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*Black Panther*: A Characterization Study of Erik Killmonger's  
Machiavellianism

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## ***Black Panther*: A Characterization Study of Erik Killmonger's Machiavellianism**

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**Abstract:** The study discusses and analyzes the characterization of a secondary character in the movie *Black Panther*, Erik Killmonger whose status as a villain is described as a Machiavellian; a person known to be gruesome and unreliable to acquire everything he desires by any means whatsoever. The *Black Panther* is a two-hour-and-14-minute feature film produced by Marvel Studio. The study functions as a source of knowledge for everyone who wishes to comprehend the deeper issue of a secondary character in a movie who does not get enough recognition, unlike the main character. This study used to collect and observing methods based on Yin's study entitled *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (2011) to acquire the data, *Black Panther* movie along with the movie script. A Qualitative research method is used to answer the problems of the study. It examined Killmonger's characterization by using three theories; i.e. the tridimensional aspects by Egri (1960), Black Nationalism by Young & Levy (1970), and High Machiavellianism by Christie & Geis (1970). A discussion of Black History counts as a great necessity to give a clearer sense of the character's background who is described as an African-American male. Lastly, a descriptive method to analyze the problems and present the analysis is chosen to complete this study. The results of this study found innovative discussions on a Machiavellian character on the parameters of self-determination, nationalism, and racial prejudice. Killmonger's Machiavellian character is categorized to have cold emotionality, lack of empathy, and manipulative features. The study results also delivered fundamental truths about the current political and cultural situation in the United States, in which people still seek persistence in their everyday lives based on racial boundaries reflected by Killmonger's mission as an African-American.

**Key words:** characterization, Machiavellianism, Black Nationalism, tridimensional aspects, Erik Killmonger

**Abstrak:** Penelitian ini mendiskusikan serta menganalisis karakterisasi pemeran pendukung dalam film *Black Panther*, Erik Killmonger yang statusnya sebagai penjahat menggambarkan sosok Machiavellian; seorang yang dikenal keji dan tidak dapat dipercaya, serta akan melakukan cara apapun dalam mencapai keinginannya. Film *Black Panther* yang diproduksi oleh Marvel Studio memiliki durasi selama dua jam dan 14 menit. Fungsi penelitian ini adalah sebagai sumber pengetahuan dalam pemahaman pentingnya pemeran pendukung dalam suatu film yang kurang mendapat perhatian dari publik, bertolak belakang dengan peranan seorang pemeran utama. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode collecting dan observing yang didasarkan pada buku Yin yang berjudul *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* (2011) untuk mendapatkan data yang berupa film *Black Panther* beserta naskah film tersebut. Metode penelitian kualitatif digunakan untuk menjawab masalah-masalah dalam penelitian ini. Metode ini mengkaji karakterisasi Killmonger dengan menggunakan tiga teori; tridimensional aspects oleh Egri (1960) *Black Nationalism* oleh Young & Levy (1970), dan *High Machiavellianism* oleh Christie and Geis (1970). Penelusuran mengenai sejarah orang kulit hitam (*Black History*) mendukung penelitian ini sebagai dorongan karakter dalam bertindak sebagai pria berkebangsaan Afrika-Amerika. Selanjutnya, metode deskriptif dipilih sebagai metode terbaik dalam menganalisis masalah serta mempresentasikan hasil analisis penelitian ini. Penelitian ini menghasilkan sebuah pembahasan inovatif dalam karakter Machiavellian yang memiliki parameter determinasi pribadi, nasionalisme, serta prasangka rasial. Karakter Killmonger sebagai seorang Machiavellian dikategorisasikan sebagai pribadi yang memiliki emosi yang dingin, empati yang kurang, serta manipulatif. Hasil dari penelitian ini juga menyampaikan kebenaran mendasar dalam situasi politik dan budaya di Amerika Serikat, dimana masyarakat kerap berpikir dan bertindak berdasarkan batas-batas rasial yang juga direfleksikan dalam misi Killmonger sebagai seorang berkebangsaan Afrika-Amerika.

**Kata kunci:** karakterisasi, Machiavellianism, Black Nationalism, tridimensional aspects, Erik Killmonger

## INTRODUCTION

According to *Encyclopedia Britannica* (2010), literature is a body of written works that includes aesthetic execution. It is classified into a variety of systems, including language, genre, and national origin. The limitation of literature is categorized into two forms; fiction and non-fiction. Over the years, it is unfortunate to sometimes witness the author's lack of complexity to each character in his or her fictional literary work. For instance, Gertrude from

Hamlet (1609) was expressed as a flat character whose views did not change until the end of the story. She remained passive and did not take any actions until she willingly became the victim. Authors in the past often over exploit the use of flat character or a simple character who only has one trait. In contrast, Tyrion Lannister from the TV series *Game of Thrones* (2011) showed his development as a round character. He was once a drunken and playful prince who often got mocked because of his small stature. By the end of the series, Tyrion had transformed himself with wisdom and maturity. He proved himself worthy as an intelligent man and a responsible advisor of Queen Daenerys Targaryen. The contrast between Gertrude and Tyrion's characterizations draws a silver lining of what makes a character interesting and unique according to his or her dimensions. Therefore, the article supports Klarer (1998) who claims that the use of three dimensions in a character which consists of physiological, sociological, and psychological qualities helped authors improve a story to have a deeper structure so that a developed analysis in one's character could be achieved.

Farner (2014) stated round characters found in antagonists, secondary characters and villains have complex personality features and are less predictable (p. 171). Consequently, the article observed and proved Farner's statements to be true. Villains have quite a reputation as 'the bad guy'. At times, they are underrated, even despised. Villains' portrayal today has transformed maturely into sympathetic ones. Their motives may vary, but their main intentions usually revolve around utilitarianism. Mulgan (2020, pp. 2-3) formulated that utilitarianism insists on the value of well-being. It promotes acts in any situation which brings maximum pleasure or happiness.

The urgency to examine the use of three dimensions (physiological aspect, sociological aspect, and psychological aspect) in a secondary character who was also a villain was counted as the main reason for conducting this article. The presence of Erik Killmonger as a villain in the *Black Panther* movie was unique because he displayed Machiavellianism. Aïn et al., (2013) explain Machiavellianism as a personality trait characterized by specific patterns of social cognition skills and manipulation (p. 1). People with Machiavellian characteristics believe they are suited with power by gaining prevalence in any conceivable way. Therefore, the study covers Killmonger's motives of being a Machiavellian by tracing back on history (Civil Rights Movement) as a quintessential bedrock of analyzing Killmonger's being because his life goals are as well reflected by the famous Civil Rights Activist, Malcolm X. The activist was dealing with a life-threatening mission on Black Nationalism and

Black Revolution during the Racial Segregation Era in the United States. According to Marable (2011), Malcolm X believed that black people constituted a 'nation within a nation'. This promotes the enactment of Black Nationalism which emphasized racial solidarity to obtain freedom in the black community. His mission was later proceeded by the Black Panther Political Party which fought off police brutality and racial injustice. The study's goal was to answer three major problems such as Killmonger's Machiavellian character strengthened by Killmonger's tridimensional aspects, the influence of history in Killmonger's portrayal. Based on the background above, the study attempts to answer the following three research questions:

1. What are the three dimensions of Erik Killmonger's character applied in the movie?
2. How did history influence the portrayal of Erik Killmonger?
3. How is Erik Killmonger's Machiavellian character expressed in the movie?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. **Black Nationalism**

Black Nationalism describes social thoughts, attitudes, and actions formed in racial solidarity to the comprehensive and sophisticated ideologies of Pan-Negroism and Pan-Africanism (Young & Levy, 1970, p. 27). Pan-Africanism promotes the life values of the African civilizations and the struggles against slavery, racism, colonialism, and neo-colonialism (Falola et al., 2013, p. 71). Meanwhile, Pan-Negroism desires political unification of the 'Black Belt' US - South with Africa to form a Black Super-state, and expansion.

### B. **Machiavellianism**

Christie & Geis re-introduced Machiavelli's (1985) view on Machiavellianism by developing a test for measuring a person's level of Machiavellianism called the Mach - IV test. The test resulted in the interpersonal strategies and behavior of 'High Machs' and 'Low Machs'. High Machiavellian seeks power by manipulating others with a lack of empathy and distrust in others. On the contrary, Low Machiavellian seeks power with high emotional intelligence and a high percentage of trust in others. High Machiavellian is categorized as follows:

1. High Machiavellians are characterized by interpersonal manipulation, such as the use of flattery, deceit, cynical, and amoral viewpoints to promote their goals.
2. High Machiavellians are oriented toward conditions, as they may change their attitude, approach, and behavior under different circumstances.
3. High Machiavellians tend to initiate and control the structure of a relationship (reflecting their goal-directed power orientation).

## METHOD

The primary data source of this study was taken from the *Black Panther* movie. The study applied collecting and observing methods based on Yin's book (2011) *Qualitative Research from Start to Finish* in collecting the data. Collecting data refers to compiling or accumulating objects for the study such as printed materials, graphics, archival records, and physical artifacts. This study first collected the data of the *Black Panther* movie (<https://privateproxy.vet>) and *Black Panther* movie script (<https://www.scripts.com>) from the internet. Nonetheless, all the data needed preliminary collecting and note-taking techniques to limit the study's field in analyzing the major problems which revolved around Killmonger's characterizations of the physical aspect, sociological aspect, and psychological aspect expressed in a Machiavellian character. Preliminary collecting functions to eliminate unimportant data in the data source such as the presence of other characters in the movie, because this study only puts its focus on Killmonger's characterizations. Note-taking serves as an important technique in this step because notetaking avoids retrieving the same material in the data source as well as in the literature review. These techniques helped giving boundaries to the objects of this study.

Observing method was chosen because it best represented the ways of collecting data without others' interference or reports which could filter the perception upon the problems and form a premature bias. *Black Panther* movie as the study's primary data source was observed deeply; by watching, re-watching, and highlighting Erik Killmonger's tendency of being a High Machiavellian through his speeches (diction, slang, confrontational statements) and his whole presence (physical appearance, choice of wardrobe) to answer the study's problems Reading books and articles related to Black

Nationalism and highlighting several big moments, and comparing to Killmonger's vision of Black Nationalism was necessary to find similarities and differences between Killmonger and the actual situation.

The last step was relating the findings to the historical figure Malcolm X and his development in the Black Panther Political Party by reading his autobiography, speeches, and related articles. By doing this, the study was reliable enough because it contributed depth to the issue.

Interpreting and concluding were chosen as the best phases of analyzing the data due to the problems of this study. As the study enhances the characterization of a character, one needs to interpret and represent the character's features, sayings, and goals and conclude in order to create a credible analysis.

Interpreting is a way of giving meaning to the assembled data in a study. However, one must have a strong reason and proof to interpret a problem and conclude a solution. There are modes that can be used in the interpreting phase, description and explanation. For instance, the study initially described one of Killmonger's physiological dimensions as to be a brown-skinned African American male. The study precisely described what a brown-skinned person is and what an African American person looked like. With a proof of selected conversation in the *Black Panther* movie, the study explained the relation between a brown-skinned African American in general and Killmonger's presence in a descriptive manner. The explanation phase mainly concerns how or why events came about.

The concluding phase connects a study's interpretation of its data. The conclusion involves the significance and the implication in one's study. By the end of the analysis, the study served a conclusion consisting of major points of each discussion and findings in a descriptive manner. The study also probed the topic with various thesis readings and interpreted the results with the character's state. This would help understand a character's being, his ways to represent himself, and his multifaceted approach to dominate triggered by an unfortunate social, historical, and cultural background.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following is the analysis of Killmonger's tridimensional character aspects (physiological, sociological, and psychological) as an African-American



male who had to go through racism his entire life, is proven by the history of Africans and slavery along with its impacts on his tendency to be a Machiavellian.

### A. Tridimensional Aspects

Egri (1960, p. 48) defined that every human being has three dimensions, which are physiological, sociological, and psychological aspects. It is believed that without these aspects, a story would not be a literary success because it consists of another 'familiar' and boring characters as they do not explore many dimensions in their presence.

#### 1. Brown-skinned American black male (Physiological dimension)

This section mainly discussed about Killmonger's heredity and sex as an American black male. It was found that his identity as an American black who lived under suppression had designed his ways of thinking. Killmonger's personality is considered to be unique because he is created to be the only character in the movie whose parents were two different races, unlike the other characters who are pure Africans. This fact makes his personality to be different considering he is in a society that differentiates everybody based on his or her race.

[Data 1] "Your uncle fell in love with an **American woman**. They had a child." (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 71)

[Data 2] "You're Erik Stevens. **An American black operative**. A mercenary nicknamed Killmonger." (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 79)



**Figure 1:**  
Killmonger's cousin meeting a Shaman



Data 1 showed the conversation between Killmonger's cousin and a Shaman, revealing Killmonger's Wakandan father who had a child with an American woman which inferred to be white skin. Killmonger was born from interracial parents; a black African father named N'Jobu and a white American mother whose name was not mentioned in the movie, therefore, Killmonger is defined as colored. There were some scenes in the movie that showed slight differences between Killmonger's lighter skin (left) and other Wakandans such as, T'Challa and W'Kabi (right) whose skins were darker. This, however, had further meanings other than just a topic about shades.

People's perspectives on how skin color influences a person's identity and his or her status in society create intolerance that leads to racism. Issues of race and racism were imperative in regards to this issue. A great philosopher of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Immanuel Kant once proclaimed black was stupid because of his dark skin (1754). He also mentioned how negroes in general and all species of men are naturally inferior to the whites (1754).

These statements that influenced a lot of people gave proof about how whites already perceived blacks to be the 'lesser race' for generations. The statement above indicated how a mixed-race person is seen in society, hence, Killmonger was never to be put in one category: a white man or black man. Identity crisis might encounter Killmonger and other African Americans as they couldn't be described as too white (American) or too black (African). They got called lesser race by American and an oppressor or American by African, proven by data 2 when Shuri, Killmonger's cousin described him as an American black government agent but not African American. However, Shuri's term justifies Killmonger's identity. Shuri defined Killmonger as a man who was born and raised in America and happened to have biracial parents (African and American).

Moreover, according to Ajiboye (2015, p. 70), African American is a person whose descendants were separated from Africa in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and brought to America to become slaves. Shuri emphasized the word American black to say Killmonger is a foreigner because he was not born in Wakanda, and, as the princess of Wakanda, Shuri represented Wakanda's views on how they see Killmonger as nothing but an outsider. Had it not been different for Americans, Killmonger lived his life as an outlander because of his dark skin.

## 2. African American in Oakland (Sociological dimension)

Coogler as the director of *Black Panther* intentionally put a strong sociological background in Killmonger's character. Killmonger was situated to be born and raised in Oakland, California where the Black Panther Political Party was first originally founded. The Party's mission had inspired so many people and it became the basis of the Black Lives Matter International movement in 2013 which founded by Alicia Garza and Opal Tometi. It protested against racial profiling for black people, police brutality, and racial inequality in the United States criminal justice system (Friedersdorf, 2017).

In a survey held by Harvard T.H. School of Public Health in 2017, as much as 71% African-Americans felt fewer employment opportunities because of their race, 61% felt they were paid less than whites, and 64% agreed that their children did not have the same chances as white children to get a good quality of education. They were in an unfortunate condition in which discrimination was still ongoing, and this only led to bigger problems such as drugs, alcohol, and prostitution which is involved greatly in their lifestyle up until now. Selling drugs was a quick choice to provide their needs because jobs were limited and it did not need a lot of educational skills which they lacked. Harvard's survey in 2017 illustrated that African-Americans who live in Majority-Black neighborhoods are facing a higher percentage of discrimination. Moreover, they implemented negative values toward their community in contrast to African-Americans who live in non-majority Black areas (Harvard, 2017).

This result was proven in the data below where N'Jobu, Killmonger's father grew to become a radicalized Black who wanted to better Oakland, Majority-Black neighborhood, "The hardships he saw there radicalized your uncle".

### **[Data 3] Scene: Prince N'Jobu meets King T'Chaka**

King T'Chaka visited N'Jobu in his apartment in Oakland to question his motives for why he betrayed Wakanda by smuggling vibraniums in order to weaponize and fight the oppressors. Even though his job was initially to be a spy in a War Dog assignment which tasked in collecting information across the globe to ensure the safety of the kingdom (01:05:22 - 01:06:15).

Zuri : Your uncle took a War Dog assignment in America. Your father placed me there to observe unbeknownst to him.

Your uncle fell in love with an American woman. **They had a child. The hardships he saw there radicalized your uncle.**

N'Jobu: I observed for as long as I could. Their leaders have been assassinated. Communities flooded with drugs and weapons. They are overly policed and incarcerated. **All over the planet our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With vibranium weapons, they could overthrow every country and Wakanda could rule them all the right way.** (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 71)

The horrible living surroundings proved by data 3 “The hardships he saw there radicalized your uncle” made N'Jobu felt responsible to help those in need because he came from Wakanda, a wealthy nation that never experienced racism. He was attached to his new assigned place, Oakland where everything is never good for black people. “All over the planet our people suffer because they don't have the tools to fight back. With vibranium weapons, they could overthrow every country and Wakanda could rule them all the right way”. He was conditioned as a central intelligence to live like them; in a mediocre apartment in the ghetto area over the years and did nothing but to observe. Eventually, he teamed up with Zuri, who was at the time faking his identity as James. N'Jobu sabotaged his mission and smuggled vibranium to work on his new task; liberate all black people and make Wakanda hold the absolute power to conquer racism.

### 3. Ambitious (Psychological dimension)

An ambitious person is driven by ambition, by means he/ she has a desire to be successful, powerful, or famous. This category was indeed seen as one of Killmonger's strong presentation to hold power and to be king of Wakanda. His upbringing was shown in the following scene:

#### **[Data 4] Scene: Ross reveals Killmonger's identity**

Okoye, a Wakandan general, informed Shuri and T'Challa that an outsider had entered Wakanda's border. Everett Ross, a CIA agent was there to reveal Killmonger's identity (1:12:45 – 1:13:09).

Ross : Erik Stevens. Graduated Annapolis age 19. MIT for grad school. Joined the SEALs and went straight to Afghanistan where he wrapped up confirmed kills like it was a video game. Started calling him Killmonger. He joined a JSOC

ghost unit. Now, these guys are serious. They will drop off the grid...so they can commit assassinations and take down governments.

T'Challa: Did he reveal anything about his identity? (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 76)

It was found in data 4 that Killmonger went by the name of Erik Stevens, an American name, as to deceive people with his identity as a Wakandan. He seemed to do well with his educational background as he was an alumnus of MIT. It can be inferred from his background that he was most likely ambitious in his ways to achieve success. According to Barsukova (2016a, pp. 79-80), psychological characteristics of one's ambition are identified into seven units, i.e. "goals, achievement motivation, self-attitude, attitude to other people, attitude to professional activity, self-regulation, and cognitive characteristics". Killmonger's goals in the scene above told everyone clearly that he was not somebody who should be taken for granted. Most of the people would recognize him smart because he graduated from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, an Ivy League University which excelled academically, high selectivity in admissions, and social elitism. He also went to Annapolis Military Academy and graduated at 19 years old. It appeared that Killmonger did not choose mediocrity when it came to education and career choice, he made sure that he was always on 'top'. He was always so consistent; knowing that he became a leader of the JSOC ghost unit which allowed him to practice his meticulous tactics and assassinating people.

According to Barsukova (2016b, pp. 80), willingness to sacrifice things in order to fulfill one's ambition fits in the attitude to the professional activity category. Killmonger's ambitions drove him to educate himself in one of the finest University in the world, dedicate himself in the Navy SEAL, live solitarily so that he would not feel any emotional attachments with anyone, and finally leave his American identity and life so that he could move to Wakanda and claim his birthright to be king of Wakanda.

## **B. Influence of Black History**

British voracious needs were notoriously responsible as the roots of Black History. It all began in August 1619, as one of its colonies, namely the United States of America, was chosen to be the home of the enslaved Africans brought by the plenty amounts of ships. This was called the Atlantic slave

trade. Enslaved Africans were forced to do what Americans most valued at that time: agriculture.

Centuries went on, America's worth was perceived highly, and the practice of slavery became common until they grew alongside their oppressors as African Americans. In addition to calling 'enslaved Africans', the term African-Americans was also known as another way to call rapist descendants whereas all the fathers must have once been the masters of women slaves. Slavery was seen grotesque; in a way that the Africans held a strong belief they were also a part of the nation so that they had to work and bleed for them, even though resentful neglect had always been shown in the minds and acts of the opposite side, the white men. The strength of US political domination was mainly caused by its economic relationship, exploiting the people and natural resources of the Third World so that its industrial development grew large and the power of controlling international markets was in their hands.

The practice of slavery went on until a massive group of people wanted to make a change and seek freedom. The 1950s and 1960s were popularly known as the period of the rise of the Civil Rights movement era. Malcolm X (1965, p. 175) stated the loyalty of black slaves were not seen and appreciated by white men as their oppressors. He specifically pictured the horror of bombing, fire hoses, and other crimes as the feedback from whites for blacks' loyalty. Asia, Africa, and other third world countries were considered as non-white. The dissatisfied African Americans towards America's imperialist government, mainly the racial segregation system which forced the whites and blacks to be separated in all activities, such as eating in restaurants, attending schools, using public restrooms had made them nothing but more eager for such change. Malcolm X, as one of the leading figures of the Civil Rights movement, condemned the status quo as modern-day slavery, in which blacks were not equipped with proper education, limitation to knowledge sources, a proper living situation that made them used to live off the wealthy ones as means of robbery, drug abuse, and prostitution. Malcolm X (1964) said that there was no place for black people to live properly as long as whites took the power in economy and politics. Social degradation depends on whites.

Erik Killmonger had a different approach to what Malcolm X was thriving to do in respect of achieving Black Nationalism by the Black Revolution. He once made a distinction between the Negro Revolution and the Black Revolution in his speech entitled 'Message to the Grass Roots'. Martin Luther King Jr., an American Christian minister, made his way to help break down the segregation law in 1955 by enhancing the Negro Revolution

which he ignited the spirit of Christianity by advancing civil rights through nonviolent protests. In an interview by Alex Haley in (1965), Martin Luther King Jr. stated what a Negro Revolution was. The Negro Revolution seeks for integration and not independence. Meanwhile, the Black Revolution demands freedom, justice, and equality to fight off oppressors and reconcile themselves to live in a community. Erik Killmonger wished to fulfill Malcolm X's failure in militant approach by not just separation, but world domination as Wakanda was told to be the strongest country possessing the greatest natural resources (vibranium) on the African continent and earth.

Initially, Revolutionary Black Nationalism wishes to overthrow existing (imperialist) political & economic institutions as a prerequisite for the liberation of black Americans and did not exclude the use of violence (Young & Levy, 1970, p. xxviii). However, Black Nationalism according to Malcolm X had three different philosophies. The political, economic, and social philosophy meant that blacks should control every part mentioned in their community. With that being said, he desired to create an independent society and fight off capitalism with a militant approach; that was to take an extreme and violent approach to cease the current corrupting government system. Black Revolution was said by Malcolm X (1965) to be based on a revolutionary Black Nationalism. The thought developed into Erik Killmonger's primary psychological stance of why he should be king. He had an urging initiative to exploit vibranium, Wakanda's most valuable resource to fight nowadays' oppressors in America. It had already taken him and all oppressed Africans for so long to get even. Therefore, he made the first command on his first day as the king of Wakanda to arm the oppressed with all powers to achieve the modern Black Revolution. It can be observed from his speech below:

**[Data 5] Scene: Killmonger Throne**

Erik Killmonger leads the first meeting as king with elders and generals (01:29:55 - 01:30:43).

Killmonger: You know where I'm from...when black folks started revolutions, they never had the firepower...or the resources to fight their oppressors. Yeah, all that ends today. We got spies embedded in every nation on Earth. Already in place. **We're gonna send vibranium weapons out to our War Dogs.** They'll arm oppressed people all over the world. It's time they know the truth about us! We're warriors! The world's gonna start over, and this time, we're on top. (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 92)



Killmonger's Machiavellian character took up Malcolm X's militant leadership, proven by data above "We're gonna send vibranium weapons out to our War Dogs. They'll arm oppressed people all over the world". Killmonger did well as a leader who managed War Dogs, Wakandan's central intelligence agent all over the world. His mission to arm people made him a militant whose mission to use force in solving problems. Those sentences above were inspired by the activist's famous saying, 'by any means necessary'. Differ from what Malcolm X desired out of Black Nationalism; separatism put its focus on pride, justice, and equality, Killmonger had a much more thrilling initiative on diminishing the current oppressors and twisted their positions into the oppressed ones. He sought his opportunity as a legitimate candidate for a king to justify his well-thought plans.

### **C. Killmonger's Machiavellianism**

The analysis below showed how big the influence of Malcolm X's 'by any means necessary' manners adopted in the characterizations of Erik Killmonger. As a high Machiavellian, Killmonger was known to be an ex-soldier who was brave enough to be despised by his own country just to show his ideology of a greater good. N'Jadaka (Killmonger's real name) was raised differently among other Wakandans as an African American in a multicultural society in which had different perceptions towards certain races. Thus, grew his motivations to enunciate his ideas in complex qualities as a High Machiavellian, cold emotionality, lack of empathy, and manipulation

#### **1. Cold emotionality**

Cold emotionality or cold cognition can be defined as the ability of cognitive processing of information that is independent of emotional involvement (Roiser, 2013, p. 139). People with cold emotionality prioritize logic over emotional matter. As a person of cold emotionality, Killmonger managed to achieve his ultimate goal in any logical way possible and not caring about the good or bad outcome in which he had to take responsible of. Killmonger motives might be proven by his wanting to develop and strengthen his mentality during the years of his service in the U.S Navy SEAL (The United States of Navy Sea, Air, and Land) from such a young age. He became a leader of the Joint Special Operation Command ghost unit as a mercenary who led assassinations and took down governments. His intelligence and genius tactics made him a skilled operative and an expert martial artist. As if he had set frameworks to build his character based on his educational and professional journey, Killmonger tirelessly heading to his final goal; bring



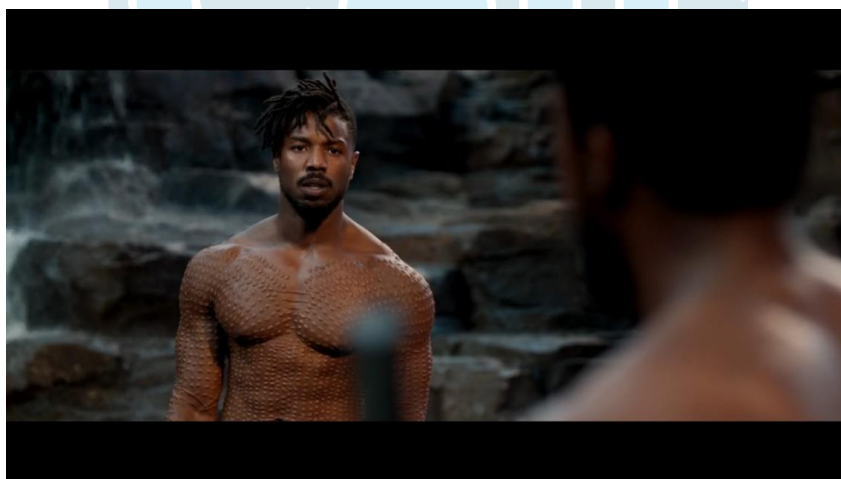
justice to every African who had been oppressed. Hence, his tendency to eliminate those who in vain had been his way to survive which simultaneously detached himself from fundamental emotions which common people should have. This is where cold emotionality took over.

**[Data 6] Scene: Killmonger Vs. T'Challa**

After showing up unnoticed, Killmonger challenged T'Challa in a battle to fight his rights as a king of Wakanda. Witnessed by all four Wakandan tribes, Killmonger was to show his persistence to overthrow his cousin's throne and life (01:18:01 - 01:18:48).

T'Challa : This is your last chance. Throw down your weapons, and we can handle this another way.

Killmonger: I lived my entire life waitin' for this moment. I trained, I lied, I killed...just to get here. I killed in America, Afghanistan...Iraq. I took life from my own brothers and sisters right here on this continent. And all this death... just so I could kill you. (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 81-82)



**Figure 2:**  
**T'Challa and Killmonger's fight**

Killmonger's statement above made clear of his likeliness to kill people like it was a 'video game'. The scene was visually important as an effort of Killmonger to pragmatically warn his cousin's comfortable royal rights had

nothing if compared to the ‘hard life’ he had to put up with. He held no doubts about killing his own families if that was what he had to do to reach greatness because Killmonger thought he deserved the throne. The scene was visualized by acts of removing his shirt, uncovered his body full dappled with patterned scarification; an African body art tradition represented strength, courage, and bravery. Meanwhile, in Killmonger's case, each scar represented each killing. People started naming him Killmonger instead of his legal name, Erik Stevens because of his thirst for killing is represented in his body. In Killmonger Vs T'Challa scene, Killmonger emphasized his intonation in words, such as, “I trained”, “I lied”, “I killed”, “I killed in America, Afghanistan, Iraq” (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 81-82), as his sacrifice to get to Wakanda; he did unforgiven things just to create a greater good for all people. He did all those logical things because he wanted to be recognized as strong.

## 2. Lack of empathy

A high Machiavellian is most likely to be lacking emotional intelligence as well as empathy as one of the elements. It is proven by Killmonger in the following scene where Killmonger is expected to be sad losing his father but did otherwise.

### [Data 7] Scene: Ancestral Plane

N'Jadaka and had a conversation with his father's spirit in the Ancestral Plane (01:27:18 – 01:27:48).

N'Jobu : They will say you are lost

N'Jadaka : But I'm right here.

N'Jobu : No tears for me?

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

N'Jobu : Well, look at what I have done. [camera shoots Killmonger dressed up as N'Jadaka crying and wiping his tears] I should've taken you back long ago. (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 89-90)

Empathy is divided into two parts: cognitive and affective. Cognitive empathy is defined as the capacity to recognize and understand another person's mental state (Smith, 2010). Based on the data above, it was best to analyze Killmonger's affective empathy; the ability to feel and share another

person's emotions. Empathy involves the ability to match other emotions, while others believe that empathy involves being tenderhearted toward another person (Lopez, et al., 2011, p. 267).

A research conducted by (Heym et al., 2019) showed that Dark Triad traits (Narcissism, Psychopathy, and Machiavellianism) shared at least one affective empathy deficit reflected in selfishness and tough mindedness. Killmonger's lack of empathy was shown in the sentence of data 7, "Everybody dies. It's just life around here" (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 89-90), when his father was expecting love from his son expressed in tears of grief. N'Jobu's regrets made Killmonger show his emotions of guilt and a slight recognition of what he had become. The word 'lost' might represent how far the damage Killmonger had done to himself, unconsciously. N'Jobu might have planted so many lessons of becoming a tough person into his son without realizing the tables would be turned on him. In this state, Killmonger had failed to feel his father's emotional level in which he was hoping for some kind of sorrow over his death. He had been detached so much from empathy and the ability to care for others as he slowly had gained power solemnly to better current society. He could not waste his time for the emotional state of consciousness that eventually resulted in tough mindedness, unsentimental in temper or outlook. Consequently, Killmonger as a high Machiavellian was often connected with Alexithymia; personality characterized by the inability to identify and describe emotions experienced by oneself or others.

Killmonger might think that his father's death was just another case of Black Nationalism which had gone bad. Any African Americans who fought for their independence were more likely to die in violence. Therefore, Killmonger grew to show fewer emotions and keep moving forward. He learned to keep the secure path in his mind to not be emotionally attached to others because empathy increases the potential vulnerability of either party. Therefore, 'live in them' was not the choice for him to pursue. He ignored his sense of emotional attachments so that his enemies could not sense his fear or vulnerability as a tool to threaten him.

### 3. Manipulative

Killmonger's quality as a High Machiavellian is seen by his ability to manipulate others and keep control of the people for his own good. Machiavellianism and manipulative behavior are social constructs in any of social and philosophical manifestations (Ibragimov et al., 2018a, p. 404). In current developing political and economic states, one of the communicating

problems involves Machiavellian adults who tend to manipulate others in which they also employ tactics accompanied by a sense of rivalry and manipulation (Ibragimov et al., 2018a, p. 405). At times, Killmonger is inclined to influence others so that they would have a different perception of him through indirect tactics.

Intending to close any opportunities for some strangers to follow his steps in terms of working with Klaue, an international criminal and underground black-market arms dealer, Killmonger involved himself in a relationship to seek a partner whom he can trust; Linda, as his criminal associate and lover. They teamed up as criminals and got involved in Klaue's routine of smuggling valuable antiques. According to Brewer et al., (2015), Machiavellian men and women do however enter long-term relationships, and these provide valuable opportunities for manipulation and exploitation of the partner. Even the movie did not give a complete look of how deep their relationship was, it can be seen that Linda was emotionally manipulated by his lover, proven by the following data:

**[Data 8] Scene: Killmonger kills Linda**

By the time Killmonger shot the pilot because of his betrayal towards Klaue, the criminal grabbed Linda as a hostage, Killmonger did not make the shot to kill him (01:02:23 – 01:02:43).

Killmonger : Oh, I ain't worried about the money, bro. I know you good at it. On our way back, just drop us off in Wakanda.

Klaue : You don't want to go there, boy.

Killmonger: Yeah, I do [shows gun].

Klaue : Drop it! Or your little Bonnie and Clyde routine ends today. Put your gun down now!

Linda : **I'm sorry [panting]. I'm sorry, Erik. It's gonna be okay.**

Killmonger : [shoots Linda] (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 68)

From the scene above, we could observe how Linda manifested her love and devotion to Erik's side. By saying "I'm sorry, it's gonna be okay", Linda gave Killmonger her approval of killing her because Klaue took her hostage. On the other hand, Killmonger did not think twice to get rid of her, another obstacle to get into his way to Wakanda.

In relation to an international article entitled *Proposing a Multidimensional Machiavellianism Conceptualization* by Rauthmann and Will (2011), High Machiavellians tend to "manage" their appearance and demeanor in social situations; emphasize and/or exaggerate positive aspects. In the process of their relationship, Killmonger made some efforts for himself to create an ideal image of a lover according to Linda in which they would do anything as long as they are together. High Machiavellians also tend to initiate and control a relationship (Christie & Geis, 1970). This explained Killmonger's dominating side on taking control of his romantic relationship with Linda, reflected in the way he had become the leading 'actor' in their criminal acts, such as smuggling Wakanda's natural resources and killing people; Linda was always the one who supported him.

The following scene showed Killmonger's ability to manipulate the nation's guard, W'Kabi, as a way to prove himself worthy to enter Wakanda. It was important to bear in mind that Wakanda was not a country that everyone could easily enter. Wakandans created the usual third-world country façade with its high-tech systems at the country's border so that any foreigners could not see the extravagant urban life inside. That being said, with its tight security system, Killmonger had to present himself legitimately for the guards to let him in.

#### **[Data 9] Scene: Killmonger enters Wakanda**

Killmonger entered Wakanda's border bringing a body bag of Ulysses Klaue. He was asked by W'Kabi, leader of the Border Tribe (01:08:04 - 01:08:07).

W'Kabi : What is this?

Killmonger : **Just a little gift.** (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, pp. 73)

It appeared that Killmonger designed and ran his plans meticulously; from working alongside Ulysses Klaue, involving himself in a relationship with a functional sidekick, until murdering them cold-bloodedly. This kept Killmonger gaining his power and maintaining it so that his idea of the perfect

monarchy and black domination would be realized the same way Lucius Junius Brutus killed his children to save Rome in 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

The data above might also be inferred as a way to seek support from W’Kabi whose parents were bombed by Klaue. His prolonged hatred had been causing him hunting for Klaue’s head for three decades. Therefore, Killmonger wanted to seek for W’Kabi’s support by killing Klaue, proven by the sentence of “just a little gift”. W’Kabi’s personal matters were taken as advantages by the villain; as Killmonger walked his first steps in Wakanda, he might have just obtained his presence as a recognition of a hero instead of a criminal. Killmonger manipulated W’Kabi into thinking he was the real hero to kill a criminal like Klaue but in reality, he intentionally killed Klaue, the man he was working just to create the ‘hero-like’ image. Machiavelli (1985, p. 40) supported ways in creating alliances with people and seek for supports so that a Machiavellian could be protected at all costs. Killmonger was smart enough to use his tactics on W’Kabi, Wakanda’s royal advisor for the sake of protection because he knew he, as an outsider, as his father mentioned before, would not be welcomed in his own country.

Surely, W’Kabi, as Wakanda’s general, became the first person to defend Killmonger after he claimed his throne, as king of Wakanda. Killmonger’s attempt to free Wakanda from isolation was successfully supported proven by the following scene:

**[Data 10] Scene: Throne**

Killmonger led the first meeting as king after defeating T’Challa. He persuaded elders and generals to be supportive of his Black Revolution mission (01:30:50 - 01:31:16).

Okoye : Wakanda has survived for so long...by fighting when only absolutely necessary.

**W’Kabi: Wakanda survived in the past this way, yes. But the world is changing, General. Elders, it is getting smaller. The outside world is catching up... and soon it will be the conquerors or the conquered. I’d rather be the former. (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 92**

The data above was proof that Killmonger’s attempt to manipulate W’Kabi had succeeded. He let W’Kabi defended him on purpose so it did not seem that Killmonger pushed his way onto the Revolution. W’Kabi became the

second person in Wakanda who fully saw Killmonger's plan as necessary access to gain independence among blacks, proven by his sentence, "The outside world is catching up...and soon it will be the conquerors or the conquered. I'd rather be the former" (Coogler, & Cole, 2016, p. 92).

## CONCLUSION

This article showed the complex behaviors known as Machiavellianism of a secondary character named Erik Killmonger in the *Black Panther* movie. The study discussed a complete outlook of his character in three dimensions; namely physiological, sociological, and psychological. The study resulted in the elaborated analysis of three great parts.

Firstly, Killmonger's appearance as an African-American male was supported by his sociological surroundings in Oakland, the United States which one of the worst states in the United States experiencing racial segregationism. Furthermore, his psychological dimensions were known to be ambitious and militant nationalist who wished to end racism. Secondly, black history explained Killmonger's behavior as an angry African-American who was not happy with his living conditions and came to a conclusion for actualizing Malcolm X's mission on Black Nationalism; a call for blacks into a solidarity that excessively seeks freedom, equality, and justice, in order to prosper independently in politics and economics. This part of the analysis was supported by Malcolm X's speech as it resembled Killmonger's mission.

Lastly, Killmonger's High Machiavellian most-seen qualities in cold emotionality, lack of empathy, and manipulative efforts. The results of his tridimensional elements and influence of Black Nationalism were validated in his High Machiavellian qualities. He was portrayed to not hesitate to eliminate and make a fool of anything or anyone who got into his way because he was the only person in the movie who could think of the liberty of black people by implementing the Black Revolution. Materials of the study might help readers to appreciate intricate efforts a writer should go through in creating a character, regardless of its status, primary or secondary character. In the course of the study, innovative questions and incoming problems need to be solved. It is necessary to continue the study on the character development understanding and its connections to the current situation in the United States in which people continuously seek for equality, not just by race but also social class and economic status.



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