

# การศึกษาแนวคิดอุดมการณ์รวมกลุ่มแอฟริกาในภาพยนตร์แบล็คแพนเธอร์

## A Study of the Pan-Africanism Represented in Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018)

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### บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มุ่งค้นหาบริบทแวดล้อมที่สนับสนุนแนวคิดอุดมการณ์รวมกลุ่มแอฟริกา (Pan-Africanism) ทั้งในด้านของการพัฒนาบุคลิก และคำพูดของตัวละคร ที่ปรากฏในภาพยนตร์แบล็คแพนเธอร์ (Black Panther) ของค่ายมาร์เวล ซึ่งออกฉายทั่วโลกในปี 2561 โดยใช้การวิเคราะห์ทางเอกสาร ได้แก่ สัมภาษณ์ และบริบททางประวัติศาสตร์สังคม เพื่อเปรียบเทียบกับเหตุการณ์จริงและนักเคลื่อนไหวที่มีตัวตนจริงในประวัติศาสตร์ ผลการค้นหาค้นหาบริบทสอดคล้องแนวคิดอุดมการณ์รวมกลุ่มแอฟริกาผ่านตัวละคร ได้แก่ เอ็นโอบู คิลมมิงเจอร์ นาเกีย และทีซาลา สะท้อนแนวคิดและความเชื่อในการสร้างความเคลื่อนไหวทั่วโลก เพื่อผืนทวีปแอฟริกาทั้งภายในและภายนอกทวีป

**คำสำคัญ :** มาร์เวล, แบล็คแพนเธอร์, ซูเปอร์ฮีโร่, อุดมการณ์รวมกลุ่มแอฟริกา, แอฟริกา, นักเคลื่อนไหว อุดมการณ์รวมกลุ่มแอฟริกา

### Abstract

This article aims to investigate Marvel's *Black Panther* (2018) focusing on utterances and the characterizations of the main actors in the movie. Researchers intended to define any support for the Pan-Africanism concept that may have existed and explore how the movie was related to real events or activists in history. Textual analysis, namely, intertextuality and socio-historical context, was applied. The findings of the study revealed Pan-Africanism was represented in Marvel's *Black Panther* mainly through four characters: N'Jobu, Erik Killmonger, Nakia and T'Challa. They held strong beliefs and enough faith to forge a worldwide movement that would reunite all African indigenous people of native African origin living outside the continent.

**Keywords:** Marvel, Black Panther, Superheroes, Pan-Africanism, Africa, Pan-Africanists

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## Introduction

After Marvel, an American entertainment company that produces superhero comics and movies, released *Iron Man* in 2008 and created Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), it became one of the most profitable companies in America and worldwide for its exciting stories and characters. Marvel usually produces superhero movies, inspired by real events and real people; thus, the audiences can engage their feelings with the movies and the characters easily (Yenisey, 2018).

*Black Panther* first appeared in Marvel's *Fantastic 4* comic in 1966 and then was transformed into a movie, directed by Ryan Coogler, and released on February 16<sup>th</sup> in 2018. After the *Black Panther* movie had been released, the movie gained massive interests because the leading casts and production teams were all black while the white characters and production staff members were the minority contrasting to previous Marvel's movies where all heroes are white (Reid-Cleveland (2018). The movie included a large number of black people: Ryan Coogler (director), Ruth E. Carter (costume designer), Chadwick Boseman (T'Challa/Black Panther), Michael B. Jordan (Erik Killmonger), Angela Bassett (Ramonda/Queen Mother), Letitia Wright (Princess Shuri), Lupita Nyong'o (Nakia/T'Challa's lover), Danai Gurira (Okoye), Daniel Kaluuya (W'kabi/Broder tribe's leader), and Winston Duke (M'Baku/Jabari tribe).

The movie's core plot involves claiming the rights of African people living worldwide, not just in the African continent. An article, based on analysis of intertextuality and

socio-historical context, suggests the plot may be linked to the concept of Pan-Africanism and its movement.

Therefore, the method of textual analysis, namely, intertextuality and socio-historical context, was applied in order to explore the supporting ideas for the Pan-Africanism concept and to analyse how the movie is related to real events and main activists in history. The focus was on the utterances and characterization of the main characters in the movie.

## Results

### Pan-Africanism

As defined by Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.), Pan-Africanism is "a belief that people from Africa and their descendants should be united, or a movement to achieve such unity".

Pan-Africanism is an idea of African origins and African Diaspora, African descendants who have not settled in Africa, for seeking unity. Pan-Africanism has represented the complexities of black political and intellectual thought over two hundred years. The movements of Pan-Africanism were often changed according to activists' focuses, such as politics, ideology, organisations and culture. It is a belief that all African people share not only a common history, but also a common destiny (Makalani, n.d.).

The definition above matches very well with the key plot of *Black Panther* where T'Challa who returns to his land Wakanda in order to succeed the throne after the death of his father, King T'Chaka but is challenged for the throne from Erik Killmonger, T'Challa's

cousin who was born and raised in the slums of Oakland, USA.

Erik Killmonger is the son of Prince N'Jobu, T'Chaka's brother who is sent to Oakland, USA for War Dogs assignment but Prince N'Jobu betrays Wakanda by disclosing the existence of Wakanda and smuggled Vibranium to America in order to give African Americans a tool with the hope to help them claim their equal rights in America. Prince N'Jobu, therefore, is killed by King T'Chaka.

Killmonger adopts his father's perspective and returns to Wakanda to challenge T'Challa for his rightful place of Wakanda's throne. Just as his father, his desire is to claim rights for black people in the world.

Even though, the movie is quite new, released in 2018, the situation of African people has not yet been improved and their suffering situations are reflected across the movie

Oginni and Moitui (2016) points out that "over decades, Pan-Africanism has been conceived as a viable instrument and ideology of political liberation while African Renaissance (a shared vision for the renewal of Africa, defined as the furtherance of Pan-Africanism within a global context) has recently emerged as a modern philosophy aimed at liberating African people from hyper-spiritual and mental colonization, and a hangover influence and hypnotic control, generally called neo-colonization. Given that African people have long suffered from anti-humanism, deprivations, dominations, suppressions and lynchings, it is unfortunate that the political independence of Africa has not brought far-reaching improvement to its citizens' well-being since 1960", (p.40).

The evidences to support Oginni and Moitui (2016)'s statement can also be found in many dialogues across the movie mainly through four main characters: N'Jobu, Erik Killmonger, Nakia and T'Challa.

The following conversation is taken from the scene that Prince N'Jobu gets caught for his betrayal. The concept of Pan-Africanism is explicit here as well as the difficult situation of African Diasporas all over the world.

1. *N' Jobu: I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities flooded with drugs and weapons. They are overly polices and incarcerated. All over the planet, our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With vibranium weapon, they could overthrow every country and Wakanda could rule them all the right way.*

The following conversations between T'Challa and Killmonger are taken from the scene where T'Challa becomes the King of Wakanda and Killmonger goes to Wakanda to claim his rightful place for the throne.

2. *Killmonger: Y'all sittin' up here comfortable. Must feel good. It's about two billion people all over the world that looks like us. But their lives are a lot harder. Wakanda has the tools to liberate them all.*  
*T'Challa: And what tools are those?*  
*Killmonger: Vibranium. Your weapons.*  
*T'Challa: Our weapons will not be used to wage war on the world. It is not our way to be judge, jury and executioner for people who are not our own.*

*Killmonger: But didn't life start right here on this continent? So aint' all people your people?*

Killmonger's utterances above obviously show that he applies his father's will which is to form unity and equality for all African Diasporas. The hardship of African Diasporas is also outstanding through his utterances.

Apart from Killmonger and N'Jobu, another character who also represents the idea of Pan-Africanism is Nakia, T'Challa's lover. The following conversations are uttered by T'Challa and Nakia.

3. *Nakia: I found my calling out there. I've seen too many in need just to turn a blind eye. I can't be happy here knowing that there're people out there who have nothing.*  
*T'Challa: What would you have Wakanda do about it?*  
*Nakia: Share what we have. We could provide aid and access to technology and refuge to those who need it. Other countries do it, we could do it better.*  
*T'Challa: We are not like these other countries, Nakia. If the world found out what we truly are what we possess, we could lose our way of life.*  
*Nakia: Wakanda is strong enough to help others and protect ourselves at the same time.*

The words "people out there" refers to African Disporas. At the beginning, Nakia is the only Wakandan who is determined to help African people outside Wakanda.

Based on dialogues 2 and 3 above, it is clear that T'Challa, at first, is against to the idea

of Pan-Africanism. The excerpt from dialogue 2 "...It is not our way to be judge, jury and executioner for people who are not our own..." can be analysed that T'Challa considers people inside Wakanda nation are his responsibility while those living outside are not.

However, at the end of the movie, after the death of Killmonger, T'Challa's perspective is changed. He decides to open Wakanda to the world and provides aid to help African Disaporas.

The following conversation is taken from the scene at the end of the movie. T'Challa and his sister, Shuri, go to the abandoned buildings, located in Oakland, USA, where Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger used to live.

4. *King T'Challa: I bought this building. And that building. And that one over there. This will be the first. Wakandan International Outreach Center. Nakia will oversee the social outreach. And you will spearhead the science and information exchange.*

All conversations above illustrate the concept of Pan-Africanism, but with different movements. However, they are all aware of the difficult life of African Disaporas who have still been treated unequally. They; therefore, have the same goal which is to reunite and help all African people all over the world which fits well with Pan-Africanism's aforementioned definition.

According to Adi and Sherwood (2003), Pan-Africanism can be represented in many various ways as a group of perspectives and actions, a social and political movement, an ideology, or a general philosophy in order to

protect the right of African Disaporas from the colonization and racial discrimination.

### The Atlantic Slave Trade

*Black Panther* movie also mentions one of the most significant events in the African people history, the Atlantic Slave Trade, which is linked to Pan-Africanism's concept.

The following utterances are said by T'Challa and Killmonger before Killmonger dies.

5. *T'Challa: Maybe we can still heal you.*  
*Killmonger: Why? So you can just lock me up? Nah. Just bury me in the ocean with my ancestors that jumped from the ships. 'Cause they knew death was better than bondage.*

Uzoigwe (2008) asserts that "Studying the African Diaspora and Pan-Africanism particularly is a complex, often frustrating task. For thousands of years people of African origin had found themselves in foreign lands for a variety of reasons and impulses. But their dispersals were, for most of this long period, isolated, hardly noticeable, developments because they occurred in trickles. It was not, however, until the period of the trans-Atlantic slave trade that the movements became more purposive and gradually climaxed in a flood before ebbing in the nineteenth century" (p.4).

### Pan-Africanists

All the characters, namely, N'Jobu, Killmonger, Nakia and T'Challa, can represent the main Pan Africanists in the history.

Amongst a number of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois' ideas are strongly relevant to the main

plot of the movie which reflects through two of the characters, Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger.

Prince N'Jobu is sent to California, the United States, for a War Dog Assignment. He falls in love with an American woman. They, later, have a child, Killmonger, was then born and raised in the United States. Both Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger have a chance to witness the situation of African people outside Wakanda which radicalises their perspectives and; therefore; urge them to fight for the right of African people outside the continent. It can be claimed that both Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger represent African American people.

According to Biography.com Editors (2019), William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, who was better known as W.E.B. Du Bois, was also born and lived in America, at Great Barrington, in Massachusetts, the United States. It was said that Du Bois was "an influential African American rights activist" during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was also the first African American who earned a Ph.D. from Harvard University.

Du Bois was sometimes referred to "the father of Pan-Africanism" as he co-founded the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People or NAACP in 1909 in the United States (Napier, 2013).

His work included numerous pieces of famous writings, not only for academics, but also articles for the popular press involving the struggle in life of African American people. One of the books that became popular calling for national attention was *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903) (W.E.B. Du Bois Papers, 2017).

*The Souls of Black Folk* presented the idea of Double Consciousness which refers to the individual sensation of feeling and thought that one's identity is divided into several parts, making it difficult or impossible for individual to have one unified identity. Double Consciousness forces African Americans to devalue themselves by whites' judgments and society (Kuryla, 2003).

Gearey (2012) suggested "Du Bois' understanding of the Negro as both part and not part of European civilisation-"integral" and "rejected"-is perhaps an elaboration on the doubleness that defines the souls of black folk" (p.267).

After Killmonger defeats T'Challa, he drinks the Heart-Shaped Herb which gives him the powers of the Black Panther and take him to the Ancestral Plane which will lead him to meet his ancestors.

Unlike T'Challa who meets his father, King T'Chaka, and other ancestors at the place located somewhere in Wakanda nation, Killmonger goes to America where he lives with his father, Prince N'Jobu.

The following is the conversations between Killmonger and Prince N'Jobu.

6. *Prince N'Jobu: What did you find?*

*Killmonger: Your home.*

*Prince N'Jobu: I gave you a key hoping that you might see it someday.*

*(Killmonger opens his mouth to show the Wakanda sign.)*

*Prince N'Jobu: Yes, The sunsets there are the most beautiful in the world. But I fear you still may not be welcome.*

*Killmonger: Why?*

*Prince N'Jobu: They will say you are lost.*

*Killmonger: But I'm right here.*

*Prince N'Jobu: No tears for me?*

*Killmonger: Everybody dies. It's just life around here.*

*Prince N'Jobu: Well, look at what I have done. I should've taken you back long ago. Instead, we are both abandoned here.*

*Killmonger: Well, maybe your home is the one that's lost. That's why they can't find us.*

The conversations above reflect the concept of Du Bois's Double Consciousness. While Killmonger comes to Wakanda in order to claim for his rightful place as the King of Wakanda, he still considers America as his home, which is why Ancestral Plane takes him there.

According to Williams (2018), Killmonger was said to be "the only black in the film". He is an African American in Oakland who is judged to be black for his skin colour in a white country while Wakandan are not. Killmonger can represent a Wakandan diaspora who returns to Wakanda to seek for his real home as well as his identity, but he would never be accepted as a Wakandan, as he is a "lost child" or African descendent who was not born and raised in the Africa continent. Even though his body is African, his mind is American. He adopts whites' brutality and uses it against white people.

In addition, other two famous Pan Africanists in the 1960s were Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. According to Carson and Lewis (2019), both King and Malcom X were

the leaders of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. However, they adopt different approaches. Martin Luther King Jr. was a member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). His historical speech "I Have a Dream" was given in Washington on 28<sup>th</sup> August 1963 in order to promote equality. On the other hand, Malcolm X preferred violence. He urged his followers to defend themselves against white action by any means necessary.

Referred to Carson and Lewis (2019), four main characters in *Black Panther* can be divided into two groups. The first group includes T'Challa and Nakia who can represent the idea of Martin Luther King Jr. where non-violent approaches are preferred. The second group involves Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger who reflect Malcolm X's perspective of violence.

According to Duncan (2018), after the death of Malcolm X, Huey P. Newton and Bobby Seale adopt Malcolm's idea and founded the "Black Panther Party for Self-Defense" on October 15<sup>th</sup> in 1966, in West Oakland, California. The party aimed to protect African Americans from police brutality by arming African Americans to protect themselves and their neighborhoods.

Based on *Black Panther* movie, Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger also live in Oakland, California, the same location of Black Panther Party. Therefore, it can be claimed that the movie title is related to Black Panther Party. The purpose of the foundation is also the same as Prince N'Jobu and Killmonger's objective as they wish all African Diasporas to be armed with Vibranium, the powerful substances, so

that they can protect themselves and be freed from the oppressors.

## Conclusion

It can be claimed that *Black Panther* explicitly promotes the idea of Pan-Africanism which can be seen across the movie through its core plot and characters. The real event that was said to be the onset of Pan-Africanism movement in the history, such as, the Atlantic Slave Trade, is obviously mentioned in the movie through the character, Killmonger. Four main lead characters: N'Jobu, Killmonger, Nakia and T'Challa can also be referred to Pan-Africanists. Even the movie title can also be linked to Black Panther Party which is one of the renowned foundations founded to fight for African American people's right.

The results found and presented in this article can benefit both *Black Panther* fans and general people as they can fully enjoy the movie once they learn and understand the concept and the history behind the story.

The difficult situation of African Diasporas is not new. Learning Pan-Africanism's concept through *Black Panther* can also encourage people which not only refer to only African people but to everyone to help make change in the society.

It can also trigger other researchers to dig deeper into other angles that are related to Pan-Africanism. As the article mainly focuses on Pan-Africanism, other researchers may explore other ideas that are embedded in the movie, such as, Slavery, Biracialism, Racism, and Afrofuturism, etc. for further fruitful discussions and thoughts.



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