

## **Beyond Vibranium: Revealing Power Dynamics in Black Panther: 'Wakanda Forever' Movie (2022)**

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*"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others  
above yourselves, not looking to your interests but each of you  
to the interests of the others"*  
- **Philippians 2:3-4 (NIV)**

### **ABSTRACT**

This study aims to show how power operates through knowledge and control, which plays out in the movie *"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever (2022)"*, for its precious source, vibranium. Employing the analytical framework by Foucault's theory of *Power: Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1977)*. The analysis unveils a perspective towards *'isolation vs global responsibility'* exploring deeply into the details of the movie. The visual effects and the cameraworks of the cinematography and the selected utterances were also conveyed along with the analysis of the movie. As a result: **1)** The movie depicts Wakanda's view of vibranium as a global responsibility, aligning with Foucault's idea of power permeating the entire social body. **2)** Wakanda's efforts to protect vibranium triggers the exercise of sovereign power, reflecting the centralized control over valuable resources. **3)** The tension between *'isolation'* and *'global responsibility'*, with Queen Ramonda resulting in refusal to trade vibranium due to its dangers and ethical concerns about sharing advanced technology for power abuse. The power dynamics in Wakanda help shape the identity and decision-making. The analysis of the issue of power dynamics of isolation, global responsibility in the movie leads to the insight and understanding about the ethics of sharing technology that provide rich material for a better good.

**Keyword:** *foucault, power structure, isolation, global responsibility, power dynamics*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Power, a strong force in how humans live together, is about being able to control and influence others. It affects how societies are organized, humans relate to each other, and share resources. This article explores the many sides of power and how it impacts human lives – how institutions are run, and how people resist. By looking closely at how power works, it helps decipher how it shapes communities and the way people live. *"Power is not only repressive but also productive, as it creates new subjects, knowledge, and discourses. Power is exercised through various mechanisms such as discipline, surveillance, and normalization, which shape individuals' behavior and thoughts"* (Foucault, M. 1977). It means that power not only restricts or controls but actively contributes to shaping and generating different aspects of society, including the creation of identities, knowledge systems, and ways of communicating.

In addition, *"Knowledge is not made for understanding: it is made for cutting."* (Foucault, 1972, p. 133) The concept of power-knowledge highlights the interconnectedness of power and knowledge production. Power does not only suppress or repress knowledge but also actively shapes and generates it. This relationship is crucial in understanding how dominant discourses and truths are established and maintained. *"Power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth."* (Foucault, 1982, p. 212) Power-identity refers to the role of power in shaping individual and collective identities. Power structures influence how people perceive themselves and others, creating frameworks for self-understanding and social relations. This concept emphasizes that power is not merely repressive but also constitutive of identities. Moreover, *"The technique of government essentially consists in this: to make the population, in its entirety, productive and useful."* (Foucault, 2007, p. 94) Governmentality refers to the manner in which power is employed through diverse methods and plans to oversee and direct individuals and communities. It encompasses the development of a *"governmental rationality"* with the objective of optimizing and regulating different facets of existence, including health, economy, and security. Importantly, governmentality extends beyond governmental bodies and extends into social institutions and individual behaviors. Hence, *"Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power."* (Foucault, 1978, p. 95) Power resistance suggests that power relations are never static or absolute. Instead, they are constantly contested and challenged by individuals and groups who resist or subvert dominant power structures. This concept highlights the dynamic nature of power and the inherent potential for resistance within power relationships.

*"Black Panther; Wakanda Forever"* is a superhero film from the United States that was released in 2022. It is based on Marvel Comics. Serves as a sequel to the 2018 film *"Black Panther."* This movie is the thirty installment in the *Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU)* produced by *Marvel Studios* and distributed by *Walt Disney Studios Motion Pictures*. In this film Letitia Wright plays the role of Shuri/Black Panther while Ryan Coogler directs it with writing credits given to Joe Robert Cole. The movie received twelve nominations for awards. Ultimately won ten accolades. Among its achievements was being recognized as an Outstanding Motion Picture and Angela Bassett's exceptional performance earning her an Outstanding Supporting Actress, in a Motion Picture award.

Taking place after King T'Challa's passing, *'Black Panther; Wakanda Forever'* pursues the efforts of Wakandan authorities to protect their nation. With ease, Namor overcomes Wakanda's sophisticated security to confront Ramonda and Shuri. Invoking Wakanda as the cause of the vibranium race. Informed by CIA agent Everett K. Ross that the scientist in question is MIT student Riri Williams, Shuri and Okoye travel to the institution to confront her. The FBI and Namor's soldiers are after the group before Shuri and Williams are taken underwater to see Namor after Okoye is defeated. Ramonda, who is enraged by

Okoye's inability to defend Shuri, removes her from her position as general of the Dora Milaje and goes looking for Nakia, who has been residing in Haiti since The Blip. Namor introduces Shuri to Talokan, an undersea country wealthy in vibranium that he has long kept secret from the rest of the world. Namor suggests an alliance with Wakanda against the surface world in retaliation for the surface world's enslavement of the Maya, but if they refuse, he'll destroy Wakanda.

Having watched the movie as the plot develops, the critical power dynamic issues can be found; therefore, Power theory by Mitchel Foucault is used to analyze the power structure in the movie. In this study, the power structure is limited to *power knowledge, power identity, governmentality, and power resistance*. It is expected that the study can provide a different perspective towards the power shown in the movie in order to increase the awareness of this particular issue. How the interplay of power knowledge and governmentality shapes individuals' construction of identity within societal structures, and what role power resistance plays in challenging or reinforcing these constructions will be discussed in detail.

### Binary opposition

Isolation	Global Responsibility
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"The individual is not an atom, a point, or a sovereign unity; it is a historical product that is constituted through practices that make it possible to identify, to name, to classify, to judge, to punish, and so on" (Foucault, 1977, p. 19).</i> It points to the idea that individual identity is not isolated but rather shaped by external forces and power structures.</li> <li>● Wakanda's control over vibranium. The exploitation of this resource shapes their destiny and sets them apart from other nations.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● <i>"The problem of government is not to juxtapose rights and duties, but to establish a power relation such that individuals are capable of acting within it on the basis of rights, and at the same time, are led to define themselves, their identities, and their interests in relation to this power relation" (Foucault, 1982, p. 222).</i> This highlights the interconnectedness of individuals and power dynamics, suggesting a responsibility to navigate and shape these relations.</li> <li>● Shuri, played by Letitia Wright, is a smart scientist and princess of Wakanda. She shows resistance by working hard to keep Wakanda's advanced technology safe. She wants to make sure it does not end up in the wrong hands and uses it to make things better for her people.</li> </ul>

## METHOD

This study employed qualitative research to analyze power dynamics in selected movie's samples objectively. The goal was to gain insights into various ways power was portrayed within these cinematic narratives. Data collection involved multiple methods. Visual data, comprising screenshots and frames, was systematically gathered to highlight key instances of power relations. Additionally, verbal and non-verbal expressions were transcribed to enhance our understanding of power dynamics.

Cinematographic analysis, focusing on framing, lighting, and camera angles, was conducted to objectively examine the impact of visual elements on the representation of power dynamics in the selected films. The research was guided by Michel Foucault's *'Power'* theory, providing a theoretical framework for the objective interpretation of power relationships within the cinematic context. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns related to power, control, resistance, and negotiation, contributing to an objective understanding of power dynamics in cinematic narratives. This theory mainly criticizes several aspects such as power and identity, power and global politics, resistance and subversion and others, the impact of history, the role of institutions. However, in the analysis, the power theory was narrowed to *isolation vs global responsibility* conflict discussion in order to reveal the power dynamics in the movie, *"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever."*

## DISCUSSION

The most wanted item from Wakanda is vibranium, the whole world is always eyeing vibranium to fall into their hands so they can become more advanced and stronger than others, because vibranium contains various elements that are stronger than other elements with potential for advancement various kinds of technology from vibranium, many countries have tried to get vibranium by making vibranium detectors and trying to infiltrate the Wakanda laboratory, by having vibranium, a party can get an advantage in various technologies including military technology.

In this part of the movie, Shuri, who is T'Challa's sister, is trying really hard to bring him back to life by making a special herb. Unfortunately, she gets some really sad news from the queen – it is too late, and T'Challa is gone. The movie shows Shuri feeling super sad, and the camera moves slowly to catch every bit of her sadness. After that, we see Wakandans saying goodbye to T'Challa at his funeral. Some parts are in slow motion to make us feel how sad everyone is about losing their hero.

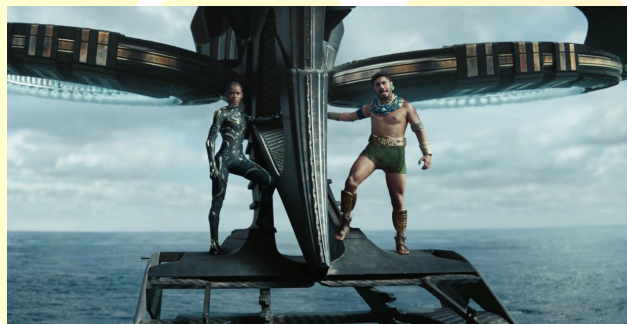


Queen Ramonda, T'Challa's mom, is not only sad about losing her son but also worried because Vibranium, a special thing in Wakanda, might be traded. She goes to a big meeting where people from other places want Wakanda to trade Vibranium with them. They think Wakanda should share and work together, but Queen Ramonda says a strong "no" to trading Vibranium. She does not want to do it because it is not just about the special material; it is about how powerful and risky it can be for anyone who has it. She says, *"Never trade Vibranium in any circumstances."* After the loss of T'Challa, Wakandans feel it is important to keep the vibranium as part of their global responsibility. *"Power is not something that a*



*group or individual possesses; it is a mode of action that permeates the entire social body" (Foucault, M., pg. 91-92, 1978).* In the context of global responsibility, the statement suggests that power is not solely concentrated in the hands of specific nations or groups of individuals. Instead, it implies that the influence and actions of power extend throughout the entire community. In the context of the possession of Vibranium, Wakanda takes part in the global responsibility by carefully keeping it from irresponsible people. This framework involves recognizing that power dynamics are not confined to particular interests of powers or entities but are woven into the whole international relations. This connects with what Foucault said about isolation, *"Isolation is a technique that does not seek to extract a confession by forcing the individual to assume the truth of his crime, but to make him experience the truth of his isolation."* – This statement means that when someone is put in isolation, it is not about making them admit to a crime by force. Instead, the goal is to make them feel the truth of being alone. The idea is to create a situation where the person is cut off from others, making them think about what they have done and realize the impact of their actions. It is more about the emotional and mental effects of being alone, encouraging self-reflection and understanding the consequences of their behavior.

On another occasion, the head of the Talokan war troop stands out among others, the scene takes a wide shot capturing the two characters side by side, showing the team-up nuance. The lighting intentionally highlights the leaders, making them the focal point, while the rest of the troops are deliberately shaded to highlight the leader's appearance. This visual



arrangement reinforces the leader's central role as they issue the command to eliminate the scientist, *"Kill the scientist, I'll deal with the witnesses."* This situation arises because external powers, represented by foreign intelligence agencies, have roamed upon their territory. These agencies are on a quest for the highly priceless metal, Vibranium, intending to use it for weapon production. As Talokan conveys this information, a subtle hint of malevolence can be seen, evident in their instructions to launch an attack. This marks the initiation of Talokan's struggle against the sinister foreign nation attempting to steal the Vibranium. Other nations respond by developing technology, specifically a Vibranium detection device. Through this technology, they discern that the primary source of Vibranium distribution is submerged under the sea, precisely in Talokan. *"Sovereign power, is characterized by its ability to decide upon life and death, to exercise the right to kill or let live. This form of power is centralized and absolute, often associated with monarchs or states, and is used to establish and maintain control over subjects through the threat or actual use of violence."* (Foucault, M, 1990, pg.136). Sovereign power, as articulated by

Michel Foucault, represents a form of authority distinguished by its pivotal capacity to make decisions regarding life and death. In essence, it holds the prerogative to either permit existence or to bring it to an end. This type of power is marked by its centralized and absolute nature, typically associated with entities such as monarchs or states. The wielders of sovereign power exercise control over their subjects by utilizing weapons and violence, whether through the overt threat or the actual implementation of lethal force.

In sovereign power structures, the authority to determine the fate of individuals rests within a concentrated locus of power. Monarchs or states, as a form of sovereign power, possess the ultimate say in matters of life and death. This authority extends beyond the mere application of laws and regulations; it controls the very existential essence of individuals within the governed population. The exercise of sovereign power involves not only the capability to end life but also the strategic decision-making to allow it to continue. This dual authority to kill or let live grants a distinct and superior dominance to those holding sovereign power.

The order to get rid of the scientists is because another country is trying to forcefully take Wakanda's valuable resources. The movie shows the leaders of Wakanda facing tough decisions about their global responsibilities while protecting their culture. Wakanda is shown as a really advanced nation with cool technology and important stuff like vibranium. The movie suggests that Wakanda, with its advanced medical tech and lots of resources, could help less advanced countries with things like aid and development. The story also tackles the question of whether Wakanda should share its cool technology with the rest of the world. This becomes a big theme, exploring what could happen if they decide to share – the good and bad. It's like the real-world debates about sharing technology and how it can affect global fairness. The movie gives us a look at Wakanda dealing with these questions, making us think about how we use and share advanced technologies in the



real world. *"The individual is not someone who hesitated between this and that, between a virtue and a vice, between a good and a bad action; he is not the choosing subject, he is physically placed at the point where several networks intersect and in which several power relations cross and oppose one another."* (Foucault, 1982, p. 212)." Foucault is emphasizing that an individual's actions and decisions are not solely a result of personal choices or internal contemplation. Rather, the individual is embedded in a complex web of societal influences, power structures, and intersecting forces. The quote highlights the idea that actions are shaped and constrained by the dynamic interactions of power relations in the broader

social context. In the film context, they will do anything to get what they want even to the very root of the resource for the profits of the elites. Foucault's (1976) argued, "*People know what they do; frequently they know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does.*" In this statement Foucault explains that individuals often have an understanding of their actions and can provide reasons for why they engage in certain behaviors. However, the crucial aspect that eludes their awareness is the broader impact and significance of what their actions contribute to. Foucault is highlighting a distinction between the personal awareness of one's actions and the often-unrecognized consequences or implications of those actions within the larger societal context. People may have a clear understanding of their immediate motives or intentions, but they might lack insight into the broader repercussions of their conduct: the impact of the behavior of a community that does not think about the fate of others.

This contrasts with Nakia's concurrent situation, characterized by a warmer color palette. The deliberate blur and minimal background detail direct the viewer's focus to the characters engaged in conversation. In this scene, Namor states, "*For centuries, the surface nations have conquered and enslaved people like us. Over resources.*" This statement serves as a reminder that both Wakanda and Talokan face threats not only for their vibranium but also due to foreign interests seeking to exploit their dependence on this resource to manipulate their actions and decisions. Consequently, external manipulation may manifest through military intervention, political influence, or alternative means.

In the subsequent scene, the camera employs multiple medium shots, capturing Queen Ramonda seated among global elites during a conference. She asserts, "*I'm the queen of the most powerful nation in the world,*" with the lighting directing attention to her as the focal point, blurring the background. Following this, she declares, "*It has been our policy to never trade vibranium under any circumstance. Not because of the dangerous potential of vibranium, but because of the dangerous potential of you.*" This statement reflects the global elites' persistent pressure on Wakanda to share their resources, a refusal rooted in the fear of vibranium falling into the wrong hands. "*Isolation, like other forms of punishment, is a technique of power; a way of establishing authority through humiliation and the reduction of the individual to silence.*" (Foucault, 1977, p. 196). According to Michel Foucault, isolation, just like other ways of punishing people, is a method of power. It is a way for those in charge to establish control by making individuals feel humiliated and silenced. So, isolation is not just about keeping someone alone; it is a deliberate way of using power to dominate and control. It goes beyond physical separation and also affects a person's mind, making them silent and submissive. Foucault is pointing out that isolating someone is a tool powerful people use to reinforce their authority and control over others. This aligns with Queen Ramonda's reluctance to trade vibranium, emphasizing the societal consequences and power dynamics at play. As tensions rise, the global elites, displeased with Wakanda's resistance, attempt to covertly steal vibranium. Caught in the act by the Wakandans, a confrontation ensues. Queen Ramonda's

assertion, "We mourn the loss of our king, but do not think for a second that Wakanda has lost the ability to protect their resources," reflects resilience against external threats.

After Okoye's mistake resulting in Princess Shuri's kidnapping, she is ousted from her role as one of the Dora Milaje. In her plea, Okoye utters, "*I beg of you, I have given everything,*" highlighting her profound heartbreak at losing her position as the general of the Dora Milaje. This aligns with Foucault's perspective on power structures, emphasizing the hierarchical arrangements and struggles within a society. As Foucault argued, "*The power to isolate, to divide, to separate, to control, to determine the movements and conduct of individuals, is an essential element in the exercise of political power.*" (Foucault, 1978, p. 155). This means that the power to influence and shape the movements and behaviors of individuals through isolation and division is a crucial tool in the exercise of political authority. The power to determine who is isolated or kept separate from certain activities or groups is a potent means by which political authorities establish dominance and regulate societal behavior. Okoye's attempt to independently aid Princess Shuri, allowing her involvement in the mission, resulted in her punishment. This situation exposes the power dynamics within the Wakandan society, particularly Okoye's position as an elite soldier commanded by the queen. According to Foucault (1977), such disciplinary power often involves techniques of power, such as punishment, to establish authority. In this scenario, Okoye's role demands obedience to the queen's commands, regardless of their nature—whether kind or harsh, equal or unequal. The scene illustrates the consequences individuals face when they deviate from established power, experiencing the struggles within the Wakandan clan. Foucault once said, "*Power is not an institution, and not a structure; neither is it a certain strength we are endowed with; it is the name that one attributes to a complex strategical situation in a particular society.*" (Foucault, 1990). He suggests that power comes from how people, groups, and institutions interact in a society. Calling certain individuals or groups "*powerful*" is a way of talking about the complex mix of control, influence, and authority that shapes how people relate to each other. In Wakanda, their fight to protect the community comes from feeling restricted.



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On another occasion, after Namor's sudden arrival, this caused a panic between the elders and queen, Namor blamed Wakanda for revealing vibranium making the Talokan's existence no longer hidden, Namor requested the queen to find the scientist and let him kill her, as the queen talks with the elder for guidance, one of the elders said "*And we have no Black Panther to protect us.*" Black Panther has been the ideal leader that represents the clan's pride and identity. At this moment, they are scared and





powerless against a vibranium rich civilization, Wakanda is also a vibranium civilization, but ever since Namor manage to past through Wakanda's defenses like nothing and the death of king T'challa has made Wakanda lose his name and power identity. In a pivotal moment during the conflict, Namor urgently conveys to Shuri, *'Without the Black Panther; Wakanda will fall,'* as he attempts to

convince her to engage with the external world searching for their Vibranium. The camera captures a brief but impactful medium shot, showcasing the relaxed yet serious conversation between Namor and Shuri. For Wakanda, the absence of the Black Panther signifies a significant setback, as he has been a powerful and influential figure in the community.

Despite the conflicts and violence arising from ideological disparities between Wakanda and Talokan, there exists the potential for reconciliation, enabling them to collectively attain their objectives. As articulated by Foucault (1980), *"I don't say that power is everywhere. But I say that there isn't one place where it is not."* Foucault's assertion



emphasizes that power extends beyond specific institutions or individuals, and also deep into society. It clarifies how individuals perceive and engage with their surroundings. The current scene features a dialogue between the two characters, shown by close-up shots for each exchange. The use of the fire setting and dim color signifies an ending of the conflict

## CONCLUSION

Based on the provided text, the conclusion drawn for the study focusing on the interplay of power, knowledge, and governmentality in shaping individuals' construction of identity within societal structures can be summarized with the following key points: Global Responsibility and Power Dynamics: The movie depicts Wakanda's possession of vibranium as a global responsibility rather than a mere individual or group possession. Queen Ramonda firmly rejects trading vibranium, emphasizing the potential risks and power associated with it. This aligns with Michel Foucault's notion that power is not concentrated solely in specific nations or groups but permeates the entire social body. The study explores the concept of power as a mode of action that extends beyond isolated interests, connecting with broader international relations. In terms of Sovereign Power and Control Over Resources: the study shows the

concept of sovereign power, characterized by the authority to decide upon life and death. In Wakanda, the struggle to protect vibranium from external threats demonstrates the centralized and absolute nature of sovereign power. The leaders face tough decisions about their global responsibilities while safeguarding their cultural identity. The use of sovereign power involves not only the control over subjects but also the strategic decision-making regarding the valuable resources, such as vibranium. Isolation vs. Global Fairness and Technological Sharing: The movie explores the theme of isolation and its impact on individuals within the societal context. Queen Ramonda's refusal to trade vibranium is rooted not just in its dangerous potential but also in the broader societal consequences of sharing it. This theme aligns with Foucault's perspective on isolation as a technique of power to establish authority. The movie raises questions about the ethical implications of sharing advanced technology. The conflict of isolation vs. global responsibility, as explored in the movie, provides a nuanced understanding of how power operates within societal structures, influencing identity construction and shaping the decisions of individuals and nations.

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