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Representation of Gender Equality in the Film Black Panther: Wakanda Forever

Siti Aurea Rivoni Nanlohy¹, Hamida Syari Harahap²

¹Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya University, Indonesia, 202010415013@mhs.ubharajaya.ac.id

²Bhayangkara Jakarta Raya University, Indonesia, hamida.syari@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id

Corresponding Author: hamida.syari@dsn.ubharajaya.ac.id¹

Abstract: This study analyzed the representation of gender equality in the film Black Panther: Wakanda Forever using John Fiske's semiotic model across seven key scenes. The findings reveal a strong and consistent portrayal of women in prominent roles within the public sphere, advanced technology, and leadership. Through assertive diplomacy, scientific genius, and heroic combat, characters like Queen Ramonda and Shuri effectively challenge traditional gender stereotypes. The analysis at the reality, representation, and ideological levels demonstrates how the film's visual and narrative elements meticulously construct and convey messages of female strength, authority, and intelligence, advocating for a society where power and competence are not limited by gender. The study concludes that Black Panther: Wakanda Forever serves as a powerful cultural text, effectively promoting gender equality and women's empowerment through its compelling characters and deliberate semiotic construction.

Keywords: Gender Equality, Black Panther: Wakanda Forever, Semiotic Analysis, Female Leadership, Subordination, Cultural Representation.

INTRODUCTION

Background

The discourse surrounding gender remains a critical global concern. According to the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index reported by weforum.org, no country has yet achieved full gender equality, with significant disparities persisting, particularly in political leadership (Zahidi, 2023). Gender, in this context, refers to the culturally and socially constructed differentiation of roles, functions, status, and responsibilities between men and women, rather than inherent biological distinctions (Jane, 2021).

Gender issues frequently highlight injustices, disproportionately affecting women. Prevailing stereotypes, such as the perception of women as weak, overly emotional, or incapable of leadership, often lead to the subordination of women's positions relative to men (Wati, 2023). The scarcity of female leaders is attributed to various factors, including cultural aspects that discourage women's participation in leadership roles and negative assumptions

surrounding female leadership (Safitri, 2021). Addressing these challenges necessitates a heightened awareness of gender equality, which advocates for equitable treatment for all individuals, free from discrimination based on gender (Jane, 2021). True gender equality is achieved when there are no longer differing perspectives between men and women, ensuring equal opportunities and fair access across all aspects of life (Sulistiyowati, 2020).

Entertainment media, particularly film, often serves as a powerful platform for portraying gender equality. As a complex mass medium, film utilizes video and sound to emotionally influence audiences through its visual and auditory narratives (Asri, 2020). Films can effectively communicate social or moral messages, functioning as an alternative medium for conveying meaning through their audio-visual artistry (Alfathoni, 2020). While often perceived as light entertainment, films also serve as an educational tool, allowing communicators to convey messages through storylines that elicit specific effects on the audience (Panuju, 2019; Prasetya, 2019).

One notable film that exemplifies this educational capacity and portrays gender equality is Marvel Studios' *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, released in 2022. As a sequel to the 2018 *Black Panther*, this film is lauded as ushering in a new era for the franchise by featuring prominent female superheroes, thereby demonstrating that leadership in Wakanda is not exclusive to men but extends to women (Ariyani, 2022). The Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), established in the 1960s, is a successful franchise known for its interconnected superhero films, TV shows, and comics (I.Net, 2022). *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* effectively addresses social issues prevalent in society by centralizing female characters, presenting an alternative femininity that challenges the notion of women as weak. The film's narrative follows Shuri, who, after the death of King T'Challa, steps up to fight injustice and a planned destruction of Wakanda by Namor from Talokan (Scott, 2022).

Following T'Challa's demise, Queen Ramonda assumes leadership, which is later passed to Shuri, T'Challa's technologically brilliant sister. Both characters embody strong leadership, with Ramonda demonstrating decisive governance and Shuri becoming Wakanda's protector and leader. This transition transforms Wakanda into a nation under female leadership, showcasing gender equality among superheroes through the personalities and roles of its characters (Scott, 2022). The film also explores themes of female leaders combating the exploitation of their nation's natural resources, reflecting realities of leadership and colonialism (Alfiyyah, 2022). This portrayal aligns with African philosophical principles like Ubuntu, which emphasizes ethical and effective leadership characterized by care for others, human interconnectedness, and the inclusion of female leadership (Poltera & Schreiner, 2019, cited in Asimwe, 2023).

Given the compelling portrayal of gender equality through characters like Shuri and Queen Ramonda in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, this study aims to delve deeper into how these representations are constructed. Utilizing John Fiske's semiotic theory, which is well-suited for analyzing moving images (Fiske, 2003, cited in Vera, 2015), this research will examine the film's social codes across three levels: reality (appearance, dress, make-up, environment, behavior, gesture, expression), representation (camera, lighting, editing, music, sound), and ideology (feminism, patriarchy, materialism). By analyzing the various signs embedded within the film, this study seeks to understand the representation of gender equality in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Therefore, this research is titled "Representation of Gender Equality in the Film Black Panther Wakanda Forever."

Research Objectives

To understand the representation of gender equality in the film "Black Panther Wakanda Forever," John Fiske's semiotic theory model was used. This allows for a clear understanding of the film's scenes and the message to be effectively conveyed to the public.

Theoretical Framework

To effectively analyze the cultural representation in the film, this study employs a combined framework rooted in Gender Studies and Semiotics.

Gender and Gender Equality Concepts

The conceptual foundation begins with a clear understanding of Gender and Gender Equality. Gender is distinct from biological sex; it refers to the psychological, social, and cultural characteristics associated with being male or female, which are learned and mutable (Jane, 2021). A key concern within gender studies is the persistence of Gender Subordination, where women are systematically placed in secondary roles and their capabilities undervalued (Wati, 2023).

Gender Equality is the core concept being analyzed. It advocates for equal access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes regardless of gender (Sulistyowati, 2020). This includes challenging the binary assumption of "natural" or *kodrati* roles and recognizing the full potential of women in all spheres, including the workforce and leadership positions (*Wanita Karir*, as discussed by Utaminingsih, 2017). The film, set in the technologically advanced and culturally distinct nation of Wakanda, offers a unique lens to observe a fictional society that appears to have moved beyond many real-world patriarchal limitations.

Semiotic Analysis

To decode the meanings embedded in the film, the theoretical lens of **Semiotics** is essential. Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and their interpretation (Vera, 2015). This approach moves beyond the surface-level plot to analyze the underlying cultural messages.

Following the model proposed by Roland Barthes, the analysis will proceed through three levels:

1. **Denotation:** The literal, objective, and descriptive level (e.g., a woman wearing a military uniform).
2. **Connotation:** The cultural, subjective, and associative meaning of the sign (e.g., the military uniform connotes power, authority, and combat readiness, challenging the traditional connotation of femininity).
3. **Myth/Ideology:** The broad, overarching societal belief or ideology reinforced or challenged by the sign (e.g., the collective signs of female military command challenge the myth of male supremacy in defense).

By applying semiotics, the research can systematically interpret how visual composition (Sulistiyawati, 2019), dialogue, character actions, and costuming contribute to the film's overall discourse on gender equality.

METHOD

Research Design

This study utilizes a qualitative research design with an interpretative approach. The primary goal is not to measure correlation or frequency, but to gain a deep understanding of the symbolic meanings and cultural messages constructed within the film text (Tono, 2015). The research treats the film, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), as a self-contained cultural artifact from which data can be systematically extracted and interpreted.

Data Source and Object of Analysis

The data source is the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022), directed by Ryan Coogler.

The object of analysis consists of selected key scenes, character compositions, dialogue exchanges, and visual motifs that are particularly rich in representing gender roles, female authority, and decision-making power. These specific units of analysis include:

1. Queen Ramonda's scenes: Focused on political discourse, parliamentary address, and emotional leadership.
2. Shuri's scenes: Focused on her role as chief scientific innovator, her psychological journey, and her eventual assumption of the Black Panther mantle.
3. Dora Milaje scenes: Focused on their military prowess, combat choreography, and their relationship with male figures (e.g., Everett Ross and M'Baku).

Data Collection Technique

Data was collected through **non-participant observation** of the film text. This involved multiple, intensive viewings to isolate and transcribe relevant dialogue, take detailed notes on visual signifiers (costume, setting, camera angles), and map the character arc and narrative positioning of the female protagonists. Specific moments were cataloged for semiotic breakdown.

Data Analysis Technique

The primary data analysis technique is **Semiotics**, specifically based on the two-stage model of denotation and connotation (Vera, 2015). The process of analysis follows these steps:

1. Data Reduction and Segmentation: Key scenes and sign-units (e.g., a specific uniform, a line of dialogue, a facial expression) representing female authority and agency are identified and isolated.
2. Denotative Description: Each isolated sign is objectively described (what is literally seen or heard). For example, "Shuri, a young woman, is shown working alone in a high-tech lab."
3. Connotative Interpretation: The cultural and thematic associations of the sign are interpreted. For example, the high-tech lab connotes intellectual power, innovation, and societal value, challenging the stereotype that technical genius is primarily male.
4. Myth/Ideological Synthesis: The combined connotative meanings are synthesized to reveal the overarching ideological message regarding gender equality the film is conveying. This stage links the film's signs to the existing theories of gender subordination (Wati, 2023) and female leadership (Safitri, 2021).
5. Validation and Triangulation: Interpretations are continually checked against the overall narrative context and the conceptual definitions of gender equality to ensure the validity and rigor of the analysis.

Data Analysis Unit

For this study, the researcher identified specific scenes from the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* that depict gender equality, serving as the primary units of analysis. These scenes were meticulously selected to identify embedded signs and meanings relevant to the research objective. The chosen scenes and their explanations are detailed in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 Unit of Analysis

No.	Time Stamp	Scene	Explanation
1.	20:26 - 23:13	Shuri in the Laboratory	This scene portrays Shuri as a genius scientist and a leader in technological innovation, highlighting women's intellectual capabilities.
2.	6:35 – 11:47	Queen Ramonda attends the United	This sequence demonstrates Queen Ramonda's assertiveness and courage in international diplomacy,

		Nations session	showcasing female leadership in global affairs.
3.	30:00 - 33:10	Queen Ramonda leads a Wakandan council meeting	This scene underscores that women possess equal rights in making critical decisions for the nation.
4.	1:58:50 – 2:00:00	Shuri trains to become a superhero	This scene illustrates Shuri as a resilient warrior with equal capacity and strength, challenging traditional gender roles.
5.	1:21:57 – 1:23:11	Queen Ramonda and Namor negotiate peace	In this scene, women exhibit strong diplomatic intelligence and negotiation skills, emphasizing their strategic prowess.
6.	1:57:36 – 1:58:03	Shuri becomes Black Panther	This depicts that women can assume heroic roles and serve as symbols of strength and leadership.
7.	2:14:55 – 2:19:32	Shuri's final battle against Namor	This scene showcases Shuri's leadership on the battlefield and her success in defeating her adversary, affirming female power in combat.

These selected scenes provide empirical data for the semiotic analysis, allowing for a detailed examination of how gender equality is represented through various cinematic codes and narrative elements within *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. Each scene serves as a critical point of investigation to uncover the underlying messages and ideological constructions related to women's roles, leadership, and capabilities within the film's narrative.

Result and Discussion

Research Findings

This section presents the semiotic analysis of selected scenes from *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*, highlighting their representation of gender equality through John Fiske's three levels of reality, representation, and ideology.

1. Shuri in the Laboratory (20:26 - 23:13)

This scene prominently features Shuri in her advanced laboratory, actively developing new technology for Wakanda. Her modern lab attire and skillful engagement with high-tech equipment visually establish her as a competent and genius scientist. The sophisticated laboratory environment itself signifies Wakanda's high regard for knowledge and innovation, with Shuri as a central figure. Cinematographically, medium close-up shots on Shuri emphasize her focus and expertise, while her confident and enthusiastic dialogue about her inventions reinforces her intellectual prowess. Ideologically, this scene powerfully portrays feminism by depicting a woman leading in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), challenging traditional gender roles in these fields.

2. Queen Ramonda Attends the United Nations Session (6:35 – 11:47)

Queen Ramonda delivers a resolute and powerful speech to world leaders at the United Nations. Her traditional Wakandan attire, adorned with vibranium accessories, symbolizes her national identity and pride. Her confident and firm expression, particularly when rejecting the exploitation of Wakanda's resources, conveys her authority. The international diplomatic setting of the UN underscores the significance of her message. Medium close-up shots effectively capture her facial expressions, emphasizing the gravity of her words. Her assertive dialogue firmly establishes Wakanda's position and warns against exploitation attempts. Ideologically, this scene champions feminism by showcasing a woman participating in, leading, and making crucial decisions in a prominent international forum.

3. Queen Ramonda Leads a Wakandan Council Meeting (30:00 - 33:10)

In this scene, Queen Ramonda presides over a Wakandan council meeting to address the emerging threat from Talokan. Her traditional ceremonial attire signifies her status and leadership. Her stern and serious expression, coupled with her dignified posture, projects authority. A long shot captures the entire council, highlighting the active participation of female figures like Okoye and Nakia, whose opinions are clearly valued. Ramonda's authoritative and articulate dialogue further indicates that their input is respected and considered. Ideologically, this scene reinforces feminism by demonstrating gender equality in governance, where women actively participate and hold significant decision-making power within Wakanda's leadership.

4. Shuri's Training (1:58:50 – 2:00:00)

This sequence illustrates Shuri's transformation from a scientist into a formidable warrior. Her superhero costume signifies her new identity, symbolizing strength and combat readiness. Her intense physical training and focused, serious facial expressions reflect her determination and commitment to mastering combat skills. Medium close-up shots highlight her physical prowess and resolve. Heroic music and powerful sound effects during her training amplify the impression of her transformation into a strong and courageous hero. Ideologically, this scene strongly supports feminism by portraying women as capable leaders and tough fighters, equal to their male counterparts, thereby emphasizing female empowerment and their capacity to contribute significantly in times of crisis.

5. Negotiation with Namor (1:21:57 – 1:23:11)

Queen Ramonda and Shuri engage in peace negotiations with Namor, showcasing their exceptional diplomatic intelligence and strong negotiation skills. Queen Ramonda's luxurious traditional Wakandan attire reflects her power and status. Her calm yet firm demeanor, combined with her controlled hand gestures and resolute facial expressions, conveys authority and dominance. The camera frequently focuses on the faces of Ramonda and Namor, using close-ups and low-angle shots to enhance their expressions and power dynamics. The tense yet serene background music underscores the seriousness of the discussion, while clear and firm dialogue highlights the importance of their words. Ideologically, this scene champions gender equality by presenting women as powerful leaders and astute diplomats, actively and dominantly participating in strategic decision-making and negotiations.

6. Shuri Becomes Black Panther (1:57:36 – 1:58:03)

Shuri's assumption of the Black Panther mantle is a highly symbolic moment. Her new Black Panther suit signifies her transition into a powerful hero. Her agile and strong movements in the costume demonstrate her combat skills, while her focused gaze upon the mask indicates her readiness for this new role. Close-up shots on Shuri as she dons the costume emphasize the significance of her transformation, accompanied by heroic music that underscores the moment's importance. Ideologically, this scene is a powerful feminist statement, showing a woman taking on a central, heroic role as Black Panther, proving that women can be strong and respected primary heroes.

7. Final Battle (2:14:55 – 2:19:32)

In the climactic battle against Namor, Shuri leads the Wakandan forces. Her Black Panther costume signifies her role as a superhero. Her resilient behavior, such as rising after being struck by Namor, and her coordinated fighting movements, demonstrate her leadership and expertise. Extreme long shots capture the intense battle action, while epic music enhances the dramatic atmosphere. Ideologically, this scene reinforces feminism by

demonstrating that women's strength and leadership are equal to men's in critical situations, showcasing Shuri's capacity to lead and triumph through intelligence and courage on the battlefield.

RESEARCH DISCUSSION

This section presents a detailed analysis of the research findings, focusing on the representation of gender equality in the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever*. The analysis, conducted through John Fiske's semiotic model, identified significant instances of gender equality across seven key scenes, revealing how the film constructs and conveys these themes.

The findings indicate that *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* strongly incorporates elements of gender equality, primarily through three overarching themes:

1. Gender Equality in the Public Sphere

The film powerfully portrays women's active participation and leadership in the public domain, extending beyond traditional domestic roles. Queen Ramonda, for instance, is depicted as a firm and dignified figure. Her assertive and courageous presence in international diplomacy, particularly during the United Nations session, underscores women's equal capacity for leadership and critical decision-making on a global stage. Ramonda's leadership is characterized by her authoritative communication, profound political knowledge, and unwavering resolve against attempts to exploit Wakanda's resources. Her diplomatic prowess and strong negotiation skills, as demonstrated in her interactions, highlight women's crucial role in diplomacy and politics (Hamida Syari Harahap & Anna Gustina Zainal, 2020, emphasized the importance of leadership communication for effective goal achievement). The film effectively illustrates how women can leverage their communication skills to forge agreements and manage conflicts.

2. Competence in Technology

Shuri's character in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* provides a compelling illustration of gender equality in science and technology. As Wakanda's lead scientist, Shuri is central to the development of advanced technology. Her exceptional intelligence and innovative spirit are not constrained by gender stereotypes; she is treated as an equal among her peers, with no discrimination based on her sex. Her advanced laboratory environment symbolizes Wakanda's valuing of talent and contribution over gender. This portrayal suggests that Wakanda, as a technologically advanced nation, transcends gender stereotypes, positioning Shuri as a symbol of female intellectual excellence and demonstrating that gender does not limit participation or contribution in scientific and technological advancement.

3. Women as Leaders

The film further represents gender equality through Shuri's leadership, particularly on the battlefield. Her strategic intelligence and courage in designing effective strategies against enemies underscore that women possess equal capabilities to men in both intellect and combat. Shuri's leadership is not merely based on physical strength but on meticulous analysis and planning, demonstrating that women's intelligence is equally vital in situations demanding quick thinking and strategic decisions.

The representation of gender equality in *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* is meticulously crafted through various semiotic elements across John Fiske's three analytical stages: Reality, Representation, and Ideology.

At the Reality Level, elements such as appearance, costume, makeup, environment, behavior, gestures, and expressions are central. Female characters like Shuri and Queen Ramonda are presented with strong and dominant appearances. Their often ornate and luxurious costumes signify their status and power within Wakandan society; Shuri's advanced

scientist attire, for example, highlights her role as an innovator, while Ramonda's regal garments reflect her leadership. Their makeup further emphasizes strength and courage, reinforcing their image as leaders and warriors. The film's environments are often neutral or emphasize Wakanda's advanced and powerful nationhood. The behavior and gestures of female characters consistently convey assertiveness and control; in council meetings, Ramonda and Shuri exhibit calm and firm demeanors, projecting authority. Their facial expressions convey determination and intelligence, asserting their equality with male characters in terms of strength and capability.

At the Representation Level, camera techniques, music, sound, and dialogue are key. *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* frequently employs close-ups and low-angle camera shots to underscore the authority and power of its female characters. For instance, during negotiations with Namor, the camera often focuses on Queen Ramonda's and Shuri's faces, capturing their firm and confident expressions. The film's music and sound design also play a crucial role; the often tense yet serene background music in critical scenes enhances the serious and profound atmosphere. The clear and firm voices of female characters in dialogue signify that their words carry equal weight to those of male characters, reflecting their intelligence and strategic negotiation skills.

At the Ideology Level, the film strongly emphasizes feminism and gender equality by portraying women as powerful leaders and intelligent fighters. *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* demonstrates that strength and capability are not gender-specific. Queen Ramonda and Shuri are not only present in negotiations but also play active and dominant roles, depicted as capable and respected leaders by allies and adversaries alike. Scenes such as Shuri assuming the role of the new Black Panther and leading Wakandan forces in battle powerfully illustrate women's capacity to be symbols of strength and leadership. This reinforces the message that women can fulfill heroic roles and exert significant influence in society, consistently showcasing their equal contributions in science, leadership, defense, and diplomacy.

In conclusion, the semiotic codes within *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* collectively interpret gender equality. Supporting codes, including conversational cues, environmental settings, and character behaviors, act as unifying elements, harmonizing the various codes throughout the film. This coherence allows the audience to perceive the film's events as realistic, thereby effectively conveying its messages regarding actions, ideologies, and the dismantling of paternalistic views. The film, directed by Ryan Coogler, functions as a superhero narrative rich with ideological codes, particularly those promoting gender equality through its female protagonists who champion their nation. While not every scene explicitly highlights gender equality, all elements ultimately converge to form a comprehensive representation of the concept, as Fiske's theory suggests that codes mutually support each other. The film's success in conveying these messages lies in its ability to code reality in a way that resonates with cultural understanding, enabling viewers to easily interpret the presented codes as a meaningful reality. Through its strong female characters, assertive camera work, and intelligent dialogue, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* effectively communicates that power and leadership are not confined by gender but are accessible to all.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to analyze the representation of gender equality in the film *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* using John Fiske's semiotic model. The findings unequivocally demonstrate that the film strongly and consistently portrays gender equality across its narrative and cinematic elements.

The analysis revealed that *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* effectively challenges traditional gender stereotypes by depicting women in prominent and powerful roles within

the public sphere, advanced technology, and leadership. Queen Ramonda exemplifies female leadership through her assertive diplomacy at the United Nations and her authoritative guidance of the Wakandan council, showcasing women's capacity for critical decision-making and international statesmanship. Shuri, as a genius scientist and later as the Black Panther, embodies female competence in STEM and heroic combat, proving that intellectual prowess, innovation, and physical strength are not gender-exclusive.

These representations are meticulously crafted and conveyed through Fiske's three levels of semiotic analysis. At the reality level, the appearance, costumes, expressions, and behaviors of female characters like Ramonda and Shuri consistently project strength, authority, and intelligence. At the representation level, cinematic techniques such as camera angles, close-ups, supportive music, and clear, assertive dialogue further emphasize their power and influence. Finally, at the ideological level, the film explicitly promotes feminist ideals by showcasing women as capable, respected, and central figures in leadership, science, and defense, thereby challenging patriarchal norms and advocating for a society where power and competence are not limited by gender.

In essence, *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* serves as a powerful cultural text that persuasively communicates a message of gender equality. Through its compelling characters and deliberate semiotic construction, the film successfully demonstrates that women can occupy and excel in roles traditionally dominated by men, thereby contributing significantly to the ongoing discourse on gender equality and empowerment.

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