



Super Heroes, Mutants, Minorities and Marginalization: A Critical Review of the 2016 Hollywood Movie, “Logan”.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In a time where democracy is believed to be the most accepted form of governance, the issues of minorities, their discriminations and marginalization are also on the rise. The effects of democratic decisions by the nations on minorities can be witnessed in their collective decision making. One of the most commonly observed reactions by the minorities in the USA in times of political turmoil is to migrate to Canada, a country with friendlier approach to minorities and migrants. *The Guardian* reported that Canadian citizenship application numbers show definite spikes in some politically significant years: 2001, when Bush was elected president; 2003, when the US invaded Iraq; and 2007, during the US housing market crash and recession (Schwab, 2017).

When Donald J. Trump won the U.S. presidency, the number of people considering moving to Canada is again on the rise. As a result, the Canadian government’s immigration website crashed during the election because it received so many queries from Americans. With reference to this incident *The Vancouver Sun* reported that it also happened earlier same year as British voters unexpectedly voted to leave the European Union (Lee, 2016).

The movie *Logan* and the X-men films in general raise questions associated with

minorities. This X-Men film has strong statements on contemporary matters like the controversial promise of Donald Trump to “build the wall” and the urge of American minorities to migrate to Canada. Asked about the film’s political reading before the American presidential election, James Mangold the director of *Logan* said he couldn’t have predicted how the presidential election would shake out. But he noted, “I think we’ve all felt what’s going on in the country right now, for several years... I’ve felt it for a long time” (www.comingsoon.net). In his interview with *vulture.com* Mangold stated, “to me, the sense of nationalism and anxiety of people who are Other seemed to fit very well into an X-Men idea (Riesman, 2017).

2 OBJECTIVE AND METHODOLOGY

This paper looks at how *Logan* a movie from a comic book genre, with its futuristic fantasy setting, attempts to create a discourse about the real issues faced by real people.

The research approaches the film from a symptomatic perspective. The narrative of the film, its characters and genre in addition to its dialogues and the uses of objects are analysed for their metaphorical meaning. The research explores how the filmmaker uses this symbolic content to



link the fantasy created in the film with the real that exists and is experienced by the audiences every day.

3 STORY AND THE NARRATIVE

Logan is a super hero, a mutant, also known as Wolverine. His genetic mutation has given him extraordinary healing abilities and three claws on each hand, which were later strengthened with the super alloy, Adamantium. His mutation has allowed him to stay in his prime for over 100 years. He never ages and cannot be killed. The character came in to existence with Marvel comic super heroes in 1974. The alternative version of “Old Man Logan” first appeared in a publication in 2010, and started its own series in 2015.

From the first Marvel Comic cinematic adaptation of Wolverine in 2000, the character is played by an Australian actor, Hugh Jackman. He appeared as the Wolverine in eight previous movies, and *Logan* is said to be his last (Dvorkin, 2017).

The film is set in the year 2029, a time when the mutant population has decreased to near extinction and without new mutant births for the past 25 years. When the movie begins, we see that Logan has aged, and he has lost his healing powers and immortality. He is suffering from the memories of his past and has become an alcoholic. He is trying to make a living as a chauffeur. It is a story about a retired super hero who has lost his super powers, but is yet called upon to save the day one last time. The dramatic need of Logan is to live a normal life, but his past keeps coming at him with new challengers.

It's visible during the opening scenes when Logan is chauffeuring a group of upper class young people in his limo, who seem to be high on alcohol and other substances, to a social event or gathering. When Logan drives his car past the Mexican border the passengers chant at

legal immigrants and Mexican travellers, “USA! USA! USA!” Failing to distinguish between legal and illegal entry, they likely can't tell much of a difference between desperate families and “rapists” either.

In the first act, Logan is persuaded by a stranger to drive a little girl named Laura to the Canadian border. Later it is found that Laura is also a mutant and shares Logan's genetic code. Further a group of mercenaries are tracking Laura on behalf of a corporate which is responsible for the annihilation of mutants.

At the end of the movie, Logan supports a group of young mutants, (a minority group, supposed to be the last of their kind) to cross the border into Canada, sacrificing his own life in the process. In his dying moment, he tells the girl who shares the same genetic code, “don't be what they made you”, and before his last breath he mutters “so this is what it feels like” referring to the feeling of death, something he observed many times over the period of 120 years, but never experienced.

4 CINEMATIC INFLUENCES

Even though the movie *Logan* as part of the X-Men series, belongs to the Super Hero genre, it shows considerable resemblance to American Westerns. The backdrops of open landscapes and untamed wilderness resonate with the scenic look and feel of the western genre. Further, as a character, Logan portrays many similarities with an aging gunslinger who stands between good and evil for one last time, calling to mind characters such as Will Kane in “High Noon” (Zinnemann, 1952) or the eponymous protagonist of the movie “Shane” (Stevens, 1953). The western genre itself is about the European migrants trying to settle down in the new world and their battles with the untamed wilderness and indigenous communities. With his



references to the western genre, Mangold reminds us of America's roots as a nation of immigrants.

The other most significant feature of *Logan* is, its breakaway from the PG13 rating of previous Wolverine movies in favour of an R-rating for strong language and brutal graphical violence throughout the film (Farokhmanesh, 2017). The magnitude of violence in *Logan* is so unbelievable that it would alienate the audience from the movie. This alienation (Verfremdungseffekt) from a Brechtian perspective, keeps the spectators conscious that they are in a cinema and distances them from emotional involvement. The audience's degree of identification with characters and events is presumably thus controlled, and it can more clearly perceive the "real" world reflected in the film. This ultimately helps the spectator to understand the complex nexuses of historical development and societal relationships. Early experimental works during the French new wave (Nouvelle Vague), with reference to Brecht, focus on the alienation and marginalization experienced by the protagonist as he (or she) moves through a dysfunctional world in which he or she has no place. These films often end with the death of the protagonist (Nouvelle Vague, 2017).

The violence in *Logan* and the alienation effect caused by it shows the potential of the movie to make the audiences ask questions about real life events and distance themselves emotionally from problems that demand intellectual solutions.

5 DISCUSSION

The idea of a weakening super hero clearly differentiates *Logan* from an average super hero movie. Furthermore, *Logan* has

disassociated itself from the melodrama of a typical super hero film and is trying to create a socio-political discourse on contemporary issues, with complex character arcs and narrative structure.

James Mangold has strengthened the synchronization of the two genres (western and super hero) by including few scenes from the western classic "Shane" inside *Logan*. We see Laura watching "Shane" on TV, where Shane after beating the bad guys, tells a little boy, "There's no living with a killing... Right or wrong, it's a brand, a brand that sticks. There's no going back". I believe throughout his life *Logan* tried to break away from this with no success. This is what *Logan* realized in his dying moment and this is what Laura understands at the end, that sometimes there is no redemption in the decisions you make or the actions you take. You have to live with who you are and what you have done. In a broader perspective, when you are born in to something you cannot get away from it. This notion of self-realization is strengthened in the final scene, where Laura turns the cross on *Logan's* grave to make it an 'X', reminding us that *Logan* is a mutant before anything else, it's not his choice but it's who he is, like all the people who are born in to different ethnicities, colours and cultures.

Even though the origin of *Logan* is rooted in the comics, its universe is more fantasy and fiction. The film has created a world in which every twist reminds us of our own socio-political dynamics. I believe that, James Mangold has created a critical political essay and released it in a comic book - pulp fiction package. In the process Mangold has deconstructed the stereotypical super hero and the super hero genre itself and created a discourse about self and the other. He has constructed a mirror that enables us to look closer at ourselves and our future.

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