigenous Australians. First, the very need for permission by ‘landholders’ for the construction of the waste facility removes the authority of the traditional, but not legally recognised, owners of the land. This was seen recently in the shock expressed by elders of one community when their Elders were informed that the Sandiorra region was suggested as a location for the site without any Indigenous consultation.39

Additionally, site nominations tend to occur in areas with higher than average Indigenous populations – Brewarina, for example, a recent nomination with 63.5% Indigenous population, compared with the Australian average of 3.4%. Finally, in the National Radioactive Waste Repository Site Selection Study, the study to investigate the location of the new repository, public concerns regarding the lack of consultation with Indigenous communities have gone unanswered, while public comment suggesting the government address unique Indigenous concerns were met twice with the reply that “[eliminating] Aboriginal land from the process could be regarded as presumptuous”40, 41

REFERENCES

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“When left to its own devices, does humanity find equilibrium, or does it disintegrate into aggression and subjects?” (Ehri 2017)

**Film Noir Has Portrayed The Human Experience with Societal Authority Structures with Artful, Expressionist Cinematography Since its Emergence in the Mid-20th Century, Typically in the Form of Stories Detailing Criminal Clashes with the Police. Classic Hollywood noir film of the 1940s and 50s has been characterised by Graeme Ross (2016) as containing “alienated antiheroes, rain slicked streets, dark shadows and seductive femme fatales.” Orson Welles’ *Touch of Evil* (1958) was, according to Tim Dirks (n.d.), the last noir film of this era. In Scandinavia, however, features of the black and white relic of classic-era American noir are being taken out of situ and contextualised in a dynamic and fluid neo-noir, known as Nordic noir. Ruben Östlund’s *The Square* (2017) has contributed to this development, taking the typical noir themes of delinquency and depravity but leaving out an element that has traditionally classified a film as noir, a police presence. In this exclusion, Östlund has unearthed the underlying theme of societal violence in noir, and concurrently raised questions about the true nature of power interactions between individuals.

**The Violent Nuances of Noir**

Twenty minutes is all it takes for *Touch of Evil* to convey its tone and themes: a car bomb explodes on the US-Mexican border, acid is thrown at a Mexican police officer (Mike Vargas), and racial tension is rife (Mexican gang members threaten Vargas’ American wife, Susan, and an American policeman named Hank Quinlan complains about poor police work in Mexico). The mystery of the car bombing is investigated by the ‘good-cop’ Vargas throughout the film, and eventually he finds out that Quinlan himself is responsible, who was seeking vengeance for his murdered wife. This prompts Vargas to ask, arguably of the viewer: “who’s the boss, the cop or the law?” In other words, how can the people trust the police if they don’t adhere to the law that they are supposed to be enforcing? And if the police, like Quinlan, are harming those they are tasked to protect, then who should the people turn to?

*Touchof Evil* is a product of Orson Welles’ libertarianism, a political position that places human liberty on the highest pedestal (Callow 2006). For Welles, the answer to Ehri’s question is the former option; when left to its own devices, humanity finds equilibrium, escaping the corruption and violence endemic to judicial and legal systems. To those familiar with Welles’ politics, it would seem appropriate that he chose Mexico as the setting for the film. *Touch of Evil* (1958) may be a fictional, but it doesn’t stray too far from Mexican truth of the paramount political and police violence in Mexico. Organised crime is known to have a grip on federal law enforcement, facilitated by corrupt politicians. When these politicians don’t comply, gangs take back power through physical violence; on average, a politician is murdered in Mexico every four or five days (McDonnell, 2016). Luis Ribu (2017) goes so far as to argue that Mexico is a country glued together by corruption, shown no better than the arrest of Alejandro Gutiérrez of the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party in December last year on embezzlement charges. This setting underlines the message of the movie; in real life, as in the film, the police perpetrate unjust violence.

Violence in *Touch of Evil*, however, is not limited to murder or assault. Susan is threatened by the Mexican gangsters on several occasions, for example, and in one scene she is kidnapped by the gang (with the help of Quinlan) which then attempts to make it appear as though she had been raped. These examples show an important distinction between direct violence and the threat of it. Violence here is an influence, not necessarily an action.

There may not be violence in the sense that anyone is hit or hurt, but there is nevertheless the threat of physical violence and indirect threat of mental violence that may even be characterised as some type of psychological violence since it constrains human action (Galtung 1969, p.170).

Based on Galtung’s theory, Susan and Mike are confronted with psychological violence, which is just as threatening, and as controlling, as physical violence. However, for psychological violence to be effective, it must be used as well, as intimidation based upon threats accompanied by inaction will invariably fade. This is shown successfully in the scene following the kidnapping, in which Susan lies almost unconscious in the hotel room where her tape has been staged, and Quinlan murders a leading gangster beside her. Susan awakens to this crime scene and to the dual realisation that not only is she being clearly threatened, but that the threats are not empty. It is scenes like these in which *Touch of Evil* constantly enacts violence, following the lead of the first twenty minutes of the film. This progression of violence is not mandatory, however - it can work in reverse, as is the case in *The Square*.

Violence in *The Square* is portrayed as more complex, nuanced, and penetrative than its ancestor *Touch of Evil*, as viewers are bombarded with one aggressive encounter after the other. *The Square* details the consequences for the main character (both protagonist and antagonist) Christian, after he is robbed outside the art museum he curates. He is convinced by his assistant (Michael) to anonymously distribute threatening letters to the residents of a low-income apartment complex, where they have traced the phone’s location. A young boy tracks down Christian after the delivery of these letters days later, demanding an apology as he was mistakenly punished by his parents over the robbery, which Christian refuses to deliver until the film’s conclusion. This personal plot is paralleled by public controversy; in order to promote “The Square”, the titular new exhibit at the art museum, Christian mistakenly authorises a viral marketing video in which a young homeless girl is blown up on the street. The film’s main plotlines are punctuated by arguments between Christian and a woman he has slept with, a chef yelling at guests who refuse to listen to him, and Christian’s daughters fighting.

This list far from encompasses every act of aggression or violence in *The Square*. Trying to keep track is a sensory overload, and it appears that the universe of *The Square* functions against the film’s main motif: “The Square [the fictional exhibit] is a sanctuary of trust and caring. Within its boundaries, we all share equal rights and obligations.” While violence in the film is pervasive, no violent act, considered individually, is far removed from reality. Almost every instance of violence in the film is an extension of normal behaviour. Therefore, while *Touch of Evil* sees violence in our institutions, *The Square* sees violence in us. Does this understanding justify and explain interpersonal violence? Is it simply human nature?

Galtung (1969, p.140) views personal violence as unnecessary, and symptomatic of a lack of “structural violence” (violence imposed upon individuals by society). “It is not at all difficult to imagine a structure so purely structural in its violence that all means of personal violence have been abolished, so that when the structure is threatened there is no second trench defence mobilizing latent personal violence.” Galtung (1969, p.171) synonymises structural violence with social
injustice; in the film, this structural violence is seen in Christian's encounters with several homeless Swedes. The sharp contrast between their lives and Christian's wealth, and the opulence of the art world in which he operates, suggests a complicity in their suffering, which also implicates the audience.

Galtung (1969, p. 180–181) may dislike the assumption "that human beings somehow need violence to be kept in line; if not of the personal type, then of the structural variety," but his discussion of this idea is exactly how characters function in The Square:

The argument would be that if there is no personal violence or threat of personal violence then a very strong hierarchical order is needed to maintain order and control conflict; and if there is no structural violence or threat of structural violence, then personal violence will easily serve as a substitute...this would be a highly pessimistic view of the human condition (Galtung 1969, pp. 180–181).

There is no police presence in the film, and citizens must seemingly take it upon themselves to self-protect and correct antisocial behaviour. In a thirteen-minute uncut sequence, a performance artist (Oleg), pretending to be a non-human primate, stalks a dining room as an act of performance art, which is introduced by this prologue:

As you all know, the hunting instinct is triggered by weakness. If you show fear, the animal might not notice you, and you can hide in the herd safe in the knowledge that someone else will be the prey.

Tension builds as Oleg's performance turns from comical to dangerous. He intimidates and drives men out of the room, harasses a woman for minutes, and begins to physically assault her until the scene cuts when the group of men begin beating Oleg. This is deliberate editing choice, a part of Östlund's moral vision for The Square: “we’re found to confront our own values, and our own visions of ourselves” (Ehiri 2017).

The threat of violence and its undertones are widespread in The Square, but beyond brief instances its physical practice is not explicitly shown. Östlund observes the perversity of societal violence, but he doesn't want to encourage it:

The industry is perverted when it comes to violence...it’s easy way to create a dramatic event. But my view is that human beings are copycats – we imitate what we see. If you’re reproducing pictures around with guns, people will imitate that. Look at any high-school shooting. The images the killers take of themselves in the mirror. (Brooks 2018).

Östlund's view upholds the understanding of violence argued by this article: it is physical and structural, and obvious as well as subconscious. The Square is a Nordic noir in its dark and cynical perception of contemporary society. Although it is clear social and political agenda (Hill & Turnball 2017, p. 6), Östlund’s noir manages to be violent without the gore, which seems to be the insidious way society functions.

Fiction exists as an alternative to non-fiction, and cannot be accepted as a completely accurate representation of reality. What fiction often is, however, especially in the case of noir films, is an understanding of the reality. Noir's treatment of violence once relied on battles between the police and criminals, or violence performed by the identifiably malicious, as was the case in Touch of Evil. These films have evolved in the 21st century to encompass the wider issue of societal violence. Societal violence is exerted not only by authority figures and the institutions they represent; it is reproduced by individuals in their interactions with one another, particularly when there is a perceived threat to personal or group safety. This actuality of human existence is depicted with frightening accuracy in The Square. Neo-noir films suggest that in the founding of social groups, aggressors and subjects are initially present, but that people will eventually fall into a hierarchical equilibrium, with violence (both physical and psychological) remaining to maintain it.

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Putting the Watchers on Trial: The Failure of the Media Response to the Austin Bomber

In March of 2018, the citizens of Austin, Texas were plagued with fear as the threat of a spree bomber hung in the air. While the bomber eventually took his own life, as police surrounded him after a pursuit in the Round Rock district of North Austin, many African-American activists believe that there is much to be amended in the media responses to the bombings. This article will attempt to put the watchers on trial, so to speak, and expose these inconsistencies in reporting and attitude.

The Suspect: The American Media

The racial bias in the media treatment of POC (persons of colour) in America is a sadly recurring pattern to those of us watching from the outside. Not only are white suspects treated with less violence by the police, but they are often given leniency by the American media, while black victims are demonised or simply ignored. White criminals are regularly excused from blame for their crimes due to their attitude. and expose these inconsistencies in reporting and attitude.

Some news organisations even begun to slander House. When reporting on House’s death, Fox News mentioned that he had “faced previous charges in Travis County” when reporting that the police were suspecting him of building the bomb and accidentally killing himself. This kind of coverage of black victims demonises them for their own deaths; in the eyes of the media, they are guilty until proven innocent, even when they are the victims.

Another particularly vile incident had KVUE sever ties with the closed captioning company VITAC when the phrase “this monkey” was used in closed captioning when referring to 17-year-old victim Draylen Mason. After outrage erupted on social media, KVUE cut ties with VITAC, and VITAC also issued an apology (in which they claimed the mistake was not “intentional”).

The treatment of Conditt’s victims resonates with other cases of media treatment of white-on-POC violence. When a black 17-year-old child, Trayvon Martin, was killed by a white neighbourhood watch volunteer in 2012, multiple sources painted him as a “thug”. One tweet from the New York Times read “Trayvon Martin Had Been Suspended Over Marijuana”, for example, which demonstrates the way in which the media appears to justify black deaths, or tarnish the reputation of black victims. In March 2012, a similar attempt at justification came from reporter and talk show host Geraldo Rivera, who attempted to explain Martin’s death because he was “wearing a hoodie” at the time he was shot.

Exhibit 2: The Bomber

The treatment of the victims, Stephan House in particular, contrasts strongly with how the American media treated Conditt. After he was confirmed to be the bomber, the New York Times tweeted an article with a headline depicting Conditt as a “nerdy young man” from a “tight-knit, godly family” after interviewing a family friend. The implication is that the bomber had supposedly just lost his way. The New York Times was later forced to apologise for this tweet. Many readers pointed out in their responses to the paper, which published the complaints they received, that interviews with close family friends and attempts to humanise an attacker is a courtesy that is rarely given to black criminals or suspects.

The stark differences between the New York Times coverage of Martin, a murdered child, and Conditt, an adult spree bomber with a body count of two, are a clear demonstration of the bias within the mainstream media. While the article on the bomber was, unsurprisingly, not received well on social media, the fact that the New York Times wrote and published the article, and the tweet in particular, is symptomatic of a larger problem within news organisations. Clearly, and this seems to be the case even for the esteemed New York Times when a suspect is white, the tendency for media stories to shield them by using words such as “quiet” and “troubled”, but when the victim is a POC, they tend to be vilified. To the media, House was a black man with “previous charges” but Conditt was “nerdy young man”.

Exhibit 3: Clock Boy

We can also compare the media’s treatment of the Austin bomber to their treatment of Ahmed Mohamed, the 14-year-old “Clock Boy” who was famously arrested and suspended from school after bringing a “bomb” to class. The alleged bomb was, in reality, an alarm clock, fitted into a metallic briefcase, which Mohamed had built and wanted to show to his teacher. A media frenzy ensued, fuelled by Mohamed’s identity as the son of a Muslim Sudanese immigrant.

After his arrest and release, Mohamed received support from many sources, including many celebrities and journalists. However, some news organisations ran ridiculous stories against him. Predictably, Fox News ripped Ahmed apart on air, accusing him of bringing the clock as a “hoax bomb” for a PR stunt, while some commentators argued the response to Mohamed’s arrest was an “overreaction” to an atmosphere of perceived excessive Islamophobia by “self-satisfied liberals”. That Mohamed was eventually invited to the White House by Obama himself is somewhat irrelevant here; the media circus had already happened by the time amends were made.

Interestingly, although much attention was given to Mohamed’s faith, similar attention was not paid to the Austin bomber. When Conditt was younger, he attended survivalist Christian camps, run by a group called Righteous Invasion of Truth (RIOT), which teaches teenagers gun skills as well as providing Christian instruction. Conditt’s sister mentioned to Buzzfeed News that these camps featured many teenagers interested in science, and that they would “discuss chemicals and how to mix them and which ones were dangerous.”

It is highly unlikely that these informal discussions at a youth camp contributed to Conditt’s eventual crimes, but importantly, Conditt’s presence at these camps was not reported widely in the media, and is notably absent in reports on the bombings in articles from the New York Times and the New Yorker. It is easy to imagine how prominent the story would be had Conditt attended similarly-focused camps with Islamic instruction.

This bias has been at least partly quantified by the Institute for Social Policy and Understanding, a Washington-based research institute. A study taking into account years of planned or successfully executed acts of ideological violence in the U.S. has highlighted the stark differences in the way that the media treats the perpetrator depending on their background. Media coverage involving Muslim perpetrators was on average 770% higher than non-Muslim ideological violence. As such, while all forms of ideologically-motivated violence should be equally condemned in principle, those perpetrated by Muslims are known to be given more media attention.
**THE VERDICT**

The American media is plagued with biased reporting of race-related crime and violence, preventing accurate or useful reporting. Violence against POC, or violence perpetrated by Muslims, are inadequately or exceptionally covered, and may well contribute to the growing divisions within American society.

**THE SENTENCERS**

Ultimately, what can be done? Perhaps, instead of focusing on the perpetrator of the violence, and thus putting aside any accidental or deliberate shielding of Conditt, the lives that were taken too soon can be celebrated.

Stephen House was a community leader and father, a talented athlete who planned to mentor young boys and girls that summer.

"He was as a humble, motivated, and quiet man, whose purpose, in the words of his mother on his GoFundMe page, “was to provide the best possible opportunities for his family to enjoy a fruitful, love-filled life”."

"He was an athlete, started his own hedge fund account from scratch," his brother Norrell Waynewood said.

"We were a community, the type of guy who just wants to push."

He is survived by his wife and his 8-year-old daughter, who he was helping get ready for school when he was killed.

17-year-old Draylen Mason was a dearly loved boy who always had an “infectious smile” on his face, remembered by friends and family as gentle and hardworking. He loved to dance, play bass, and was remembered by friends and family as gentle and hardworking. He loved to dance, play bass, and was remembered by friends and family as gentle and hardworking.

Stephen House’s Family’s GoFundMe: https://www.gofundme.com/tx-bomb-leaves-8yr-old-daughter-wo

Draylen Mason’s Family’s YouCaring: https://www.youcaring.com/jennfosterfamily/1120564

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Jessica Jones

+ Noir

FROM THE GRITTY ILLUSTRATIONS AND DARK, evocative music of the opening sequence to the jarring camera angles and the ever-present pervasive lighting, Netflix’s Jessica Jones is neo-noir in its most obvious form. More a style and tone than genre, the noir element is more fitting. Characterised by an emphasis on cynicism and disillusionment, multifaceted and elaborate narratives, and the technical use of low-key lighting, narration, and flashbacks, noir films often reflect the conflicts and anxieties of the time in which they are created. When this style extended past the noir period of the twentieth century, and began representing updated circumstances and content, neo-noir was born.

Season One introduces us to Jessica Jones, a severely damaged, deeply flawed - albeit effective - private investigator with a penchant for booze and dry sarcasm. Opening on grainy, shadowed shots of cheaters, accompanied by Jessica’s gravelly sardonic wit. The following twelve episodes are marked by over-narrated paranoia and guilt peppered with flashbacks and hallucinations of her past trauma. And in true noir style, it is the memory of this that drives her forward. Over the course of these flashbacks, it becomes clear that Jessica has been compelled into a non-consensual relationship with Kilgrave and is still reeling with the memories of her actions while under his control. When she’s not drunk or hungover in her claustrophobic, low-rent apartment-slash-office with no lock and venetian blinds (with car headlights dramatically streaming through the gaps, of course), Jones spends her time on dimly-lit New York streets and grimy fire escapes. The locations of this gritty noir are characteristic of classic noir films that embrace dark, gloomy interiors and rain-slicked streets.

With Jessica as our brooding anti-hero, there’s no room for her to be either the archetypical good and loving woman or the femme fatale that we so often see in noir cinema. By subverting the pessimistic, hard-hearted detective disillusioned with society that is so characteristically present, it would make sense to use another female character to fill this archetype. And so, we have Jeri Hogarth as the scheming, powerful lawyer cheating on her spouse with her secretary, and Trish Walker as the child-star turned talk show host who just barely hides her jealousy of Jessica’s powers. The answer to this femme fatale gap lies with the ‘big bad’ of the season, Kilgrave. Positioned as the personification of misogyny and sexism, Kilgrave has the power to make somebody do anything he wants, and finds particular pleasure in forcing women to smile. The truly terrifying aspect of his powers is the way he is able to influence desires, making his victims really want to do these awful things, not unlike the seductive power of the traditional femme fatale.

Kilgrave’s influence creates a strong sense of paranoia, not only in Jessica, but also in Trish and Oscar Arocho’s initial mistrust, the alienation and Hogarth continually manipulate and damage women of colour. Jessica’s history has also been changed quite drastically in relation to the original comics, in particular, the reason for her powers. The unsanctioned experimental surgeries performed on both Jessica and her mother give us the requisite moral ambiguity of neo-noir.

The male anti-hero of classic noir doesn’t question his role in society and how he is so easily able to straddle the two worlds of good and evil. Jessica Jones uses its female protagonist to not only question what it means to be a hero, but to examine how women can find their true identity free from the constraints of society’s expectations. Trish and Hogarth continually manipulate and damage others to change their own circumstances and ‘win,’ but it is our anti-hero Jessica who faces the greatest internal conflict, while still trying to help others. By the end, she has achieved a certain level of acceptance of her own situation, echoing her mother’s words. ‘Here isn’t a bad word, Jessica. It’s just someone who gives a shit and does something about it.’
With the increasing importance of isolationist populism globally — and we need look no further than Brexit or the election of Donald Trump as examples — it is easy to assume that media attention given to racist causes is on the rise. Recently, it would appear as though mainstream and leftist media outlets have more readily given a platform to those on the far-right, as an inevitable result of the growth of these political movements globally. Channel 7, Triple J, and even NPR in the US have all come under fire online for hosting members of alt-right movements, which are closely related to right-wing populism.

This viewpoint is held by the Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner, Tim Soutphommasane, who at the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination in Geneva commented:

“...And, unfortunately, there are signs that racial intolerance and prejudice are on the rise. There has been a deterioration of public discourse in Australia on matters concerning race and immigration. There has been, if you like, a normalisation of bigotry and discrimination that is beginning to creep into the Australian civic culture [...] And, we have found in recent years that far-right political groups are enjoying regular and sympathetic platforms on mainstream media.”

However, the normalisation of racism and bigotry are not “just beginning” to creep into civic culture. The declaration of Terra Nullius in 1788 normalised racism within Australian law, politics, and our social environment. It took over 200 years for Terra Nullius to be rejected by the High Court, yet Indigenous Australians continue to fight for their basic human rights. This ongoing struggle was seen in the Northern Territory intervention in 2007, in which the operation of the Racial Discrimination Act 1976 (Cth) was suspended. This move was deemed discriminatory by UN Special Rapporteur James Anaya, and considered unnecessary even by Indigenous groups in support of the intervention.

Within our media too, racism appears to be part of our “normal”. Even our most mainstream media sources have seriously infringed professional codes of conduct. In 2015, 4,000 protesters rallied at Flinders St. Station against the closure of Indigenous communities, the Herald Sun dismissed them as a “Selfish Rabble”. A more recent instance was the Sunrise ‘debate’ about the adoption of Indigenous children, in which commentators favourably called the Uluru Statement of the Heart, a missed opportunity for the Government to create a strong, Constitutionally-protected platform for dialogue with First Australians.

Public discourse on race and immigration can’t be characterised as “deteriorating” if it was never healthy, and it should come as no surprise when our elected officials fail to lead us into more constructive dialogue. So where do we go from here? How can we repair our public discourse after years of bigotry and fake news? Is that even possible?

One answer comes from an organisation called All Together Now, a not-for-profit which seeks to combat racism in Australia through “innovative, evidence-based and effective social marketing that is positive, provocative and courageous.” One of their most recent projects involved the development of a media monitoring methodology, in partnership with the University of Technology Sydney (UTS).

Media monitoring has been theorised as a way to counter discrimination and promote a more equal society. In the 1980s and 90s, media theorist Tuen A. van Dijk wrote about media monitoring as a way to promote standards of conduct within the media in how it deals with minorities:

“T... media monitoring is not a form of control, let alone a limitation of the freedom of the press. Its aim is to make the media workers to adopt or enact recognised professional standards of quality, balance, fairness and social responsibility [...] such standards have become especially important if the media are to play a positive role in the development of egalitarian multicultural societies in which the human rights of immigrants and minorities are respected.”

Following these theories, All Together Now ran a media monitoring project to assess race-based reporting in Australia. The project sampled 124 opinion-based reports from The Australian, Sydney Morning Herald, Herald Sun, Daily Telegraph, A Current Affair, 7:30 Report, 60 Minutes, and The Project. This included both online newspapers and TV programs, from mid-January 2017 until mid-July 2017.

The project categorised these reports as depicting either positive, neutral and negative perceptions of race:

“...Race is a social construction, and these constructs are used by those in power — and through the media — to generate a social hierarchy. Given that the media is often the only interaction people have with racial backgrounds other than their own, these interactions are powerful instances in which perceptions of race are formed and shaped. They could be positive, neutral or negative perceptions.”

Following the work undertaken by other NGOs such as Race Forward and Haas Institute in the United States of America (USA), and the Runnymede Trust in the United Kingdom (UK), All Together Now aims to gain a better understanding of race-related reporting in the Australian media. The organisation defines racism as “unjust covert or overt behaviour towards a person or a group on the basis of their racial background. This might be perpetrated by a person, a group, an organisation, or a system.” The theoretical basis for their research was inspired by Haney Lopez’s research on racial bias and coded racism:

“Coded racism works by invoking racial stereotypes — for instance, that whites are innocent, hardworking, endangered, and the ‘real’ Americans; and that people of color are predatory, lazy, dangerous, and perpetual foreigners. The coded part comes in that politicians deploy these stereotypes without expressly mentioning race.”

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It’s important to note the obvious gap in this analysis—non-traditional news and reporting avenues, such as social media, were not analysed. The basis for this decision was that traditional media and mainstream news sources are known to be strongly preferred by the public. Australia wasn’t exempted from the fake news phenomenon, and according to the Edelman Trust Barometer, Australians are more skeptical than ever of their newsfeeds and are more willing to trust traditional media as a result.4 While our trust in the media as a whole is at just 31%, our trust in ‘traditional news media and journalism’ is on par with the rest of the world at 61%.5 There has been a spike in public trust in traditional media—last year it was only at 46%.6 Given that the public recognizes the difference between trustworthy sources of information and a rogue ‘Twitter thread’, it’s important that these well-known and credible publications are meeting these increasingly high expectations.

The main findings of All Together Now’s media monitoring study, however, showed that many of these mainstream sources are not meeting these expectations—62 out of 124 race-based reports analysed had negative depictions of race, meaning that the report’s title, content, images, or tone of voice expressed racist views. Although the definition of racism used by the organisation is known (and detailed above), it is unclear how these were judged to be present or absent in a particular report, and whether a consistent, or objective, approach was taken across all 124 analysed articles.

News Corp online newspapers (like the Daily Telegraph, The Australian and the Herald Sun) were reported to have the most negative portrayals of race. Over the six-month period, A Current Affair broadcast nine negative race-related reports. Muslims were the most mentioned group in opinion pieces and were portrayed negatively in 63 percent of reports. Western superiority, fear-inductive narratives (such as “us vs them”), and denial of islamophobia were all themes heavily present in the opinion pieces analysed. ‘Nationalism’ was also included in negative race-related reporting, but what the organisation means by ‘nationalism’ isn’t defined by the report, so it is unclear whether the term implies superiority over other nations.

The recommendations stemming from the report mainly focus on reprimanding journalists and publications that publish negative depictions of race. The report recommends strengthening media regulations and giving audiences the ability to make complaints. It also suggests that news agencies should support journalists who discuss race respectfully.

Can this solution actually work as a preventative measure to improve public discourse, or is this merely a punitive alternative? In other words, would journalists be more cautious in the articles they produce if they, and the publications they work for, faced consequences for poor race-based reporting? The answer to this is unclear. It is also unclear, given the opacity of All Together Now’s media monitoring methodology, how we can define the parameters within which we would determine whether a report had a “negative” portrayal of race.

It should be noted that complaints are already taken into account by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). However, the approach of the ACMA has been to investigate matters of community concern, whilst All Together Now appears to be calling for a wider range of complaints to be taken seriously. It was recently reported that the ACMA is finally investigating whether Sunrise breached the Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice 2015 after NSW Greens MP David Shoebridge lodged a formal complaint. The ACMA said that “a significant amount of community concern has been expressed about that broadcast,” and it had commenced a formal investigation.

How Sunrise is reprimanded for their conduct may influence how they treat Indigenous and race issues in the future. Given that it took six days of protests and community outrage for Sunrise to try and fix the issue by hosting an Indigenous panel of experts on the issue (the closest Sunrise has come to a genuine apology), the idea that strengthening regulations on, and monitoring of, the media is the solution to much more covert expressions of racism seems far-fetched. Nevertheless, while it might not be a quick solution to negative depictions of race, given how much trust we put into our mainstream sources of media, it’s important to stay vigilant and critical of the narratives we are told.

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Ryan Coogler’s *Black Panther* has shattered box office records, raking in one billion dollars worldwide on its 26th day of release and unseating James Cameron’s *Titanic* as the third highest grossing film of all time. The film’s success is not only impressive, but powerful - *Black Panther* proved that not only is Black talent abundant, but that it’s bankable too. An all-black cast (almost, with the exception of Martin Freeman and Andy Serkis), in a film not focused on slavery or ghettos, appears to be as financial as any of the other blockbuster Marvel Studios films. Black actors, writers, directors, and artists sell tickets just as well, if not better, than their white counterparts.

*Black Panther* has also garnered praise for its positive representation of the Black community. All Black characters in this film are the subjects in a complex and multilayered story, in stark contrast to their traditional roles in film, in which Black characters typically play objects acted upon by white characters or victimised by social systems. Beyond this, the film progressively represents Black women, a group who are particularly vulnerable to being portrayed stereotypically, or used only as scantily-clad props for eye-candy. The female characters in *Black Panther* transcend the trope of existing solely to advance the male protagonist’s character development, by driving the plot and being heroes in their own right.

In the Marvel Cinematic Universe, Wakanda is the only African nation without a violent history of colonisation, and its existence is a utopian exaggeration of what Africa could look like without the interference of the West. This Afro-futuristic paradise stands in stark contrast to modern day Black America, a juxtaposition personified through T’Challa and Erik “Killmonger” Stevens, the film’s antagonist.

T’Challa, for the first half of *Black Panther*, prioritises the best interests of his people above all else, believing that Wakanda should stay hidden from the rest of the world, or else risk its safety and stability. Killmonger, on the other hand, wanted to use Wakanda’s technological superiority to empower oppressed peoples all over the world to liberate themselves from their oppressors. Killmonger, therefore, serves to challenge T’Challa’s isolationism within the larger narrative of a world plagued by anti-Blackness.

The struggle between T’Challa and Killmonger is a mirror of the dichotomy between their respective fathers, T’Chaka and N’Jobu who were themselves brothers. T’Chaka believed that Wakanda’s sole purpose was to protect its people and hide their technology from the rest of the world. Many years before the events of the film, N’Jobu was sent as a spy to live among Black communities, seeing the height of the Civil Rights Movement in America. This informed his very different opinion of what Wakanda should do with its power and technology:

“I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities flooded with drugs and weapons. They are openly policed and incarcerated. All over the planet our people suffer most. There is no way to fight back. With vibranium weapons they can overthrow every country and Wakanda can rule them all the right way.” — N’Jobu to T’Chaka

N’Jobu’s exposure to the plight of Black America inspires him to smuggle Wakanda’s source of technological power, a metal called vibranium, into the hands of an arms dealer named Ulysses Klaue. When confronted with his treason, he responds with violence and is killed by T’Chaka, leaving Killmonger fatherless. Thus the stage is set for the ensuing drama: having highlighted from the very beginning the plight of Black America, and acknowledging Wakanda’s uniqueness in being untouched by the violence of colonisation, T’Challa, an African monarch entrenched in his own culture, must fight against Killmonger, an African prince robbed of one.

A key theme in *Black Panther* is the heartbreaking loss of identity felt by the modern African diaspora facing intergenerational trauma and colonisation. This was explicitly embodied by Killmonger, and was a point of connection the film had with many of its viewers. To those living through the difficulties faced by Black communities, particularly in the United States, Killmonger’s search for unity in the face of oppression and severed cultural identity make him a deeply relatable villain. This is why, arguably, it is easier for a Black audience to see Killmonger’s motivations as motivated by pure intentions. He wanted justice; he wanted freedom. And this is where the problem lies.

In *Black Panther*, Marvel essentially takes the concerns and plight of Black people and infuses them with the more ethically unambiguous elements of Killmonger’s actions: misogyny, violence, and extremism. This makes Killmonger’s character easy to condemn, yet his desire for liberation is valid. Thus, by conflating racial struggles with overwhelming violence, *Black Panther* delegitimises the apologetic call for equality by Black people who already hold privileged economic or social status. He’s the hero white people want because he keeps them comfortable; he’s passionate about his people and protecting his family, but without seriously shaking the structures of power that contribute to the oppression that so troubled N’Jobu and Killmonger. This is why T’Challa can be seen as an unknowing agent of colonialist methodology.

The colonialist methodology is characterised by the comprehensive, exhausting oppression of the colonised peoples. This goes beyond the physical domination of a people through the use of resources - this oppression also includes systemic cultural and psychological manipulation, which is designed to improve social control and enforce a hierarchical status. According to the political theorist, the lasting effects of colonisation, even after independence, often feature explanations that are “desirable” to the audience. And if this is the case, the audience is forced to question if Black liberation and autonomy are even worth fighting for.

This subtle delegitimisation is fortified by decisions made by T’Challa which align him with the status quo, as opposed to T’Challa making any meaningful action toward Black liberation. For example, T’Challa discredits Killmonger on the basis of information provided to him by the CIA, a racist institution notorious for destabilising the governments and regimes of people of colour simply because they didn’t align with the best interests of America. Furthermore, T’Challa aligns Wakanda with the United Nations at the conclusion of the film, a Eurocentric institution with a tendentious commitment to prioritising the political and economic desires of Western powers. By placing his trust in the CIA and the UN, T’Challa essentially becomes the white population’s poster child for positive change in global race relations by forfeiting Wakanda’s agency. Even T’Challa’s first attempt to share Wakanda’s wealth with the world – in the form of an outreach program in the impoverished area of Oakland, California where N’Jobu lived and died – seems no different than the efforts of other aid organisations to donate wealth, rather than to promote and build autonomy.

T’Challa, therefore, becomes an agent of “respectability politics”, the term used to describe attempts by marginalised groups to demonstrate that their goals are both continuous and compatible with the mainstream, irrespective of whether more just options can be conceived. The King of Wakanda is, in the Marvel Cinematic Universe, framed as “The Good Negro”, a Black man palatable to those who already hold privileged economic or social status. He’s the hero white people want because he keeps them comfortable; he’s passionate about his people and protecting his family, but without seriously shaking the structures of power that contribute to the oppression that so troubled N’Jobu and Killmonger. This is why T’Challa can be seen as an unknowing agent of colonialist methodology.
manifest as intergenerational psychological traumas and conditioning that remain lodged in the collective psyches of colonised peoples. Many forms of racial disparity in modern life can be seen as the resultant effects of colonialism, including colourism (prejudice or discrimination against individuals with a dark skin tone, typically among people of the same ethnic or racial group), internalised racism (racism knowingly or unknowingly performed against one’s own ethnic group), the bias legal systems have against people of colour, and the vilification of indigenous belief systems. One specific example of postcolonial oppression is the prison system in the US, David A Love and Vijay Das argue that the American prison system is simply a reiteration of pre-Civil War slavery, as African-Americans are incarcerated at a disproportionate rate and are often punished with greater severity than their white counterparts. The accuracy of this comparison is strengthened by the exploitation of American prisoners - convicts are often required to do manual and/or high-risk labour, such as construction or firefighting.

Colonialist methodology manifests as the rivalry between T’Challa and Killmonger. Killmonger, unlike his cousin, openly challenges white supremacy and advocates for the validation and liberation of Black people around the world. He puts the needs of the oppressed before those of the oppressors, and will stop at nothing to achieve their freedom. This is why his intentions were so seductive to victims of racial oppression. In spite of his violence, his desires were pure. He wanted an end to racial injustice and subjugation. Thus, Marvel’s radicalisation of what could have been an effective revolutionary was intentional. Without the violence and misogyny, Killmonger would have held the morally correct position. Had Killmonger been peaceful, and had used nonviolent means for the liberation of his people, he would have been presented as a man with valid grievances, not just advocating for equality, but holding non-Black individuals and populations accountable. Killmonger demanded that structures and institutions upholding white supremacy and perpetuating racist be dismantled and rebuilt from the ground up. He fought to empower oppressed peoples to reclaim their autonomy and finally live their lives with the humanity and dignity that they deserve. It is evident from Killmonger’s beliefs that racial equality cannot exist alongside white supremacy, the existence of one is antithetical to the other. White people cannot maintain their privilege whilst simultaneously hoping for racial equality, as said privilege exists at the expense of marginalised groups.

Killmonger, with the above modifications made to his methods, therefore represents a harsh reality that many people aren’t willing to face - true liberation from racism and anti-blackness requires sacrifice. Non-Black people would need to sacrifice the systems and institutions affording them privilege on the basis of their skin colour in order to realise a world of racial equality. This would mean actively dismantling centuries of structures which contribute to Black inequality, such as the US prison system. On a personal level, this requires non-Black people to confront individual biases and challenge bigotry in their lives, every single time it surfaces. This work is hard. And for many, this work involves sacrifices that challenge their comfort and privilege - sacrifices they are unwilling to make.

Black Panther will always be a cultural phenomenon. The now-iconic “Wakanda Forever” salute will take its place permanently in modern pop culture alongside Star Trek’s Vulcan salute and the dab. Not only is it culturally significant, but there is no denying the positive impacts this film will have on audiences today. However, Black Panther may have shown us Black people in a way we’ve never seen them before, but it does not do more than that. So take this action movie for what it is, and read up on postcolonial theory for a genuine look at modern race relations.

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