

**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY**

**THE VAMPIRE, THE WOLF AND THE GHOST:  
THE REPRESENTATION OF  
INBETWEENNESS IN DIVERGENT  
SUPERHERO MOVIES**

**Master's Thesis**

**TUNA TETİK**

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**THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY  
BAHÇEŞEHİR UNIVERSITY**

**THE GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES  
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**İSTANBUL, 2016**

T.C.  
BAHÇEŞEHİR ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
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Tuna Tetik

## ABSTRACT

### THE VAMPIRE, THE WOLF AND THE GHOST: THE REPRESENTATION OF INBETWEENNESS IN DIVERGENT SUPERHERO MOVIES

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Since Superman, the superhero has been a visible part of the American and global popular culture. The classical superhero had been defined by a clearly defined mission, power and secret identity/costume. With the proliferation of alternative character designs by Marvel Comics, the superhero universe had expanded beyond such conventional boundaries. The objective of this thesis is to provide a deeper understanding of such expansion through a focus on divergent superheroes. Their mission lacking a coherent definition, their power becoming an individual curse, and their identity reflecting a constant inbetweenness. Within the confines of this thesis; Blade, Wolverine and the Ghost Rider will be examined as divergent superhero exemplars. Their inbetweenness will be assessed along the oppositional dichotomies of law/lawlessness, hero/villain, belonging/displacement, animalism/civility, past as memory/present as absence.

Keywords: Superhero, Divergent Superhero, Inbetweenness, Identity, Marvel Comics.

## ÖZET

### VAMPIR, KURT VE HAYALET: AYRIKSI SÜPER KAHRAMAN FİMLERİNDE ARADALIĞIN TEMSİLİ

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Süpermen'den günümüze süper kahramanlar, Amerika'da ve dünyada popüler kültürünün önemli bir parçası haline gelmiştir. Klasik süper kahramanlar misyon, süper güç, gizli kimlik/kostümleriyle tanımlanmaktadır. Marvel Comics'in alternatif karakter tasarlama girişimleriyle birlikte, süper kahraman evreni de geleneksel kalıpların ötesine geçmeyi başarmıştır. Bu tezin amacı, ayrıksı süper kahramanları inceleyerek süper kahraman dünyasındaki genişlemeye daha derinlemesine bir bakış sunmaktır. Misyonlarının fluluğu, sahip oldukları gücün kendileri için birer lanete dönüşmesi ve kim olduklarıyla ilgili arada kalmışlıkları bu ayrıksı süper kahramanların tanımlayıcı unsurlarıdır. Bu çerçevede; Blade, Wolverine ve Ghost Rider karakterleri ayrıksı süper kahraman örnekleri olarak ele alınacaktır. Bu üç süper kahramanın arada kalmışlıkları; kanun/ kanunsuzluk, kahraman/kötü adam, aidiyet/yerini bulamama, hayvansılık/medenilik, hafıza üzerinden geçmiş/ yokluk üzerinden şimdi olarak kurulan karşıtlıklar üzerinden incelenecektir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Süper kahraman, Ayrıksı Süper Kahraman, Aradalık, Kimlik, Marvel.

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## 1.INTRODUCTION

*‘I’m the best there is at what I do  
but what I do best isn’t very nice.’*  
(X-Men Origins: Wolverine, 2009)

Superhero movies became globally dominant blockbusters not only in cinema but also in television. As Robin S. Rosenberg and Peter Coogan (2013) underlines “during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the superhero movie became the most successful genre product in Hollywood” (p.55). Superhero movies reflect a multiplicity of themes such as action, romance, thriller, soap opera, etc. Paul Levitz (2013) uses the term ‘melting pot of other genres’ (p.126) to define the superhero genre. Especially, the period after 2000s can be considered as the Golden Age of superheroes in cinema.

Mainstream superhero movies generally are constructed around classical superheroes. This kind of superhero characters is born by the end of 30s. They were created in line with the needs of the American society at the time. They had clear-cut features and styles, clearly defined missions, and symbolic universes that reflected their ideologies.

As a consequence of civil rights movements in the 60s, American political emphasis had shifted from patriotism to tolerance, equality and freedom. Ruth Beerman (2015) highlights that “within their narrative art form comics reflect their society’s values, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies” (p. 159). Within this perspective, the aforementioned socio-political shift in the American society may be considered as one of the influential factors regarding the portrayal of the new superheroes. Following the 70s, the superhero universe reflected more diversity in terms of characters’ gender, race, attitude and ideology.

At the beginning of the 70s, three divergent superheroes were released by Marvel Comics that can be viewed as an epitome of the counter classical approach to

characterization. Ghost Rider set the first example in 1972 that was followed by Blade in 1973. A year after Wolverine appeared as a cameo in the Incredible Hulk comics.

These three superheroes were positioned as antiheroes in the sense that they diverged from the classical superheroes such as Batman, Superman and Captain America. Their divergence is defined by their lack of clear-cut features manifested by the classical superheroes, by their existential ambiguity, hence by their inbetweenness. For example, Blade is a vampire slayer who is half vampire half human. Wolverine is an animalistic mutant whose mutation triggers the wolf inside him come out. Ghost Rider's super power is handed over to him by the Satan whom he fights against. Moreover, this inbetweenness is also at the core of their identity problems. Wolverine struggles to identify himself neither as an animal nor as a human. His vampiristic nature prevents Blade to see himself as fully human. Ghost Rider is stuck between his devilish and human side.

This inbetweenness manifests itself internally as the source of a constant search for an absolute answer to characters' existence and externally as a driving force in their battles against their own kind. Blade dedicates himself to destroy all vampires even though he is partly one of them. Wolverine fights with mutants although he is a mutant himself. Ghost Rider challenges the Devil in order to eradicate him from the face of the earth, in spite of the fact that he owns his superpowers to the Devil. This intense identity struggle is externalized through bloody and wild fights between the characters and their villains. Although they are dedicated to good causes and their ideologies are justified by an essential goodness, these characters behave brutally. In short, the inbetweenness of their attitudes, decisions and behaviors make these three characters divergent superheroes compared to their classical counterparts.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine these three divergent superheroes namely Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider. They were specifically selected because these characters do not only fight the villains but also endure an internal battle against their selfhood. In that sense, their strife is ontological more than physical and ideological. They see their super power as a curse rather than a blessing. While fighting their own

demons, they also dedicate themselves to fight the wrongdoings in the society. Serving the good in defiance of their own evils makes them superheroes. Their inbetweenness make them apart.

Within the confines of this thesis, their inbetweenness will be analyzed with regard to their identity and their dissociative relationship with the society they live in. In order to shed light on their discrepancies from the classical superheroes, first a definition of the superhero will be provided and the roots of the superhero genre will be discussed. Then, each divergent superhero (Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider) will be investigated in reference to the movies they appear as the main character.

Blade will be analyzed in reference to Blade trilogy that includes individual movies of *Blade* (1998), *Blade II* (2002) and *Blade: Trinity* (2004). Although, there are multiple X-Men movies that showcase Wolverine, two specific movies were selected based on the fact that the story is centered on Wolverine: *X-Men* (2000) and *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* (2009). The movies *Ghost Rider* (2007) and *Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance* (2011) will be analyzed to examine the Ghost Rider character.

## **2. THE LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1. DEFINING SUPERHERO**

In this chapter, the boundaries of the superhero concept will be provided and the defining characteristics of the superhero universe will be examined. Moreover, evolution of the superhero genre will be reviewed.

#### **2.1.1. Hero vs. Superhero**

To come up with a working definition of “hero” as a concept shared by everyone has been a constant challenge since the beginning of storytelling. And to define the concept of “superhero” necessitates elaborating the concept of “hero” first. The word hero comes from Greek and means “someone who protects and serves” (O’Neil, 2013, p. 129). In other words, hero is a protector for people who acts in the name of humanity. As Tom DeFalco (2013) quotes “in classical mythology, a hero is anyone who possesses an extraordinary gift. In modern times, it is someone who shows great strength, courage or some other admirable trait” (p. 139). Achilles, Heracles, Odysseus are few examples of Greek heroes.

In today’s world, the definition of hero is more complex and multidimensional. To protect is still a defining motivation for a hero. Everyone has her/his own heroes who protect them. Within this perspective, parents can be seen as heroes in the sense that parenthood involves protection and care. From a broader perspective, police officers, firefighters, doctors, etc. can be labeled as heroic, because a hero is someone who acts heroic. Protecting, caring and rescuing can be classified as heroic acts. Hence, people who work in such professions can be called as heroes.

A superhero differs from a hero in certain respects. As the name implies, the word “super” seems to draw the line between a superhero and a hero. Globally acclaimed creator and producer of comics Stan Lee (2013) highlights that “a superhero is a person

who does heroic deeds and has the ability to do them in a way that a normal person could not” (p. 115). In that sense, the word super implies having powers out of the reach of a regular individual. Everyone can be a hero but a hero needs to have a superpower to become a superhero. Hence, a superhero is a protector with superpowers.

However, not everyone who has a superpower is qualified as a superhero. There are some values and virtues that make a superhero a superhero. Kurt Busiek (2013) provides six distinguishing hallmarks of a superhero: “Superpower, costume, code name, secret identity, heroic ongoing mission and superhero milieu” (p. 113). According to Busiek, if the character exhibits three of these qualities then s/he can be called a superhero. In parallel with Busiek, Gina Misiroglu (2014) describes superhero as “a heroic character with an altruistic mission who possesses superpowers, wears a defining costume, and functions in the “real world” in his or her alter ego” (p. 229). For the most part, the identity of the superhero reflects the alter ego of the real identity of the character. In other words, the identity of the superhero can be seen as an ideal-self of the real life character. For example, Superman with all his superpowers can be seen as the ideal-self of Clark Kent who is an introvert, often unnoticeable, mediocre reporter in a daily newspaper.

Coogan (2013) underlines the centrality of a mission for the superhero and claims that adherence to a mission provides a context for all the other qualities a superhero possesses. As part of their greater mission, superheroes dedicate themselves selflessly to the public good. They do everything in their power to protect people from dangers and criminals and to bring order. Sometimes these criminals reflect such unique and complex personas which elevate them to the position of the villain. The villain is central to the story as well as it is indispensable to the superhero because it legitimizes superhero’s mission, hence provides a *raison d’être* for the superhero. For example; it is due to Joker’s villainous intentions to bring down Gotham into chaos, Batman’s existence as the ultimate savior and order-provider gains importance. In short, it is Joker’s means that justify Batman’s ends.

As mentioned earlier, costume is another defining feature of a superhero. Almost all superheroes wear a specific costume (i.e. Superman, Batman, Captain America, etc.). It has the function of hiding the real identity of the superhero and symbolically representing her/him. It is not surprising that “the superheroes are often referred to as ‘capes’ or ‘masks’ by the fictional cops and criminals who populate superhero stories” (Rosenberg and Coogan, 2013, p. 7). Joe Quesada (2013) illustrates that “the costume is definitely part of the appeal of the superhero - the bright primary colors, the whole silhouette of the character standing there in a heroic pose, cape flapping in the world” (p. 147). According to him, a superhero is made of the combination of “a colorful costume, extraordinary powers and a secret identity” (Quesada, 2013, p. 48).

Most of the time, the costume reflects the code name of the superhero. For example, Ironman’s costume is made of iron or Batman’s costume is black like a bat and involves bat-like ears and cape. A code name generally gives prominence to a specific quality of the superhero and can be associated with a superhero’s personal history and past traumas. For example, the code name Fantastic Four was selected because there are four people who make the team and each team member has a fantastic power like being invisible or having a flexible body. Another example is Spider Man. Spiderman is the code name that Peter Parker chooses for himself after being bitten by a radioactive spider. This incident transforms Peter Parker into a superhero with spider skills like ultra-elevated senses and wall climbing. Hence, the power determines the code name and the code name prompts Peter to select a costume with a spider logo.

Code name and costume are the constituting elements of superhero’s identity. As Coogan (2013) quotes “the identity convention is the clearest marker of the superhero genre. The identity is composed of two elements: the code name with secret identity being a customary counterpart to the code name and the costume” (p. 6). Apart from the costume, the code name is another way of disguising superhero’s actual identity. If the actual identity becomes known to a villain, she/he can do harm to superhero’s real life relatives or special ones to hurt her/him.

Other than a code name and a costume; what gives superhero an identity is a distinct approach to life, a specific worldview, in other words an ideology communicated through a motto. This motto differentiates a superhero from others, legitimizes her/his existence and draws attention to her/his uniqueness. Spiderman who is the superhero identity of the human character Peter Parker is always driven by the motto “with great power comes great responsibility”. This line originally belongs to his uncle Ben who took care of him after the death of his parents. When his uncle becomes the victim of a murder, the line becomes the punchline of Spiderman’s fight against criminals.

Having a superpower is often associated with a godlike and divine ability. One of the most popular title phrases of DC Comics is “Gods among us”. Such title can be assessed as the company’s creative and narrative approach to “superheroes as gods”. The traces of this approach can be found in Marvel superheroes like Thor who is an actual God. Another popular godlike superhero example is Superman. He is the alter ego of Clark Kent who is sent to planet earth by his parents in order to save him from the war in their planet, Krypton. As soon as Clark Kent realizes his superpowers he starts to use them for public good. Clark Kent chooses “Superman” as his code name because of the nature of his powers. On the other hand, milder representations of superheroes also exist. For instance, John Jennings (2013) sees superheroes as modern messiahs. Like messiahs, superheroes can be defined in terms of “clarity of vision, heroism, and rebirth” (Jennings, 2013, p.61).

Despite all the earlier efforts to define a superhero it is still not an easy task to accomplish. To emphasize the complexity of the concept Geoff Klock (2013) provides different features of superheroes:

*Superman is an alien with alien powers, Batman is a regular guy with realistic but advanced technology and a big budget, and Wonder Woman is from a magic island and has a magic lasso. Captain America is a soldier whose body has been augmented through science. Thor is a god, and Fantastic Four and Spiderman have been given powers by exposure to radiation and a radioactive spider bite, respectively. Aliens, regular dudes with advanced technology, magic and gods, humans mutated by radiation- this is pretty diverse. This is going to be hard to get a definition out of it (p. 72).*

As Klock underlines, each superhero is a unique case. Therefore, each of them should be examined in its own context and within the confines of its own features and motivations.

As provided so far; a special power driven by a mission and symbolized by a code name and costume are the key features of superheroes. But there are superheroes that do not exhibit a perfect fit to such definition. Anomalous and contradictory in a sense, these superheroes are different from classical heroes like Batman, Superman or Spiderman because they are “too good to be a villain, too evil to be a hero” (Spivey and Knowlton, 2008, p. 52). These so-called contemporary superheroes can be seen as anti-superheroes who are partly evil, partly likeable, and partly repellent (Spivey and Knowlton, 2008).

This thesis specifically focuses on this kind of contemporary superheroes who diverge from their classical counterparts in terms of their inbetweenness regarding their identity and their relation with the society they are part of. However, as Klock (2013) provided every superhero should be evaluated by taking into account its singularity as well as its commonalities. Upcoming analysis will be based on three contemporary, divergent superheroes (e.g. Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider), how their inbetweenness is represented through common manifestations and how their singularities contribute to such inbetweenness.

### **2.1.2. Contemporary Superheroes**

Heroism is often associated with Greek mythology and gods. Some considers that there is a link between ancient heroes and contemporary superheroes. Brian J. Robb (2014) thinks that “while none are simple one-to-one match, they share enough core elements for it to be possible to pair up Greek gods and superheroes such as Poseidon with Aquaman or Hermes with the Flash” (p, 23). In his examination of the American society and its relation with superheroes, Robb (2014) adds that America has a very short civilization history compared to Europe which implies lesser time to create its own myths. He sees superheroes as the American equivalent of the European myths such as

ancient Greek or Roman mythologies. Similarly, Stan Lee says “superheroes exist as a twentieth century mythology” (Cited in Robb, 2014, p. 23).

Superman who is created in 1938 is accepted as the first superhero of the genre. Late 1930s are also considered as the beginning of the golden age of the superhero genre that will be examined with more detail in the upcoming chapters. After Superman, lots of publishers began to create their own unique superheroes with an increasing pace. The dynamics behind it are various. One can trace a parallelism between the proliferation of the superheroes and the Great Depression and the Second World War. The hardships that people have gone through due to Great Depression and the Second World War might increase people’s need for heroes. Hence, the overlap between the Golden Age of the superheroes and these times of economic and social hardships can be seen as more than a coincidence. Within this perspective, the classical superheroes of the period like Captain America, The Clock or Aquaman can be assessed as the embodiment of the hope for a brighter future for the American society. For example, Captain America who appears in the first issue of comics in 1941 is portrayed as fighting with Adolf Hitler. In that sense, he symbolizes the American power and patriotic values. The superheroes that were created before and during the Golden Age (i.e. Superman and Batman) constitute the classical superhero type.

Contemporary superheroes became visible during the Silver and Modern Age of the genre. The Silver Age started with DC Comics’ rebooting attempts in 1956 with Flash and in 1959 with Green Lantern. These superheroes whose superpowers were an outcome of scientific experiments or accidents can be seen as exemplars of the period in focus. Another peculiarity of the period was superheroes acting as special teams such as Justice League<sup>1</sup>. While DC Comics was the corporate domineer of the superhero market, Stan Lee and Jack Kirby were the individual pioneers. They created the most popular superheroes such as Fantastic Four in 1961, The Incredible Hulk in 1962, Spider-Man in 1962 and X-Men in 1963. These superheroes instantly became a social

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<sup>1</sup> Justice League is a superhero team created by Gardner Fox in 1960 as part of DC Comics universe. It includes Aquaman, Batman, Flash, Superman etc.

and cultural phenomenon in America. Part of their popularity can be attributed to the characteristics of the medium itself. On one hand, comics is a highly visual medium in the sense that the narrative is largely carried out by images and drawings accompanied by limited amount of comments and dialogues. Therefore, visual nature of the medium enabled every member of the American society to read comics and be entertained by it. On the other hand, comics are cheap artworks; so they were affordable for the most members of the American society of the time.

Superhero narratives are often claimed to reflect the values and norms, needs and aspirations of an existing society. Rosenberg and Coogan (2013) indicate that “comic book superhero stories have proven to be exceptional outlets for showcasing changes in the American society” and “...superheroes have often changed in order to fulfill society’s wishes and needs”(p. 189). In their view, superhero narratives paralleled the important social, cultural and political developments and shifts in the American society. Similarly, Danny Fingeroth (2004) argues that “the superhero can represent a snapshot of a moment in time in a culture’s development, or a broader sense of cultural identity” (p. 126). Feminist and civil right movements of the 60s can be regarded as one of the shaping developments regarding the superhero characters and storylines of the Silver Age. With such influences, came a new generation of superheroes.

In 1972 Marvel Comics released its first African-American superhero called Luke Cage. Robb (2004) describes Luke Cage as ‘a street-wise black man unjustly incarcerated and given superpowers – super strength and ultra-dense skin- in a scientific experiment intended to destroy him” (p. 7). Luke Cage paved the way for various minorities in the American society to be represented as a superhero character in comics. For example, in 1975 Marvel Comics presented “Storm” who is an African-American female superhero as one of the main members of the X-Men team. In 1977, DC Comics replied to Marvel generated black-hero boom with the release of an African-American superhero called Black Lightning. “To help clean up the community's drug traffic—and to give teens in the 'hood an empowering role model—Pierce donned a voltage-generating belt, a blue bodysuit with stylized yellow lightning bolts, and a white mask and took to the streets as Black Lightning” (Robb, 2004, p. 8). Within this context, the white mask with an

Afro attached to it can be assessed as an attempt to foreground the black and white inequality in the American society of the time. Frantz Fanon (2014) criticizes such inequality by asserting that black men and women were not perceived as equals in the public eye even though they had similar socio-economic status, education and career as white people. From a critical standpoint, the white mask symbolically highlighted the idea that the only way a black man becomes eligible for superheroism is disguising his true self and reflecting a white identity.

Apart from the proliferation of alternative identities for superheroes, the Silver Age marked a departure from classical superheroes through more flexible missions. The Incredible Hulk, firstly released in 1962, is a good example for such contemporary superheroes. “The Hulk is a superhero without a mission: At times he seems absolutely antisocial and his adventures do not typically arise from his attempts to fight crime or improve the world” (Rosenberg and Coogan, 2013, p. 7). From a similar vein, Quesada (2013) quotes “some superheroes are hugely dislikeable people; some of them come from really bad circumstances and some started as villains. They might not necessarily seem like the hero of story, but in the end they always teach us a moral lesson” (p.148). A moral lesson is not the only thing classical and contemporary superheroes share in common. For example, Spider Man being a teenager is a contemporary approach to superhero but there are also classical aspects to him like a costume, a clearly defined mission and a superpower. However, not all contemporary superheroes exhibit such hybrid features. There are also completely divergent superheroes that are the real focus of this thesis.

Gary Fredrich, Roy Thomas and Mike Plog released their divergent character Ghost Rider in 1972. He is a superhero who becomes the servant of the Devil in exchange for his father’s wellbeing. Ghost Rider is the alter-ego of the human character Johnny Blaze. His superpower is kind of a curse that transforms Blaze into a ghost-like creature at nights. As soon as Blaze manages to control his power, he decides to stand up against the devil and to fight the diabolical creatures. Then he becomes a superhero with a mission. The character traits of Ghost Rider set him apart from other contemporary

superheroes. His attitude and the choices that he makes involve certain similarities with other divergent superheroes that are the subject of this thesis: Wolverine and Blade.

Wolverine was created in 1974 by Roy Thomas, Len Wein and John Romita. He is a Canadian superhero that first appeared as a *cameo* in *The Incredible Hulk*. Later, Wolverine joined the X-Men team. In brief, he has animalistic features and struggles to control his anger. Although he wears an X-Men uniform in comics and movies he does not have a specific superhero costume. In July 1973, Marvel created Blade. His first appearance was as a *cameo* in *Tomb of Dracula*. Blade is a vampire hunter. Similar to Wolverine and Ghost Rider, he never wears a superhero costume. All the three superheroes have identity problems and ambivalent missions and see their powers as a curse. Such qualities – which will be analyzed in details in the upcoming chapters – make them clear examples of contemporary divergent superheroes.

### **2.1.3. The Superhero Universe**

As mentioned earlier, Marvel and DC Comics are the two key players that dominate the current superhero comics and movie market. Each of them has its unique superhero style and a vision about how the superhero universe should be constructed and presented. For example, most of DC Comics' superheroes are rooted in the Greek mythology and have Godlike powers (i.e. Superman and Aquaman). In contrast, Marvel's superheroes are creatures endowed with humane qualities. For instance, Spiderman can be wounded, injured or bruised. On one hand, Marvel and DC are divided by their perspective on how a superhero should be; on the other hand they are united by the moral codes and superpowers a superhero should possess and the themes a superhero story should reflect. As Jennifer Stuller (2013) draws attention to common denominators of superheroes;

*A superhero story often borrows classic and archetypal themes from world mythology, and can also involve the paranormal or fantastic. Superheroes are uniquely talented- some so much so that they become synonymous with their skill- and they have a commitment to fight for the greater good (p. 19).*

In parallel, Rosenberg (2013) says that the underlying themes of superhero narratives are “right versus wrong, personal choice, sacrifice for the greater good, finding purpose and meaning” (p. 6).

The first inhabitants of the superhero universe were from DC Comics: Superman (1938), Batman (1939), Green Lantern (1940), Wonder Woman (1941) and Aquaman (1941). When Marvel entered the comics market DC Comics has already become the dominant player. That is why their contribution to superhero universe was limited. The only significant superhero developed by Marvel was Captain America, a character that still preserves its popularity. After Stan Lee’s joining to Marvel Comics another wave came with Fantastic Four (1961).

After participation of the superhero genius editor Stan Lee in Marvel Comics, they introduced superheroes which become timeless phenomenon not only in the Marvel age but also present day; Fantastic Four in 1961, Hulk (1962), Spiderman (1962), Thor (1962), Iron Man (1963), Dr. Strange (1963), X-Men (1963), Daredevil (1964), Ghost Rider (1972), Blade (1973), Punisher (1974), Wolverine (1974) and Deadpool (1991). 60s marked the growing popularity of the superheroes and the attempts to appeal to audiences outside the American continent. In order to make the superhero universe more international, Marvel Comics came up with new superheroes of foreign origins. Banshee (Irish), Wolverine (from Canada), Storm (African-American with a Kenyan descent), Nightcrawler (from Germany), Colossus (from Russia) are few examples of this trend (Robb, 2014).

Throughout the development of the genre, a superhero character was often influenced by another. For example, The Incredible Hulk who is a Quasimodo and Frankenstein like creature was inspired by and built upon one of the Fantastic Four characters: the Thing (Robb, 2014). Robb (2014) traces the roots of the superhero back to the Jewish legend of Golem, a magical hulking humanoid creature. Stan Lee describes the character design process of the Incredible Hulk as follows: “I decided I might as well borrow from Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde as well- our protagonist would constantly change from his normal identity to his superhuman alter ego and back again” (Cited in Robb,

2014, p.170). In that sense, the development of a superhero character can be seen as a complex process of interaction between various cultural texts and motifs.

Another illustrative example of the interrelation between superhero characters can be found in Batman who is created by the legendary comic book artist Bob Kane. Batman is the alter ego of the human character Bruce Wayne who is a rich businessman in Gotham City. During the day, he is a billionaire bachelor. During the night, he becomes the dark knight of Gotham who provides help to the police force to bring order to the city. Twenty four years after Batman's first appearance; Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, Larry Lieber and Don Heck created a new superhero called Iron Man who is the alter ego of Tony Stark. Stark and Wayne similarly exhibit the same public image of "playboy billionaire". Their successful business background emphasizes their entrepreneurial spirit, a quality endorsed by the so-called American Dream. Bruce Wayne and Tony Stark can be assessed as the idealized embodiment of what America stands for: Being the global superpower and the primary endorser of the capitalist system.

In the superhero universe, relationships especially romantic commitments are not easy to sustain in contrast to superheroes' strong dedication to their mission to serve the public good. Superheroes find hard to manage their relationships and their firm adherence to their cities or communities at the same time. Another possible reason why they cannot preserve a permanent relation with significant ones can be that they are too wary to protect them against their enemies, even at the expense of losing them. A significant other becomes a primary target for the villain when s/he wants to hurt a superhero. Moreover, a love interest demands a constant shift between the alter-ego and the human character of the superhero. Rosenberg and Coogan (2013) exemplify this problem through the story of Superman: "Two person love triangle - best embodied by Superman – Lois-Clark relationship in which the woman is attracted to the superhero who spurns her advances, while she similarly spurns the advances of the secret identity alter ago who pursues - is firmly identified with the superhero genre" (p. 10).

As mentioned in the previous section, another significant element of the superhero universe is the villain. In Stuller's words (2013);

*Supervillains give superheroes a reason to exist and function in a given society. When supervillains disrupt order, superheroes restore it. By their very nature, superheroes are reactive. They preserve the status quo and rid the system of radical super-criminal elements. (p. 85)*

In short, the supervillain makes the superhero a superhero. Similarly, Andrew Smith (2013) highlights the influence of villains on superheroes by providing that "each type of villain reveals a different aspect of the superhero. In doing so, each aspect that comes to the fore provides an added dimension to the definition of the superhero" (p. 111). He adds that the power of the supervillain should be equal to superhero's capability. What makes a superhero and a villain to occupy opposite ends of a moral equation is having the responsibility to use the power in restraint (Carpenter, 2013). Superheroes are the ones who use their power in ways to prevent themselves to be corrupted and possessed by it. Spiderman's motto "with great power comes great responsibility" reflects this approach to being a superhero. On the other hand, villains use their abilities without restraint. In fact, their superiority is defined by the excess of their power and the chaos it causes.

In the superhero universe, there happen instances where superheroes not only fight with the villains but also with each other. For example, Marvel's Iron Man and Captain America<sup>2</sup> are recently portrayed as opposing superheroes as in the case of Superman<sup>3</sup> against Batman. The implications of these encounters or the cultural dynamics behind them are beyond the limits of this thesis. However, to examine them can provide helpful insights to understand the superhero universe on a deeper level.

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<sup>2</sup> Captain America and Ironman are portrayed as enemies in the movie *Captain America: Civil War* (2016) directed by Joe Russo and Anthony Russo.

<sup>3</sup> Batman and Superman are portrayed as enemies in the movie *Batman vs. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) directed by Zack Snyder.

#### 2.1.4. The Formula of Marvel Comics

Marvel Comics was founded in 1939 as Timely Comics by the publisher Martin Goodman. The first issue of Marvel Comics had a special format called *anthology* that consisted of the adventures of different superheroes like The Human Torch, The Angel, Submariner and Masked Raider (Misiroglu, 2004). Currently, Marvel Comics is owned by the Walt Disney Company. In order to break the domination of DC superheroes like Superman and Batman in the market, Marvel aggressively started to develop superheroes. Some of them failed to connect with readers such as The Blue Blaze, Flexo, and the Phantom Reporter. After these initial attempts of unsuccessful superhero characters, first hits of Marvel comics came with Human Torch in 1940 and Sub-Mariner in 1941. (Misiroglu, 2004). These new superhero market hits elevated Marvel Comics to the main competitor of DC Comics status.

During the first years, Marvel Comics followed a strategy similar to DC Comics. The company designed superhero characters that embodied the nationalist iconography. Influenced by the socio-political environment of the Second World War, a patriotic superhero called Captain America was born. The story was about Steve Rogers who was transformed into an impeccable superhero – Captain America – as a result of an experiment that he participated while serving in the army. He was not just fighting supervillains like Red Skull but also real historical figures like Adolf Hitler. He was the epitome of pure nationalism and a symbolic means of social wish-fulfillment.

With Second World War superheroes became an integral part of the American pop culture and due to their ubiquity the period was marked as the Golden Age, a time when Marvel also reached high selling numbers. Under the guidance of Stan Lee, the company introduced a new approach to superhero characters. Dissimilar to DC Comics that was known for its Godlike superheroes, Marvel introduced superhero characters with a human touch and series with emotional resonance. Driven by Lee's interest in characters as people (Misiroglu, 2004) the first seeds of Marvel Superhero Formula were planted. Lee's vision was to create personally relatable characters, "they'd be flesh and blood, they'd have their faults and foibles, they'd fallible and feisty" (Robb, 2014,

p.163) Fantastic Four (1961) came out as a result of this new formula. It is a superhero team that consists of two scientist and two fellows. The storyline depicts these four normal people who are accidentally exposed to a nuclear ray that enables them with superpowers such as having a flexible body or being invisible. Although Marvel's unique approach to superhero characters was to design them as ordinary people, Fantastic Four as the alter ego of a group of scientists is criticized as far from ordinary (Robb, 2014).

The formula was seen as provocative for the period. Given the fact that the most popular superhero of the time was Superman who was an alien with Godlike powers and came from a different planet, it is not surprising. However, Marvel's formula became a success. Rosenberg and Coogan (2013) point that this new breed of humanly superheroes was relatable for many and explains that "Marvel Comics did something new in the 1960s by introducing a superhero with a genuinely geek private life. Teen boys could see themselves for the first time in Peter Parker" (p. 11). These characters created new outlets for the reader to identify easily with the superheroes. While bringing a new face to the conception of superhero, Lee kept elements that already resonated with the comic fans like the costume. Marvel's methodology of combining ordinariness with the constituting elements of a superhero – costume, mission and superpower – carried the company to the leadership seat in the market.

All through the 70s, Marvel tried to bring diversity to the superhero universe. The company created new subgenres like sword and sorcery, horror, martial arts, etc. Conan the Barbarian, the Tomb of Dracula, Man-Thing, Master of Kung Fu, and Iron Fist became comic book figures. As a result of the diversification attempts, first generation anti-heroes were born: Punisher and the clawed mutant Wolverine. This kind of anti-heroes was important in the sense that they democratized the superhero universe. They introduced the idea that everyone, every type of character can be a superhero as far as they have a mission to be accomplished and act for the public good.

To understand the developments that brought such diversification and democratization to the conception of superhero is important because they paved the way for divergent superheroes like Ghost Rider, Blade and Wolverine. They don't look like our friendly neighborhood (the nickname of Spider Man). They do not wear superhero costumes like Fantastic Four or Ant Man. Their mission is not explicit like Captain America. They are not in demand by their society like Batman. Nobody asks for help from Ghost Rider, Blade or Wolverine to bring the social order. In fact, to present them as social saviors would not create a believable story given that the most prominent feature of these superheroes is their identity issues – their problematic relationship with themselves and with their society.

Moreover, this kind of divergent superheroes changed also the reader demographics of the genre. Superhero comics are everybody's terrain, but mostly teenagers. Storylines that involved such anomalous characters became the area of interest of an older audience, namely the adults. Robb (2014) explains that both Marvel and DC “would introduce imprints to publish ‘mature’ material. Marvel through Epic and DC through Vertigo” (p. 237). Therefore, to focus on these characters as this thesis intends to do will provide a broader perspective to understand the superhero genre and characters and will expand the existing literature on the subject.

## **2.2. FROM COMICS TO CINEMA: SUPERHERO GENRE**

### **2.2.1. Superhero Comics in a Nutshell**

The first examples of superhero comics were published by Pulitzer-Hearts newspaper, a popular example of yellow journalism at the time. Several comic strips such as The Little Bears (1893-96) appeared on its pages. The first issue with color printing was published in 1897 (Robb, 2014). As Alex Boney (2013) mentions “the origins of comics as a medium can be tied directly to developments in various print and visual medium” (p. 43). In 1912 Hearst published an entire page that consisted of comic strips in New York Daily Journal. At that time, these pages were as known as “funny 32 pages”. By 1922, colored daily newspaper comic strips have become a regular feature of the

American newspaper stands. Alongside with the increase in comics' usage by newspapers, some heroic figures started to appear on cinema screen such as *The Mark of Zorro* (1920) and *Robin Hood* (1922). Though not as popular known as Zorro or Robin Hood, "the Clock" is accepted as the first masked crime fighter without a superpower. He was designed as a comic book character by George Brenner for the Comic Magazine Company (Robb, 2014).

Misiroglu (2004) divides the history of superhero comics into four main categories: The Golden Age (1938-1955), the Silver Age (1956-1969), the Bronze Age (1970- 1979) and As the Modern Age (from 1980 onwards). The divide is not solely based on sales but also on the semantic features (the appearance of costumes, masks, superpowers, etc.) and the content of the story. The Golden Age is marked by the dominance of DC Comics due to its popular superhero launches like Flash, Hawkman, the Spectre, Dr. Fate, Green Lantern, the Shadow, Captain Midnight in addition to all-time in demand Batman and Superman. On the other hand, Marvel overshadowed DC Comics during The Silver Age thanks to its complex formulation of superheroes (i.e. Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk, Spiderman, Ironman, Thor) that became the embodiment of the shift in cultural, political and social values of the American society (Hassler-Forest, 2012).

From the very beginning, superheroes were constantly and specifically associated with American national and cultural identity. According Boney (2013) superhero comics have always functioned as a mirror for American culture and society and reflected the underlying concerns and transitions of the modern life. And throughout the Golden Age; American life, hence the superhero comic stories were mainly shaped by the Great Depression and World War II. As Boney (2013) elaborates;

*'During the Depression years, urban dwellers began fearing poverty and crime and ultimately each other more than they ever had before. The crime fighting those superheroes engaged in during formative years was borne of an immediate, direct concern over rising crime rates and social transition (p. 46).*

The Great Depression was succeeded by World War II, Bradford. W. Wright (2003) portrays the transformation in the American society as follows;

*As defense spending finally pulled the nation out of the Great Depression, millions found work and brought home larger paychecks. ...More disposable income for Mom and Dad meant more nickels and dimes for kids to spend on comic books (p. 31).*

It was the boom time for comic book industry as the name Golden Age connotes. The books were cheap, portable and they presented purely nationalistic superheroes that were the prime examples of physical prowess, endurance and courage. In a sense, they were casted as role models and means of wish-fulfillment for the young generation of America. They were the epitome of the historically repeating American exceptionalism, “the idea that the United States is a chosen nation, a country whose history and unique mission in the world defy comparison” (Vagnes, 2005, p.62). It was a time when American superheroes became uber-patriotic (Robb, 2014). Marvel’s Captain America was a product of such climate and over the course of his journey; comic fans witnessed him fighting Adolf Hitler as well as Japs, communists and suspects of 9/11.

Jeffrey. K. Johnson (2012) draws attention to another time of social and cultural tension in the American society, namely the 60s. He adds “the civil rights struggle was an issue that Americans would slowly address over the coming decades and that would be define much of the 1960s’ cultural ideology” (p. 65). Civil and feminist movements alongside Vietnam War influenced the design of the superheroes of the time and the storylines. Within this context, for example the superheroes of the team X-Men represent minority groups in the American society. Robb (2014) explains that the themes of X-Men comics included prejudice, acceptance, tolerance and racism. These themes are the main concerns of civil rights movement.

Today, superhero stories still reflect the social anxieties of the American society. Especially after 9/11 American society is said to have entered a new era. Dan Hassler-Forest (2012) gives a detailed description of this time of sudden transformation, its effect on the perception of heroism and the presentation of superheroes as follows;

*...a great deal of cultural and political discourse surrounding 9/11 has concerned itself explicitly with the canonization of these new figures that were suddenly recognized in firemen, policemen and rescue workers. To the point of hyperbole, the aesthetics of comic books and Hollywood action blockbusters were used to enshrine the new “real heroes” as equal to, or perhaps even greater than, the fictional figures that had previously been primarily associated with that term (p. 27).*

A sudden increase in the publication of comic books appeared shortly after the attacks. After the demise of the World Trade Center towers, Marvel positioned its superheroes as protecting the same front with the “real heroes” of the tragedy. Superheroes began to be depicted in scenarios where they were set to protect the American society in general and New Yorkers in specific. Even fictional places where superheroes lived like Metropolis (Superman) and Gotham (Batman) were influenced by the tragic incident of New York. Marvel superheroes like Spiderman was portrayed as guarding New York against possible enemies. As Slavoj Zizek (2004) explains the representations of 9/11 reflected the frame of mind that America had “suddenly encountered an Evil which fits the most naïve Hollywood image: a secret organization of fanatics who fully intend and plan in detail, a terrorist attack whose aim is to kill thousands of random civilians” (p. 75). Following 9/11 supervillains also are influenced by the incident and exemplified real life figures that took part in the incident. Marc DiPaolo (2011) discloses such phenomenon in Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins* where the supervillain of the movie Ra’s al Ghul is a commentary on Osama bin Laden. Moreover, superhero narratives provided a more digestible version the tragedy and provided the readers/watchers with “familiar coordinates that establish the difference between good and evil, right and wrong, hero and villain, victim and attacker” (Hassler-Forest, 2012, p.29). With 9/11, superheroes’ sphere of action has expanded. They are not bound to be acting within the boundaries of fictional cities or planets; they can transcend the limits of their alternative world and meet the society they protect in real settings like in the case of Marvel superheroes rescuing 9/11 victims in New York.

### 2.2.2. The Passage to the Screen

Before the comics, the adventures of the superheroes were first told on the radio. Superman was the first radio superhero and gained huge popularity between 1940 and 1951. “The radio show was part of a merchandising boom that saw Superman’s image plastered over everything from puzzles and games, greeting cards to bubblegum” (Robb, 2014, p. 292). This interest was partly due to the fact that radio was the main medium of entertainment before television. Before its television series, Superman cartoon was released in 1941 and it was awarded for an Oscar.

In 1944, Captain America was released as the first Marvel superhero movie on the screen. Later, Republic Pictures adapted Superman as a movie in 1948. It was brought to the screen as television series under the name of the “*Adventures of Superman*” that casted George Reeves as Superman. The television series reached wide audiences all around the world and Reeves was identified with Superman in the public imagination. Television series was on air for six seasons (1952-1958), 104 half-hour episodes and after the first two seasons it was shot in color (Robb, 2014).

Batman is another superhero who met with the screen earlier than the others. The character first starred in two serial films in the 1940s. However, it was not received well by the public. The popularity came with the television series between 1966 and 1968. The unique design of Batmobile and intriguing villains like Joker, Penguin, The Riddler and Catwoman contributed to the success. During the 1970s; The Incredible Hulk, Wonder Women and Spiderman starred in their own television series. “The ‘pow’ and ‘zap’ graphics of the comics were used on screen to great effect, and the series deliberately focused on the outré villains, bringing in star names to play the guest villain of the week (Robb, 2014, p. 308).

After the success of superhero television series, the first cinematic superhero blockbuster was released in 1978. Not surprisingly, Superman was the protagonist. Christopher Reeve acted Superman and Richard Donner directed the movie. The appearance of names like Marlon Brando and Gene Hackman also contributed to the

box office success of the movie. The sequels *Superman II and III* were released in 1980 and in 1983. In 1986 the first Marvel superhero movie featuring Howard Duck as the main character was released. The movie was produced by George Lucas. Howard Duck is not a classical superhero but a Marvel comic character adapted into cinema.

The 80s and 90s DC Comics' Batman dominated the cinema screen. Tim Burton's *Batman* became as the biggest film of 1989. It grossed 411 million dollars globally and such box office success led to *Batman Returns* in 1992, also directed by Tim Burton. The two movies had a gothic atmosphere due to the auteur style of Tim Burton called "Burtonesque". Two successive Batman movies directed by Joel Schumacher were screened in 1994 and in 1997. The box office was not as brilliant as Tim Burton versions.

Then, the *X-Men* movie came. As Robb (2014) underlines "X-Men was the first superhero movie to break through to a mainstream audience that did not feature the 'big two' Superman or Batman" (p. 335). Following X-Men, Spiderman movie - inspired by the 1977 television series – was released by Colombia Pictures. Tobey Maguire played the Spiderman who is the alter ego of Peter Parker. The popularity of the first movie has brought two sequels (in 2004 and 2007) casting the same actor and were directed by Sam Raimi.

2008 is an important year for the superhero movies because the film *The Dark Knight* (the second ring of Christopher Nolan's The Dark Knight Trilogy) was nominated for an Oscar in the 2009 Academy Awards. Christian Bale played Bruce Wayne who is the real life character of Batman. As seen in the examples above; if an actor was believed to successfully embody a superhero by the audience, he becomes indispensable to the continuity of the character. Robert Downey Jr. and his performance in Tony Stark role in the *Iron Man* movie directed by Joe Favreau is another exemplar of such situation.

Robb (2014) explains Downey Jr's perfect suitability for Iron Man character as follows;

*"The humor and lightness of touch of Downey Jr. combined with the spy and adventure movie trappings that Favreau deliberately evoked turned a niche comic book property in to mass audience mainstream breakout hit"* (p. 345).

It has been almost 80 years since the first appearance of Superman on the pages of the first issue of Action Comics in 1938. After its exceptional success, costumed superheroes became an integral element of the comic book form, soon extending into other popular narrative media like radio and film serials. Today, superhero movie is accepted as a genre of its own and its marketing success continues to grow. According to Mojo<sup>4</sup>, by February 2016 sixteen superhero movies from Marvel and DC Comics are among the 100 top grossing movies of all times. At the moment, not only in cinema but in television also superhero narratives dominate the airing schedules like *Daredevil* on Netflix, *Gotham* on Fox, *Arrow* and *Flash* on CW and *Agents of SHIELD* on Channel 4.

### **2.2.3. The Birth of a New Genre: The Superhero Movie**

Apart from TV cartoons and everyday objects such as t-shirts; superheroes permeate to our daily life through big-budget movies "occupying narratives in which Manichean categories are embodied by heroes and villains, usually as such by their name and their costume for all to see" (Dittmer, 2012, p.2). They are an integral part of the media in specific as well as the popular culture in general. In that sense, they are this century's pop icons. The box office rates of recent classical superhero movies can be seen as the testament of their popularity. When their production budget and their worldwide box office gross are compared; movies like *Avengers* and *Avengers: Age of Ultron*, *Iron Man 3*, and *Spider Man* brought a six fold profit. Superhero movies presenting divergent superheroes like *Blade*, *Wolverine* and *Ghost Rider* (e.g. *Blade*, *Blade II*, *Blade Trinity*, *X-Men*, *X- Men Origins: Wolverine*, *Ghost Rider*, *Ghost Rider: The Spirit of Vengeance*) provided a threefold return on investment.

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<sup>4</sup> [www.boxofficemojo.com](http://www.boxofficemojo.com) is a web site that provides box office numbers of movies.

Hassler-Forest (2012) specifies superhero movie genre as a popular narrative identifiable on three levels:

*Semantically (by the appearance of costumes, masks, superhuman powers, etc.), syntactically (narratives in which heroes save cities/worlds/communities from destruction by evil), and pragmatically (texts that are written and talked about as part of an existing superhero genre) (p. 8).*

The particular genre consists of various themes such as law, justice, order and sacrifice. Superheroes watch out for the misfortunate and punish wrongdoers. They are moral exemplars for the society. DiPaolo (2011) highlights the working dynamics of the genre as follows: “Superheroes typically fight crime, which means that their stories are required on some level to depict and sometimes deconstruct the boundary between the law and lawlessness” (p. 86).

Although superheroes are claimed to make their debut in the late 30s, “the roots of these figures can be traced back to older forms of American genre, most notably cowboy figures like the Virginian, and the heroes of pulp novels from the 1920s and early 1930s” (Hassler-Forest, 2012, p. 6). Similarly, Robb (2014) explicates that “the first great modern American mythology was the Western, tales of the frontier and expansion of civilization westwards” (p. 360). He claims that superhero genre replaced the Westerns as the new American myth in a new technological age. Jason Dittmer (cited in Hassler-Forest, 2012) emphasizes the continuity between two forms;

*Just as the cowboy served as a masculine source for (racialized) order on the Western frontier, protecting a feminized ‘civilization’ in regions beyond the reach of the state, superheroes serve as a masculinity barrier between the vulnerable, feminized urban population and the chaotic savagery of criminals and supervillains (p. 12)*

For some, superhero movie genre is a blend of other forms of popular fantasy. Levitz (2013) sees the genre as a melting pot of other genres, hence emphasizes the variety. He explains (2013) that “superhero story has become a separate, albeit hybrid genre. It is a

mix of science fiction, fantasy, fairytale, Western, detective, soap opera, romance and other genres, combined with elements of opera and professional wrestling” (p. 126). For example, Iron Man movies can be seen as an amalgamation of action and comedy genres since cynical humor is a dominant trait of Tony Stark character.

While the characteristic codes of the superhero genre in comics were transferred into cinema, the medium provided them with its specific features such as visual effects and soundtrack. Wright (2003) attributes the latest success of superhero movie genre to the computer-generated special effects that made more realistic renderings of comic book fantasies possible. For example, CGI technologies enable directors to create fully computer based characters such as Ang Lee’s *Incredible Hulk* and *Silver Surfer 4: Rise of the Silver Surfer*. Another defining feature of the genre specific to the medium of cinema is authorship. Each director puts its personal touch to the superhero characters and aesthetic language of the movie. Tim Burton’s *Batman*, Christopher Nolan’s *The Dark Knight*, Ang Lee’s *Hulk* are all auteur cinema examples in terms of narration, atmosphere and rhythm.

Similar to comics, the most recognizable aspect of the cinematic genre is costumes and capes. Jennings (2013) defines superheroes as effective visual communication vehicles. For the most part, the costumes of the superheroes are designed according to the specific vision of the director. For example, Christopher Nolan’s *Batman* looks minimalistic whereas Tim Burton’s *Batman* costume has a gothic look. Moreover, the costume accentuates the masculine power by at times revealing superhero’s hard-body. As Jennings (2013) explains “the superhero a symbol of power that is reified as the hyper- physical body, and that body then comes to be a visual representation of that power” (p. 50). In other instances, the costume can be a means to compensate superhero’s lack of natural superpower. In the film *Iron Man*, Tony Stark does not have any special power but he invents a high-technology iron suit that endows him with superpowers such as extreme strength and flying.

Another specific feature of the genre is supervillain. Supervillains make the conflict more dramatic. A regular character who has superpower becomes a hero by combating

with villains. Levitz (2013) underlines that “the supervillain gives legitimacy to the superhero’s mission” (p. 85). For fans, the ultimate fight scene between the superhero and the villain is the most captivating part of the movie. Defeat of the villain is what creates the state of catharsis in the audience. According to Levitz (2013) the usage of the fight scene between the superhero and the villain is for promotional purposes. He explains that “when comics are translated to film, the cover becomes the key art of a poster, with dueling power figures poised to battle” (p. 81).

As provided at the beginning of this section, superhero movie genre stands at the intersection of various genres such as science fiction, fantasy, fairytale, Western, detective, soap opera, romance, etc. When these genres become a narrative tool in the hands of an author director, the superhero character become solidly associated with a globally acclaimed actor/actress and the production includes high-tech special effects; a superhero movie becomes a blockbuster.

The demand for such superhero blockbusters partly lies in the psychological needs of the spectators to identify with these highly empowered creatures, hence to feel powerful her/himself. At other times, the spectator chooses to identify with the victims that the superhero protects so that s/he can feel safe. Levitz (2013) explains that “superheroes also present us with the idealized version of ourselves. They possess the physical and mental attributes, the courage, and the honor we wish we had” (p. 145).

As the above examples illustrate, the lines that define the superhero movie genre is flexible rather than stable. The genre has dominant features but they can be subject to be modified or change. As Klock (2013) claims;

*To say, superhero must have superpowers would push Batman out of the genre. If they must have a secret identity, then The Fantastic Four are gone. If magic makes a story part of the genre of fantasy, then there goes Wonder Women and Thor. If aliens are for science fiction, Superman is out (p.74).*

### **3. DIVERGENT SUPERHEROES: INBETWEEN CHARACTERS**

Within the confines of this chapter, divergent superhero concept will be scrutinized with a specific focus on Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider. The nature of their inbetweenness will be investigated for each character separately.

#### **3.1. BLADE**

The roots of Blade go back to Vampirella (1969), a vampiristic heroine who devotes herself to fight the vampire race. While she possesses typical vampiristic qualities such as heightened senses, speed, immortality and mesmerizing stare; she is immune to daylight, holy water, garlic and the cross. After Vampirella; the first African-American superhero Luke Cage was introduced by Marvel in 1972. He was an important attempt in terms of breaking the white male action superhero norm of the Golden Age of comics. One year after, Marvel released another superhero exhibiting similar traits called Blade, an African-American vampire hunter. Blade had first appeared as a cameo in *The Tomb of Dracula*. A piece that solely told the story of Blade was published in the *Vampire Tales* comic book in 1974. He quickly became a popular superhero in the Marvel universe, although the adventures of the character had never been published as a monthly issue.

Since her mother was raped by vampires while she was pregnant with Blade, the character shows half human-half vampire qualities. Although he is half vampire, his mother's violent murder caused him to wage war on all the vampires. His vampirist features give Blade his superpower. Different than classical vampires, Blade is immune to the negative effects of the sunlight because he carries human blood. This quality provides him with the unique power of "daywalking".

Blade is empowered by becoming a vampire. But, what makes him a superhero is his will to keep his humanity. Roz Kaveney (2008) explains this as follows;

*Vampires, more or less by definition, have superpowers. When vampires choose to work for good, especially when the object of the enterprise is their own redemption or a loyalty to friends that transcends their personal statuses as good or evil, then those vampires become superheroes almost automatically (p. 208)*

In the vampire narratives, superheroes often become a vampire hunter or a monstrous creature. Blade is a vampire hunter who is half vampire. His vampire and human sides put him in a constant identity struggle. Since vampires are great threat to human kind, to kill them is a way of serving the public good. However, the society sees him not as a superhero but as a potential threat. Heather L. Duda (2008) explains the social position of monster hunter in the society as follows: “Even though monster hunters are there when we needed, they identify with the night. For this reason; monster hunters can only truly be accepted into a society of other monster hunters” (p. 17). Blade’s life reflects a similar scenario. He lives also in the dark; humans do not see him as a member of their society even he fights for the public good against other vampires.

The character design of Blade was influenced by the 60s civil right movements and the race equality discourses in America. As an allegory of being an outcast, an outsider in a dominantly white society; Blade struggles to find a place as a vampire among humans. Veronica Hollinger (1997) sees vampire figures as inherently deconstructive and explains;

*It is the monster that used to be human; it is the undead that used to be alive; it is the monster that looks like us. For this reason, the figure of the vampire always has the potential to jeopardize the conventional distinctions between human and monster, between life and death, between ourselves and the other (p. 201).*

In that sense, vampires with all their aforementioned qualities can be seen as a threat to the absolute boundaries between good and evil. Duda’s (2008) approach parallels this line of thinking, she emphasizes that vampires trigger a society’s anxiety towards monsters that can blend in without being recognized.

As she explains; “The whole point of humanizing apparatuses is to prevent the monstrous from walking around with the human. A great fear of any society is the inability to differentiate between good and evil” (p. 12). Joan Gordon and Hollinger (1997) address that the vampire figures can be seen as a reflection of contemporary concerns “such as relations of power and alienation, attitudes toward illness, and the definition of evil at the end of an unprecedentedly secular century” (p. 3). Within this perspective, Blade can be seen to represent such social worries.

Vampire stories’ roots go back to Victorian literature. Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* is the one that paved the way for power hungry predators (Auerbach, 1997) in the literature as well as on the screen. The novel is accepted as the quintessential exemplar of monster-hunting narrative. The novel tells the story of Count Dracula and his journey from Transylvania to England to find new blood and spread the undead curse, and the battle between Dracula and vampire-hunter Professor Abraham Van Helsing. According to Duda (2008) while *Dracula* represents “all that is villainous, chaotic and repressed in society” (p. 9). Van Helsing is all about bringing the order back and sustaining the status-quo.

Nina Auerbach (1997) draws a line between *Dracula* and earlier vampire figures of the Victorian era. She points out that *Dracula* was “animal rather than phantom, mesmerist rather than intimate, tyrant rather than friend, safely quarantined vampires from their human prey” (Auerbach, 1997, p. 7). Vampires are often associated with power that comes from their immortality and domination over mortals. Auerbach (1997) highlights *Dracula*’s difference from earlier versions of Victorian vampire and his association with domination after its migration to the United States as follows;

*Before Dracula, vampires embodied forbidden ideals of intimacy; after Dracula, they moved to America and turned into rulers. Just as Victorian patriarchal precepts officially forbade citizens to long for friendship, so American democracy forbade us to long for monarchs* (p. 101).

F. W. Murnau's *Nosferatu* (1922) and Tod Browning's *Dracula* (1931) are accepted as the earliest adaptations of Dracula into the cinematic screen. In Browning's adaptation, Count Dracula is portrayed as a vampire who lives in a castle in Transylvania. The community nearby is frightened by him. They see Dracula as a threat and a monster. The story is driven by the dichotomy of monstrousness and being human. When the sun sets, the safety of the daylight is replaced by an uncanny fear. Associated with the dark, Count Dracula represents the fear of the unknown. In the night time, he searches for human preys. When he encounters them, he bites and sucks their blood. People try to protect themselves by locking their doors, using primitive tools and garlic. At other times, he travels to London to find a bride. However, the woman that he decides to marry happens to be engaged. Prof. Van Helsing warns the family about the true nature of Dracula and tries to kill him.

Dracula character was seen as "the herald and epitome of the American Depression" (Auerbach, 1997, p. 116) and all the social horror that it brought. In the movie, Dracula was hardly a monster. He had nothing animalistic about him. Instead of fangs his distinctive feature was his cape. He was more hypnotizer than biter. There was no physical interaction between him and his female victims which foregrounds his aloofness. Auerbach (1997) defines him as "a singular, physically aloof monster" (p. 119). In that sense, he can be seen as more attackable than an all permeating monster. In later filmic adaptations, Dracula have gone some transformations. Light became another primal enemy for him other than the societal forces. The plots reflected the changing needs and desires of the post-war America and provided the symbolism of an atmosphere where "self-canonized authorities – medical, moral and patriotic – proliferated, all preaching the health of domesticity (national and familial) – and the horror of the world beyond" (Auerbach, 1997, p. 125). For example, Terrence Fisher's *Horror of Dracula* (1958) portrayed two women, Lucy and Mina opening the windows of their room voluntarily to Dracula and infected by his vampirism. In that sense, Dracula becomes the trigger of the female disobedience and a threat to the integration of the patriarchal family. Therefore, he has to be destroyed so that the society could be saved from his toxic influences on the social order. Van Helsing, the vampire hunter, is depicted as the embodiment of the social force that fights back the threat.

Until the 70s, Dracula was the Vampire, in other words the ultimate archetype for all the vampires. Auerbach (1997) marks the 70s as a breaking point and a decade when the conception of vampire has reinvented itself. She describes this period of transformation as follows;

*Vampires in the 1970s become authorities. Hovering between animal and angel, they are paragons of emotional complexity and discernment, stealing from Van Helsing the role of knower but adding tenderness and ineffable sorrow human beings have become too monstrous to comprehend (Auerbach, 1997, p. 131).*

The era was marked by Vietnam War and Watergate Scandal and Johnson and Nixon were forced to leave their presidency due to them. According to Auerbach (1997), it was a time of lack of leadership. This authority gap created a social anxiety regarding a possible cultural crisis and disintegration. In her idea, vampire figures filled this gap.

The diversification of vampire figures continued with the 1980s. Child vampires came to light. As a manifestation of the traumatic memories of childhood, Auerbach (1997) finds them “symptomatic of fear of the future” (p. 159). The child vampire Claudia in Neil Jordan’s *Interview with the Vampire* (1994); who matures psychologically but remains a little girl physically can be assessed as a symbolic representation of the resistance against the future. Blade also creates a similar shift in terms of the divergence from the classical vampire figures. He can be seen as a continuation of this line of vampires that manifest uncanny combination of identities like child/monster/demon. He is a vampire/vampire hunter. In other words, he is both Dracula and Van Helsing in a singular body. He tries to suppress his vampiristic urges like blood thirst. He is ashamed from his vampire identity since he perceives vampirism as associated with violence. Another important quality that he possesses is that he can survive daylight. For that reason; vampires envy him.

He is a vampire who chooses to be a vampire hunter. Different than earlier vampire figures that embrace their nature and takes their power from their vampirism, Blade sees his vampiristic features as a threat to the society in general. He experiences a constant cognitive and emotional dissonance. Therefore, he tries to suppress all of his qualities

that are related with his vampiristic nature. Within this perspective, his identity becomes a terrain of constant conflict. He is vampiristic by instinct, but humanistic by behavior. His nature becomes a barrier for his prosocial behavior. The ambiguities surrounding his identity make it harder for the society to categorize and recognize him as a superhero, or better to say to categorize him at all. He represents the human's fear of the unknown. His inbetweenness makes him worth examining as a new type of superhero: A divergent one.

### **3.2. WOLVERINE**

James Howlett is the human identity of the mutant superhero Wolverine, a member of a superhero team called X-Men. Wolverine's first appearance was as a cameo in the *The Incredible Hulk* comics (1974). The character was presented as a Canadian mutant. His roots make him an outsider but the moment he becomes part of the X-Men team he becomes a superhero. X-Men members are mutants whose powers come from a genetic deformation. DiPaola (2011) explains that "the powers were a result of the mutation of children born in the nuclear age. These beings were called, respectively, '-mutants', 'children of the atom', and 'X-men' because of the radioactive source of the powers and because they have 'extra power' than the average person (p. 222). Similar to Blade, Wolverine is a loner by choice. Misirlioglu (2004) defines Wolverine's distinct personality as "a dangerous loner in the tradition of the Western anti-hero; he has no compunctions about killing, and treats the helpless well as long as they don't give him a tougher time. He is, in short, Clint Eastwood with tights and claws" (p. 625). Wolverine is a superhero whose mutation is built upon his wolf genes. He has excessively hairy body and a heightened ability to smell. Due to his mutation his wounds cure super quickly. As a result, he ages very slowly. Similar to immortal vampires, his physical immutability is contrasted with his psychological maturity. Wolverine is an old man with a non-aging body.

Like Batman, Wolverine is a superhero with a childhood trauma. They both struggle with the remnants of the trauma of dead parents. Different than Batman whose parents were murdered, Wolverine is the one who kills his parents. After a series of incidents,

Wolverine is shot by his head and loses all his memory and forgets about his past, including the traumatic experience of killing his own parents. When Wolverine joins the X-Men team, the leader of the team Prof. Charles Xavier helps him to remember his past by using his telepathic mutant power. His aloofness, once caused by his inability to remember his identity, is now driven by his constant guilt. His trauma can be seen as a defining feature of the character and the justification of his anger and brutality. Apart from being an outcast among people in general, he cannot conform to the X-Men pack either. His only commonality with the team is that he uses his powers for the public good. But the way he uses them is not compatible with the general order of the team. In that sense, he can be seen as an anti-hero. Johnson (2012) describes Wolverine as a necessary evil in a corrupt society. In his idea;

*Wolverine believes in individualism and strong action against criminals and one's adversaries. He displays cowboyistic traits as the brooding loner and tough lawgiver, but in true Reagan era fashion the super-killing mutant intensifies these traditional qualities to become an extreme super conservative (Johnson, 2012, p. 132)*

In contrast to the dominant superhero mode of conduct, Wolverine's attitude can be summarized as "no mercy to the enemy".

Wolverine's most crucial and unique feature is his constant search for a stable identity. He always goes back and forth between being an animalistic mutant and a human. Such inbetweenness regarding his identity makes him a divergent superhero. His wolf-like mutant genes provide him with his superpowers which he sees as a curse and a source of regret. He sees his mutation built upon his animalistic genes as the source of his uncontrollable anger which eventually led to the death of his father. Elaine L. Graham (2002) defines such characters stuck between human and animal as monsters and explains that;

*There are monsters that are born with a form that is half-animal and the other (half) human, or retaining everything (about them) from animals, which are produced by sodomists and atheists who "join together" and break out of their bounds-*

*unnaturally- with animals, and from this are born several hideous monsters that bring great shame to those who look at them or speak of them (p. 48).*

X-Men narratives also are based on this mutant as abnormal/to be feared and mutant as normal/to be friended dichotomy. The stories are constructed through social perception of mutants as animalistic monsters with whom the interaction is accepted as dangerous and inappropriate. It is why; one of the defining missions of X-Men leader Prof. Xavier is to change the social stigmata against the mutants and to normalize the relationship between mutant and human communities. Within this perspective, Wolverine can be seen as a borderline character, always trying to balance his animalistic instincts and his humanly manners. Wolverine always stands on the edge of savagery and civility. The line that separates these two psychological states is very thin, most of the time blurry. In his journey to find his identity; the team X-Men functions a social facilitator for him. Prof. Xavier teaches Wolverine how to transform his anger into a superpower that he can use for the public good. Hence, he opens the door for Wolverine who is a loner superhero to be integrated into the society.

### **3.3. GHOST RIDER**

Ghost Rider first appeared in a comic book anthology called Marvel Spotlight (1972). The first solo comic book of Ghost Rider was released in 1973 by Marvel's Roy Thomas and Mike Ploog. This was not the first attempt to create a Ghost Rider story. In earlier versions he was depicted as "a macabre Western lawman from the 1950s, inspired by the hit Vaughn Monroe song, Ghost Riders in the Sky" (Roach, 2004, p. 227). Due to its commercial failure, Thomas and Ploog decided to re-design the character and by clothing him with a sleek dark blue leather costume and by replacing the horse with a motorcycle. The most distinct feature of the character was that Ghost Rider had a blazing skull for a head. He was promoted as the most supernatural superhero of all time.

After the superhero boom of the 60s, Marvel Comics tried to create alternative superheroes in the sense that they were anti heroic and diversified compared to the Golden Age versions. One particularity of the period was characters influenced by the

design features of the horror genre. David A. Roach (2004) mentions that “Marvel Comics responded to the demand with a major line of horror stories, adopting the same sort of continuity and characterization that had made their superhero stories so successful” (p. 227). Ghost Rider character, designed by Gray Friedrich, Roy Thomas and Dick Ayers, carries the traces of the above mentioned period. His journey of becoming a divergent superhero starts as Carter Slade who eventually becomes the Ghost Rider.

Carter Slade arrives to the West in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century to become a schoolteacher at a new settlement, but a group of attackers shoots him and he gets severely injured. The Indians come to help. The wizard of the Indian tribe turns him into a Ghost Rider so that he could be saved. However, the cure becomes a lasting curse. During the night, Carter Slade becomes the Ghost Rider and his horse is transformed into a fiery creature. To pay his dues to the Indians that saved him, Ghost Rider fights with criminals to protect the order in the West. The narrative is influenced by other genres such as action and fantasy but the unchanging theme is Western. Carter Slade is the ancestor of Johnny Blaze who is the human identity of Ghost Rider that was created in 1973.

Being a Ghost Rider is a rank that implies a devilish and supernatural power. The character was introduced to the readers with a punchline that said “Is He Alive or Dead?”. Ghost Rider is an inbetween superhero shifting between life and death, day and night, a living and a ghost, a human and the Devil. The human character of Ghost Rider is Johnny Blaze who is a motorcycle acrobat in a circus where he works with his father. When his father was diagnosed with lung cancer, Blaze makes a Faustian deal with the devil named Mephistopheles to save his father’s life. Thereafter, he became Ghost Rider and a servant of the devil. However, the devil does not keep his promise and Johnny Blaze’s father dies and that is when his tragedy starts. F. Scott Fitzgerald once said “Show me a hero and I will write you a tragedy” (Cited in Rosenberg and Coogan, p.47). Tragedies and past traumas are common features of superheroes and Blaze is not an exception. Although, he loses his father, he cannot break the deal and disobey the devil. Because when Blaze is transformed into Ghost Rider, he loses his consciousness. Since, he is immortal this becomes an eternal burden.

Ghost Rider punishes criminals who harm innocent people, and devilish creatures that disobey to the devil. To do that, he uses fire and chains from hell. Rosenberg and Coogan (2013) provide that “the superhero’s mission is to fight evil and protect the innocent; the fight is universal, prosocial and selfless” (p. 4). In contrast to this definition, Ghost Rider does not fight with devil, he serves it. But, after a while, Ghost Rider learns to control his power which he uses against the devil itself. The choice of using his devilish power against the devil makes Ghost Rider a superhero.

### **3.4. BEING A DIVERGENT IN THE SUPERHERO UNIVERSE**

Classical superhero narratives are based on clear binary oppositions such as good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, dead vs. alive. After the Golden Age, comics companies tried expand the boundaries of the superhero narrative by creating superheroes outside of the classical definition. These superheroes have different origins, behaviors and attitudes that made them anti-heroic characters. This thesis focuses especially on such superheroes, namely Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider. These three characters are not only anti-heroes but also reflect a certain inbetweenness. Blade is half human- half vampire, Wolverine tries to balance his wolf genes and his human features, Ghost Rider is stuck between life and death. Within this perspective, it is hard to assign them at one end of clearly defined binary oppositions.

These three superheroes are characterized by their ambivalence, in other words by the inaccessibility of their true self. Their main struggle lies in this impossibility. They try to reach a resolution in terms of their identity but due to their hybridity it becomes a dead end. Blade is a half-vampire superhero who fights against its own kind. Wolverine is a mutant superhero with a wolf DNA and struggles to contain his animalistic behaviors. His animalism is not something he embraces but he tries to control. His biggest challenge is to be able to sustain its civility, hence to be part of the human community. Ghost Rider, on the other hand, is a superhero that struggles between life and death, humanistic and devilish, light and darkness. His superpower (transforming into an immortal devilish creature at night) is not something to be proud of but to be

ashamed of. For this reason, he tries to destroy the devil, the ultimate source of his superpower.

What makes these three superheroes apart from the rest is their struggle with themselves. In fact, the one with themselves is their primary battle. For example, Deacon Frost the vampire bites Blade's mother while she was pregnant with him. From then, Blade's ultimate objective becomes to kill Frost and all the vampire kind. In that sense, Blade tries to kill his creator, his father. Ghost Rider also struggles with his creator, the source of his power, the Devil. Wolverine's biggest enemy is his brother Sabretooth who exhibits the same wolf-like qualities and behaviors as Wolverine. Therefore, these superheroes are also bound by their oedipal fight with themselves. They are not in terms with their true self. Their power is something they try to suppress rather than to embrace. They constantly strive to liberate themselves from their genetic inheritance. In their world, the line between hero and enemy, good and evil is always blurred.

Michael Spivey and Steven Knowlton (2008) provide taxonomy of similar anti-heroic superheroes. They categorize superheroes based on their self-doubt level and their position in a good-evil spectrum regarding their means and ends. As Table 1 shows, Wolverine is positioned along with Punisher<sup>5</sup> and Judge Dredd<sup>6</sup>. These two characters are defined by their mercilessness toward their enemies and by their brutality. Wolverine is depicted as having highly good ends and moderately evil means. In comics, Wolverine is portrayed as a brutal killer; whereas in movies, he is depicted as a character that makes decisions based on his conscious rather than on his animalistic urges. But still, because of his appearance, superpowers and animalistic features, the existing society sees him as a monster. The same applies to Blade and Ghost Rider.

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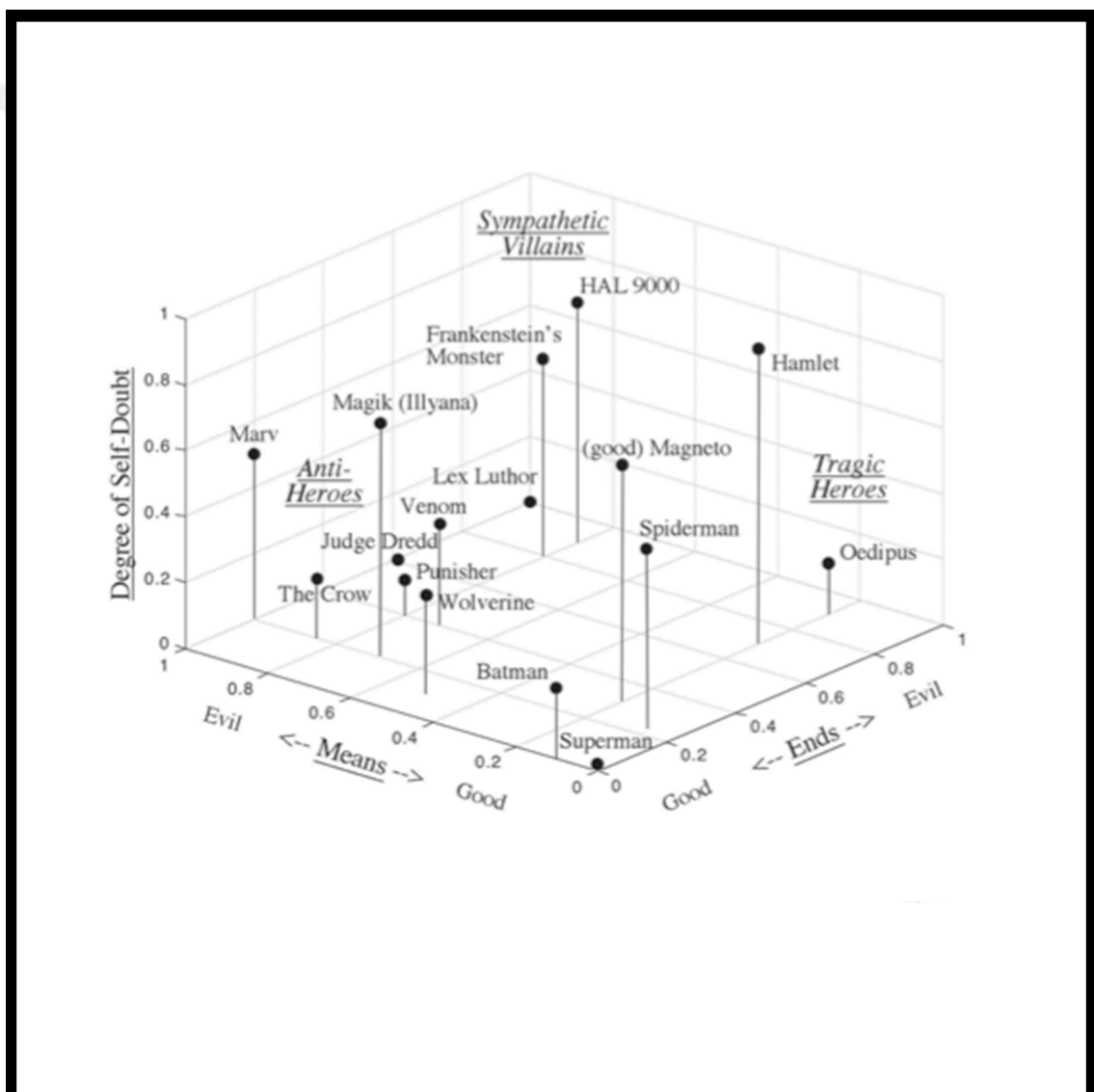
<sup>5</sup> Punisher is a revengeful assassin character created by Gerry Conway and John Romita, Sr. His first appearance was as a supporting hero in The Amazing Spiderman comics (1974).

<sup>6</sup> Judge Dredd is a law enforcement officer in the dystopian future city of Mega-City One in North America. The character is created by John Wagner, Carlos Exquerra and Pat Milles (1977).

Since they are not identifiable then they are to be afraid of, to be named as the “Other”. Graham (2002) explains that;

*Monsters are, therefore, effectively the demonstration of the workings of difference. Their otherness to the norm of the human, the natural and the moral, is as that which must be repressed in order to secure the boundaries of the same. Yet, at the same time, by showing forth the fault-lines of binary opposition - between human/non- human, natural/unnatural, virtue/vice- monsters bear the trace of difference that destabilizes the distinction (p. 54).*

**Figure 3.1. Spivey and Knowlton’s Superhero Taxonomy**



Source: Spivey, M. & Knowlton S. 2008. Anti- Heroism in the Continuum of Good and Evil. Canzoneri, J. & Rosenberg, S. R. (Eds.). *The Psychology of Superheroes*. (p.62). Dallas: Benbella Books, Inc.

Similar to these three superheroes, Marvel and DC Comics developed stories that casted inbetween characters. For example, Hulk is the alter-ego of Dr. Bruce Banner and is a big green monster. When Banner feels in danger or angry, he is instantly transformed into Hulk. And when he is Hulk, Banner does not control his consciousness, He is free from the norms of the society and the boundaries of civility. Dr. Bruce Banner struggles between being a monster and a human, between a savage and a man of science. In DC Comics universe, such characters are generally villains. For example, in Batman, Oswald Cobblepot has penguin features (i.e. having fins and eating uncooked fishes). He uses the code name Penguin and he gathers an army of penguins to attack Batman as a villain. He is also a hybrid character like Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider. He is half-penguin half-human.

Another animalistic figure from Batman universe is Killer Croc. As a result of a genetic condition, Waylon Jones looks like a crocodile and he becomes an animalistic supervillain. Marvel Comics also has a character that is transformed into a Lizard in Spiderman universe. Dr. Curt Connors loses one of his arms and creates a new arm by using genes of other creatures like a lizard. As a result of the complications in the experiment, he transforms into a Lizard. He has a lizard like appearance but walks on his two feet like humans. Lizard follows his animalistic instincts, but Dr. Connors finds a way to control his alter-ego consciously. In the light of the aforementioned examples, the inbetweenness is portrayed through animalistic appearance vs. human psyche, instinct vs. consciousness, savagery vs. civility, abnormality vs. normality, etc. Moreover, characters like Wolverine add another layer to the conception of inbetween superheroes, because he is not totally a wolf but a human with wolf genes.

Classical superheroes are defined by their mission, superpower, identity and costume. For Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider their second identities become problematic, something they struggle to control. This state defines what kind of superhero they are. They have clear missions such as killing vampires, or devilish creatures. Superheroes devote themselves to the public good but these three superheroes serve the society indirectly. If they renounce their superpower which creates identity problems for them

then they face the threat of losing their identity all together. To destroy their dark side means to destroy their existence in its totality.

Regarding the costume, these three superheroes do not wear any costumes. Blade and Ghost Rider, similarly wear dark leather jackets. Jennings (2013) mentions that superhero costumes mostly reflect primary colors of red, yellow and blue. In that sense, black foregrounds their divergence and emphasizes their dark side. In short, they do not look like classical superheroes. Especially Blade and Ghost Rider typically reflect the codes of the horror genre. As Randy Duncan and Matthew J. Smith (2009) explain “the connection between color and superheroes is so prominent that some creators working in other genres have consciously avoided the use of color, choosing to work in black and white in order to distance themselves from the (potentially) juvenile connotation of bright color” (Cited in Jennings, 2013, p. 236). Wolverine, in his cinematic version, does not wear a superhero costume but a cool leather jacket similar to Blade and Ghost Rider. But in his comics’ version, he wears a superhero costume that emphasizes his membership to the X-Men team. They wear a team uniform to underline their unity and oneness. Since X-Men house serves as an institute for gifted students (mutants); these costumes are also school uniforms. However, X-Men members perceives wearing a costume as a superhero cliché. The dialogue between Beast, Cyclops and Prof. Xavier reflect such perception. The Beast says “I was never super. Why you had us dress up superheroes anyway, Professor.” and Cyclops – another member of the team - answers “The Professor thought people would trust us if we looked like something they understood” (Klock, 2013, p. 73). As the dialogue implies, the costumes were not used as a prop to emphasize superhero’s uniqueness but as a means to blend in, to facilitate the integration of the mutants into the society at large. The costume in that sense does not signify the singularity of the superhero but anonymity. For X-Men mutants it is a way to say “I am one of you, humans”.

What makes Wolverine, Blade and Ghost Rider a superhero is not their costume or their compatibility with other codes of classical superheroes. What elevates them to superherodom is the choice they make between different aspects of their identity. This is a constant struggle for them, but as long as their choices are driven by their conscious

and their behavior is driven by their humanity they are presented as superheroes.  
Although, divergent ones.



## 4. BLADE, WOLVERINE AND GHOST RIDER VIA MOVIES

This chapter provides a detailed investigation of the divergent superhero movies that are subject for further analysis. For each movie, the basic plotline will be provided and the narrative dynamics that reveal the identity dilemma of the divergent superhero (i.e. Blade, Wolverine, Ghost Rider) will be evaluated.

### 4.1. BLADE TRILOGY

#### 4.1.1. Blade (1998)

First *Blade* movie was directed by Stephen Norrington (1998). Blade character was designed as an African-American superhero and was played by Wesley Snipes. The story involves Eric Brooks whose mother is attacked by vampires during her pregnancy. She cannot survive the attack but the baby is saved and is born as half-human/half-vampire. He later becomes Blade. Due to his hybrid nature, Blade is different than classical vampire figures. For example, he is immune to silver, garlic and daylight. On the other hand, he shares some commonalities with classical vampires. He has a thirst for blood which he constantly tries to contain. This particular line explains his self-perception: "I am another thing different from a human being, humans do not drink blood". Therefore, he often tries to disassociate himself from his vampiristic part.

After his mother's death, Blade is raised by a man named Whistler who also becomes his mentor throughout his heroic journey. By inventing a preventive serum, Whistler helps Blade to control his blood thirst. In other words, he guides Blade to suppress his vampire identity so that he can be integrated into the human world. The first person that Blade interacts is Karen, an African-American doctor. He saves Dr. Karen from a vampire attack. From then on, she cooperates with Blade in his quest to kill all the vampires. As an alternative version of Dr. Van Helsing, Dr. Karen does not try to hunt Blade. Instead, she stands by him and tries to develop a cure for him. She supports Blade's self-struggle of containing his thirsty and comes up with a serum. She does not

kill vampires as with the scientist and doctor figures in classic vampire narratives. But she supports Blade's cause of exterminating vampires. By keeping him alive and human she indirectly contributes to the archaic mission of vampire hunters.

The plot of the movie includes scenes in which the relationship between Blade and Dr. Karen becomes emotional. The love dynamic is designed as a cheesy love trope. Roland Barthes (2001) underlines that female figures are like shadows whose function are to highlight male figures. Within this perspective, the function of Dr. Karen can be seen as humanization of Blade by appeasing his thirst for blood and facilitating the process of healing from his mother's trauma.

At the beginning of the movie, a flashback of Blade's mother is used as a prologue. The movie starts with the camera following a man who enters to an underground disco. We see people dancing ecstatically. The event is like the epitome of the pornography of self-indulgence. Once the blood bath starts all the people are transformed into vampires except the man who becomes a prey for them. Then, Blade breaks in and kills the vampires. The scene can be seen as an allegory of the modern hedonistic culture. The vampire society is represented as filled with partying and reveler types. In contrast to earlier vampire narratives that portrayed vampires as aristocratic creatures with manners, the scene exemplifies the transformation of the society of vampires into a society of pure enjoyment. Todd McGowan (2004) in his critic of the modern American society claims that;

*Advertisements, friends, movies, parents, television shows, internet sites and even authority figures all call on us to maximize our enjoyment. This marks a dramatic change in the way the social order is constituted: rather than being tied together through a shared sacrifice, subjects exist side by side in their isolated enclaves of enjoyment (p. 2).*

The rave party scene reflects a similar picture. Each vampire is portrayed as lost in its own enjoyment, almost hypnotized by it. They are all new generation vampires that represent the social fabric of the current vampire community. As the scene provides, the

only thing that binds them together is their thirst for blood and enjoyment. This amalgamation of nature and culture define the new generation of vampires.

While the blood bath turns the partying vampires into savage creatures, Blade with his all black costume and sunglasses, with his polished fighting manners is like a modern knight. He is like the embodiment of civility. Other than this, his skin color also becomes a point of differentiation. Classical vampires are represented by pale, powder like white skin that accentuates their non-living nature. Blade, as a black half-vampire, invalidates all the dominant representations about vampires. In that sense, he is a divergent superhero.

There are several dichotomies in the movie. The juxtaposition of the new generation vampires against a royal vampire council is one of the backbones of the storyline. The former represents the society of enjoyment whereas the latter stands for traditional vampire values. After the incident at the rave party, the council gathers and discusses the behaviors of Deacon Frost, the leader of the vampire society. The members of the council see him as a degenerate figure that doesn't have respect for the collective knowledge of earlier generations and long-established vampire traditions. The movie problematizes the generational clashes among the vampire community.

Deacon Frost is discriminated by the council since he is not a pure-blood vampire. He is a human turned into a vampire. The president of the royal council calls Frost and warns him about his improper human hunting regiment. The council is concerned that his inappropriate conduct will harm the council's relationship with human politicians. Frost ignores the council, kills the president and takes over the council. The vampire community once divided becomes unified under his command. Frost has supporters among humans too. These vampire fans believe in vampirism, are aware of their existence and envy them. They want vampires to transform them. To reach their goal they agree to serve them during daylight. Both the vampire fans and vampires themselves envy Blade. Vampire fans see their future in him; vampires yearn for his ability to daywalk. This particular feature puts Blade in a superior position compared to regular vampires. He is seen as the final stage in a vampire's evolution.

Like in the comics, the movie presents Deacon Frost as the killer of Blade's mother. Therefore; Frost can be assessed as Blade's vampire father. Blade's vampiristic features and DNA carry his genes. He is genetically related to Frost. Although Blade tries to pacify his vampiristic urges and everything related to it; he cannot fully transform into a human which makes him an inbetween character.

#### **4.1.2. Blade II (2002)**

The second Blade movie was directed by Guillermo Del Toro (2002). In *Blade II*, the vampires and humans form an alliance in order to destroy a common enemy Strain that threatens both. Movie opens up to the aftermath of Deacon's murder by Blade. Whistler is kidnapped by vampires and Blade tries to find his mentor. When Blade finds him he is saddened by the fact that Whistler is bitten by a vampire. He attempts to reverse the transformation by injecting Whistler his own serum and succeeds. Meanwhile, vampires visit him and warn him that a new gene is spreading among vampires. This new kind of vampires that is called Strain can feed from both vampires and humans. They are immune to garlic and silver, have more enhanced bite, and turn and feed much quicker. And when a Strain bites a human, s/he is transformed not into a vampire but into a Strain. For this reason, vampires want to make a pact with Blade to destroy Strains. A new alliance is formed between Blade and vampires that were once each other's enemies. Second movie adds other juxtapositions to the classic vampire vs. human dichotomy: Strain vs. human, vampire and Blade. In that sense, Strain becomes the mutual enemy of vampires, humans and Blade.

Strains are threat to the vampire community at large because they have the power to transform them into Strains. Strains came to life as a result of unsuccessful clinic attempts to improve vampires' DNA to create a superior version. Hence; it's an intentional evolutionary experiment to dominate human race by creating the perfect vampires. Guillermo del Toro (2014) said that;

*The Strain is a composite of two creatures: the Aswang and the Strigoi. The Aswang is a creature found in the Philippine Islands, which attacks its prey by projecting its tongue. The Strigoi, of Eastern European fame, on the other hand, has a stinger under its tongue (the-strain.wikia.com).*

As the human society creates its own evils the vampire community has created its own maleficent, Strain. It appears that vampire community has more thirst for power than blood. As Guillermo del Toro (2014) explains Strains “suck out your blood, smash your skull to a pulp so you don’t become a vampire and they leave... and that’s what they think of you. ... They aren’t ‘romantic’ and brooding. That they are just ‘fucking hungry’ ” (epicgeekdom.com). They are asexual since when a human is turned into a Strain her/his genitals fell off. Since, they have longue tongues that sting and enable them to suck the blood of their prey afar. They don’t need the intimacy of biting. In that sense, they have more to do with capitalism’s hunger for consumption (in this case blood) and power than the Freudian discourse.

After vampire community and Blade reached an agreement to terminate the Strains, Blade first goes after Nomak who is the original carrier of the so-called "Reaper" virus that was invented to create a vampire “super-race”. He has a hatred for vampires, a shared motivation from Blade’s part. But, he is a more serious threat than vampires. Hence, Blade chooses to fight with him by aligning with vampires. However, this is a match made in hell. During their cooperation against Strains, vampires try to kill Blade several times. In each attempt Blade survives and finally, succeeds to kill both Nomak and the vampire squad. Hence, he saves the continuity of the human race while preventing the vampires to mutate into stronger creatures. The old status-quo is contained.

The movie introduces another important character apart from the Strains and Nomak: Nyssa Damaskinos. She is the daughter of Eli Dmaskinos who created Nomak. Blade and Nyssa reflect the same dynamic as Romeo and Juliet, two people coming from two rival families of species. Nyssa was raised with the perception that Blade was the enemy. But as the emotional bond between the two grew deeper and as her life is saved by Blade several times, Nyssa realizes how her perception of him was wrong. The

murderer was not Blade but her father, who does whatever it takes to dominate the human race. She recognizes that her father can jeopardize his own race (e.g. vampires) without hesitation to obtain absolute power. As a result, she gives herself to Nomak in order to be transformed into Strain. She prefers to be a Strain than a demonic vampire like her father. In that sense, she chooses the hunger for blood over hunger for power. However, this doesn't save her from her ancestral shame. To feel a glimpse of what does it feel like to be human and to be Blade she exposes herself to sunlight that is mortal for her and she dies.

#### **4.1.3. Blade Trinity (2004)**

The last movie of the Blade trilogy was directed by David S. Goyer (2004) who was also the screenwriter of the previous two movies. David S. Goyer is known for his screenwriting for superhero movies like *The Dark Knight Trilogy*, *Man of Steel*, *Ghost Rider*, *Batman v. Superman*. His popularity is based on the dark atmospheres he created such as *Dark City*. In the last leg of the trilogy, namely in *Blade Trinity*, the vampire society decides that they should turn to their roots and traditions if they wanted to destroy Blade. The movie opens up with vampires' attempts to find Dracula, waking him from his eternal sleep and persuading him to help them to kill Blade. However, in the movie the modernized version of Dracula is presented and his name is Drake. Different than the archaic vampire Dracula, Drake can survive daylight.

The dichotomy of the society of enjoyment represented by new generation of vampires vs. royal vampire council in the first Blade movie is reconstructed as the clash between modernism and tradition in Goyer's *Blade Trinity*. The earlier alliance between Blade and vampires against Strains in the second movie is no longer valid. *Blade Trinity* can be read as the glorification of the classical vampirism. Hence, the alliance the film portrays is between Drake as the representation of the tradition, young vampires and human vampire fans against Blade. Within this perspective, the movie remodels a new vampire society, even an ideal community, where the old and the new are united to achieve a common goal: To destroy Blade. Also this time, vampire fans are not just flaneurs that passively support the cause of the vampires. They are influential political

figure who work proactively to serve the vampires. In that sense, vampires are presented as figures that solved the dynamics of power. Rather than running after superior race dreams like in the second movie, they see the power in the politics of life. Earlier movies highlighted the severity of the threat that mutated vampires could cause and the narratives framed it as something to be avoided. Hence, Blade as a mutated vampire should be destroyed to save the future of the vampire race.

A new war emerges between this new vampire society and Blade alongside human vampire hunters. One distinctive feature of the movie is daytime battles. Since no involving parties (Blade and vampire hunters vs. Drake and human vampire fans) are affected by daylight, the movie provides a brighter atmosphere compared to Goyer's earlier dark, gothic aesthetic representation of the vampire world. Therefore, the movie provides an alternate, a postmodern approach to vampirism and the eternal fight between the vampires and humans. For example, when vampires decide to kill Blade instead of a field battle they set up an ambush. They send a human with fake fangs to fight with Blade. They record the fight. When Blade kills his opponent they serve it to the media to create a perception in public that Blade is not what he seems to be. They try to create a public opinion around the image of "Blade as human killer". The movie presents vampires as using all the ideological state apparatuses like politics and media to reach they goal. In that sense, the fight between vampires and humans is not physical anymore. It's a fight where, instead of physical quality or strength, the power to influence the public opinion matters the most.

As art imitates life, the war between Drake and Blade is not about man power anymore but about media power. Media is new world's weapon of destruction. From a similar line of thought, Jean Baudrillard (1995) argues that the Persian Gulf War did not take place. As a postmodernist theoretician, he proposes that during the war the media became the primary complicit of the US by presenting the war real time and recycling the images of war in a propagative manner to endorse the perception that US was winning the war against Saddam Hussein. In his view, the war was a high-tech media spectacle rather than a reality. Therefore, the war between Drake and Blade can be assessed as an instance of postmodern war. For example, when the video footage of

Blade killing a human (disguised as a vampire) was served to the media, a psychologist/expert/hidden vampire fan appears on televisions to comment on the incident. He explains that what people name as vampirism was just a genetic disease every human can suffer. He adds that people, who exhibit vampiristic features, have sexual sadism and a merciless rage. He portrays Blade as “a problematic, sociopath and a criminal individual”. Like in Persian Gulf War where military experts were one of the gatekeepers of public opinion, this figure is a key figure to create a negative public opinion around Blade’s image and to demonize him.

Drake’s media campaign that positions Blade as an enemy of the state pays off and the police arrest him. Blade goes through regular law enforcement procedures as a human would go through. This shows that the state does not treat him as a vampire or does not recognize his vampire identity. During his interrogation, Blade testifies that he killed 1082 vampires. When he hunts vampires the system defines him as a superhero, but when the same action is taken against a human then he is labeled as the enemy of the state. Apart from bureaucracy and media, the law also becomes a means of the public conviction of Blade.

One of the mottos of the capitalist world is “image is everything”. In a system where image is seen as the most valuable asset, to be able to manage this image is the ultimate power. For example, when Drake enters into a supermarket he sees that shelves are filled with vampire themed goods and Dracula has become a commodity. He realizes that the world that he fell asleep is not the same world he woke up to. To influence their pray and make them their servants vampires no longer need to rely on their mesmerizing or hypnotizing skills. As a commodity consumed by humans vampires now has fans rather than servants. They are popular figures in terms of the image economy of the modern times. Want is one of the main pillars of capitalist system. Their attitude, power and fashionable style make vampires an object of envy for humans. Within this perspective, Blade Trinity can be seen as a system criticism.

The movie blurs further the line between image and reality, old and new, classic and modern, hero and villain, but most importantly between vampire and human. Blade’s

inbetweenness is foregrounded through the fact that neither vampires nor humans accept him as their own. His hybrid identity is perceived as a threat by both parties. As a result, after he defeats Drake in their final battle he breaks his alliance with human vampires.

#### **4.1.4. Blade Highlighted**

Blade is defined by its difference. First, he differs from traditional vampires by daywalking. In the traditional narratives vampires are associated with darkness. Blade's code name "daywalker" highlights his divergence from classical vampire figures. Moreover, Blade is an action figure. Therefore, to put him in a coffin and let him stand still for the half of the day as earlier vampires did would contradict with genre's codes and necessities. Also in Goyer's movie, other than Blade the villain character Drake also has the same ability. Therefore, their battles take place in daylight which also affects the stylistic features and general atmosphere of the movie.

Blade is not a pure vampire but a half-breed. Similar to vampires; he has fangs and appetite for blood, is physically superior to humans and ages, much slower than humans. He differs from vampires with his humanlike features and his hate for vampire race. Blade defines himself not as a vampire or human but a monster. He is ashamed of his vampire identity and wants to suppress it, or even to destroy it. Because this identity is something that is forced to him rather a natural outcome of his existence. The vampires attack and bite his mother when she was pregnant with him, then he undergoes a metamorphosis. The vampire genes blend into his DNA and alter his original genetic code.

In his fight with vampire race Blade blends innovative technology with traditional methods. He uses guns and bombs that spread a powerful light similar to daylight, silver sword and knives. In that sense he can be seen as an amalgamation of the modern and the traditional. His inbetweenness is manifested in different aspects of his life. He never is transformed into another creature such as bat or wolf etc. in classical narratives. He is ambivalent in the sense that he is stuck between being a vampire and human. Because of his inbetweenness, he diverges from the vampire race also from a psychological perspective. In contrast to more archaic figures like Dracula or Nosferatu who seem to

be in peace with their own skin, Blade is in a constant battle with himself, with who he is. He perceives his vampirism as a curse. In that sense, the vampire race signifies his shadow part, all the things that he tries to suppress about himself. In classical narratives, vampires are not visible in the mirror. They don't have a reflection. It is mostly attributed to the fact that they lack a soul, they are not living creatures. However, Blade is both. He is a living like humans and dead like vampires. All the vampires he fights against can be assessed as his reflection. For that matter, he hates them all and tries to destroy them. In that sense, his external battle can be read as a reflection of his internal battle.

This internal dilemma is sometimes portrayed through his romantic affiliations. In the first movie, he is romantically involved with a human but in the sequel this emotional intimacy is directed toward a female vampire. In the last movie, he sees that humans do not reciprocate his affection for them. Similar to vampires, humans also want him to be destroyed. At the end he chooses to be by himself, breaks his alliance with humans and positioned as a lonely warrior. He accepts his anti-heroism and becomes an ultimate outcast. He belongs nowhere but to himself. This is what makes him a unique character: A divergent and an inbetween superhero.

## **4.2. WOLVERINE & X-MEN**

### **4.2.1. X-Men Origins: Wolverine (2009)**

The movie tells the story of Wolverine before he joins the X-Men team. When James was a child, he witnesses his father being brutally murdered. When he finds out about the murderer, his rage is triggered and it becomes a defining feature for him. And that particular state of pain and rage prompts his mutation. His claws start to grow. In an ecstatic rage, he instinctively kills his father's murderer with his newly developed claws. The man who is injured by deadly wounds confesses James that he is his biological father. Being confused and angrier, he escapes from his home. His brother Victor chases after him and tries to calm him. Two brothers promise each other to start a new life.

James and Victor carry mutant genes and as a result of it they are physically more powerful than humans. When they are injured their wounds recover super quickly. Therefore, they live longer than humans. Their mutation affects not only their instincts but also starts a series of bodily transformation. Their appearance becomes more animalistic and wolf-like. James Holwett has claws and a hairy body. Similarly, Victor has his brother's hairy body in addition to his long nails.

After James and Victor escape home to start a new life, they join the army. To cut his ties with his past; James changes his name to Logan, the name of his biological father. Together with his brother Victor, he fights in the American Civil War, two world wars and the Vietnam War. During their serving time, Logan observes his brother's uncontrollable hunger and animalistic pleasure while he kills humans. He realized that the more Victor killed the more he lost his human qualities. Humans also realized that there was something unusual about them. When Logan and Victor were captured as prisoners of war, they were executed. Since they heal quickly, soldiers became aware of the fact that it was impossible to kill them. Their immortality is revealed.

After they return, they join Major Stryker's squad as part of a genetic experiment on mutants. The objective of the study is to create superhuman army. Members of the squad have various supernatural abilities like controlling electricity, being invisible and moving faster than the speed of life. When Logan started to question the ethicality of the squad's battle methods (i.e. mass massacres towards civilians), a moment of separation came quickly for him. After his leave, the squad fell apart and every member parts its own way. Logan starts to work in woodcraft business and leads a low profile life. He has a girlfriend whom he thinks is a human, but in reality she is a covert mutant. Stryker continues to hunt mutants, keep them in a prison and use them as subjects in his experiments. He tries to build a system where mutant soldiers are used by a human (himself) to destroy mutants. As the story develops, he attempts to trick and trap Logan through his girlfriend who is controlled by Stryker himself.

Movie's main juxtaposition is humans vs. mutants. Wolverine's internal conflict is about being a human and a wolf-like creature at the same time. Although he tries to live

a life as a regular human being, he cannot escape his wolf genes and his mutation. His primary dilemma lies in his inbetweenness. When his girlfriend is killed by Victor in order to attract his attention, an intense rage takes him over. He shows his pain and anger by howling like a wolf. When he finds out that his own brother is the killer, he confronts Victor and is beaten by him in the battle. Victor pulls his claws to pieces. The reason behind Victor's attack against Logan's girlfriend is to hurt his brother, since Logan is the one who is accepted by the society and Victor is the outcast.

When Stryker finds Logan severely damaged by his fight with Victor; he offers a deal so that Logan can take his revenge from his brother. Logan accepts Stryker's proposal to use him as subject in an experiment called Weapon X. During the experiment, a virtually indestructible metal called Adamantium is injected into Logan's body. This chemical alloy covers his skeleton and claws and makes Logan immortal and unbreakable. The word Adamantium comes from Adamastos in Greek mythology which means "untameable" or "not capable of being domesticated". As a result of the experiment, Logan loses all his humanistic qualities and is transformed into an animal/mutant that cannot be tamed. Since Logan was his human name, he changes it into Wolverine, which highlights his animalistic identity. After the experiment he escapes Stryker's prison, declares war against him and his mutant army. Victor is also one of the soldier mutants.

The movie depicts a world where human society is not aware of the existence of mutants. Stryker who is a Major in military is one of the few knowing them. He develops strategies to destroy the mutant race all at once. However; his project Weapon X backfires when Wolverine escapes, learns that his girlfriend was Stryker's spy and her death was a false impression by Victor and becomes uncontrollable by his rage. As a counter strategy, Stryker activates a super mutant killer called Deadpool – an old teammate of Wolverine known as Wade Wilson – and provides him with multiple mutant powers such as laser emitting eyes, invisibility and sword-like claws made of Adamantium. In that sense, Deadpool can be seen as a modernized version of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818). The novel tells the story of Dr. Frankenstein who tries to create the perfect human. For that purpose, he recombines hands of an artist with the

brain of a scientist. But the search for perfection proves to be a failure and the procedure creates a monster. Stryker follows Dr. Frankenstein formula with a couple of add-ons. With the help of a chip embedded in Deadpool's brain, Stryker can track and control his monster through a computer.

In the final battle, Victor and Wolverine join forces to fight Deadpool. The scene looks like an extremely post-modernist pastiche of the finale of the movie *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly*. Within this perspective, Wolverine represents The Good, Deadpool stands for The Bad and Victor is The Ugly. As a result of the triple fight, Wolverine and Victor succeed to destroy Deadpool. When Stryker realizes that even Deadpool cannot kill Wolverine, he decides to take things in his own hands. He shoots Wolverine in the head by an Adamantium bullet that causes a long-term amnesia. Although he physically heals, his memories seem to be gone for good. His name engraved on his dog tag remains as the only thing that belongs to his past. The rest of the mutants that are imprisoned by Stryker is saved by Prof. Charles Xavier who later creates the X-Men team.

Throughout the movie several dichotomies are used as the backbone of the narrative tension. Wolverine's search for his identity is also reflected through these dichotomies: Wolf/mutant vs. human, savage vs. civilized; instinct vs. conscious, animalism vs. humanness, militarism vs. civility. Wolverine is portrayed as an inbetween superhero who tries to find a way out. The exit is provided in the form of an absolute amnesia. Since Wolverine loses his memory, everything that makes him who he is becomes unknowable to him. All his internal dilemmas regarding his identity wither away and a new possibility is presented as Prof. Xavier recruits him for the X-Men team.

#### **4.2.2. X-Men (2000)**

Wolverine had first appeared in Byran Singer's *X-Men* (2000), nine years before Gavin Hood's X-Men spin-off *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*. The movie takes off from the time when Wolverine loses his memory and joins the X-Men Team under the leadership of Prof. Xavier. The movie introduces Magneto as the leader of another mutant community called Brotherhood. These two leaders represent two different views of mutants and the

society they live in. Prof. Xavier stands for a hopeful future for a society where humans and mutants can live together and peacefully. On the other hand, Magneto represents the politics of conflict and division. Moreover, Wolverine's estranged brother Victor returns to the screen as Sabretooth and becomes a member of Magneto's Brotherhood. Sabretooth's physical appearance and attitude differ from Victor. Physically he is more animalistic. He has sharp and long nails similar to claws, a hairy body (almost like a fur), a long and blonde hair and he runs on his arms and legs. He is like a wolf-man, a predator that takes pleasure from hunting and killing. In contrast to Victor; he doesn't manifest any human qualities. He is the embodiment of pure animalism and wildness. In contrast to his animalistic appearance he is more submissive than Victor who was occasionally acting against Stryker's orders. Sabretooth is loyal to Magneto's orders.

The movie portrays a world where humans are aware of mutants' existence and see them as a threat for society. When a legislation regarding mutants' right to vote was debated and voted in the White House, humans protest it on the streets of Washington. Prof. Xavier advocates mutants' right to be accepted as equal citizens. He is pro co-existence. His means to reach this goal is through dialogue and peaceful action. On the contrary; Magneto, a former friend of Prof. Xavier, promotes co-existence through force and violence. In the battle of these two opposite leaders; Wolverine takes side with X-Men in return for a treatment by Prof. Xavier to get his memory back.

X-Men's visible objective is stopping Magneto, but their intrinsic motivation is to create a society of tolerance where mutants and humans can live together despite their differences. In *X-Men Origins*, Wolverine was part of a squad whose actions were not compatible with Wolverine's sense of ethics and codes of moral. He left the squad at the expense of being a loner. During his partnership with X-Men, Wolverine experiences a different team dynamic. Scott Summers whose alias is Cyclops is the unofficial team leader of X-Men. He is one of the mutants that Wolverine saved from Stryker's prison. Since Wolverine lost his memory, he cannot remember him.

After Wolverine and Rogue – another mutant who can absorb the powers or memories of any person touching her skin – were attacked by the Brotherhood and saved by

Cyclops, Dr. Jean Grey treats Wolverine. She is a mutant with powerful telepathic and telekinetic skills. In that sense, she is more like Prof. Xavier and is seen as his possible successor. She has a relationship with Cyclops. Apart from Wolverine's individualistic attitudes that are incompatible with the team spirit; his emotional interest in Dr. Grey puts him in a competition of power with Cyclops.

#### **4.2.3. Wolverine Highlighted**

The two movies *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *X-Men* foreground dominant dichotomies in the American society of the period. In that sense, Wolverine's identity becomes a terrain of constant struggle. In *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, he struggles to find a balance between his animalism/mutation and humanness. Also, he tries to counterbalance the objective of bringing order and the morality of the militaristic methods to accomplish this end. Within this perspective, Wolverine can be seen as a postmodern superhero that is often described in terms of his ambiguities and the absence of absolute moral certainties. In that sense, he diverges from classical superheroes that are defined by moral perfection and clear distinctions between right and wrong. His inbetweenness becomes an illustrative feature of his divergence.

Both movies *X-Men Origins: Wolverine* and *X-Men* portrays Wolverine's journey to find a place in the society. Both movies involve juxtaposition of individualism vs. community. In the previous movie, he becomes part of a militaristic squad defined by hierarchy, a command chain. In the latter, he joins a team of equal members led by a pacifist scientist Prof. Xavier who tries to integrate mutants into society peacefully. The narrative illustrates the social and cultural paranoia of the American society in the aftermath of 9/11. *X-Men origins* present mutants as the hidden enemy of humans and a threat to be eliminated by militaristic action. Mutants are portrayed as invisible monsters that can harm the social order unexpectedly. *X-Men* movie problematizes the integration of mutants into society. For example, a "Mutant Registration Act", which would force mutants to publicly reveal their identities and abilities, is debated in the US Senate. This can be assessed as the obsession of the post-9/11 America to monitor the threat and anticipate the outcome. It is an illustration of America's political strategy

against terrorism: Profiling and tagging the enemy. Within this perspective, Magneto as the leader of Brotherhood (can be read as a reference to Muslim brotherhood) becomes the embodiment of America's biggest fear. It is because he sees organized violence as the only way for mutants.

Since Wolverine loses his memory, he becomes a superhero without a past. This also implies an absence of identity. Most classical superheroes are defined by their past or by their childhood traumas. Wolverine's constant internal struggle to find an identity, to come to terms with his own existence becomes an external reality due to his amnesia. However, the movie provides X-Men as a new way of defining himself. By becoming a member of the team where individual differences are respected while group values are protected Wolverine obtains an alternative existence. This hybridity is provided as the ideal solution for his aloofness and search for self.

### **4.3. GHOST RIDER MOVIES**

#### **4.3.1. Ghost Rider (2007)**

First Ghost Rider movie (2007) was directed by Mark Steven Johnson, also the director of *Daredevil* (2003). In contrast to first comic versions that presented the story of Carter Slade, the movie's narrative revolves around Johnny Blaze. Johnny Blaze and his father work in a circus as motorcycle acrobats. Roxanne is Johnny's love interest. They both plan leave the town and explore other places. Just before their departure Johnny finds out that his father has cancer. When his father's situation worsened, Mephisto the devil pays him a visit and proposes an agreement. He demands Blaze's soul in exchange for his father's salvation. Johnny agrees but his father dies anyway. He blames Mephisto for his father's death. The Devil reminds him their contract and promises that one day they will see each other again.

With a flash-forward the movie shows Johnny Blaze turning into an icon and celebrity. He does grandiose motorcycle shows in big cities. Since the Devil protects him from getting injured, he can design extremely dangerous spectacles. With each show Johnny

increases the risk and difficulty of his acrobatic numbers to test the limits of Devil's protection. He avoids things that are associated with Devil like consuming alcohol. He pours Haribos into martini glasses and watch comic monkey videos instead of adult contents like TV series or movies. In other words; he tries to create an environment that the Devil will abstain from.

Blackheart is the demonic son of Mephisto and the arch-enemy of Johnny Blaze, aka the Ghost Rider. He wants to take over his father because he thinks that his father is weak and old. Also; he is angry at his father since he gave the fire of Hell to Ghost Rider, not to him. As a result, he chooses to disobey Mephisto who orders Johnny Blaze to destroy him. Blackheart tries to defeat Johnny Blaze by finding the Contract of San Vanganza that will allow him to collect all the corrupt souls and make Hell on Earth. He teams up with three other demons named Gressil (Demon of Earth), Abigor (Demon of Wind), and Wallow (Demon of Water).

After his confrontation with Blackheart; Mephisto contacts Johnny Blaze, he offers to return his soul if he defeats Blackheart and transforms him into the Ghost Rider. During the day, he is a normal human being. At night, the Ghost Rider takes over. His body transforms into a skeleton, his head becomes a blazing skull, and his motorcycle turns into a super-speedy punishment machine. Around evil souls he cannot control himself but transforms into the Ghost Rider straightaway. During his transformation into this immortal creature, Johnny Blaze suffers from extreme pain and memory loss. His consciousness shifts into another reality where he is controlled by the forces of evil. When faced with an enemy, he can see all her/his past wrongdoings and turns it against her/him. In other words, he can recognize evil souls and use their inner darkness as a punishment. He destroys them by making them experience all the pain they've caused in their lifetime. He is like a mirror of evil. He reflects the evil to its owner through the pains of her/his victims. His pending stare into corrupt souls is his superpower. That is why Mephisto uses the Ghost Rider to hunt and destroy Blackheart and his accomplices.

Since Mephisto is far away from his world (the Hell), when he visits the land of the livings his power is limited. That is why he selects a human to provide a devilish

superpower. Johnny Blaze and Ghost Rider are like the two sides of the same coin: An immortal inside a mortal, a human host with a good heart for a devilish superpower. Ghost Rider is a superhero who is both the victim and the punisher. He is the victim because Johnny Blaze sold his soul to the Devil to save his father and tricked by him. The Caretaker (e.g. the original Ghost Rider Carter Slade) told him that he had the power of God in him because he made the deal following a good deed, not out of greed. He is a punisher, because he can make corrupt souls experience all the emotional pain and suffering that they have inflicted on everyone in their lifetime, permanently damaging their soul in the process. These corrupt souls sometimes happen to be devilish creatures from other worlds; other times humans with bad intentions. He serves the Devil and the public good at the same time.

The movie provides several thematic dichotomies embodied by the Ghost Rider character. He is an inbetween superhero. Johnny Blaze does not want to serve the Devil yet he is obliged to obey his contract. He is in constant struggle with his evil side. He is a superhero who tries to escape his superpower. The fire that he owns does not only burn dangerous souls but his soul too. His loss of consciousness when transformed into the Ghost Rider is another representation of his refusal of his evil side. He has to forget himself; he has to lose awareness of his real identity so that he can become the servant of the Devil. The absolute moral categories of good and evil becomes blurred. When it comes to Johnny Blaze; the importance put on the concept of “responsibility” in classical superhero narratives loses its validity. Since he loses his consciousness and his will to decide after he is transformed into the Ghost Rider, one cannot blame Johnny Blaze for using his power irresponsibly. Instead, the movie presents the concept of “control” as the defining feature of a superhero. Throughout the movie, Johnny Blaze tries to understand his power and take control of his fire.

In the aftermath of his first transformation, Johnny Blaze wakes up in a cemetery. An undertaker, who happens to be Carter Slade, helps him to recover. While talking with him, Johnny Blaze defines his power as monstrous and he characterizes Ghost Rider as the assassin of the Devil. From that moment on, Carter Slade becomes his mentor who guides him on how to control his power and his actions during his transformation.

Another helping figure for Blade in his struggle with the Devil – inside and outside – is his lifelong sweetheart Roxanne Simpson who is a news reporter, whom he abandoned after his father's death.

Roxanne is kidnapped by Blackheart in order to force Johnny Blaze to find Contract of San Vanganza possessed by Carter Slade. Blaze brings the contract; as a result all the corrupt souls of the world are released and hosted by Blackheart. As soon as, the souls enter the body of Blackheart, Ghost Rider destroys him with the flames of Hell. Mephisto announces that Johnny has accomplished his mission and they can terminate the agreement. He proposes Johnny to pass the curse to another person. But Johnny refuses to pass the curse and says “I will own this curse and use it against you”. This final line can be seen as the declaration of his will to fight against the Devil with his own methods. By accepting his hybridity, his inbetweenness as his true self; Johnny Blaze becomes a superhero.

#### **4.3.2. Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance (2011)**

*Crank* and *Gamer* filmmakers Mark Neveldine and Brian Taylor directed the *Ghost Rider* sequel *Spirit of Vengeance* and created their unique cinematic language by blending humor and action genres. The movie takes from Johnny Blaze deciding to leave all behind: His fame as a successful stunt motorcyclist and his love interest Roxanne. He hides in East Europe and tries to suppress and get rid of his superpower. Johnny Blaze agrees to help a priest named Moreau to save a boy from the attack of the Devil. The boy's name is Danny and he is the designated successor of the devil (Roarke) on earth. In exchange, Moreau uses his priesthood abilities to restore Johnny Blaze's soul and remove his curse for good.

Before dying Nadya, the mother of Danny, confesses to Blaze that while she was pregnant she made an agreement with Roarke. The terms of the contract involved her giving her baby to the Devil. Since Roarke's powers diminish when he moves away from Hell, he needs a human host to transfer his devilish powers. Danny is the chosen one. When the day came, Nadya and Danny escape the human accomplices of Roarke.

This is the reason why Moreau thinks that only the Ghost Rider who possesses the same devilish powers as Roark can protect Danny and fight with him.

Different than the first movie; Roarke does not use devilish creatures that come from beyond worlds as servants but hires humans for the task. The movie has several capitalistic undertones similar to this. For example, the pursuers whose leader is Ray Carrigan, the former boyfriend of Nadya, try to kidnap Danny in exchange for a ransom from the Devil. Carrigan is a regular human being, therefore his capabilities are inferior to the Ghost Rider. Because of this, Roarke endows him with the power to decay everything he touches and send it to darkness. After he is transformed into a vicious creature called Blackout, he finds the boy and returns him to Roarke. While the ritual to transfer Roarke's soul and power to Danny was continuing; Moreau, Johnny Blaze and Nadya enter the compound to save the boy. Roarke escapes with Danny. Moreau is killed by Carrigan. Johnny Blaze who was released from his superpower is too weak to fight with the Devil. Danny, who has the same capabilities with the Devil, restores his superpower. The Ghost Rider sends Roarke back in Hell and saves the boy.

The movie portrays the values of the capitalistic system as the defining feature of the social interaction. The relationship between the Devil and humans is represented as a constant bargain. Everything is subject to buy, even a boy's soul. The world is depicted as an ever expanding market of souls. Each one has a different motive to enter the bargain. While, Johnny makes a deal with Moreau to save himself from curse, Nadya agrees to sell the soul of his boy in order to be saved by the Devil from a deadly wound. Every soul seems to be for sale, waiting for the best bidder. The movie highlights that now the younger generation deals with the perils of the capitalist exchange.

#### **4.3.3. Ghost Rider Highlighted**

Both movies present Johnny Blaze as an inbetween superhero, carrying the curse of being a human host for a devilish superpower. He lives between the world and the Hell. He acts at the edge of good and evil. There are several themes dominant in the movies. For example, the first movie portrays Johnny Blaze as the embodiment of the celebrity

culture. His public persona as a celebrity is as powerful as his presence as the Ghost Rider. Apart from his soul, his image is also bound by a contract. When Roxanne and his best friend came across at his apartment, he accuses her to have a bad influence on Johnny Blaze. He describes Blaze as an investment that keeps growing and growing until Roxanne cashes it in.

The relation of Johnny Blaze with his superpower is problematic in the sense that he cannot contain it nor escape it. The only way for Johnny to live with it is to forget it. His loss of consciousness during his transformation is presented as a justification of his actions. While being interrogated in the police station, Johnny Blaze refuses the murders he committed as the Ghost Rider. While the first movie presents Carter Slade, an archaic cowboy figure, as his savior; in the second movie a priest figure emerges as his liberator.

As a general feature of the superhero genre that plays on the boundaries of law and lawlessness, the first movie calls into question the idea that “what happens when a devilish creature fights for the public good?”. This adds another dimension to the debate. “Superheroes regularly interfere with the normal prerogatives of states, implying that legal processes are insufficient, and perhaps even that inner directed morality is superior to other-directed legality” (Costello and Worcester, 2014, p.86). In Ghost Rider, other than legality the morality also becomes a contested terrain.

## 5. THE REPRESENTATION OF INBETWEENNESS AND DIVERGENT SUPERHEROES

Robert Jewett and John S. Lawrence (1977) define American superhero as follows:

*The (American) mono mythic superhero is disguised by disguised origins, pure motivations, a redemptive task, and extraordinary powers. He originates outside the community he is called to save, and in those exceptional moments when he resides therein, the superhero plays the role of idealistic loner. His identity is secret, either by virtue of unknown origins or his alter ego: his motivation is a selfless zeal for justice (p. 47).*

In short, being a superhero necessitates a mission, an identity/costume and a superpower at the service of the public good. Superheroes are uniquely an American phenomenon, representing a particular amalgamation of idealism and mythic qualities. For some, their popularity is quite understandable. However, the definition reflects, for the most part, the superheroes of the Golden Age. Starting with the 1970s, the superhero scene started to change with the introduction of new, unconventional, unfitting, divergent superheroes. Their defining feature was their ambivalence regarding the primary characteristics of the superheroes. Their identity was the most contested terrain. In a world where the clear-cut boundaries between good and evil, man and monster, power and weakness became blurred, these superheroes represented this inbetweenness. Jiri G. Ruzicka (2010) explains that when the characters have some kind of weakness or defect like Hulk, these superheroes were further revolutionized. The storylines that involved these characters reflected the ideas and realities of counter cultures in America. “While traditional superheroes try to protect the values of society as it is, new superheroes try to determine and define their existence within a society in which they do not agree” (Ruzicka, 2010, p.48).

## **5.1. LAW/ LAWLESSNESS- SUPERHERO/ VILLAIN- BELONGING/ DISPLACEMENT**

Wolverine, Blade and the Ghost Rider are all struggling characters in terms of managing their relationship with the society they live in. In contrast to classical superheroes (i.e. Superman, Batman) that were seen by their community as protectors and saviors, there is an ambivalent perception regarding these divergent superheroes. This uncertainty may be due to the fact that they belong nowhere. Beerman (2015) explains that superhero narratives reflect their society's values, beliefs, attitudes and ideologies. For that matter, superheroes become the symbol of the prevalent values and idealistic behaviors within a culture. Batman is for order and justice, Captain America is seen as the symbol of American patriotism. This kind of absolute value categories is not applicable to anti-heroic characters like Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider.

The only thing that divergent superheroes and their classical counterparts have in common is their adherence to the idea that "the good should always prevail". However, for these characters the boundaries of goodness and evil is not very definite. For example, they don't work along with the state to prevent crime and bring the order. While Batman is seen as a legitimate partner of the police force, The Ghost Rider is seen as a vigilante.

*A vigilante is an individual, who may join a group displaying similar logic, who takes the law into his or her own hand without permission from legal or governmental authority, because that is allegedly inadequate, thus prompting the individual, or group to fight, prevent and punish crime, ultimately representing an alternate, ambiguous form of justice (Marazi, 2015, p.69).*

Although the Ghost Rider is a superhero whose logic (the world should be cleansed from corrupt souls) and motives (using the power of the Devil against himself) can be subjectively understood and supported by the citizens (i.e. Roxanne who is a journalist represents the public perception); he is still an outcast of society. The police see him as a criminal. The chaotic methods that he uses while hunting the corrupt souls (i.e. putting streets and buildings on fire, destroying a police station) position him as a villain. While

his human identity Johnny Blaze enjoys the public interest and affection as a stunt motorcyclist celebrity, his alter-ego the Ghost Rider reflects an outside-the-system figure. And this hybridity becomes a metaphor for one of America's biggest fears: A dysfunctional social system that creates its own enemies and invisible threats that permeate the society and attack at the least expected time.

Blade is a similar outcast superhero. As a result of the public fear regarding vampires, he has to hide in the dark. He is half human-half vampire who is a vampire hunter. He fights against his own race. Therefore, he belongs nowhere. The society sees him as a threat since he has the blood thirst of a regular vampire. The vampires perceive him as an adversary because of his rage against the vampire community. They try to destroy him since he has certain qualities that make him genetically superior such as being immune to daylight.

As Phillip L. Cunningham (2015) provides; "black superheroes are predominantly street-level vigilantes" (p. 37) and adds "the vengeful (even if justifiably so) black man is such a popular trope in mainstream comics largely because writers seemingly have very little else upon to draw. The most prominent black men in American culture were, for quite some time the beleaguered, defeated black worker and the hoodlum" (p. 41). In contrast to criminalistics portrayals of black superheroes, Blade represents hyper-masculinity, machoism through "a cool pose" (Gayles, 2012). Adilifu Nama (2011) defines Blade as "a mash-up of Dirty Harry's<sup>7</sup> take-no-prisoners gruffness, a samurai warrior's steely detachment, and John Shaft's urban machismo" (p. 141), a character that lacks superhero humanism.

He is a metaphor for a changing perspective on racial hierarchies in the superhero universe. Being a black vampire in a society where vampirism is mainly associated with ultra-pale white skin becomes an allegory of the rising diversity arguments in the

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<sup>7</sup> Dirty Harry is a fictional anti-heroic police officer character which Clint Eastwood played in Dirty Harry (Don Siegel, 1971), Magnum Force (Ted Post, 1973), The Enforcer (James Fargo, 1976), Sudden Impact (Clint Eastwood, 1983), The Dead Pool (Buddy Van Horn, 1988)

American society. Nama (2011) provides that the early examples of blaxploitation films legitimized the self-esteem politics revolving around the idea that “black is beautiful”. Moreover, they expanded the boundaries of black narrative characters “beyond the confines of enslavement, Jim Crow segregation, social subservience and the inner-city blues of the black ghetto” (Nama, 2011, p. 39). Hence, these films prepared the stage for future black superheroes by providing alternatives to black stereotypes. Within this perspective, Blade breaks another stereotype within the genre. Apart from being a human/vampire, being a black vampire adds another layer to his divergence and his Otherness as a superhero. Being an outcast in the human society as well as in the vampire society foregrounds his inbetweenness.

Blade differs from the new generation of vampires in terms of his worldview and attitudes. The movie *Blade* portrays these young vampires as living for the sheer enjoyment of blood. They love to lose themselves in their blood thirst. They search for the hedonistic experience of being a vampire. For these vampires, blood is not an object of survival but of pleasure. On the other hand, Blade is defined by his struggle with his blood thirst. It is something to be suppressed rather than enjoyed. It is a biological curse he tries to get rid of. The royal vampire council is also against this new version of vampirism that ignores the tradition. Although they cooperate with Blade to prevent the new vampires to take the lead, they don't accept Blade as one of their own. For them Blade is half-breed. Humans perceive Blade's inbetweenness not as a biological reality but as symptom of a terrorist, a sociopath and a criminal. DiPaolo (2011) explains that “the superhero constitutes an obvious example of ‘the other’”, but the same time superheroes can be wielded as propagandistic icons of nationalism, patriotism and ethnicity designed to divide in-groups from out groups” (p. 86). Blade, as the Other, is marginalized by both vampires and humans. In the eyes of these societies, he is a villain rather than a hero. For each party, he represents the fear of the unknown and the unidentifiable. The intolerance and discrimination from the part of the humans and vampires leave him with the sole option of isolation.

Wolverine is also stuck between his mutant and human identity. Chris Deis (2013) mentions that “X-Men stories have used ‘mutant’ identity as a means to interrogate questions of personhood and citizenship critically as they relate to race, sexuality, class, gender and physical disability” (p. 96). Born as a human, Wolverine gradually turns into this inbetween character. In his personal journey from James Howlett to Logan, from Logan to Wolverine; he always finds himself in search for a place to belong. First he joins the army, and then he is affiliated with a militaristic squad and finally he joins the superhero team X-Men.

Robb (2014) specifies dominant themes of X-Men as “prejudice, acceptance, tolerance, and racism, following the real world Civil Rights movement” (p. 188). Driven by the guilt and anger of killing his father and losing his home, Wolverine’s story is about self-acceptance as well as social acceptance. In that sense, Prof. Xavier can be seen as a father figure that guides him to control his anger, and to reach a resolution about his identity, hence his existence. As “an adherent of Ghandi’s philosophy of passive resistance, Xavier hopes that humans will respond to mutants with less fear and more acceptance when they see how nice and reasonable most law-abiding mutants are” (DiPaolo, 2011, p.86). Wolverine, as a loner superhero, learns to be part of a community through the X-Men team. Prof. Xavier tries to abolish the prejudice against mutants that are seen as threat to the integrity of the society by propagating peacefully the beauty of diversity.

X-Men team itself represents such diversity. Wolverine an animalistic mutant from Canada, Storm has African roots, Nightcrawler is German. The leader of the X-Men team Prof. Xavier is a disabled mutant with a wheel chair. Steven Popper (2013) indicates that the members of the X-Men team “represent a range of ethnic and social groups, different nationalities, both genders, people of sexual orientations, and people of different ages and with different needs all combining together as one large cohesive unit in the service of their principles and mission” (p. 136).

These mutants are portrayed as the victims of constant discrimination, inequality and violence. Rosenberg (2013) provides that “X-Men stories in comics and film, explore

themes of prejudice and discrimination as well as institutionally sanctioned discrimination, such as state-sponsored kidnapping and experimentation on mutants” (p. 7). In the movie *X-Men Origins: Wolverine*, mutants are seen by the state as invisible threat for the human society. Military Major Stryker creates an army made up of mutants to hunt their own species and imprison them for later use in a genetic experiment. The US government seeks to attain and control the superpowers of the mutants to destroy them.

*Powers, whether physical or intellectual, accumulated via magic or science, ...are the attributes that enable one to become a superhero. They also call into question the actions and motives of the individual who has such power at his or disposal, and more importantly the right to take advantage of that power by taking matters into his or her own hands (Marazi, 2015, p.71).*

Within this perspective, mutants are seen as anonymous and potential vigilantes who can use their powers against the welfare of the state. Wolverine is not an exception. Therefore, Stryker uses the strategy of “divide and rule” to control and contain mutants. Since their identity is anonymous, the state use mutant with superpowers to detect them. Anonymity is one of the main features of superheroes. The creation of secret identity serves the purpose of rendering the superhero anonymous. According to Fingerth (2006), “anonymity can also serve those who engage in acts of political, or social, courage who would otherwise be severely punished” (p. 48). In other words, anonymity makes it difficult for the state to see and identify the potential sources of harm.

Throughout the movie *X-Men*, the anonymity of mutants is problematized. The government tries to pass a legislation that obliges mutants to reveal themselves. This attempt by the US government highlights that the state sees mutants as villains rather than superheroes. While Magneto calls for an armed resistance, Prof. Xavier supports a peaceful integration and acting within the constraints of the constitution. Stanford W. Carpenter (2013) expresses that “Prof. Xavier’s dreams echo Dr. Martin Luther King’s dream of a world where people will not be judged by color of their skin but by the content of their character or, in the case of mutants the construction of their genome” (p. 90). While Prof. Xavier represents tolerance and inclusion; Magneto stands for

separation. Within this perspective, two figures become the representatives of two distinct worldviews. The line that separates them is the same line that separates a superhero from a villain.

*Prof. X represents a dream of the future. Magneto represents a view of reality, both past and present. As Professor X espouses that attainment of an idealized future, Magneto needs only to recall his past as a holocaust survivor, and the present day persecution of mutants (Carpenter, 2013, p.91).*

Prof. Xavier founds an institute in order to raise a generation of mutants who believe in tolerance. According to Popper (2013) the institution also “symbolizes the whole perpetual parental and educational mission of bringing up the next generation to be good people who act well towards themselves and each other” (p. 137). As DiPaolo (2011) further elaborates;

*Only by segregating mutants out of mainstream American society, giving them a safe haven to develop their power, intellects, and worldviews as free of oppression as possible could they hope to lead fulfilling lives as adults (p. 238).*

Prof. Xavier’s vision is to educate mutant against active verbal and physical abuse and violence from the part of the humans and to create an environment of co-existence. The education can be seen as a solution for taming the anger of the mutants and to show them ways of mutual understanding. For example, a scene from the movie *X-Men* shows Wolverine walking into a bar right after the revelation of this mutant identity. The owner of the bar orders him to get out and says “no muties here”. Mystique is another mutant from Magneto’s Brotherhood. As her name implies, she is a shape shifter. She physically mimics other humans to hide herself. Following the lead of Magneto who advises the mutants in his team not be afraid of their identity, she quits hiding as another human and embraces her identity and her blue, lizard-like skin. She represents the view “Mutant and Proud”. “Mystique could be used as an example of a person who starts off by hiding who she really is but ends up proud and empowered to be herself” (Popper, 2013, p.147). Johnny Blaze takes another road to deal with his identity issues. He decides to leave everything behind, go to a place where he will be incognito.

He isolates himself from the society. It is seclusion by choice. This is his way of protecting the society from possible harms he can cause as a result of his devilish rage.

Deis (2013) thinks that “by implication, the superhero genre is about a great deal more than just guys and gals who wear tights and capes; these characters tell readers something about a given society’s values, struggles, and beliefs” (p. 95). Within this perspective, divergent superheroes represent what is feared, hated and rejected in the American society. Wolverine, Blade and the Ghost Rider are one of them. They have a rage that they cannot control and they are in constant struggle with their dual identity. While Ghost Rider withdraws from social life, Blade chooses to live in the dark. Wolverine, on the other hand, tries to remain anonymous. Although they choose to fight for the good of the society, the society itself perceives them as monsters. The lines that separate good and evil, human and monster, civility and animalism are very thin when it comes to these inbetween superheroes.

## **5.2. ANIMALISM/ CIVILITY- RAGE/ CONTROL**

Animalism is not new to superhero universe. For instance; the Hulk is generally associated with monstrosity. Dr. Bruce Banner tries to help a military general to recreate a W.W.2 “super soldier program” that will make humans immune to gamma radiation. However; the experiment goes out of hand and Dr. Banner is mistakenly exposed to gamma rays. From that day on; when he feels angry or considers himself in danger, he transforms into this green giant. He escapes the military that wants to use him as a weapon and becomes a fugitive. As (2012) Johnson underlines, Hulk is about “man’s inability to control both himself and atomic energy” (p. 61). Hulk reflects American society’s sensibilities about nuclear power and its need to contain it.

When Hulk controls his anger and converts his rage into a mission for public good, the monster becomes a superhero. To suppress the rage and anger becomes the main struggle for Dr. Bruce Banner. This struggle becomes visible in his famous quote “Don’t make me angry, you wouldn’t like me when I’m angry” (Robb, 2014, p.314). Hence, Dr. Bruce Banner tries to escape Hulk because of his destructive powers. In that

sense, Wolverine, the Ghost Rider and Blade go through the same struggle. Wolverine fights with the repercussions of his wolf-genes and his animalistic impulses; the Ghost Rider strives to restrain his devilish rage symbolized by his flaming skull; every day is another struggle for Blade to control his thirst for blood. What Kaveney (2008) says about Hulk is valid for these divergent superheroes too: They are “the creature of violence that bursts from the id of an ordinary man” (p. 229).

For all these superheroes, to be able to control and contain rage and anger is presented as the solution for their integration into society. By controlling their anger they become more of a human than a monster. Their capacity to love, to have and maintain friendships set them apart from angry superheroes like Hulk or Punisher. As Fingeroth (2004) explains with regard to Wolverine: “...rage is part of who he is, but not entirety of who he is. Again, his goal is not just wailing in anger and frustration...Wolverine’s goal is to protect his chosen family substitute unit” (p. 136). His intention becomes an explanation for his anger and rage. “Wolverine is not fighting on behalf of phantoms. He is fighting for every persecuted mutant” (Fingeroth, 2004, p.136). Just as the Ghost Rider fights on behalf of all the innocent people who are tortured, killed, persecuted and victimized by corrupt souls. As in the case of Blade who uses his anger as a weapon against the vampire race in order to protect humans. Then, their rage finds a justification. However, this does not save them from the agony of carrying a monster inside. When Johnny Blaze turns into the Ghost Rider, the excess of his pain reflects his effort to control his rage. It is the pain of confronting his dark and unwanted side. The Ghost Rider is the metaphor for the dehumanizing effect of rage.

For Wolverine, the epitome of his dark side is his brother is Sabretooth. A mutant carrying the same blood and genes with Wolverine yet is purely animalistic. What makes Wolverine a superhero becomes his choice of controlling his anger, his animalism. Rosenberg (2013) provides that “despite any similarities between the two archetypes (superhero and supervillain), the superhero will sacrifice himself for others, whereas the supervillain will sacrifice others for himself” (p. 159). Since Sabretooth yields himself to the necessities of his animalistic impulses, he presents a constant threat for humans. Carl Lindahl (2002) illustrates that “comparable accounts of ‘battle rage’

can be found in ...'berserker' figures that have animal like characteristics and are 'impervious to wounds' "(p.39). During his time with X-Men team Wolverine learns that what makes him unique are his choices not his genome structure. Humans' capacity to think rationally sets them apart from animals. Within this perspective, Wolverine signifies the constant struggle between rationality and instinct, civility and animalism. When Wolverine uses his rage as a weapon for public good, he becomes a real superhero. Fingeroth (2004) explains that "Wolverine takes out anger and uses it as a weapon, and in so doing purifies us all. He kills for our sins" (p. 137). In other words, the anger that is put in good use becomes a functional tool for the superhero. Otherwise, it is savagery.

Wolverine's anger, the Ghost Rider's wrath and Blade's rage are what separate them from the classical superheroes. The choice of what they will do with their anger gives them heroic qualities. The concept of superhero is all about choices. Heroes choose their mission; define their values and act according to the moral codes of the existing society. As Kaveney (2008) mentions "the struggle between good and evil tends, of course, to take the form of violent struggle, because that is the way that, since the beginning, comics have chosen to stylize moral connection" (p. 14). In that sense, for these divergent superheroes the fight with evil is internal as much as external. The Ghost Rider fights with the Devil who grants him his superpower, Blade fights with the vampires who are his genetic ancestors, Wolverine fights against his family lineage (his brother Sabretooth).

Blade's eternal rage is fed from his hate against vampire race. Blade's mission to protect human kind defines the limits of his intolerance against a possible threat. And this threat happens to be partly him. Since he is a half-breed, he has a thirst for blood of humans he wants to protect. This is the source of his constant internal dilemma and his self-hate. He is half-vampire because vampires killed his mother while she was pregnant with him. Therefore, Blade's anger against vampire race is in fact stimulated by his feelings of revenge for his mother's death. Being a half vampire prompts his feelings of guilt. As a result, he tries to suppress all his vampiristic needs and control his thirst. He

sets himself to reject one part of his identity and dooms himself for an eternal inbetweenness.

Blade, Wolverine and Ghost Rider's style of heroism is most of the time brutal. Especially, the Ghost Rider's fight against his enemies is based on severe punishment. He burns the souls of the wrongdoers with the fire of Hell. Mikhail Lyubansky (2013) underlines the link between punishment and superhero justice and says that "most superheroes do not literally follow the biblical edict of 'an eye for an eye', but they do tend to share our own cultural belief that 'the punishment must fit the crime'" (p. 176). Within this perspective, the Ghost Rider's way of punishment reflects "an eye for an eye" approach. However, when he is back to his normal self as Johnny Blaze he feels guilty about the brutality of the Ghost Rider's methods. When the police want to put him in jail where other criminals reside, he tries to resist and prevent the harm he can cause. He sees his power as a curse rather than a superhero quality. Therefore, he constantly works on his abilities to control it, to prevent it to be released against his will. For Johnny Blaze, the Ghost Rider is his biggest enemy. Just as Blade and Wolverine are their own enemies.

Frank Verano (2013) provides that "many superhero comics feature an archenemy, that villain who acts as the hero's doppelganger- his or her mirror opposite" (p.83). Magneto and Prof. Xavier, Wolverine and Sabretooth, Blade and Drake can be named as examples of such rivalry. Rosenberg (2013) categorizes the villain types as the straightforward criminal, the vengeful villain, the heroic villain and the sadistic villain. The straightforward criminal is defined as a villain that constructs a crime network in order to achieve his or her devilish plan (i.e. Kingpin<sup>8</sup> in Spiderman). The vengeful villain (i.e. Lex Luthor) is fed from his personal traumas regarding the superhero. The sadistic villain creates random chaos (i.e. Joker). But the heroic villain is more complex because s/he chooses bad methods for good causes. Magneto is a heroic villain, because similar to Prof. Xavier he wants a society where mutants can live freely. But the

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<sup>8</sup> Kingpin is a villain who has a powerful and widespread crime network in Marvel universe. Kingpin which is the code name of Wilson Fisk, appears in Spiderman and Daredevil comics.

possibility of harming people in the process is not his concern. The way they choose to accomplish their ends sets the defining line between a hero and a villain. Verona (2013) describes that;

*Superheroes and supervillains sometimes coexist in a somewhat symbiotic relationship, in an almost brutal choreography around this ‘line’. The social identity of both heroes and villains is very much informed by and defined by their opposition to each other, which justifies their very existence within the social fabric of the superhero story (p. 83).*

Although Blade, Wolverine and the Ghost Rider stand for the rights of the innocent and protect the society from the ones who want to disturb order, the society sees them as a threat, as a villain. But more importantly, these divergent superheroes are their own villain. They fight for the good of the society despite themselves. Blade is a half-breed vampire hunter, Wolverine is a mutant with wolf-genes that causes uncontrollable rage outbursts, and the Ghost Rider is the servant of the Devil on earth. Fingerroth (2004) interprets these kind creatures as follows;

*Their power was their curse, this simultaneously was what made them intensely appealing to audiences. But one thing they were not, on a consistent basis, was heroic. They each had only one goal. Dracula for blood. The Wolf Man for a cure. Frankenstein’s monster to be accepted. Heroism was not on their agenda; doing good was way down on their list. Their existence was their mission. There was no time for such niceties as becoming deputies to the Transylvania police department (p. 122).*

Within this perspective, the story of these divergent superheroes was not about heroism in the first place but to find themselves, to accept their identities. They fight with their animalism and monstrosity as part of their self-mission to find a place in the society. They try to find a way resolve their past traumas and overcome existential absence.

### 5.3. PAST AS MEMORY/ PRESENT AS ABSENCE

Sharon Packer (2010) calls superheroes as “wounded warriors” and explains that “they must suffer some degree of undoing before they become better people or stronger warriors or wiser leaders” (p. 236). Even the most ideal portrayals of heroism like Superman is subject to early wounds. He was orphaned and abandoned. He comes from another planet. He is an alien. Wolverine, Blade and the Ghost Rider are also superheroes with imperfections. They suffer from their childhood traumas. Packer (2010) describes that “After the 1960s, superheroes were specifically configured with psychological imperfections. They self-reflect and second-guess themselves and suffer from self-doubt” (p. 237). These traits also characterize these divergent superheroes and provide an explanation for their inbetweenness. Wolverine and Blade have a traumatic origin story, whereas Johnny Blaze has a tragic flaw as he carries the fire of Hell inside him.

Wounded warrior plotlines exemplify the idea that “what does not kill you makes you stronger”. Packer (2010) explains that “post-traumatic stress propels superheroes into action and adventure and achievement” (p. 238). Wolverine’s story began with his tragic loss of his father and then killing his own biological father whom was the murderer. Blade’s eternal war against vampire race is a result of his traumatic birth. The reason why he is half-breed is because his mother was slaughtered by vampires when she was pregnant with him. Johnny Blaze curse is an outcome of his contract with the Devil to save his father who dies anyway. They repeatedly suffer from flashbacks of original trauma. Some retain physical marks from the original event. For example, Wolverine’s Adamantium skeleton is a result of the genetic experiment he was part of. After that very painful experiment, he became a mutant with an indestructible physique.

Their traumatic experiences make these superheroes who they are. But what happens when they forget about their traumatic experiences? What happens to their relationship with their self? After he was shot in the head with an Adamantium bullet, Wolverine loses his memory. He knows nothing about himself but his name. His prior psychological struggles with his dark side are gone. One part of his identity becomes a

memory for him. His past is erased. His split-self (human and wolf) is merged into a single unit as a mutant. The only thing that is left from his past is his anger, now without an anchor.

For mutants, anonymity is a means for self-protection. When Wolverine loses his memory, it becomes his reality. The only connection he has with his past is shattered images that appear as hallucinations. His presence turns into an absence. Another superhero that suffers from a similar absence is Johnny Blaze. When he is transformed into the Ghost Rider, he forgets himself. Packer (2010) explains our relationship with our shadow side with reference to Jungian psychology;

*Jung speaks of a shadow side that lurks inside each of us. Sometimes we are aware of that shadow but choose to conceal it or “keep it in the closet”. Sometimes that shadow is hidden from its owner and awaits discovery. ...Persona (or public face) hides vulnerable emotions and sets boundaries between the public and the private. ...The persona conceals the shadow (p. 132).*

In line with this description, Johnny Blaze is the persona and the Ghost Rider is his shadow side. Most of the time, superheroes when they become their super-self are conscious of their persona. Each side is aware of the actions of the other side. In other words, the shadow and persona know what they do in their own time. Most of the time, the only thing that separates them is a mask or a costume. This is, in fact, one of the defining features of superheroes. But in Johnny Blaze's case, his loss of consciousness paves the way for a complete separation of the two sides of his psyche. Since Johnny Blaze cannot control his actions while he is the Ghost Rider, this creates an absolute split identity. During the day, he is a celebrity stunt motorcyclist. At night he turns into the servant of the Devil. The only thing that connects the two is the motorcycle they ride. Johnny Blaze is terrified with his absence; therefore he tries taking control of his presence while he is the Ghost Rider.

Blade, on the other hand, carries the burden of his birth trauma all the time. In other words, he remembers all the time. This causes him a constant rage against the vampire race. The more he remembers, the more he becomes revengeful. But at the same time,

he tries to suppress his vampiristic urges. “Jung’s shadow side is inherently instinctive and irrational” (Packer, 2010, p. 133). Blade is always struggling with his shadow side. He tries to kill the vampire inside him by containing his blood thirst. Different than Wolverine and the Ghost Rider, Blade suffers from over-presence. Both sides of his split identity (human/vampire) are equally powerful and present. This creates an identity confusion, which in turn triggers his inbetweenness.

C. Gustav Jung (1958) says “Unfortunately, there can be no doubt that man, on the whole, less good than he imagine himself or wants to be. Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is” (p. 76). Johnny Blaze spends his life by running away from his shadow side. When he transforms into the Ghost Rider, he becomes the ultimate shadow: The Devil itself. It is too much of a burden for his conscious to become the Devil, therefore it shoots itself down. However, there is always a helping figure in a superhero’s life – a love interest, a mentor – to remind her/him who s/he is. For Johnny Blaze this figure is Carter Slade.

An early ghost rider himself, he supports Johnny Blaze to control his rage and to keep himself conscious during his transformation. He repeatedly reminds him his good deeds while choosing to sell his soul to the Devil. He is sort of an alternative memory that reconstructs the past for Johnny Blaze so that he can come to terms with his shadow side. Blade’s helping hand happens to be Dr. Karen Johnson, a scientist, whom he has a romantic relationship. She helps him to suppress his blood thirst and to deal his shadow side more effectively. She develops a serum for him to appease his thirst and control his anger. Similarly, Wolverine’s love interest Dr. Jean Grey becomes his guide to contain his anger and balance his emotions. Interestingly but not accidently, her superpower happens to be her telekinetic and telepathic abilities. She can communicate with the minds of others and infiltrate into their unconscious. She comforts him through his hallucinations about his past. These figures function as facilitators rather liberators. His love towards Dr. Grey encourages Wolverine to be more in touch with his human side. Misirlioglu (2004) indicates that “even as he found love, though, Wolverine still batted to control the violent ‘berserker rages’ that threatened to break out of his unconscious and turn deadly for those near him” (p. 625).

These divergent superheroes also represent the shadow side of the society. Repressed ideas and feelings, weaknesses, shortcomings and instincts are embodied by these inbetween characters. Rosenberg and Coogan (2013) mention that superheroes “incorporate an otherness, and their respective superpowers are the result of this very difference” (p., 27). Similarly; Wolverine, the Ghost Rider and Blade are defined by their difference which comes with a price. A. David Lewis (2013) draws a parallelism between classical superheroes and divergent ones;

Batman and Superman would not be the crusaders they are if not for their orphanhoods, both Iron Man and Captain America are indebted to the early sacrifices of a mentor figure, and even anti-hero killing machines like the Punisher and Wolverine have the murder of loved ones fueling their rage (p. 37).

As Lewis (2013) mentions; the death of their loved ones becomes the source of superheroes’ endless rage and otherness. Therefore, these mentor and female figures with which these divergent superheroes have a special connection have another function within the narrative other than being a facilitator: To make death a part of these immortal creatures’ life. Lewis (2013) underlines that;

*Superheroes cannot know they are endless. ...In order for mortality to be perceived as a threat, the superhero must also be tied to the shadow of death. Whereas he or she might personally escape it, there is usually a dear one who cannot or will not escape it (p. 37).*

Within this perspective, to carry the burden of remembering is not very easy for a superhero. For example, Wolverine’s anger regarding his father’s death is amplified by endless wars he participated over the years and the violence he witnessed. His ability for fast recovery makes him almost immortal. Therefore, he cannot escape to see and remember. The same applies for Blade who ages very slowly. Hence; to make death a part of their story is not just a dramatic tactic but an existential necessity. To be able to live; first they have to believe that they can die. Otherwise, the knowledge of this world would be too much to bear, even for superheroes like them.

## 6.CONCLUSION

In today's world where economic crises and social unrests reign, global warming threatens the ecosystem, and states find hard to control the security of their nations, we need superheroes who would make the world a better place, maybe more than ever.

*A superhero is a man or woman with powers that are either massive extensions of human strength and capabilities, or fundamentally different in kind, which she or he uses for truth, justice and the protection of the innocent (Kaveney, 2008, p. 4).*

In its classical definition, three elements – mission, powers and identity – lie at the core of each superhero. “In the popular imagination; the figure of the superhero evokes images of men and women with amazing powers, wearing colorful costumes and having unbelievable adventures” (Deis, 2013, p. 95). Superheroes are idealized versions of ordinary people. They show us the best we can be.

But what happens when a superhero uses the power of the Devil to punish wrongdoers and save the innocents, a half-vampire superhero tries to protect humans whom blood triggers his thirst or a mutant superhero who has difficulty to control his rage tries to create a peaceful environment of co-existence between people and mutants? When it comes to this kind of characters, what happens to the absolute categories of good and evil, human and monster, order and chaos, hero and villain that once defined the genre? These were the questions that this thesis tried to answer with a specific focus on 3 superheroes, namely Wolverine, Blade and the Ghost Rider. Within the confines of this thesis, they were described as divergent superheroes to emphasize their difference from the classical superheroes. Their inbetweenness in terms of their identity was featured as their defining characteristic.

Throughout the movies, these divergent superheroes are depicted as outcasts. Although their mission is prosocial (i.e. saving humans from vampires, punishing corrupt souls to prevent further harm to the society, providing a peaceful co-existence), they are perceived as threats by the society at large. In contrast to classical superheroes that

represent “the peak of physical, mental and moral evolution” (Coogan, 2013, p. 6), these characters are in a constant existential struggle. Wolverine’s physical strength is due to a genetic experiment that he participated and causes in him a full-blown anger that he has difficulty to control. The Ghost Rider is the devil inside Johnny Blaze that he cannot escape and contain. Blade is a half-breed vampire who has to abstain from his blood thirst throughout his mission to protect humans from vampires. Because of these aforementioned reasons, their true calling lies beyond the public good. Their real mission is to find themselves and to come to terms with their existence. Will Brooker (2013) says superheroes “are about creating an alternate version of yourself – bigger, brighter, bolder than the real thing” (p. 11). Within this perspective, these divergent superheroes represent our imperfections, weaknesses and dark sides rather than providing us an idealized version of ourselves. Compared to classical superheroes, such divergent characters may provide more identification outlets for the current audience in the sense that they represent the complexities of the modern man.

Umberto Eco (1972) in his seminal essay “The Myth of Superman” points out that the hero has an obsession with preserving the law and order of the majority. He criticizes the construction of Superman as having a larger than life power yet using it just to prevent small crimes within the boundaries of his limited community instead of preventing larger social problems like battling corrupt governments. Wolverine, Blade and the Ghost Rider are far from being larger than life characters. They are affected and abused by their circumstance. Their heroism does not lie in their perfection, but in their will to fight for the good despite their imperfection. Empowered by their self-doubt and self-hate, they set to deal with bigger social problems like integration, diversity, moral corruption among others. Within this perspective, the superhero movies reflect the cultural beliefs and values, and the social conditions of the existing society. However, the revelation of the social realities is not as visible as in the superhero comics where the narrative design and the character development serve as a platform for the critic of the existing social dynamics.

As an allegory of the modern individual, these superheroes suffer from fragmented identities and are mostly portrayed in futile attempts to reach an absolute notion about who they are. Their hybridity – human/animal, evil/good, hero/villain – blurs the definite boundaries of identity once established by the classical superheroes. Their animalistic rage, their violent methods and their brutalism put at the service of good deeds; their psychological fragility nurtured by their childhood traumas; their search for belonging in a society of intolerance amplify their image of inbetweenness.

Throughout the movies there were several oppositional dichotomies that represented this inbetweenness such as animalism/civility, superhero/villain, belonging/displacement, law/lawlessness. Instead of the responsibility of power as the central theme in the classical superhero narratives, control of the power is the major concern of these divergent superheroes. Often, control of the power involves the containment of the animalistic urges and anger. The actions of these characters stem from a personal vendetta. The roots of Blade's fury against vampire race go to his mother's murder by vampires; Johnny Blade's anger is triggered by his father's death despite his agreement with the Devil, Wolverine's violent outbursts derive from the tragic killing of his father and the cruelty of the militaristic experiments toward mutants. For example, this unprecedented anger makes it harder for Wolverine to suppress his animalistic side. As Fingeroth (2004) provides "Wolverine's back story involves him being painfully implanted with an indestructible 'adamantium' metal skeleton, and sightings of him running naked through snowy woods, howling like a proverbial wild animal" (p. 135). Misirlioglu (2004) describes Wolverine as "the most popular member of the mutant X-Men team and the best there is at what he does, but what he does isn't pretty" (p. 624).

Richard Reynolds (2013) uses the term "superculture" to define the lives of certain classical superheroes like Batman and Iron Man. In his words;

*Members of the superculture choose to hide from public view in order to protect themselves. ...The super-rich and super-famous congregate in locations inaccessible to the average citizen and are cautious about flaunting their wealth and celebrity elsewhere. ...Some off-duty superheroes, it could be added have always inhabited*

*this billionaire superculture: Reed Richards, Tony Stark, Bruce Wayne* (Reynolds, 2013, p. 55).

Within this perspective, divergent superheroes like Wolverine and Blade represent subcultures in the sense that they are marginalized from the cultural mainstream. They epitomize a bestial Otherness. They reflect the dark sides of their society. Repressed ideas and feelings, weaknesses, shortcomings and instincts are embodied by these inbetween characters. As much as we need the classical all-encompassing and powerful superheroes; we also need these superheroes that are in some way paradoxical, and doesn't quite fit in, like ourselves.



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## **Appendix 1: Basic Terminology**

In order to prevent possible confusions with regard to the concepts that are used in the thesis, following definitions are provided as a guide to the reader:

*Superhero* is one of the most commonly used concepts throughout the study. Superheroes manifest superpowers that cannot be possessed by ordinary men. They are the ones who devote themselves to preserve the justice, serve the public good and to protect the innocents. Their most common features are having a superpower, a code name for a second identity, a clear mission and a costume. The notion of power is crucial for superheroes, because this is what separates a superhero from a hero. Jeph Loeb (2013) underlines that “superheroes are people with powers and abilities beyond those of mortal men” (p. 119). Even though these aforementioned qualities are shared characteristics of the superheroes, they can differ from each other. Coogan (2013) describes the superhero as “the protagonist of the superhero genre” (p. 3). His conception of the superhero is important in the sense that it entails also superheroes that have anti-heroic features. Because if this kind of superheroes is removed from their original context (e.g. the genre), they will probably not be accepted as heroes.

*Anti-hero* is a flawed hero. It is a protagonist who lacks conventional heroic qualities such as idealism, courage, righteousness. This is what separates an anti-hero from a regular hero. In literary tradition, anti-heroic characters are often subject to alienation, boredom and angst. In that sense, anti-heroes generally suffer from conformity problems with regard to the society they live in, to the community they are part of or to the team they belong. Spivey and Knowlton (2008) describe anti-hero as “too good to be a villain, too evil to be a hero” (p. 52). Despite their social incompatibilities, they choose to serve the righteous cause.

*Villain* is the antagonist of the superhero genre. The character who fights against the superhero. Villain generally dedicates her/himself to disrupt the order within the society or to destroy the superhero. By way of such disorderly objectives, the villain becomes a

major threat and challenge to the superhero. Verona (2013) points out that “the supervillain gives legitimacy to the superhero’s mission” (p. 85). The term “super” indicates villain’s extraordinary power compared to an ordinary villain.

*Arc enemy* is the prime adversary of the superhero. Throughout the journey of a superhero, various villains can come into her/his way but only one of them will rise to the occasion of becoming the archaic challenger. For example; over the course of the movie series Batman had different villains whom he fought against such as the Riddler, the Penguin or the Cat Woman. However, the arc enemy of Batman is the Joker.

*Comic* is a visual and graphical medium that consists of both images and textual narratives. The medium has its unique narrative tools like speech balloons, cartoons, taglines and effects such as “kapow!”, “boom!”. Starting from 1938, superheroes had been an essential part of comics.

*Comic books* are monthly or weekly magazines that contain comic and cartoon series. Each monthly or weekly series is called *issue*. Sometimes, comic books that include specific characters, events or topics are brought together for a special issue and are published as an *anthology*.

The short appearance of a character in a story is called a *cameo*. In most cases, a superhero appears initially as a *cameo* in another superhero comic and this instance is accepted as her/his first appearance.

Sometimes superheroes take the journey as a special team, because superheroes that are created by the same comic company (i.e. Marvel or DC) are considered to share the same *universe*. Since they are living together in the same superhero universe; at one instance Spiderman can be seen as helping Iron Man in his fight against the enemy at another Batman and Wonder Woman can be seen as each other’s enemy.

## Appendix 2: A Timeline of the Superhero Universe

Beginning of Golden Age of Superheroes.....	1938
First Issue of Marvel Comics.....	1939
The Inception of Silver Age of Superheroes and New Attempts.....	1956
First Appearance of Vampirella.....	1969
The Publication of First African- American Superhero “Luke Cage”.....	1972
First Appearance of Johnny Blaze a.k.a. Ghost Rider.....	1972
First Appearance of Blade: The Vampire Hunter.....	1973
First Appearance of Wolverine.....	1974
Blade Movie by Stephen Norrington.....	1998
X-Men Movie by Bryan Singer.....	2000
Blade II by Guillermo del Toro.....	2002
Blade: Trinity by David S. Goyer.....	2004
Ghost Rider Movie by Mark Steven Johnson.....	2007
X-Men Origins: Wolverine by Gavin Hood.....	2009
Ghost Rider: Spirit of Vengeance by Neveldine & Taylor.....	2011