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VIOLENCE AND CONFINEMENT

Black Superheroes and Restricted Spaces in Marvel Comics

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Teo Scheepstra: Violence and Confinement: Black Superheroes and Restricted Spaces in Marvel Comics
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Tämä pro gradu -tutkielma käsittelee mustaa tilaa ja sen kokemien rajoitteiden ja eristyksen ilmentymistä Marvelin *Power Man and Iron Fist*-, *Rise of the Black Panther*- ja *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* -sarjakuvissa. Tutkielman tavoite on demonstroida, kuinka musta tila on aina jollain tavalla rajoitettua ja eristettyä. Huolimatta siitä sijaitseeko musta tila fyysisesti valkoisen tilan ympäröimänä vai ei, valkoisella tilalla on taipumus yrittää hallita ja rajoittaa mustan tilan olemassaoloa itsenäisenä tilana.

Analysoin tutkielmassani, kuinka sarjakuvat esittelevät fyysistä tilaa niin konkreettisesti kuviensa kautta kuin myös metaforisesti erilaisten sarjakuvan elementtien – tai sarjakuvien kielen – kautta. Käytin analyysissani erilaisia sarjakuvatutkimuksia, tilatutkimusta ja myös Afrikan ja Afrikkaan sijoittuvan kirjallisuuden tutkimusta. Tutkielmassa käyttämäni tilatutkimus keskittyy paljolti mustan tilan analysoimiseen, mutta myös itsehallinnan ja tilan välistä suhdetta tarkastellaan osassa tutkimuksesta ja näin ollen myös tutkielmassa.

Kokonaisuudessaan tutkielma jakautuu neljään lukuun, joista ensimmäisenä on johdanto. Toinen ja kolmas luku ovat analyysilukuja ja neljäs luku pitää sisällään loppupäätelmät. Johdanto esittelee mustien supersankareiden historiaa Marvelin sarjakuvissa ja paneutuu myös sarjakuvien ja tilan suhteeseen. Ensimmäinen analyysiluku käsittelee *Power Man and Iron Fist* -sarjakuvia, joissa New Yorkin Harlemin kaupunginosa on keskiössä. Luvun aiheena on paljolti mustien tilojen rajoittaminen yhdysvaltalaisessa kaupunkiympäristössä. Kolmas luku käsittelee Black Panther -sarjakuvia. Siinä keskiössä on kyseisten sarjakuvien esittelemän Afrikan ja muun länsimaalaisen kirjallisuuden kuvaileman Afrikan eroavaisuudet, ja kuinka Black Pantherin Afrikan näennäisestä vapaudesta huolimatta sekin on eristettynä ja rajoitusten alaisena.

Tutkielmani loppupäätelmä on, että musta tila on aina rajoitettua ja eristettyä. Harlem on eristetty ja valvottu ulkopuolisten tekijöiden toimesta, kun taas Wakandan fiktiivinen kuningaskunta Black Panther -sarjakuvissa on aluksi eristäytynyt näennäisesti vapaaehtoisesti suojautuakseen ulkopuolisilta valloittajilta. Myöhemmin Wakanda pyrkii pois eristyksestä, mutta ulkopuoliset tahot yrittävät silti kontrolloida sitä. Mustaa tilaa ei voi olla olemassa ilman, että valkoinen tila yrittää hallita sitä.

Avainsanat: tila, sarjakuvat, supersankarit, musta tila, eristys, rajoitukset, Black Panther, Power Man and Iron Fist, World of Wakanda, Rise of the Black Panther

ABSTRACT

Teo Scheepstra: Violence and Confinement: Black Superheroes and Restricted Space in Marvel Comics
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This Master's thesis is about black space, the restrictions and confinement suffered by black space, and how those restrictions and confinement are portrayed in Marvel's *Power Man and Iron Fist*, *Rise of the Black Panther,* and *Black Panther: World of Wakanda*. The aim of the thesis is to demonstrate how black space is always confined or restricted in some way. White space has a tendency to try and control black space no matter if the black space is surrounded by white space or not.

In my thesis, I analyse how the comics represent physical space through both the actual images and the use of comics methods – or comics language. In my research, I utilised various comics studies, spatiality studies, and studies of Africa and literature portraying Africa. For the most part, the spatiality studies I turned to discuss black space, but some of it also discussed the relationship between sovereignty and physical space.

The introduction introduces the history of black superheroes in Marvel comics and also discusses the relationship between spatiality and comics. Chapter 2 is about *Power Man and Iron Fist*, in which the neighbourhood of Harlem has a central role. The chapter is largely about the confinement of black residents in American urban areas. Chapter 3 is about the Black Panther comics. The central theme there is the difference between the Africa portrayed in the comics and the Africa portrayed in earlier works of literature, and how the Africa of the Black Panther comics is also confined and restricted despite its apparent freedom.

The conclusion of my thesis is that black space is always confined and restricted. Harlem is isolated and under surveillance by outside parties, while the fictional kingdom of Wakanda is at first seemingly voluntarily isolated to protect itself from outside conquerors. Later on, Wakanda tries to escape the isolation and confinement, but it is met with attempts of control by outside parties. Black space cannot exist without white space trying to take control of it.

Keywords: spatiality, comics, superheroes, black space, confinement, restriction, Black Panther, Power Man and Iron Fist, Rise of the Black Panther, World of Wakanda

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1. Introduction

Black superheroes and the spaces they occupy have been an integral part of superhero comics since the 1960s. Marvel was the first comic book publisher to react to the shifting cultural and political climate revolving around race (Nama 12) in 1961 by introducing the king of the fictional African nation of Wakanda, the Black Panther. He made his first appearance on the pages of *The Fantastic Four* #66, in which he tested the defences of his home country against the world's most famous superhero team. Other black superheroes followed, adding symbolism along with cultural and political relevance to comic books (Nama 9).

The first black superheroes either came from exotic places such as Africa or largely defended the white middle-class values. The Black Panther lived in Wakanda, and former criminal Sam Wilson, also known as the Falcon, was given a respectable job as a social worker and a superhero role as Captain America's sidekick. By placing the black superheroes in these kinds of circumstances, Marvel's seemingly progressive and radical inclusion of black superheroes could have been an attempt to avoid taking a side in the racial issues that plagued American society during in the 1960s. This has been negated by the appearance of Luke Cage. He was the unapologizing black man, who did not come from some far away land and was not a sidekick. In fact, Cage became the first black superhero to have his own comic book when *Luke Cage, Hero for Hire*[1] was released in 1972, at a time when the blaxploitation film genre was popular. He was raised in Harlem, New York and wore no mask to hide his identity. Rather than selflessly help another superhero, Cage worked by himself and for money in Harlem: a darker, more crime-ridden environment than those of other superheroes in the 1970s.

After Cage's debut, the ghetto became the stereotypical environment for black superheroes, and while the Black Panther comic books mostly take place in the fictional

[1] Renamed to *Luke Cage, Power Man* with issue #17.

African nation of Wakanda, they have more openly discussed the effects of colonisation and racial issues.

In this thesis, I am going to study the two spaces that are so essential to the stories of these two heroes, the ghetto of Harlem and the kingdom of Wakanda, and how the comic books, through their narrative, call attention to these spaces and show how racial attitudes and constructs that are visible in our own society are represented in them, how they morph the identities of their inhabitants, and can determine their role in society. The comic book series I will be focusing on are *Power Man and Iron Fist* (2016) by David F. Walker, *Black Panther: World of Wakanda* (2016) by Roxane Gay, and *Rise of the Black Panther* (2018) by Evan Narcisse.[2] The two characters featured in them could be argued to be the most important ones in the history of black superheroes and the comic books themselves provide two different viewpoints into the world of black characters in the superhero genre. The Black Panther symbolises black life outside racism, while Luke Cage is a direct consequence of it (Nama 63). The thesis will demonstrate that the cultural and political significance along with the symbolism of black superheroes is not only limited to the characters themselves but also extends to the spaces around them, and that the comic books represent social and political issues regarding race – such as the race-based distribution of the American population and its effects (Hanafi 365) – through space as well as their characters and dialogue. It will also show how black space is always treated with certain kind of expectations no matter who is in control of the space officially, and that black space is subjugated to attempts of control and surveillance by those who are not part of it.

[2] Only the writers have been listed as all the series feature art from multiple artists. Both of the Black Panther books also had Ta-Nehisi Coates, the writer of the main Black Panther series, on as an advisor.

Previous studies concerning space and race have mostly been in fields like geography, education, anthropology, law, and sociology[3] (Neely & Samura 1933-1934). There has, as of yet, been little research on black superheroes and space. While black superheroes have been the focus of academic research, previous scholars like Adilifu Nama and Jeffrey A. Brown have focused on the history of the characters and why they mattered at the time of their appearance, similarities to cultural and political phenomena and organisations at that time, and reader reception.

Comic books present physical space through images, rather than description. Functions that are separate in language are simultaneous on the page of a comic book (Davies 11). The page itself is also physical space, and the arrangement of bubbles, images, and sound effects has a profound effect on how it reads (Miodrag 66). The spatiality of a comic book page has been researched by Thierry Groensteen. His work focuses on the arrangement, size and functions of panels and speech bubbles, and how they serve the overall narrative of the story. I will use Groensteen's existing research along with Peterle's research on comics and cartography as tools to analyse the spatiality of *Power and Iron Fist* and the *Black Panther* comics, both of which I will discuss next. Comics and spatiality will also be discussed further in the next chapter.

Power Man and Iron Fist is a comic about Luke Cage, also known as Power Man, and his teammate Danny Rand, the Immortal Iron Fist. It is mostly set in the New York neighbourhood of Harlem and goes through three separate storylines with connecting factors such as characters and locale. While Danny – a white man – is a part of the comic book series, choosing Harlem as the location makes it more about Luke Cage and the black superhero than about Danny Rand. Harlem is shown as a space with its own culture, politics, and rules. It is

[3] e.g. *Race and Social Analysis* by Caroline Knowles (2003) and *The Black Metropolis in the Twenty-First Century: Race, Power, and the Politics of Place* by Robert D. Bullard (2007).

an area which is mostly inhabited by black and Hispanic Americans, and the series treats it as such. In this thesis I will focus on the spaces of *Power Man and Iron Fist* and how the comics present the black space of Harlem and ties Luke and other characters into the political and cultural importance and heritage of the space.

Studying the country of Wakanda in the Black Panther comics provides a different angle to the spaces around black superheroes from the one in *Power Man and Iron Fist*. Whereas *Power Man and Iron Fist* recreates Harlem, a place that actually exists, the Black Panther comics create a nation that does not. *Rise of the Black Panther* revisits the history of the character and is more focused on giving the reader an overview on the history, politics, and culture of Wakanda rather than the character of the Black Panther. *World of Wakanda* is about two women who both serve in the Black Panther's royal guard, the Dora Milaje, and looks at Wakanda from their perspective rather than the Black Panther's. It is a more character-focused story of how the Wakandan people are an extension of their homeland and thus the physical space within it. I will compare Wakanda to more traditional representations of Africa in Western fiction, such as Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and also compare the two Black Panther comics and how they present the Wakandan space and how the members of Wakandan society experience the spatial realities of the country. Wakanda is far away from the traditional superhero space of New York, and the Black Panther is the original faraway hero of the earliest days of black superheroes. Throughout its history Wakanda has been free from the effects of colonisation, and the comic books showcase an interesting alternate world and ask the question of what maybe could have been had Africa and its resources been left alone.

The first stories involving black superheroes were largely created by white people and were ridden with stereotypes and leaned heavily on blaxploitation. Luke Cage and the Black Panther are some of the earliest black superheroes, as mentioned earlier. While their first appearances are important pieces of the history of black superheroes, focusing on the more

recently published comics used for this thesis provides a more contemporary viewpoint into the world of black superheroes and serve the purposes of this thesis better. The two characters present different viewpoints into the world of the black superhero. In the era of a post-racial world where the significance of race is supposed to be on the decline (Neely & Samura 1934-1935), the study of space can be used to analyse racial attitudes and processes still in effect. The study of fiction can present alternate viewpoints to our own reality or entirely different versions of it.

Additionally, Marvel's superhero comics present a reality that is much like our own. The politics, culture, and locations of our world are transferred into the Marvel universe. This realistic representation of our own world gives the fictional reality of the comics a more real feeling. The New York in which Luke Cage and other superheroes live in is almost – there are some fictional buildings such as Avengers Mansion – the New York that exists in our own reality, and Marvel no longer shies away from the political and cultural discussions that exist on its streets. While past Marvel comics might not have always referred to anything directly, they have reacted to events in our world in the past. The Legacy Virus encountered in the *X-Men* comics in the 1990s was an allegory to HIV, and, in a more direct comparison, the drug problem was discussed by giving Spider-Man's – or rather Peter Parker's – friend Harry Osborn an addiction to pills that eventually led to an overdose. Even the fictional locations within the Marvel universe, such as Wakanda, are tied into our own universe through their relationship with the locations that mimic actual places.

Comic books and spatiality make a good match because comics in themselves are physical space rather than just representations of it. A comic page is a physical area of space, and how panels, frames, margins, and word balloons are used on that space is utilisation of that space. As Peterle puts it, comics are "narratives organized through a spatial grammar" (44). They create their worlds through the use of their spatial features and language, and thus create

a spatial reading experience in addition to the spatiality in the stories themselves (46). Each of the units of comics language – the panel, the coordination of panels in a sequence, the page, the frame, and the balloon – is characterised by space (48). Even the complete images in a comic have the "sharing of space as their first characteristic" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 31). The distribution of that shared space is of "fundamental importance" to comics (67). To read comics, the "internalisation of a specific visuality involving the ability to translate the spatiality of two-dimensional sequential images into four-dimensional narrative" is required (Dittmer 223). In short, comics are "spaces within spaces" (Davies 4).

Edward Soja divides space into three different categories – which are an adaptation of Lefebvre's conceptual triad. Firstspace is fixed mainly on the concrete materiality of spatial forms. Secondspace is about ideas about space, about representations of human spatiality in mental or cognitive forms. Thirdspace is an enquiry into the spatial turn phenomenon and also focuses on how humans think about space and its concepts (Soja 10). Ignoring Thirdspace, comics have a lot to do with the first two of Soja's categories of space. The images on the pages are representations of Firstspace. They show the reader concrete examples of space and spatiality through their contents. The units of comics language then operate in Secondspace. They are representations of spatiality in forms that are not concrete. This spatiality that functions on two levels is an attribute that sets comics well and truly apart of other formats when it comes to spatiality.

A panel is generally a comic's indicator that time or space are being divided (McCloud 99). Panels are usually surrounded by frames, but as seen in the comics analysed in this thesis, sometimes the only frame can be the edge of the page. That is, the very edge of the physical space allowed for the panel. Groensteen lists six separate functions for the frame: the function of closure, the separative function, the rhythmic function, the structural function, the expressive function, and the readerly function (*System of Comics* 40). The names of these functions are

quite self-explanatory. For the purposes of this thesis, I will focus on the function of closure, the separative function, and the structural function, as they are the ones that are most relevant for the topic of spatiality in comics.

The function of closure means the physical closing of the panel. Groensteen calls this the first function of the panel (40). The closing of the panel is "to enclose a fragment of space-time" (41) which belongs to the larger unit of the comic page. Similar to McCloud, Groensteen says that closing the panel often indicates a displacement in space, and then time – or even in the two dimensions at the same time (41). When the panel is fully closed by frames on all sides, its contents are closed away from the rest of the comics page. The only way for those contents to move on is for them to appear in another panel. If there are open sides to the panel, the contents can flow out of it and into other images on the page.

The separative function separates the panels from each other. This separation or isolation of the panels is a necessary condition for reading the comic (43). The frame tells the reader when to stop reading the current panel and move on to the next. In that sense, the role the separative function plays is similar to that of punctuation in written text (43). It is critical for the comprehension of the text. According to Groensteen, the separative function and the function of closure are "nothing but the same function, successively envisaged as it exerts itself on the interior space of the frame and toward the exterior field" (43). I interpret this as the function of closure having to do with what remains inside the framed panel, and the separative function then deals with what is left outside of it. For example, when a panel is closed on all sides by frames, the function of closure deals with the image left in the panel. The separative function then takes things such as the gutter and the margin and separates them from what is inside the panel's frames.

The structuring function has to do with the way panels and their frames construct the whole that is the comics page. The rectangular shape that is used most often is important here.

It is the shape that is the easiest to use when placing multiple framed panels in succession, and as such has become the most common way to draw panels in comics (46). The way space is utilised on the page is dictated by the shape of the frames and the panels. A panel is never isolated, but always participates in a series of other panels that is presented on the comic page. The shape of the panel also affects what is inside its frames. Things such as the point of view of the image within, the angle, and the location of the word balloons and sound effects can only be used in ways the frame allows them to be. The structuring function of the frame is the most important when it comes to the distribution of the comic page's space between the different units of comics language. It also affects how the reader sees and understands that space, because the structuring of the page affects how the reader's eye moves from one panel to the next. In this thesis, the structuring function is the one most commonly used for analysis, as I will be treating whole pages as representations of actual physical space. That is, I will be analysing both the Firstspace and Secondspace of the comics.

According to Tally, the role of literature is to project a place (42). Comics are very well suited for this task because both the images in the panels and the units of comics language themselves deal with physical space and project places not only through written text but visuals as well. Comics do not rely entirely on the reader's imagination when creating the projections of places, but instead provide the reader with some ready-made projections in the form of the Firstspace visual representations found in the actual images present on the page. As such, comics are a great medium to analyse when it comes to spatial analysis.

Chapter 2 is about *Power Man and Iron Fist* and how it recreates the physical space of Harlem in both Firstspace and Secondspace. Harlem is a black space surrounded by white space and its role in society is largely determined by its surroundings. The chapter will examine how this is presented in both the concrete visualisations of space and the metaphorical visual elements of the comics.

In chapter 3, the focus is on the Black Panther comics. The kingdom of Wakanda differs from Harlem in not only its fictionality, but also how it has remained hidden from white space until the events of the comics. Wakanda's role in the world has so far been defined by the country itself, and not by other parties. Here, too, the way Wakanda is created and acts on the pages of the comics is examined through both Firstspace and Secondspace. Chapter 4 will then conclude the thesis.

The main argument of this thesis is that black space is always – in one way or another – confined and restricted. White space has a tendency to try to control black space and how it acts in relation to its surrounding spaces, and to avoid this attempt at control black space has to hide itself from white space. This is demonstrated in this thesis.

2. Luke Cage, the Confined Black Superhero

Superheroes are not usually confined by the borders of their home countries, by fiscal limitations or by the means of transportation. The heroes often travel to spectacular settings in outer space or mythical faraway lands. Awe-inspiring panels of colourful landscapes or futuristic cities on faraway planets are not uncommon. Even when most of Marvel's superheroes reside in New York City, superhero comics that focus on even a location as large as the city itself are rare. The city is their place of residence, but their adventures often take them away from there.

In *Power Man and Iron Fist*, Luke Cage – and Danny Rand, the Immortal Iron Fist – are both very much removed from the world-saving, galaxy-exploring exploits of the bigger names of the Marvel universe. The comic book is very much grounded in the street life of Harlem, and while supernatural elements exist, they do not reach the scale of those seen in comics like *The Avengers* or *The Fantastic Four*. The comics are just as much about Harlem as it is about the characters. This chapter examines how this lack of cosmic adventures is not purely by Luke and Danny's choice, but also a consequence of the confinement experienced by the black space of Harlem and its residents. The analysis in this chapter demonstrates how Harlem is confined and controlled by the white space surrounding it.

One could argue that every single detail in the early stages of *Power Man and Iron Fist* is meant to emphasise the fact that these are street-level heroes, and as such almost like regular people. The very first pages see Luke and Danny in street clothes, waiting for their friend Jenny to be released from prison. From there they move to a diner which – even if clearly a traditional place for superheroes to eat – is not glamorous in any way. Even when Danny changes to his Iron Fist costume, he does so in a regular car instead of a secret hideout or a rooftop somewhere out of sight. When the two travel from place to place, they do so by driving or walking. While

this does not call attention to Harlem or black space, it does ground the heroes in the spaces that they are inhabiting, rather than setting the tone for an adventure across the cosmos.

The focus on the mundane, non-supernatural nature of the neighbourhood and the placing of the characters in that ordinary setting is achieved through the arrangement of elements on the pages, too. *Power Man and Iron Fist* has very few two-page spreads, which is different from the more grandiose superhero stories that try to show off the wondrous locations they take their readers to through their art. Most of the pages have multiple smaller panels instead of one bigger one, and there is also plenty of dialogue between the characters. Pages that show off the art instead of focusing on the dialogue or smaller details are rare. This lack of ostentatious pages (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 86) puts further focus on the unspectacular setting of *Power Man and Iron Fist*.

The selection of Harlem as the place of importance for the story is very much tied to Luke. Even though the title of the comic book series is *Power Man and Iron Fist*, Danny is often a supporting character when compared to Luke, except for a storyline in the second volume where he goes to jail after fighting a police officer. His role is to be that of the questioning outsider. He is the one who does not quite understand life in Harlem and asks his questions out loud so that the reader can get the answers from Luke instead. Meanwhile, Luke is the main protagonist who is also a black superhero. The ethnicity of black superheroes is often central to their identity. I would argue that their spaces are also central to the black superheroes' identity, and thus Harlem is central to Luke's. This makes it the easy choice for the most important locale in the story. The first arc takes place in Harlem, as does the last. When events take place outside of it, Luke and Danny find themselves in an almost foreign or hostile environment. McCloud's idea that in comics anything that is not shown does not exist (McCloud 60) further turns the reader's focus on Harlem.

The first indications of there being differences in Luke and Danny's worlds come in the second issue of the first volume; the pair are discussing the supersoul stone, a mystical artefact very much in the epicentre of the first volume's events. Danny, who is not from Harlem, has never heard of the stone, even though he proclaims himself to be an expert on mystical powers (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #3). For Luke, a Harlem resident, the supersoul stone is something that everyone has heard of. This sets Harlem apart from the rest of New York as a space with its own culture and mythology. The division is further strengthened by a conversation the two have with Doctor Strange, the Marvel universe's Sorcerer Supreme. Strange calls the supersoul stone "lesser magic", further noting that there are some forms of the mystical arts that are not "*worthy* of mastering" (emphasis original). It is also worth noting that while Strange says he is "truly sorry" that he was not able to help Luke and Danny, his facial expression in the panel signals arrogance and insincerity and does not look particularly apologetic. An enraged Luke then goes to Señor Magico, a sorcerer from Harlem. Magico takes the supersoul stone very seriously, causing Danny to wonder how such a powerful object could be unfamiliar to someone like Strange. The street magic seen in Harlem is something that Strange, an outsider, does not deem worthy of his attention. This is another way of setting Harlem apart from the rest of the Marvel universe, and of its heroes.

Figure 1: Discussion with Doctor Strange in Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town #3

As Hanafi notes, "space has a lot to reveal about social relations" (361). While Strange's attitude towards Luke and Danny is not necessarily directed at Harlem on purpose, it is clear that the sorcerer considers something that everyone in Harlem knows about unworthy of his attention. Strange does not consider the "spatial realm" (361) of Harlem worthy of his

attention or he does not believe that something worthy of concern could originate from a place like Harlem. The actions of the Sorcerer Supreme make Harlem a marginalised black space (Salenius 884), and the marginalisation causes tension between him and Luke, a resident of Harlem. While Salenius focuses on the stories of James Baldwin, the scenario where two opposing spaces create social tension between each other (884) occurs in *Power Man and Iron Fist* as well. Luke takes the culture of Harlem wherever he goes, thus carrying Harlem with him to the physical space of Doctor Strange's Sanctum Sanctorum in Greenwich Village. His marginalised space and Strange's space collide, creating the social tension between them. This marginalisation of Harlem is emphasised by an exchange between Luke and Danny. Danny asks Luke how something like the supersoul stone can exist without him knowing it, and Luke replies "Same reason that the Black History Month is the shortest month of the year" (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #3). The supersoul stone is an unknown because of the marginalisation of Harlem and its occupants.

The idea that Doctor Strange does not know about the supersoul stone because of spatial boundaries is further supported by Haynes' argument that "place makes race" (151). A white man living in Harlem, according to Haynes, could have his "racial consciousness" (151) shaped by the place which in this case is Harlem. This means that while he was white, his racial consciousness would define him as black because he lives in a black space. Strange, who is not from Harlem, has his consciousness shaped by his place, Greenwich Village. He probably has no notion of Harlem's culture or its ideologies, and thus has no notion of the supersoul stone, which is something that is very much a part of Harlem's mythology and supernatural community as *Power Man and Iron Fist* makes clear.

Another factor that makes Harlem a black space are the villains of the series. Most of the villains residing in Harlem are black Americans. Captain Marvel and the Black Cat are white women, but they come from outside of Harlem. Mr. Fish – a Harlem resident – even calls

the Black Cat's attempts to wrestle over control of Harlem from the local crime lords gentrification: ". . . Black Cat's got her eyes set on uptown -- she got that gentrification bug" (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Street Magic* #10). The Black Cat is trying to drive out the original black occupants – in this case the crime bosses – and seize control of the black space for herself. Gentrification – the phenomenon where the character of an urban area is changed by wealthier people moving in, often at the cost of the area's current residents – is a real-life threat to black neighbourhoods, and by referring to it *Power Man and Iron Fist* further emphasises the blackness of Harlem.

Other than Harlem, *Power Man and Iron Fist* also sets up other spaces as black spaces or at least spaces that have strong ties to the black populace of the United States. Prison plays a large role in the story because of Luke's past as a wrongly convicted inmate, and because of its central part in the second main storyline, where former supervillains who have since stopped their ways of crime are being hunted because of expunged criminal records that are made active again by an application called the Agnitus. All these ex-supervillains are representatives of ethnic minorities. This structural racism is brought into attention when Danny ends up in prison after preventing a police officer from choking another character. After a suggestion from another inmate that Danny could use his powers as the Iron Fist to simply break out of the place, Danny notes that it would only make the situation worse. Jasper Daniels, another inmate, calls out Danny's naivety: "Spoken like a true bleeding-heart liberal with a silver spoon in his mouth" (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #7). According to Jasper, the one putting people who do not belong in prison behind bars is the "American criminal justice system", which Danny does not understand because he can use his status and financial wealth to simply buy his way out of jail. This exchange between Danny and Jasper sets up prison as a space that has strong negative connections to the ethnic minorities in the United States, including the people of Harlem. Danny, the rich white boy oblivious to the structural racism of the country,

is once again used as a device to explain the connection to the reader as well. Prison is something that some black men consider a constant possibility in their lives. In George Jackson's words: they are prepared to go to prison. The reality that black people are also categorised and placed into suitable locations or neighbourhoods like Harlem is also a form of policing them and keeping them somewhere where it is easy to have surveillance on them (Shabazz 277-279). In Harlem's case, this surveillance is achieved by pushing the neighbourhood to the very edge of Manhattan, with the Harlem River separating it from the Bronx. It is telling of how the American justice system views black people and black spaces that the men wrongly imprisoned in *Power Man and Iron Fist* are being held in prison with no active charges. They are just there, as they say themselves (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #7). For the people in charge, it is easy to imagine a black person in prison, so nothing is done to check if these people are being held there for a reason.

The strained relationship with the American justice system and ethnic minorities is highlighted earlier in the comic book series as well, when the headquarters of Luke and Danny are attacked by the people hunting the reformed criminals (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #6). Cletus Evans is calling the police, but Dontrell Hamilton tries to stop him: "Man, *never* call the cops" (emphasis original). After the police have arrived and make the situation worse, Dontrell reminds Cletus that he told him never to call the cops. Cletus responds that he "wasn't thinkin' straight". The conversation shows the mistrust the residents of places like Harlem have towards American law enforcement because of the mistreatment they have faced.

It is worth noting that while some events take place outside of Harlem, the people there are almost always presented as adversaries and hostile towards Luke and Danny. Luke is a part of the recognisable group of black Americans and within that group placed into Harlem, a suitable location for the group. He – and the rest of Harlem's occupants – have been subjected to a process where they are categorised into their group and then placed into the aforementioned

suitable location (Tally 124), i.e., Harlem. When Luke is outside of that suitable location, he is met with a hostile response. When Luke and Danny visit locations such as Greenwich Village mentioned earlier, their influence does not reach those areas. Doctor Strange is unable to help them in their dilemma and treats them almost disrespectfully. Another example of this hostile reaction is when Luke attempts to free Danny from prison, and he is treated as a criminal individual by the other superheroes who arrive on the scene (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #8). In addition, the superhero team intercepting Luke operates very much on a global or even cosmic scale. They are not superheroes tied to a certain community like Luke. This difference between the two parties is visible in the art of the scene. The other superheroes – many of them able to fly – come at Luke from the sky, placing themselves above the more down to earth, local type of superhero that Luke Cage is. This also further emphasises the confinement of Luke, who is unable to move freely through the skies or at high speeds. The scene also calls more attention to the rift between ethnic minorities and law enforcement in the United States. The other superheroes want to arrest Luke because Ulysses, a man who can see possible futures, saw a vision where Luke broke Danny out of jail. Luke, who has been wrongfully imprisoned in the past, does not take kindly to being arrested for something the others think he might do. The situation is very similar to the ones African Americans face in their daily lives, in which the police consider them more likely to be dangerous than white people. In the case of *Power Man and Iron Fist*, the prejudiced attitude is not explicitly stated to be about race, but it just so happens that Luke is the target of said prejudice.

Figure 2: Captain Marvel arrives with her group in Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II #8

The art of the comics confines the events to their setting in other ways, too. Using panels as a reference point, Harlem's confinement can also be seen in the type of panels that *Power Man and Iron Fist* mostly consists of. "It is the frame that makes the panel" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 30), and more often than not the pages consist of multiple closed panels – completely framed, no open edges – one after the other or on top of each other. The function of closure and the separative function of frames are used to create a succession of panels where each panel is closed and the contents of it are confined within the frames. Rarely does an image flow over the boundaries of the panel or "bleed" (McCloud 103) onto the next page. Landscape panels, which stretch throughout the page (Groensteen, *Comics and Narration* 45), are mostly limited to action scenes, where they are mostly used for style or to achieve an effect of an image

that is still in motion. Groensteen also points out that in addition to fitting the page according to the needs of the story, the symmetry of panels can be used to either highlight spatio-temporal elements (47) or bring social constructs to the reader's attention (50). The panel itself is a "portion of space isolated by blank spaces and enclosed by a frame" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 28) and as such is perfect for creating a representation of the confinement suffered by Harlem and its occupants. As mentioned before, most of the panels in *Power Man and Iron Fist* are framed. The events within those panels are confined into their own space, much like the characters in the panels are confined to the space of Harlem. An example of using panels to create a representation of the confinement the residents of Harlem face would be the scene where Luke and Danny are making their way through Harlem to visit the crime boss Tombstone. Every single panel on the page is framed from all sides (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #1), and all the events in the panels take place in Harlem. The way the page is structured makes it seem like every image is neatly fitted into its frame, and with no panel reaching the edges of the page itself, it is as if the contents of the panels are being forced into their space, with no chance of expanding out of them.

Figure 4: Luke and Danny on the streets of Harlem in Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town #1

This confining panel composition is also visible in the two pages which portray Luke and Danny's journey to meet their friend Jenny (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #2). They get into a small car – which Luke almost fills out by himself – and drive to the safehouse where Jenny is staying while discussing their current predicament. Once again,

every panel is framed by black bars on all sides. The usage of the frames also serves in creating the image of the small car which barely fits the two adult men. The frames also, along with the discussion the characters have within the panels, further emphasise their status as street-level heroes. There is a flashback included in which Luke's wife tells Luke that he is not allowed to use their car for his adventures with Danny. More glamorous superheroes would not have a problem of this kind.

Comics language is also used to set up prison as the confining space that it is. When Luke and Danny's friend Jenny turns into a monster (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #4), corrupted by the power of the supersoul stone, the reader is given a flashback into Jenny's life before that moment. Jenny spent time in prison, and when the flashback reaches that part, all the panels on the page are framed from all sides in the middle of a white margin. The same applies for the first two scenes in which Danny is in prison (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #7). First when he is being visited by Misty Knight, and then when he is eating with some of the reformed criminals wrongly imprisoned. Here the similarities between prison and black urban areas mentioned by Shabazz appear in comics language. Just like scenes taking place in Harlem feature multiple closed frames, so do the scenes set in prison. Both are areas which the white space is attempting to watch and control.

Conversely, when Luke and Danny visit the Triskelion after hearing of two of their superhero colleagues getting hurt (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #6), the page depicting the scene has panels that have their backgrounds spreading all over the pages. There are framed panels, but the scene as a whole is unframed, leaving the possibility there for the space to expand wherever it pleases. The same kind of confinement that is visible in Harlem cannot be seen here. Similarly, when Captain Marvel and her group of superheroes come to stop Luke from breaking out Danny, there are very few framed panels on the two-page spread. (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #8). This shows how the other superheroes are not

confined to a single space like Luke and Danny are. They have the possibility of simply flying away and leaving the space they are located in at any time. The closing function of frames is not used for the other superheroes.

Figure 5: Luke and Danny visit the Triskelion in Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II #6

Other than the frames, *Power Man and Iron Fist* also uses the location of the panel, or its "site" (Groensteen, *System of Comics 36*), to influence how the reader sees the scene which is taking place and its space. The site determines the panel's place in the reading order – or "reading protocol" (36) – and controls the reader's gaze on the page. It plays a large part in the structuring of the comics page. If an artist wants to draw attention to a particular panel, the site is one of the tools used to achieve that. If we look at the scene where the other superheroes come to stop Luke from breaking Danny out (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #8), the panel that dominates the space is the unframed two-page spread of the other superheroes approaching Luke from the sky. It is a large panel, and its site is very central to the page. All the other panels are pushed to the corners or the bottom part of the page, and they are much smaller. The reader's gaze is naturally drawn to the large panel, which also is the one which emphasises the locations of the characters in the scene itself. By drawing the reader's attention to the panel, it is also drawn to the differences between Luke and the other superhero group both in physical location and their superpowers. Furthermore, emphasis on this particular setting is created by the whole page being dedicated to it. All that goes on is the conversation between Luke and the others. Transitions between panels are panel-to-panel or moment-to-moment (McCloud 70). These transitions further emphasise that the scene takes place within a small amount of time in one location.

Site is used differently in the scene where Luke and Danny go visit Tombstone (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys are Back in Town* #1). On the first page of the scene there is no dominating panel that captures the reader's gaze immediately. The flashback panel where Luke reminisces about his child screaming obscenities that she learned from Luke is squeezed in between two larger panels on top of and under it, which makes it clear that it is not as important to the page as a whole than the rest of the panels. While the rest of the panels are of different sizes, none of them jump out, and they are placed in a logical reading order either from top to

bottom or from left to right. Multiple actions are also placed on the page, instead of just one conversation. The transitions between the panels are action-to-action transitions (McCloud 70). First, the heroes are in the car, then there is the flashback. After that they are walking on the street, they get to Tombstone's headquarters, and then they are at the door. The scene remains the same, but there are multiple actions. This emphasises that the scene is taking part across a longer period of time within a larger space. In this particular scene, the reader gets a more comprehensive look into the life Luke is living. The family life nor the method of transportation are particularly glamorous. Aside from being a superhero, Luke's life seems fairly ordinary, and the scene draws attention that. Site is used in this manner also in the scene with Doctor Strange and when Luke and Danny visit the Triskelion. Neither of those scenes has a panel that dominates the page or one that attracts the reader's gaze more than the others. The structure of the pages is fairly standard and easy for the reader to follow.

Whatever is left outside of the panels' frames on the page is the margin (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 33). It is a space outside the frames which contains a page number or nothing at all. The comics analysed in this thesis do not have something that could be classified as a margin. There are no page numbers, and – as has already been seen – the panels might not have frames at all, instead stretching all the way to the edge of the page. Thus, for the purposes of this thesis, I would extend Groensteen's definition of the margin to include whatever space is left empty on the edges of the page, even if there is no frame to separate it from the rest of the contents. It is important not to confuse this modified concept of the margin with that of the gutters, the unused space *between* panels. Gutters have to do with events not shown in the panels. Their content is something that the reader fills in on their own due to the idea that said content needs to exist between the events shown by the panels around the gutter (McCloud 66-67). My definition of the margin does not have to do with the events, but the space around the panels. In terms of Soja's three different categories of space, the margin would be an example

of Secondspace. If images on the page are examples of Firstplace in that they are concrete visual examples of physical space, the margin is a metaphorical representation of physical space that is around the concrete examples space found in the panels.

In *Power Man and Iron Fist*, the margin is often white, and so the black space of Harlem within the panels is surrounded by the white margin. The page where Luke and Danny move through Harlem to get to Tombstone's headquarters has an all-white margin in addition to its framed panels. It presents a Harlem confined by the frames of the panels but also surrounded by the white space of the margin – here symbolising the physical white space around Harlem – on all sides. As Peterle puts it: the employment of the units of comics language – in this case the panels – within the narrative composition turns them from "types of spaces" into "places" (48). The panels placed onto the page are turned into Harlem as they are already images of an imagined Harlem in the world of the comics, and the margin is turned into a representation of the space around Harlem. as they are metaphorical representations of physical space rather than concrete visualisations of it. A visible margin is missing mostly on pages that feature a character making an entrance, such as the following page of the one described above, when Luke and Danny go inside Tombstone's building (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #1). The lack of the margin is used as a narrative device that creates a more impressive-looking image for the characters' entrance to the scene, and not to demonstrate black space expanding into white space.

The scene where the other superheroes come to arrest Luke for potentially breaking Danny out of jail (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Civil War II* #8) provides a good contrast for the confined panels of Harlem. It is a two-page spread, and it has no white space. No margin. There is no confinement here. The other superheroes do not have restricting frames surrounding them, and those frames are not further surrounded by a margin that holds everything inside itself. Here, rather than being just a narrative device, the lack of a margin also goes to show that the

space around the panels is extending and non-restrictive. Similarly, when Luke and Danny momentarily dive into another dimension (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Street Magic* #15), there is no margin. The page is dominated by the one panel showing off the monster within the dimension, and there are smaller panels called insets that add dialogue and details to the larger panel that captures the insets within itself (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 76). If traditional panels signal a shift that says *when*, insets signal a shift that says *meanwhile*. The whole scene basically takes place within the larger panel, and the insets only add to that scene. Again, this kind of large panel without a margin has been reserved for a scene that – in a way – takes place outside of Harlem. When the story takes the reader outside of the black space, the panels are not confined.

Figure 6: Luke and Danny fall into a different dimension in Power Man and Iron Fist: Street Magic #15

Word balloons are a crucial element of comic books that may seem independent of the rest of the page. But in addition to providing dialogue or thought processes, balloons also affect the space of the comic page. They always carry "an effect of concealment" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 63) when placed into a panel, as they must conceal a part of the image portrayed

within the panel. In the image where Luke and Danny are trying to avoid falling into the other dimension (*Power Man and Iron Fist: Street Magic* #15), the balloons within the larger panel are placed so they do not conceal the environment of the dimension, but just empty space. They are placed that way to avoid hiding what is a new and unknown location to the reader. This is done to show off the space and to make it seem like a large area that spreads out. On the page where Luke and Danny are on their way to meet Tombstone (*Power Man and Iron Fist: The Boys Are Back in Town* #1), the word balloon placement is much more concealing. There are more balloons than on the page with the monster, and the balloons overlap with parts of the characters' bodies and environmental elements such as a bystander on the street. There is nothing particularly wondrous about a street in New York, and there are also no important elements that need to be portrayed in the story. However, the balloons are also placed in a way that allows the reader to see where Luke and Danny are, and thus in that way their placement highlights the environment. The reader can see clearly that Luke and Danny are indeed on a street in Harlem, New York, and that they are just walking among the regular people there. It sets them up as Harlem's superheroes, as a part of that black space in the city. Lastly, in the scene where Captain Marvel and her group come to interrupt Luke's attempts to break Danny out of prison, the word balloons are heavily concentrated on the top and bottom edges of the page. As much space as possible is reserved for Captain Marvel and her group, so that their introduction to the scene gets as much attention from the reader as possible. The space around them is left empty, as if to demonstrate how they are not as restricted in their movements by the space around them as Luke is.

As I discussed earlier, the panel, the frame, the sequencing of frames, the word balloon, and the whole comic page are units of a structured language of comics (Peterle 48). These units are characterised by their spatial essence, their existence in the space of the comic. Through the combined use of these language units, a comic creates its own geographies and tells a

"spatial story" (48). In *Power Man and Iron Fist*, the city of New York and the neighbourhood of Harlem are largely reconstructions of places that exist within our world. Some fictional landmarks like the Triskelion or Doctor Strange's mansion have to be created – or rather recreated as they already exist in other Marvel stories – but otherwise the geography presented by the comic resembles that of the Harlem which exists in our world. By utilising the units of the language of comics, *Power Man and Iron Fist* presents a Harlem which is isolated, confined, and not respected. Luke Cage is firmly placed into the community of Harlem as its own black superhero, representing a group of people who have been placed in a location that is suitable to them (Tally 124) and does not spread out to the surrounding white spaces. The difference between the black Americans confined to the ghetto in what is a form of racial othering (Neely & Samura 1943-1944) and white Americans like Doctor Strange or Captain Marvel is that the spaces which the white Americans occupy are not isolated or confined. Instead, the spaces are open, and they are free to move in and out of them at their pleasure. Doctor Strange is from Greenwich Village, but he is not considered the superhero of Greenwich Village who looks out for that particular community. He operates on a grander scale, defending the whole universe from mystical threats. Harlem needs its own black superhero, because people like Doctor Strange consider it insignificant. Through the use of comics language, *Power Man and Iron Fist* presents Harlem as a black space that has been closed and separated. Its occupants are confined within the boundaries pointed out to them. Meanwhile, outside of Harlem such constraints and separation do not exist.

The confinement and the restrictions placed upon Harlem come solely from outside parties. The space is confined like it is because those not living there willed it so. The confinement experienced by the seemingly free African nation of Wakanda is different. In the next chapter, I will discuss how this confinement is visible in *Rise of the Black Panther* and *World of Wakanda.*

3. Wakanda, Black Space Free of White Influence

Rise of the Black Panther and *World of Wakanda* present a different kind of black space than that of *Power Man and Iron Fist*. While the Harlem of *Power Man and Iron Fist* was a marginalised black space surrounded everywhere by whiteness, the fictional African kingdom of Wakanda is a presentation of what a black space could look without the intervening of white people.

This chapter examines how the representation of Wakanda is different from the Africa portrayed in other literature – such as *Heart of Darkness* and Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* – and how the Black Panther comics examine the Wakandan space. Despite these differences and Wakanda's apparent freedom of outside influence, Wakanda still finds itself falling victim to the problems present in the Africa of our world and in other portrayals of the continent, as white outsiders attempt to take control of it and to control its behaviour in the space outside of Wakanda. This chapter demonstrates how even this free, unconquered black space is confined by its own doing and, later on, by outside influencers attempting to take control of the space.

Wakanda is a mix of traditional African tribal culture and futuristic highly advanced technology straight out of a science fiction story. Its portrayal is different from the way Western literature [4] like *Heart of Darkness* speaks of Africa. Instead of being a continent that is seen as a primitive land with untouched resources, a presentation of the white race's supremacy (Mudimbe 17), Wakanda is a part of Africa untouched by Western influence that has prospered. The mountain of vibranium – a fictional precious metal that can absorb energy and then redirect it – at the heart of the country is largely to thank for this prosperity, and the target for many would-be conquerors. *Rise of the Black Panther* shows both the traditional African elements

[4] *Rise of the Black Panther* should also be considered Western literature portraying Africa as even though both Evan Narcisse and Ta-Nehisi Coates are African American, they are still American.

and the new, more technologically advanced side throughout its story. The tribal paintings and stone halls of the Wakandan royal palace are accompanied by futuristic skyscrapers in the background, and the characters handle advanced technology like touch screens while wearing traditional tribal clothing. All of the royal palace and even planes taking people to and from Wakanda are controlled by an artificial intelligence called Kimoyo.

Tally speaks of "the spirit of place" (81) which ". . . informs, if not directs and controls, the ideas of the people who live in that place". Tally discusses this spirit as something that writers try to achieve when describing real-life locations in fiction, but Wakanda clearly has its own spirit too. It is a technological marvel in the middle of primitive Africa, but at the same time it is steeped in tradition. That tradition is what informs and directs Wakanda's people. For example, the process to become king is through a challenge day, where anyone who wants to try is granted a chance to fight the current king with the winner taking the throne. This is how T'Challa becomes king, too. After the death of his father, his uncle takes over as regent. T'Challa then challenges his uncle and defeats him to become king (*Rise of the Black Panther* #2). This kind of combat challenge does not fit into the image of the technologically advanced Wakanda, but it is an important tradition of its tribal culture. Visually, the union between tradition and technological advancement can be seen, for example, when N'Jadaka – or Erik Killmonger, a future villain – is waiting for an audience with the queen. He is guided into a room by members of the Dora Milaje who wear their traditional clothing, but behind the large glass windows spreads a view of the futuristic skyscrapers of the capital city, Birnin Zana (*Rise of the Black Panther* #4). Also shown in the scene is Wakanda's advanced technology, as the White Wolf reveals himself after having made himself invisible with Wakandan cloaking technology. A similar contrast of tradition and futuristic cities can be seen when T'Challa is rowing a wooden boat down the river with the city of Birnin T'Chaka in the background (*Rise of the Black Panther* #2).

Figure 7: N'Jadaka waits for an audience in Rise of the Black Panther #4

Whereas the Harlem of *Power Man and Iron Fist* is a reconstruction of a place within our world, Wakanda has been created from nothing for Marvel comics. The map below shows that while Wakanda is very much an isolated space like Harlem, it is isolated because of its

location rather than because its residents have been forcibly placed into a particular location by people other than themselves. This natural isolation kept colonisers away from it while the rest of Africa was being organised and submitted to the Western model (Mudimbe 3): "Wakanda . . . repelled the colonizers". (*Rise of the Black Panther* #2)

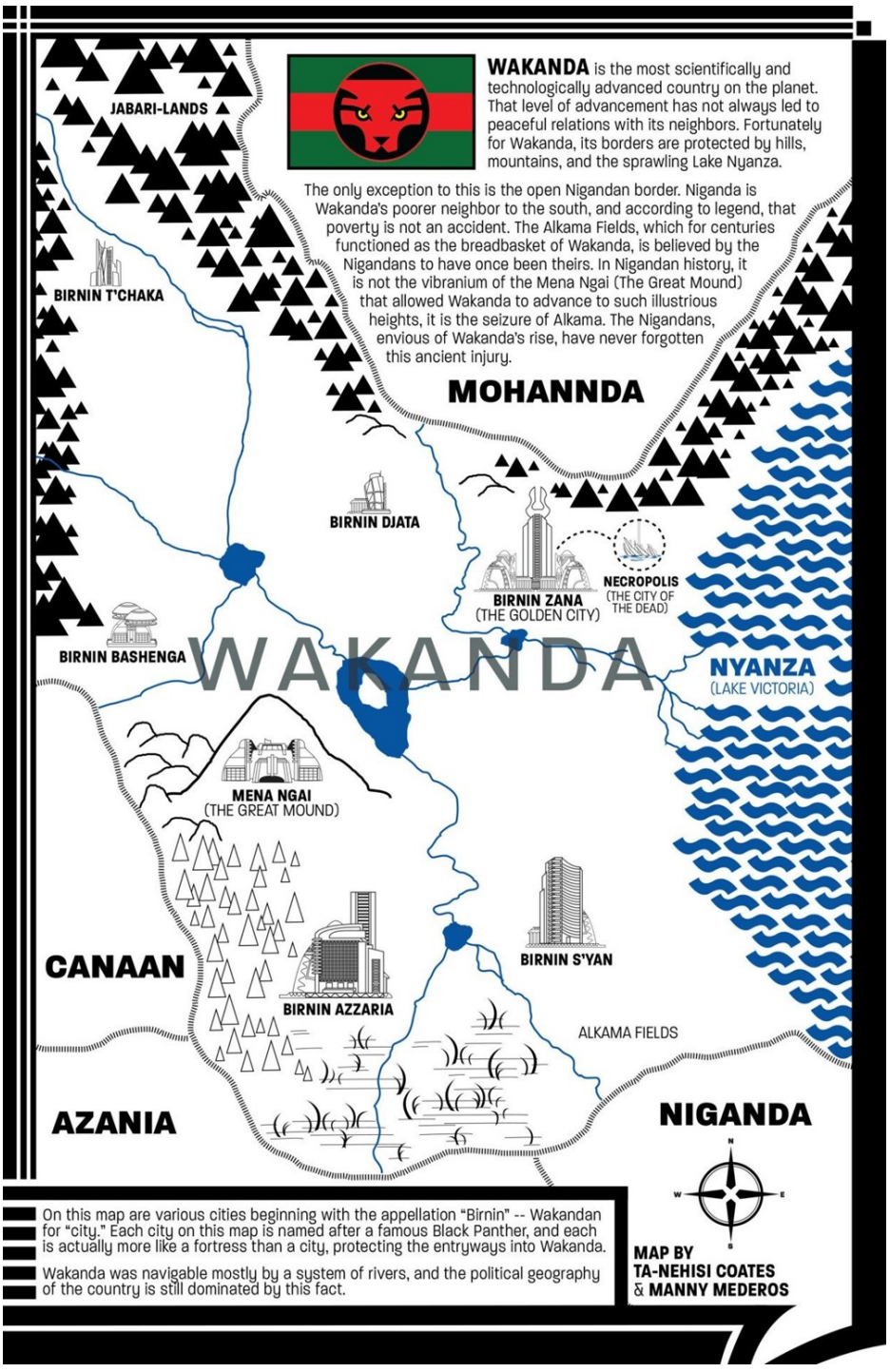

Figure 8: Map of Wakanda

While the map is not very detailed, it provides the reader a tool in building the geography of Wakanda (Peterle 44). The reader does not have to rely on their imagination when they try to think of distances between cities or even Wakanda's location on the African continent. The lake Nyanza is told to be Lake Victoria, and Wakanda lies on its western shore. The reader learns of the river system of Wakanda, which is a large influence on the political geography of the country. We can see that the major cities are located along the rivers. The map also shows an African country that did not have to succumb to the postcolonial distribution of territory and setting of borders like the rest of the continent had to (Olusola 290-291). The distribution of African space that was done in the process of decolonisation was largely dictated by the nations that had been doing the colonising. African nations were all too eager for independence and as a result took the "flawed structures and imposed borders" which were offered. Olusola attributes some of Africa's struggles to move from a developing continent into a developed continent to this distribution of space in Africa because the respect for the "existing European-delineated boundaries" (295) has dictated much of Africa's actions after independence. Wakanda has always had and still retains sovereignty over its boundaries and the distribution of its land thanks to it not being subjected to either colonisation or the decolonisation process. Thus, Wakanda has been able to develop more easily. Its progress has not been halted by a need to conform to the boundaries set by the colonisers. The lack of detail in turn serves to keep Wakanda mysterious and untouched by outside influence. With Harlem, all this information was already present in our own world, and the geography of the Harlem in the comic books was built simply through the units of comics language. In Wakanda's case, the geography is built from the map provided by the comic's creators and through the use of the units of comics language.

The geography of Wakanda is also visible in the margins of the comics. Considering my modified version of Groensteen's margin where the margin is an example of Soja's

Secondspace and thus represents actual physical space, the margin surrounding the pages of *Rise of the Black Panther* and *World of Wakanda* is often black or non-existent. The white margin exists too, but if in *Power Man and Iron Fist* it symbolised a Harlem surrounded by white space, in the Black Panther comics the mixed margins could be seen as symbols of the mixed surroundings of Wakanda. On one hand, Wakanda exists safely isolated and surrounded by its African neighbours, hence the black margin. On the other hand, the constant efforts from white outsiders to penetrate its borders and get to the vibranium mound are present in the white margin.

The very first scene of *Rise of the Black Panther* shows off Wakanda's resilience. King Azzuri – T'Challa's grandfather – confronts Captain America who has wandered close to Wakandan territory. The first page is a close-up of Captain America, with Azzuri's hand on his throat. Azzuri reminds the captain that he was "told to leave" (*Rise of the Black Panther* #1). The page has no margins, but the two pages following it have white margins. The Wakandan jungle behind Captain America on the first page expands all the way to the edges, pushing back the white space that tries to force its way into the page on the next two pages. On the second page Azzuri is attacking Captain America and his men, who he suspects have come to steal vibranium from Wakanda: "So you have come to steal what you desire, as elsewhere on the continent?" On the third page, Azzuri and Captain America end up fighting members of the terrorist organisation Hydra and driving them away from Wakanda.

Another example of this resilience to the white space outside of Wakanda's borders comes later in *Rise of the Black Panther* #1. When T'Challa's father, King T'Chaka, is killed by infiltrating members of Hydra, the margin combines both the non-existent variant and the white, which is creeping down from the top of the page. The non-existent margin then reflects Wakanda's independence from both its neighbours and the would-be intruders. It symbolises a Wakanda that resists its surroundings and any threats to itself.

Figure 9: T'Chaka's death in Rise of the Black Panther #1

Later, when T'Challa takes the throne, the non-existent margins show his efforts of trying to expand Wakanda's reach and influence to the outside world – rather than be influenced *by* it. For example, when T'Challa makes the decision to reveal Wakanda to the rest

of the world, the page has no margins on either side (*Rise of the Black Panther* #2). This time, Wakanda is not trying to hide or protect itself, so the margins are not there. The margins here could almost be argued to resemble the boundaries of Wakanda itself. Whereas boundaries enclose or set bounds for a nation and its people (Matereke 26), the task of the margins is to enclose or set bounds to the contents of the comic page. Wakanda previously only looked inside its own boundaries, staying within the margins. But as T'Challa makes the decision to take them out of hiding, the country shifts its focus to outside its boundaries, and the margins disappear. There is no need for representation of Secondspace, because the Firstspace – that is, the concrete visualisations of physical space – is all that matters in the moment.

The same is true when the foreign visitors are in Wakanda. One of the governments visiting tries to sneak in the Winter Soldier to get their hands on Wakandan technology. Before the Winter Soldier's presence is brought to T'Challa's attention, there are white margins on the page. As the reader gets further down the page, all the way to the panel where T'Challa learns of the spy, the margins disappear. They are also not there when T'Challa confronts the Winter Soldier and fights him. The white margins represent the foreigners' attempts to sneak into Wakanda, while their disappearance symbolises T'Challa pushing back the attempt of the white space to overtake Wakanda and gain access to its technology.

The frames, too, show a Wakanda that is not as forcibly confined as the Harlem of *Power Man and Iron Fist*. While many panels in *Rise of the Black Panther* have frames, they are not as thick as the ones in *Power Man and Iron Fist*. The feeling of closing the contents of the panel within it is not as strong. The pages are also often structured in such a way that the framed panels are placed on top of a panel which is framed only by the physical edge of the page, so the background for the framed panels often is the setting of the larger panel. This creates an effect where the contents of the smaller panels are not isolated from the rest of the page. Davies argues that lack of frames leaves the characters without protection (12), so the

thinner or non-existent frames could also symbolise a Wakanda coming out of the shadows, and thus losing its protection from the outside world. The difference in frames could also be interpreted to symbolise T'Challa's relationship with the space surrounding him. As king, he rules over Wakanda, and its territories are for him to traverse as he pleases. Some superheroes like Batman can be described as ruling over their designated city state (Meteling 135), but in the Black Panther's case he is literally a king of a sovereign nation. In the case of someone like Luke Cage or a group like the Dora Milaje – who I will discuss later – the frames of the panel represent the limitations they face in their surrounding space and how their movements in said space are restricted. For T'Challa such restrictions are non-existent because he rules over the space he inhabits. Thus, the frames are either thinner or not there for him.

Figure 10: T'Challa makes the decision in Rise of the Black Panther #2

T'Challa's ability to pass through the restrictions of the frames is visible in his ability to get out of Wakanda, while entrance to his country is only possible by either violent invasion, being sneaked in by a traitorous Wakandan or by having T'Challa's permission. Only Doctor Doom is able to infiltrate Wakanda with one of his Doombots without T'Challa knowing it.

Even when the Winter Soldier infiltrates Wakanda, Wakanda's systems notice this almost immediately. T'Challa does not need such methods to get into other countries' territories, as he easily leaves the boundaries of Wakanda and enters those of Wakanda's southern neighbour Niganda and Kenya without any sort of invitation or permission to enter those countries.

What further separates the presentation of Wakanda from Western narratives surrounding Africa is the idea that pre-European Africa was supposed to not have any form of civilised society (Mudimbe 1). Wakanda is shown to be more civilised than many European countries, regardless of whether we consider civilisation to mean Western democracy or technological advancements. The technological advancement not being in line with the Western idea of Africa is even noted in the comics themselves, when a foreign visitor says that they "cannot believe" that they're seeing technology of Wakanda's level in Africa (*Rise of the Black Panther* 56). On the governmental side, while Wakanda is a monarchy where the rule of the king is absolute, it is by no means a dictatorship where its citizens live oppressed and malnourished. In *Rise of the Black* Panther, the technological advancements and wealth brought on by the mining of vibranium are available to most of Wakanda's citizens, and the people are all shown to be valuable to the governing body. T'Challa personally goes on a quest to find twelve missing Wakandans who are all of a lower social class. Instead of an oppressive culture which could be improved by outside influence or one that tries to imitate and become like Western cultures (Ferguson 158), Wakanda is more like a utopia which other cultures should strive to learn *from*. Its southern neighbour, Niganda, is more like the Africa the colonisers left behind (Matereke 24) and resembles the continent ravaged by both poverty and civil war much more than Wakanda does. The cause for this difference between the neighbouring countries is explained in the map: the Alkama Fields belong to Wakanda.

The resource vibranium is also a contradiction of the traditional Western view where Africans could not produce anything valuable (Mudimbe 13), and that all African knowledge

came from other parts of the world. The ability to mine vibranium and to develop it into tools and weapons did not come to Wakanda from the outside. Rather, the Wakandans are the only ones with the ability to do so. The tendency or – as Achebe puts it – "need" (*An Image of Africa* 15) of Westerners to use Africa as a foil to Europe that Achebe argues has existed long before Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and still exists today is not present in *Rise of the Black Panther* and *World of Wakanda*. In the comics, Africa is something that Westerners cannot reach on their own no matter how hard they try. Similarly, Wakanda is not a nation that needs the West for aid in technological advancements or medicine and has no interest in becoming something similar to Europe or America (Ferguson 157). It is a country that has found its own identity. This is attributed to the lack of outside influence in Wakanda's development by T'Challa himself: "Despite the efforts of some, Wakanda has not suffered the same... *interruptions* as elsewhere on the continent." (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3) This echoes the thoughts of many Africanists who believe that colonialism is the reason for the legacy of instability that has followed Africa to its postcolonial days (Matereke 24).

Furthermore, the Africa we see in Wakanda is not the dark and uncivilised place portrayed by writers such as Conrad, but a place full of light, colour, and civilisation. The panels of the comics are bright and colourful, and more often than not they present to the reader one or more of Wakanda's technological wonders. There are much more of the "ostentatious" (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 86) pages which show off the images on the comics page in *Rise of the Black Panther* than there are in *Power Man and Iron Fist*. Here, too, the lack of thick black frames and clear margins comes into play. As mentioned earlier, many panels are placed on top of the background of a larger image on the page. This is a clear effort to show off the beauty and wonder of Wakanda rather than ground the events of the comics in a mundane setting like *Power Man and Iron Fist* does. Wakanda is a vast and wondrous land, and the reader is meant to see it. Panels which do not have a background image are rare, which

further supports the idea that the creators want the reader to see Wakanda and the combination of the traditional elements and the futuristic technology. Word balloon placement is such that the reader has a view of either Wakanda's scenery or the technological inventions unique to Wakanda, as is the case when T'Challa is introducing his foreign visitors to all that Wakanda has to offer (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3). In fact, the country of Wakanda is given as much attention in the story as the main character, with the detailed descriptions of its culture and technical advancements. The structuring of the pages in *Rise of the Black Panther* is one that allows for both detailed inspections of Wakandan technology – as is the case with T'Challa's presentation to the foreigners – and also for looking at larger physical areas, such as the throne room (*Rise of the Black Panther* #1). Panels and their frames are not arranged into strict order from left to right. Instead, they are freely placed next to and on top of each other while still adhering to the Western way of reading text from left to right.

Figure 11: Wakandan inventions presented in Rise of the Black Panther #3

Another example of Wakanda being shown off to the reader is when T'Challa is addressing his people in a broadcast. He promises to personally lead a search for missing Wakandans. On the page, different parts of Wakanda are introduced to the reader: the Extraction Academy, the Alkama Fields, the vibranium mines and the Techno Jungle. Each

panel on the page has a single speech balloon which is placed so that it does not intrude with the reader's view of what is in the panel. The scene also shows off another piece of Wakandan technology: drones with screens broadcasting Wakanda's speech are flying over the Alkama Fields.

The story of Wakanda differs not only from Western literature, but also from portrayals of Africa in novels such as Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart.* While Achebe's novel shows an Africa trying to resist change but eventually having to succumb to it through its main character Okonkwo, the Wakanda of *Rise of the Black Panther* is at first resisting change and exposure to the Western world, before eventually being revealed to the Western world by the main character, its own king. T'Challa's advisors – mostly remnants of older administrations – disagree with his decision to take Wakanda out of hiding and reveal the country to the rest of the world. They support the old way of doing things and would rather stay hidden and avoid joining Wakanda's physical space to that of the world around it, fearing conflict and increased attempts from outsiders to claim Wakanda for theirs. This shows the interesting duality of Wakanda. Its traditions demand that the country remains an isolated space, confined not by force – like the Harlem of *Power Man and Iron Fist* – but by choice and aided in that confinement by its geographical location. The new way represented by T'Challa wants Wakanda to be a space which opens its boundaries. T'Challa's reasoning for the decision to bring Wakanda out of hiding is to allow Wakanda to dictate the way it joins the world. He believes that the recent occurrences of outsiders finding their way into Wakanda's territory is a sign which indicates that Wakanda will have to join the rest of the world soon, one way or the other. Wakanda is being brought out of hiding so that it will avoid the fate of Achebe's Africa which resists change and outside influence until it is broken by the colonisers. The main character Okonkwo's eventual suicide in *Things Fall Apart* is a metaphor for this. His death symbolises the death of the traditions of his people in the hands of the colonisers. Wakanda's

story is not that of Achebe's Africa, but of a completely independent nation that is voluntarily making its first steps to join the rest of the world and doing so on its own terms. By doing this, T'Challa intends to prevent Wakanda's spirit and essence from being broken in the way that Okonkwo and the spirit of Africa were broken in *Things Fall Apart*. T'Challa's decision to expose Wakanda eventually causes much harm to the country, but even in the face of despair Wakanda's spirit does not break in the way Okonkwo's and Africa's spirit does in *Things Fall Apart*.

The expansion of Wakanda's boundaries T'Challa desires is countered by the villain Erik Killmonger's plans for expanding Wakanda. Where T'Challa wants to oppose the old traditionalists by incorporating Wakanda into the outside society, Killmonger wants Wakanda to show that it is mightier than the rest of the world through force. Killmonger – or N'Jadaka – is a Wakandan who was kidnapped and raised away from Wakanda. After T'Challa brings Wakanda out of hiding, Killmonger can finally return to his homeland. Motivated by the hardships he suffered during his time away from home, Killmonger uses T'Challa's plans against him. He believes that now that Wakanda is out of hiding, it will invite would-be conquerors and thieves – a belief that turns out to be true. In turn, he wants the world to see that Wakanda's technological advances are not only for peaceful causes, and that the people are also "warriors to be feared" (*Rise of the Black Panther* #4). Later, he kills a leading scientist of Wakanda named Takami and gains access to plans of vibranium weapons that were never constructed. Killmonger says he will use the weapons to "transfrom the unconquered realm... into the *conquerors* we were meant to be" (*Rise of the Black Panther #5*). Curtis introduces the concept sovereignty in relation to space as something that is "pertaining to national identity or international relations" (Curtis 3). He then goes on to discuss the philosophical ideas of sovereignty, to which I will return later in the thesis. Here, however, I will focus on the "international relations" part of sovereignty and how T'Challa's and Killmonger's views on

sovereignty differ. T'Challa sees Wakanda's best chance of retaining their sovereignty to involve them peacefully with the rest of the world. Making Wakanda an important partner to other members of the UN is crucial to his plan, offering what Wakanda has freely and not waiting for others to try and take it by force. Killmonger sees sovereignty as a result of strength. His experiences in the world outside of Wakanda have led him to believe that Wakanda's only option to retain its free status is to show Wakanda's superiority and usher in a new era of Wakandan control in the world by force. The common factor for both views is that they are concerned with *retaining* sovereignty. That means that there is a concern that the sovereignty might be lost. The assumption is that the other countries will want what Wakanda has and will also try to take it. T'Challa and Killmonger both justify their actions with the same reason, which shows that the black space of Wakanda always has to be wary of attempts to take it over from the outside. It is the spatial reality of the country that it needs to defend itself, no matter if that defending is through violence or diplomacy.

What is similar to other portrayals of Africa in how Wakanda is portrayed is the coveting of its land and resources by outside parties. In both *Rise of the Black Panther* and *World of Wakanda* many storylines involve organisations or people from outside of Wakanda trying to gain access to their vibranium mound or get their hands on Wakandan technology. From the outside, Wakanda is seen as a mysterious and alluring land, that holds danger within in the form of its panther king and his subjects. The idea of a "battlefield devoid of all recognizable humanity, into which the wandering European enters at his own peril" (Achebe, *An Image of Africa* 21) is present in this way. However, in the comics the people who see Africa in such a way are clearly presented as villains. In stories such as *Heart of Darkness*, the desirable way is for Africans to conduct themselves in ways befitting of white Europeans. The original African way is described as savage and uncivilised. In the Black Panther comics, the desirable way is for Wakandans to conduct themselves in ways befitting of Wakandans and

reject outside influences. The world outside of Wakanda is the one that is uncivilised. After T'Challa's sister Shuri finds out about Project Koukou, a plan where Wakandan technology would be used to create weapons, he confronts its creator and reaffirms the idea of the outside world being uncivilised when compared to Wakanda: "The Golden City shines because we've built a better world than the one outside the walls" (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3).

Wakanda is also subject to white racism (Achebe, *An Image of Africa* 21) and prejudices towards Africa. The comment mentioned earlier in the thesis about how a foreign visitor cannot believe that the kind of technology Wakanda has exists in Africa is an example of such racism because it adheres to the stereotype of Africa being a backwater continent, the inhabitants of which can create nothing of value by themselves (Mudimbe 13). The attempts to gain access to Wakanda's resources are also an example of it, as the parties coveting them often believe themselves entitled to them and see the Wakandan people as the savages Africans are commonly seen as in Western imagination (Achebe, *An Image of Africa* 25). But in this case, too, this way of seeing Africa and Africans is the villains' perspective. The heroes of the story act in the desirable Wakandan way and see Wakanda as the advanced nation that it is. In fact, the state of the rest of Africa is directly attributed to the involvement of white Europeans in T'Challa's comment about the "interruptions" elsewhere on the continent (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3).

However, T'Challa's decision to reveal Wakanda to outsiders leads to harmful consequences, as does his involvement with the Avengers. Already during the very first visit from the outsiders (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3), the Winter Soldier infiltrates Wakanda and ends up fighting T'Challa. Later on, T'Challa's feud with Namor, the king of Atlantis, leads to Atlantean spies coming to Wakanda, followed by a direct attack by Namor himself. Last, Thanos' search for the infinity stones leads him to Wakanda, and once again makes the "unconquered realm" a battlefield with numerous casualties. T'Challa's intentions in

expanding his realm are peaceful. He means to better both Wakanda and the outside world. When he visits the UN Security Council with his sister Shuri, he asks the foreign nations for trust: ". . . Wakanda's future rests in the ability to create trust beyond our borders." (*Rise of the Black Panther* #3) But the parties outside of Wakanda do not see Wakanda as a potential ally, but as a potential enemy or a land to conquer in hopes of gaining its valuable resources. They do not want to grant Wakanda the position in the world T'Challa seeks: "I want Wakanda to help secure peace and progress across the planet we all share." Even if Wakanda is a sovereign black space with control over its laws and the distribution of its space, unlike Harlem, it still faces the expectations set on black spaces by outsiders. It is meant to be controlled and confined, not to join and lead the effort to "secure peace and progress". The attempts at expanding Wakanda's influence outside its boundaries are met with hostility, as black space attempts to take a place in the global – or even universal – society it is not expected to occupy. To put it more concretely, Wakanda does not act in a way which is expected out of an African country, and there arises a need from the outside to make it act like that. As a foil to Europe, as Achebe would say, even if Europe is not the sole adversary in this case.

World of Wakanda does not follow T'Challa as closely as *Rise of the Black Panther* does, but the effects of his actions during important moments in the Marvel Universe such as Thanos' hunt for the infinity stones are seen through the eyes of members of Wakandan society lower on the totem pole. While the Dora Milaje are the king's personal bodyguards and thus high-ranking members of society, they do not get to take part in decisions. They are expected only to serve the king, and on occasion one of them is chosen as the king's wife. They have to fight the battles that T'Challa invites to Wakanda. This causes frustration among the Dora Milaje, who say that the king has "forgotten what it means to be a son of Wakanda" (*World of Wakanda* #2). This in turn creates mistrust between the king and the Dora Milaje, eventually leading to the bodyguards' rejection of the king. They proclaim that they serve Wakanda, not

the royal family. Their loyalty is to the physical space they live in rather than its rulers: "We are more than servants to any one man or woman – we serve Wakanda." In Curtis' analysis of *Secret Wars*, he argues that Doctor Doom maintains sovereignty over Battleworld because of the threat of the monsters that lie beyond The Shield. Doom's sovereignty over the space he rules is because he protects the world from an outside threat (Curtis 7-8). Similar to that, T'Challa's – or whoever is the Black Panther – sovereignty over Wakanda has relied on his ability to protect the realm and keep it safe from threats both inside and outside. T'Challa's actions directly invite war and danger to Wakanda, so in the Dora Milaje's eyes T'Challa loses his sovereignty over the nation and its people.

Similar to the loyalty to the country of Wakanda rather than individual people, the Wakandans carry the space of Wakanda with them wherever they go, just like Luke Cage carries Harlem wherever he goes. The "racial consciousness" (Haynes 151) of the Wakandans is shaped by the space of Wakanda, their home country. Being from Wakanda is an attribute of these people, and something that defines them. ". . . every Wakandan possesses the strength and the guile to keep the realm inviolate." (*Rise of the Black Panther* #2) Geography is central to our understanding of things like territory, politics, and identities (Matereke 27). The Dora Milaje and other Wakandans have made the geographical territory, that is the physical space, of Wakanda into a very central part of their identities.

The lack of focus on T'Challa in *World of Wakanda* shows the reader a different Wakanda from the one in *Rise of the Black Panther*. It prevents the story of Wakanda from becoming a single-voiced narrative that only presents the country as an imagined example of an African country without white interference. Instead, it gives the reader a different point of view to life inside Wakanda's boundaries – both physical and mental. Soja's Thirdspace, the discussion of how people think about the space around them and experience it, comes into play more in *World of Wakanda*. It shows a Wakanda which has flaws. A country which might not

be the utopia described earlier even to its own citizens. Even if Wakanda and the Black Panther comics symbolise a black space without racism (Nama 63) and are free of outside influence and restrictions, the society of Wakanda itself can be restrictive to its occupants. While T'Challa is the king and can move freely in and out of Wakanda and within its borders, the members of the Dora Milaje are bound to the royal family. The sovereignty enjoyed by Wakanda as a nation is not extended to its most revered warriors. They are held in great respect, but they are still servants, and their movements and actions are limited by the orders they are given – at least until they decide to forsake T'Challa, as described earlier. Another example of this difference in how Wakanda treats the Dora Milaje differently from T'Challa is given by Aneka, when the Dora Milaje find out that T'Challa has been conspiring with his former enemy, Namor. Namor's attack on Wakanda was devastating, and the Dora Milaje cannot accept that T'Challa is allying himself with the Atlantean king.

> You have lost your *soul*. You have forgotten what it is to be a son of Wakanda. I am loyal to Wakanda, T'Challa. I have trusted you, but I too see that we can trust you no longer. You were not there as we cleaned the dead bodies from the street, not once, but twice. You do not live with the rotten stench of senseless death consuming you. (*World of Wakanda* #2)

For all of T'Challa's good intentions when he is executing his plans to bring Wakanda out of hiding in *Rise of the Black Panther*, the consequences his actions reap in *World of Wakanda* are not truly felt by him, as he is away with the Avengers when the devastating attacks of Namor and later Thanos hit his country. The Dora Milaje and the everyday Wakandans are the ones to feel the direct consequences and the ones to salvage what is remaining of their home, trying to help the people who are suffering because of the attacks. While the blows to

the country are most likely felt by T'Challa, the true victims are the Wakandan citizens. It is this absence that also causes the Dora Milaje to reject T'Challa's sovereignty over Wakandan space, rather turning to his sister Shuri, who has been governing Wakanda during T'Challa's trips elsewhere. This shows that even in the seemingly utopian black space of Wakanda, there is injustice in the distribution of its space (Hays-Mitchell 202). The royal palace and its inhabitants – and T'Challa, who was not present for Namor's attack of which Aneka speaks in the earlier quote – are not the ones truly in the line of fire. The decisions which affect the whole space are made in the royal palace, but the negatives of those decisions do not truly affect the ones making those decisions. Namely, the physical violence which follows from T'Challa's feud with Namor is not directed at T'Challa or the royalty, but at the regular people.

Hays-Mitchell speaks of "spatial injustice" (203) in relation to spatial justice. Spatial justice is a concept that is meant to help us "understand how race, class, geography, and spatial scale . . . are implicated in the neoliberal state" (202). In Wakanda's case, spatial injustice happens in the case of the Dora Milaje because of their class. The different spaces of Wakanda, both physical and mental, are not as open for them as they are for T'Challa because of their position on the social totem pole of the kingdom. The Dora Milaje are meant to protect the king. They are more like accessories to the king's space, rather than having a space to call their own.

Even in *Rise of the Black Panther* – which gives a much more positive image of Wakanda than *World of Wakanda* – spatial injustice reveals itself to the reader. In this case, it appears in the form of Hunter. Hunter is a white man who was rescued from a plane crash when he was a boy by T'Challa's father. T'Chaka raised Hunter almost like he was his own son. However, because Hunter was "not of the blood" (*Rise of the Black Panther* #4), he "could never be king". Hunter rose to become the head of the Hatut Zeraze, Wakanda's secret security division. He is bound to the throne because the previous king saved his life and took him in.

Hunter's origin story makes the king seem noble, and the act was noble indeed. But the way Hunter was afterwards hidden from the public eye and his existence made almost into a secret counteracts this nobility. Hunter does not have a public role in the Wakandan royal family, and he is never seen in public gatherings. He is not free to show his face around the palace or the whole of Wakanda like T'Challa is, nor is he a revered figure as a protector of Wakanda like the Black Panther is even though he too is "a son of T'Chaka". He suffers spatial injustice in Wakanda because of his race. He can never be a true Wakandan in the eyes of the rest of the country. Even T'Challa, the supposedly righteous hero, points out Hunter's place in society when Doctor Doom suggests a "son of T'Chaka" has betrayed the throne:

> My worst fear is of betrayal from someone Wakanda raised as one of its own. If the man given purpose and power by our father desires the throne, if *the White Wolf* thinks *he* should be king, then the Black Panther's next challenge will be the hardest yet. (*Rise of the Black Panther* #4)

It is later revealed that Hunter is not the traitor and the two reconcile. However, T'Challa makes it clear that Hunter's place is not on the throne, but in the shadows. His first act after speaking with Doctor Doom is to attack the headquarters of the Hatut Zeraze intending to kill Hunter. In his eyes, Hunter should be content with being allowed to exist in Wakanda. This shows how Hunter, despite being "one of Wakanda's own", is expected to accept his position, whatever it may be. He has no right to dictate the terms for his existence in the space of Wakanda because, in the end, he is an outsider. No matter what he does or how long he has served the throne, he is not Wakandan.

Spatial injustice brings us back to the question of sovereignty and the more philosophical ideas of it that Curtis speaks of. T'Challa enjoys sovereignty over the space of

Wakanda and its borders. The Dora Milaje and other lower-ranked Wakandans enjoy sovereignty only over their own bodies, as T'Challa is the final decision maker in things concerning Wakandan space, and as such, the final decision maker in things concerning the lower-ranking members of society. By involving Wakanda in conflicts its citizens did not choose to be a part of, T'Challa strips them of the sovereignty that is attributed to them as human beings. They no longer enjoy any sort of agency when they go to war for T'Challa. Through no choice of their own they end up fighting a battle that could have been avoided and are reduced into "bare life" (Hannah 62) occupying the space of Wakanda. The definition of bare life in Hannah's analysis of sovereign power is that of Agamben's: a person is "stripped of every political status and wholly reduced to bare life" (Agamben 171). This is another form of restriction placed on the Dora Milaje and the rest of T'Challa's subjects, and of the sovereignty that has been stripped from them and handed to T'Challa. The basis for this stripping of political status and agency is based on T'Challa's right as sovereign to declare a state of emergency (Curtis 5-6). T'Challa is the person with the right to "suspend the law in the face of exceptional circumstances", and he uses this right to order the Dora Milaje into dangerous situations and to strip them of the protection they are usually provided inside the space of Wakanda. The rules of the spatial dimension of Wakanda change the moment T'Challa's actions cause the state of emergency, and the Dora Milaje are forced to join the efforts to defend the country.

Even after they rebel against their king, the Dora Milaje are still bound by their loyalty to Wakanda and the rest of the royal family. This is another aspect of Wakanda's traditionality. For all its technological advancement and the apparent happiness of its people, the people of Wakanda are still very much controlled by the idea of honour and fulfilling their particular role in society. In the Dora Milaje's case, this restrictiveness comes from their servitude to the king. They move at the royal family's orders, no matter where they are, and as such their freedom to

use the space around them is always restricted. It is a very different experience of the Wakandan space when compared to that of T'Challa or maybe even an everyday Wakandan. The main locale for events in *World of Wakanda* is the Dora Milaje training center called Uponga. It is where the members of the Dora Milaje spend almost all of the time they are not on a mission. The Dora Milaje are being restricted to a specific space within the larger space of Wakanda. The conclusion of the story sees Ayo and Aneka, the two main characters, break free from these restrictions after Ayo steals prototype armour to help Aneka escape from prison. The two openly rebel against the Wakandan throne and start their lives as free women, moving through the space of Wakanda as they please. The restrictions of the Dora Milaje and the throne are a thing of the past, and they are now "free women" (*World of Wakanda* #5). What is notable about the pair's defection is that even if they have renounced their ties to the royal family, they do not leave Wakanda. Instead, they stay and help the regular Wakandans who are in peril. The physical space of Wakanda is such a strong part of their identity that even when they are fugitives in the eyes of the governing body, they do not flee the country and strive to help its citizens. The image in the cover of *World of Wakanda* #5, where Aneka is standing with a burning Wakandan flag in her hand, could be interpreted to mean that they are rebelling against Wakanda as a whole, but with their devotion to the country the meaning changes into rebellion against the throne and not the physical space of the country.

Figure 12: Cover of World of Wakanda #5

What causes Ayo and Aneka's rebellion against the throne is Aneka being sentenced to death after killing a Wakandan village chieftain who was exploiting the women of his village. The chieftain used his power to round up women who pleased him. He had the women imprisoned in cages inside his home and then forced them into having sex with him, threatening

punishment if they did not. Aneka comes to rescue the women, and she ends up killing the chieftain after he refuses to be arrested peacefully. Even after it was proven that Aneka killed the man to protect the women, her death sentence stands. The reasoning is that in killing the chieftain, Aneka acted against the law of Wakanda, and that the Dora Milaje are supposed to uphold the laws, not turn "into its flouters" (*World of Wakanda* #5). This is another example of how Wakanda treats its citizens differently depending on their stature. There is punishment for the killing of man, no matter that he was an evil man "whose honor is ostentation, whose justice is deceit". Aneka gets turned into an example of what happens when a member of the Dora Milaje ends up breaking the laws of Wakanda, even if it is to protect innocents. Later on, when news of Aneka's deed carries throughout Wakanda, more and more women ask for aid from the Dora Milaje. The initial reaction from their leader, Mistress Zola, is that they cannot act before the now reinstated King T'Challa finishes grieving for her dead sister and gives the order. The Dora Milaje do end up breaking this rule and go on the mission after Zola promotes Ayo to captain and Ayo gives the order to the rest of the group. The Dora Milaje are bound by their servitude and by their gender. They cannot act officially before T'Challa gives them the order and are supposed to accept that meanwhile bad things are happening to innocent people all over Wakanda in the hands of men. Again, Wakanda, despite it being this seemingly utopian black space free of white influence, shows that within its boundaries confinement and restrictions exist for certain members of its society. This is seen in Aneka's words to the rescued women after she has killed the chieftain: "You are all safe now. I am sorry your fathers and brothers did not honor you as they should have by keeping you safe. I did what I had to do." (*World of Wakanda* #4) The men of Wakanda look the other way when women are the subject of violence or oppression. They are fulfilling their expected role in society by being the foils of men.

The restrictions placed upon the Dora Milaje in the space of Wakanda are visible in the comic book language as well. Whereas *Rise of the Black Panther* has plenty of panels and whole pages showing off Wakanda and its marvels, *World of Wakanda* is more character-focused, and the space around the characters is not explored in as much detail as in *Rise of the Black Panther.* The pages of the comic resemble more of the ones in *Power Man and Iron Fist*, where there were less ostentatious (Groensteen, *System of Comics* 86) pages and more smaller panels. Even important scenes such as the one where the Dora Milaje abandon T'Challa (*World of Wakanda* #2) are not given full-page panels or two-page spreads. Rather than exploring Wakanda and trying to introduce the reader to the country, *World of Wakanda* explores what it is like for the members of the Dora Milaje to live in the space of Wakanda. Panels are more often closed and separated from the rest of the page, making them more restrictive. The frames are thicker than they are in *Rise of the Black Panther*, creating a more closed feeling to the images. The Dora Milaje are also separated from the rest of Wakandan society by the closed frames. Their role is that of an adored servant to the throne. They do not mingle with commoners, but neither are they allowed to exist on the same plane as those of higher status. They occupy a lonely spot in Wakanda's spatial realm, where they only have each other as peers. Everyone else is either above or below their status and thus closed outside of the frames, outside of their reach.

Figure 13: The Dora Milaje leave T'Challa in World of Wakanda #2

The fact that the Dora Milaje are bound to servitude is perfectly visible after they have abandoned T'Challa and reaffirm their loyalty to the country of Wakanda even when its king has betrayed their trust. While Mistress Zola, the leader of the Dora Milaje, acknowledges that the group has broken centuries of Wakandan tradition, she also reminds her group that first and

foremost they "serve *Wakanda*" (*World of Wakanda* #3). The panel in which Zola utters these words is centred on the lower part of the page and completely closed by thick black frames, even though the rest of the page is unframed. Even after the Dora Milaje have forsaken the king of Wakanda, they are still restricted by their loyalty to the country.

The scene in which Ayo and Aneka contemplate their feelings for each other is another one where the boundaries set for the Dora Milaje are visible in the comics language in use. The first panel, which sets the scene in Uponga, is not framed, but it has two insets – one of Ayo and the other of Aneka – which are framed from all sides. The rest of the panels are either completely or mostly framed against the black-and-white margins. The frames of the panels show the boundaries that Ayo and Aneka have to move within even when they are in love with each other. They cannot be open about their love, but instead need to conform to the role their society expects from them. Ayo is ready to try and break those boundaries, but at this point in time, Aneka is not: "I am a captain of the Dora Milaje. I will not be broken by an initiate still wet behind the ears. She is nothing to me. The softness of her skin is nothing to me. Her eyes are nothing to me." (*World of Wakanda* #1)

Figure 14: Ayo tries to meet Aneka in World of Wakanda #1

This forbidden love is once again on display when Ayo and the rest of the initiates are made into full-fledged members of the Dora Milaje (*World of Wakanda* #1). Aneka gives her congratulatory speech: "Congratulations, my new Dora Milaje sisters. And now a *toast*. From this moment forward, we fight together, we work together, we learn together... and we love

together." The only panel that is completely framed on the page is the one where Aneka looks at Ayo and finishes her speech: "...and we love together." The panel that focuses on the love Aneka has for Ayo is the only one which places the restriction of the frames around an otherwise open and joyous scene.

The margins in *World of Wakanda* are a mix of black and white space. In the story, Wakanda is constantly under threat of an attack, under attack or recuperating from an attack. The margins – when they exist – are either completely white or a mix of both black and white. They represent the white space that is trying to creep into Wakanda through the attacks it has suffered. For example, when the Dora Milaje discover Atlantean spies within Wakandan borders (*World of Wakanda* #1), the margins are at first non-existent, but the jagged frames reveal glimpses of white between the irregularly shaped panels. The same happens on the next page, where the larger margin on the top right is black, but then the margin also turns completely white by the time the reader reaches the bottom of the page. The black space of Wakanda is cracking thanks to the infiltration by the Atlanteans. Right after Namor's attack on Wakanda, the page structure is more traditional than in the case of the pages with the Atlantean spies, but the margins are a clearer mix of black and white.

The irregular panel shape in the scene with the Atlantean spies infiltrating Wakanda is also worth noting. *World of Wakanda* largely consists of regular rectangular panels, but in this scene the shape of the framed panels is irregular. It is almost as if cracks are appearing in a solid surface. This, too, represents the cracking of the space of Wakanda, which was previously considered unconquered and impenetrable. It also symbolises the chaos that war has brought to the country. The uncommon structuring of the panels also makes the page read faster than a regular page consisting only of rectangular-shaped panels. It creates a feeling of tension and uneasiness, which fits the atmosphere of Wakanda at the time. The country is feeling uneasy because of these spies who were able to infiltrate its territory.

Figure 15: Atlantean spies have infiltrated Wakanda in World of Wakanda #1

This irregularity in panel shapes is once again on display in a scene where an everyday Wakandan seeks to get the attention of Shuri by feigning an assassination attempt. Ayo and Aneka stop the false assassin, who then plants in them the seed of doubt towards T'Challa. The

man lost his wife in Namor's flood and blames T'Challa for letting outsiders into Wakanda. "Look at all we have lost! Namor's flood was brought here by Wakanda's very hand!" (*World of Wakanda* #2) In this instance, the margins between the panels do not appear through cracks, but the white margin is all around the panels. The white space is surrounding Wakanda. The irregularly shaped panels resemble regular rectangular panels more than in the scene with the Atlantean spies. They are only slightly bent instead of being clearly a different shape and having sharper edges, as if they were broken pieces of an object. This demonstrates how this time the perfectly protected Wakandan space is being slowly bent to something strange and unknown from the inside, and not cracked open by an outside force.

The scene where Aneka kills the chieftain who is holding women captive (*World of Wakanda* #4) is also an example of irregular panel shapes representing moments of uncertainty or change in the physical space the panels depict. Most of the page looks like you would expect a standard comic page to look like. The first row of panels has a large inset of Aneka's face, but the middle row is just three rectangular panels that are placed one after the other. On the bottom row, however, the first panel is irregularly shaped, and it reveals a bit of red margins that look as if they are hiding under the page. The moment of violence itself is depicted in the irregularly shaped panel. It symbolises how the killing of the chieftain is the catalyst for change in Wakandan society. It is the moment from which the Midnight Angels – what Ayo and Aneka call themselves after stealing the prototype armour and rebelling against the throne – are born, and the moment from which the women of Wakanda find courage and no longer submit to the evils of the men around them.

Figure 16: Aneka kills the chieftain in World of Wakanda #4

Further support for the idea of irregular panel shapes symbolising irregularities in the actual physical space is provided in *World of Wakanda* #5 when Folami, a traitorous member of the Dora Milaje, attempts to kill Ayo while making Aneka watch through a video broadcast. The panel where Folami is about to stab Ayo is slightly tilted and not disproportionate. Even

if Ayo is merely pretending to sleep and ends up stopping Folami's attack, the moment is about to cause a large ripple in Aneka's world and change the physical space of Wakanda by taking away one of the members of the Dora Milaje. The irregular panel shape symbolises this.

World of Wakanda also introduces to the reader Necropolis, the city of the dead, though only through two brief scenes. Necropolis is another demonstration of the special privilege T'Challa holds in Wakanda. Only he is permitted to enter Necropolis at his pleasure. The Dora Milaje are only able to accompany him there because he so desires. Necropolis is where T'Challa chooses to hold his hidden meetings with Namor after the two join other superheroes in the fight against Thanos and the destruction of the universe. The reason for this decision is that Necropolis is a space in which concerns only T'Challa. He says this himself to his sister, Shuri, after the Dora Milaje betray the king's trust and tell Shuri about the secret meetings between T'Challa and Namor: "Necropolis does not concern you, sister. What happens here is of no matter to the kingdom." (*World of Wakanda* #4) Even as the queen of Wakanda, Shuri breaks the spatial rules of the country by entering Necropolis, which both is and is not a part of Wakanda. T'Challa is the Black Panther, and thus the space of Necropolis is only his to enter when he wants to. It is yet another example of Wakanda providing its citizens with a seemingly free space where they can live free of oppression, but the spatial rules of the society are very different depending on the person or social class. In the scene which takes place in Necropolis, T'Challa has surrendered some of his sovereignty over Wakanda to Shuri, but he remains the sole ruler of Necropolis because he is the Black Panther. Once again in his role as sovereign, T'Challa is the only one who is allowed to determine who enters Necropolis. The area is under a constant ban for anyone other than T'Challa. Usually, the sovereign can instate a ban for an individual who breaks the rules of the space under the sovereign's control (Curtis 11), but in Necropolis the rules are reversed. The ban is the normal state of affairs, and lifting the ban is the sovereign declaring a state of exception for Necropolis' spatial rules.

In contrast to Harlem in *Power Man and Iron Fist*, Wakanda is supposed to be the ideal black space. It has not underwent the treatment at the hands of white colonisers that its African neighbours went through, and there are no white spaces around it that control it and shape how the space is distributed between its occupants. The international isolation of the country is a choice made by all of the generations of Wakandan rules who preceded T'Challa, not a forceful restriction placed on the country by people who do not even live in it. Its borders are drawn by natural protective elements like mountains and lakes, except for the open southern border, which Wakanda shares with the hostile Niganda. There, the source of Wakanda's prosperity is controlled by Wakandans itself, and not by an outsider party. There are attempts at this forceful restriction after T'Challa brings Wakanda out of hiding, but they remain as attempts. Wakanda's involvement in the outside world and the expansion of its boundaries is not successfully contained by outside parties, and the country's status as a free, sovereign black space is retained. Therefore, one would expect Wakandans not to suffer from confinement or restrictions to their movements and actions at least when they are within the boundaries of Wakanda. However, the truth is different. As demonstrated in this thesis, Wakanda is a black space that treats its citizens differently based on their status in society. Members of society lower on the totem pole are stripped of their sovereignty in times of emergency, and they are subject to Wakanda's traditions and laws with no exception even when their actions are proven to be the right thing to do. This state of Wakandan spatial injustice is brought to the reader's attention through both the dialogue in the comics and through the use of comics language.

This chapter demonstrates that even seemingly free black space is under some kind of confinement either to hide itself from outside parties or because of expectations placed on it by those parties. The next chapter will draw together the main findings made in the thesis so far and conclude the thesis.

4. Conclusions

When I started working on this thesis, I had the idea of presenting two very different black spaces. My initial reading of the comics gave me the impression that *Power Man and Iron Fist* presents the reader a black space confined forcibly by white outsiders, and the Black Panther comics would show a prospering black space free of white influence and thus free of involuntary confinement. The black spaces represented in *Power Man and Iron Fist*, *Rise of the Black Panther*, and *World of Wakanda* are all indeed different from each other. The black space of *Power Man and Iron Fist* represents the urban American spaces of today's world, *Rise of the Black Panther* portrays an Africa very different from the idea Western literary works such as Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* have of the continent, and *World of Wakanda* provides a different viewpoint into that space by moving away from T'Challa as the main character. However, as I got further along the thesis and analysed these comics more and more, Wakanda revealed itself to be just as confined and restricting of its occupants as Harlem. Just in a different way. In the end, this thesis ended up demonstrating how that confinement is visible both in the Firstspace of the comics, the visual representations of the physical space, and in the Secondspace, the comics language that was used to create metaphorical representations of physical space around the concrete visualisations.

In Chapter 2, I analysed *Power Man and Iron* Fist and demonstrated how it represents the confinement faced by urban black spaces in our own reality. Black people in American cities are forcibly confined into the areas designated for them – like ghettos or specific neighbourhoods. Harlem is such an area. By moving the black space to the edge of the city – or in Harlem's case, the borough – it is easier to govern and police black people while also keeping them under surveillance. It is also easier to prevent the black neighbourhoods and communities from spreading into the white spaces if they are confined to the edges. In *Power Man and Iron Fist*, the black space is in the centre of things – not on the edge – in the form of

the images and the panels of the comics. Its confinement and restriction are shown in its surroundings. The white margins pressing on the black space from all sides represent the white space that is around Harlem – though Harlem is not necessarily surrounded by white space *on all sides*, as the Bronx is to the north of it, separated from Harlem by the Harlem River. Inside that white space, the characters of the comic and the black space of Harlem are confined into small, framed panels which both close their contents within them and separate them from the white space.

In Chapter 3, it was demonstrated how black space – no matter how free it apparently is – is not truly free. Black space is always confined and its existence is somehow restricted. The Wakanda presented in *Rise of the Black Panther* and *World of Wakanda* is confined in a different way from Harlem. Its isolation from the surrounding world is both natural – thanks to geography – and seemingly voluntary. The country made the choice to hide itself from the rest of the world. This choice was made out of necessity to hide itself from the colonisers and prevent the country from facing the same kind of devastation that crippled the rest of the continent. When T'Challa becomes king, he decides to take Wakanda out of hiding. In contrast to Harlem and the Wakanda of the past, the new way of Wakanda is to expand its influence to areas outside the confining frames and pages of the comics. This shift is visible in the way *Rise of the Black Panther* presents space with the use of comics language. The style and structure of the pages is much more open and freer than it is in *Power Man and Iron Fist*. Eventually, T'Challa's decision to try and make a black space that is not restricted in any way is met with a hostile response. Outsiders attempt to confine the black space, wanting what it has for their own.

World of Wakanda provides a counter to the openness of *Rise of the Black Panther* by showing a darker side of the seemingly utopian society in Wakanda. The members of the Dora Milaje cannot enjoy the same kind of freedom as their king. They are constantly closed inside

much smaller frames than T'Challa, bound by their service to the throne and their country. It is not until the end of *World of Wakanda* that the main characters break free of their restrictions and are able to travel through the surrounding space by their own decision. *World of Wakanda* shows that even when white influence is not present in a black space, the society and its culture can still restrict the members of the community in that space. The space of Wakanda is unjust to different groups of its own citizens, even if it is not oppressed by an outside force.

Despite the differences in the ways black space is handled and represented in all three comics, there is one common factor: confinement or restriction of some kind. Even in *Rise of the Black Panther* which seemingly demonstrates boundaries that are broken down and presents Wakanda taking its first steps into the outside world as a positive outcome, the result is that of violence and attempts to either conquer Wakanda or steal from it. The same phenomenon happens in *Power Man and Iron Fist* when Luke leaves Harlem. He is met with scorn by Doctor Strange and with hostility by Captain Marvel and her group. When black space tries to expand or when its occupants try to leave the designated space that others have given for them, the response is negative. Either the blacks are put in their place when they try to leave the location that has been designated for them, as is the case with Luke Cage, or they are met with violence and attempts of taking what is theirs if an uncontrolled black space is revealed, which is what happens in Wakanda's case. This confinement is in conflict with the ideas of the supposed post-racial era – as it is called by Neely and Samura. In a post-racial world, race is not supposed to affect treatment of people or the spaces and places they are put in. However, the world that *Power Man and Iron Fist* and *Rise of the Black Panther* present in their stories is one in which white outsiders definitely want to confine black spaces into easily controllable areas and not allow them to expand or gain control or influence. Wakanda's tradition of isolating itself from the world is perfectly justified by the crises T'Challa faces after bringing the country out of hiding. Black space either is confined by force or has to isolate and confine

itself willingly in order to avoid violent reactions from white spaces. In *World of Wakanda*, the confinement is different. It shows how Wakanda's traditions and customs force people to act according to the role given to them. These restrictions are present in every action of Ayo and Aneka, who struggle against the confinement suffered by them in their work as servants of the throne, in their personal life as members of a lower social class and as women who do not find the justice they seek when they have to break the law to protect other women.

Both *Power Man and Iron Fist* and the Black Panther comics show black space that is always suffering from what Hays-Mitchell calls spatial injustice, either from the outside or within the black space's own borders and boundaries. The spatial injustice of Harlem is caused by outsiders who want to control it and keep it out of their own spaces. Luke and the other residents of Harlem suffer from this injustice not because of spatial constructs laid down by Harlem citizens themselves, but because others have made Harlem into marginalised space. Wakanda, on the other hand, does not face spatial injustice from the outside, but its culture and traditions subject its own citizens to it. The sovereignty and the ability to traverse in and out of Wakanda's boundaries that T'Challa has are not extended to other members of Wakandan society such as the Dora Milaje or Hunter.

In the end, comics art can make a difficult subject for analysis when studying series that have multiple authors involved in what are unusually short series. Art styles change, as do preferences regarding the use of panels, frames, and margins. Some artists prefer to use more landscape panels, others prefer a more traditional three rows of panels with three panels per row. Despite these challenges, the common features shared throughout the series analysed in this thesis were apparent. All three comics analysed present black space as something that is never truly free. The shadow of white space lurks over it whether it be directly or indirectly. In Harlem's case the effects are direct. Its predicament is caused directly by its marginalisation. Wakanda suffers from an indirect influence, where the trauma of colonisation that Africa

suffered affects the country's every decision and caused the country to spend generations in secrecy. The analysis in this thesis shows that while the circumstances differ between individual spaces, black space is always confined by white space.

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