

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

“We Are the Renaissance”

Multimodal Analysis of Black Identity in the
Production of Beyoncé

Master’s Program in English Studies

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Abstract: The aim of this thesis is to study how the artist Beyoncé constructs Black identity multimodally through her production. This thesis is grounded in my 2024 bachelor’s thesis “I just might be a Black Bill Gates in the making: Portrayal of Black Identity in the Music of Beyoncé”. For this thesis, I expand my focus from song lyrics studied in there to Beyoncé’s other production pieces, including Beyoncé’s Formation music video (2016) and the Renaissance World Tour (RWT) concert (2023). I introduce two research questions for this study: “How is Black identity constructed multimodally in the production of Beyoncé?” and “What kind of differences are there in the multimodal construction between the music video and the concert?”

Theoretical background relies on introducing previous studies conducted on Beyoncé, multimodal analysis, concepts relating to Black identity, and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The data relies on qualitative methods. I adopted the methodology by Bateman et al. (2017) as well as Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025) in the analysis for multimodal analysis, as well as Machin and Mayr (2012) and Fairclough (2012) for critical discourse analysis. The data was acquired on YouTube, using the official Beyoncé ‘Formation’ music video (2016) as well as Andrew Concerts (2023) concert film of the RWT.

The results of this study suggest that Beyoncé constructs identity multimodally through a variety of themes. Beyoncé discusses Black collective trauma, reclaiming white spaces, Black community, shifting power balance within the Black community, and Black future (Formation) as well as Black Joy, Black community, spatial reclamation and Black future (RWT). Production pieces deal with some similar topics (e.g., Black community and Black future) as well as some differences due to, e.g., material/medial affordances of the production pieces.

I would like to thank Beyoncé for this Master's Thesis.

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1. “Welcome to Mother’s Mind” — Introduction

Attending Beyoncé’s Renaissance World Tour in 2023, the quote seen in the title of this chapter could be heard echoing throughout the stadiums, voiced by Kevin JZ Prodigy. One year earlier, in 2022, Beyoncé had released her seventh studio album ‘RENAISSANCE’. Both the album and the world tour were widely acclaimed and unanimously considered as a testimony to the Black queer culture.

RENAISSANCE was not the only testimony dedicated to the Black people. A bit over ten years ago, on February 6, 2016, Beyoncé released without advance marketing a song called ‘Formation’ for her upcoming sixth studio album, ‘Lemonade’. Formation marked a significant turning-point in Beyoncé’s career, since the song and the accompanying music video raised awareness about the challenges of the Black community, in a novel way compared to Beyoncé’s earlier production. The music video consists of imagery that was shocking to many — for instance, dancing inside plantation houses, and putting middle fingers up in the air while singing about a person who “fuck me good”.

Both the RWT concert and the Formation music video are culturally impactful artefacts in Beyoncé’s production, and in the music business altogether. The impact of Beyoncé can also be seen in academic research, as her works have been studied in two interdisciplinary collections: *The Lemonade Reader* (2019), and *The Renaissance Reader* (2025). Having done research on Beyoncé’s lyrics and Black identity in my bachelor’s thesis (Puhakka, 2024), I wished to explore these themes further in the master’s thesis. Thus, for this master’s thesis, I expand the focus from sole lyrics to a wider context in which Beyoncé constructs her Black identity, for instance through sounds, gestures, imagery and spatiality. All these areas are studied in the field of *multimodality* (e.g., van Leeuwen, 2022; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Bateman, et al., 2017), a method, and a theory of communication and meaning-making, I intend to deploy in this thesis. Therefore, this master’s thesis is seeking to answer two research questions:

- (1) How is Black identity constructed multimodally in the production of Beyoncé?
- (2) What kind of differences are there in the multimodal construction of identity between the music video and the concert?

As mentioned above, both *The Lemonade Reader* (2019) and *The Renaissance Reader* (2025) have stemmed from the urge to study and understand Beyoncé in a wider context among various fields of research. However, studying Beyoncé's construction of identity through the multimodal perspective has yet to be applied, as many studies have focused solely on single-axis research, i.e., focusing only on a single theme, such as the use of language. By conducting this thesis on the subject, I hope to fill this research gap and bring this thesis into the line of scholarly work conducted on Beyoncé.

I continue this thesis by first introducing the background for this thesis to the reader, consisting of relevant terminology, introducing theoretical framework, and discussing earlier studies conducted on Beyoncé in Chapter 2. Next, I introduce the present study by familiarizing the reader with the data collection of this study, and discussing the methodologies applied to this study while also addressing the ethical considerations of this study in Chapter 3. After that, I offer the reader results of the analysis in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I address these findings more in depth in relation to the research questions, while also offering the reader a wider context of this study in light of the earlier research and implications on the future research. I conclude this thesis altogether in Chapter 6.

2. Background

In this chapter, I explore the theoretical background to studying the production of Beyoncé and familiarize the reader with relevant terminology. First, I familiarize the reader with the artist Beyoncé and her 2023 Renaissance World Tour. Secondly, I will discuss the relation between multimodality and discourse, identity, and music. In addition, I discuss the concept of Black identity, and the complexity of defining it. Lastly, I discuss critical discourse analysis in relation to multimodality.

2.1 Beyoncé as an Artist and a Subject of Scholarly Inquiry

Singer and songwriter Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter, commonly known only by her artist name *Beyoncé*, was born on September 4, 1981, in Houston, Texas. Her career was launched in the girl group Destiny's Child, and initially released her first solo album, *Dangerously in Love*, in 2003. She has since released seven other studio albums: *B'Day* (2006), *I Am... Sasha Fierce* (2008), *4* (2011), *Beyoncé* (2013), *Lemonade* (2016), *RENAISSANCE* (2022) and *COWBOY CARTER* (2024). She has additionally recorded a soundtrack 'The Lion King: The Gift' [commonly referred to only as 'The Gift'] in 2019, and a deluxe album of the same album in 2020. She has recorded many accompanying music videos for her songs, many of which have reached a widely renowned status — music videos are a key medium for any successful artist, in addition to recordings, and Beyoncé is not an exception in this matter.

In addition to her many music videos, she has also been touring for many years. In 2023, she toured on the 'Renaissance World Tour' (RWT). RWT was critically acclaimed by a large number of critics. For instance, Marcus (2023) described RWT as “a dazzling, Afrofuturist¹ fantasia”. Furthermore, Marcus (2023) describes that the RWT was a tribute to LGBT+ and Black people, both historically marginalized groups. Kinitra Brooks, co-editor of both *The Lemonade Reader* (2019a) and *The Renaissance Reader* (2025a), discussed more below, claims that during the RWT Beyoncé endorsed “a broader conception of what a famous Black woman from the South can be in America” and celebrating her stance as an icon of Black femme culture, and recognizing “undervalued sounds and style of Black women and Black queer men or queer folks in the South” (Marcus, 2023). Additionally, the RWT has been described to have

¹ Samie (2025) defines afrofuturism as a “cultural movement blending art, science, and technology with African diasporic history and culture; reimagining the Black experience; and envisioning alternate empowered futures through speculative and innovative lenses.”

transformed Beyoncé as a queer-allied icon as the tour adopted Black queer cultural discourse (Shackelford, 2025, p. 43).²

Beyoncé is regarded as one of the most influential artists and public figures of the twenty-first century. As a result, she has also been a subject in a variety of academic research. For instance, linguists Eberhardt and Vdoviak-Markow's (2020) studied African American English (AAE) as a part of Beyoncé's performative persona, concluding that semiotic resources of AAE created visibility and value for Black lives, and helping her move from a female pop star to Black feminist icon (Eberhardt and Vdoviak-Markow, 2020, p. 76). Additionally, sociologist Cashmore (2010) has examined the brand of Beyoncé, claiming that the narrative of Beyoncé is "only a wish-fulfilment fantasy that portrays the hard-earned success of a [B]lack woman in a culture largely purged of its historical iniquities" (p. 146). However, this specific article was written in Beyoncé's "pre-Formation era", a turning point in Beyoncé's career, as discussed in Chapter 1.

In particular, Beyoncé's 2016 visual album³ 'Lemonade' sparked a massive amount of scholarly interest. One of the most significant is an interdisciplinary collection 'The Lemonade Reader' (Brooks and Martin, 2019a). The goal of the Lemonade Reader was to bring together experts in African Diaspora histories and culture and to study the feminist and political sensibilities of Beyoncé and Lemonade (Brooks and Martin, 2019b, pp. 3–4). Much similar to 'The Lemonade Reader', 'The Renaissance Reader: Beyoncé and Black Queer Popular Culture' was released in 2025 as a way to analyze her 2022 album 'RENAISSANCE', again, by interdisciplinary scholars of popular culture — examining the centering of Black women's experiences, Beyoncé's artistry, and cultural impact of RENAISSANCE and Beyoncé (Brooks and Jones, 2025a).

Beyoncé has been praised by many for her efforts on Black feminism. Wallace (2017) deems Beyoncé as an "iconic symbol of black success", bringing joy and confidence to her fanbase, Beyhive⁴ (p. 189). However, scholars have also criticized her for potentially exploiting racism and sexism for monetary purposes — according to Forbes, Beyoncé's net worth in 2025 lies around 780 million U.S. dollars. For instance, Wallace (2017) points out that Beyoncé has

² In this paragraph, I have utilized non-academic sources, as it is argued by Brooks and Jones (2025b, p. 1) that in the contextualization of Renaissance it is important to assess both academic and lived non-academic realities in the strengths and weaknesses of the Black experience.

³ Visual album is an album where each song is accompanied with a music video.

⁴ Beyhive is the name of Beyoncé's fanbase, phonetically resembling the word *beehive*.

become more than just a private person, and people tend to mix up this with branding — and with careful branding people are willing to identify with Beyoncé (p. 189).

Black feminist scholar bell hooks has described Beyoncé as a ‘terrorist’ for her sexualised performances, potentially harming Black girls (Sieczkowski, 2014, cited in Weidhase 2015, p. 128). In addition, after the release of *Lemonade* in 2016, hooks published a critique *Moving Beyond Pain*, where she criticized the album (Lääveri, 2018, p. 20). However, bell hooks received backlash from many other Black scholars (ibid., p. 3).

However, Wallace (2017) joins hooks to ponder whether *Lemonade* was a strategic marketing tactic or emerging from authentic concern for Black feminist issues (p. 190). Wallace (2017) scrutinizes *Formation* and backlash from her Super Bowl performance in 2016 as carefully constructed pieces of branding. Wallace (2017) points out, for instance, that when #BoycottBeyoncé started (as a counterreaction to the aforementioned Super Bowl performance), she quickly found a way to monetize the event with t-shirts, questioning Beyoncé’s motive to possibly capitalize on pro-Black movements instead of solidarity (p. 195).

In addition, Celeste (2015) argues that Beyoncé has benefitted from the capitalism and its power structures of the music industry — also arguing that Beyoncé has in the media moved away from struggles of racism and racial hierarchies (p. 2). However, what is important to notice, that this specific article was written before 2016 when Beyoncé released *Formation*. I will discuss these relations between Beyoncé, being Black, power and capitalism in relation in Section 5.2.

2.2 Multimodality

Studying the construction of Beyoncé’s identity through a music video and a concert is quite intricate, as both of them include many building blocks of identity through a variety of components. Therefore, the multimodal theory offers a tool to analyze the construction of identity in a way that allows a comprehensive analysis.

2.2.1 Multimodality and Discourse

From the mid-to-late 1990s, the academic field of multimodality emerged with publications by scholars such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (e.g., Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; van Leeuwen 1999). As a phenomenon, multimodality emerged when various disciplines felt the need to spread out from their origins — for example, traditionally linguistics has dealt with language. However, these remit have been expanding, as nowadays linguistics is additionally interested in, e.g., page compositions for written language, and gestures in spoken language

(Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 7–8). Stöckl (2019, p. 41) describes multimodality research as a young field that has numerous inter-relations to other fields – it has its roots in functional grammar introduced in the 1980s. Multimodality argues that one mode is contextualized by another, and that modes mutually give co(n)text, and that often modes can function properly only through this “co-contextualization” (ibid., p. 41).

One widely adopted definition for the term ‘mode’ is “a set of resources, shaped over time by socially and culturally organized communities, for making meaning” (Jewitt et al., 2016, p. 15) – for instance, writing and painting. Additionally, all modes, such as the aforementioned writing and painting, have or make available “sets of semiotic resources” – for instance, writing can tell a story, interpret that story and make up a rational argument (Stöckl, 2019, p. 47). Stöckl (2019, p. 47) emphasizes that different modes can be deemed as related and close in terms of their “semiotic affordances” but different in their “material/medial affordances”, raising an example of speech versus writing. Additionally, he views that modes are realized in media, for instance, writing through ink (ibid., p. 49; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, p. 22).

Kress (2010) argues that communication is inherently multimodal, as it inherently includes many semiotic resources beyond language. Additionally, modes are socially and culturally constructed, as also argued by Jewitt et al. (2016, p. 15) above. Kress includes some of the key communicative modes in the meaning-making practices, such as the linguistic mode (spoken and written language), visual mode (images, diagrams, typography), auditory mode (music, sounds), gestural mode (bodily movement, postures, expressions), and spatial mode (organization and arrangement of elements in space, e.g., layout of a page) (Kress, 2010 [cited in Oyebamiji and Olutayo, 2025, p. 141]).

However, some scholars, such as Bateman et al. (2017) appeal to not listing individual modes in multimodal analysis but to analyze multimodality as a whole, as the very core of multimodal research is to investigate how different forms come together to create meaning (p. 16). Additionally, Bateman et al. (2017, p. 18–19) study different definitions for the term ‘mode’ that have been proposed by different scholars, and they argue that rather than being helpful in multimodal analysis, they offer limited practical help. Therefore, in this thesis, I use the definition of multimodality that allows me an interdisciplinary analysis:

“Multimodality is a way of characterising communicative situations [...] which rely upon combinations of different forms of communication to be effective”

(Bateman et al., 2017, p. 9)

Multimodality arises when it is necessary to explain “what happens when various modes with different reaches combine” (Stöckl, 2019., p. 51). Combining different modes compensates for the limitations of individual modes that leads to meaning multiplication (ibid., pp. 51–52). This means that combining modes is a dynamic process that is the very core of multimodal research (ibid. p. 52) – mode linking refers to the core idea of multimodality, in which different modes link together to create coherence in terms of form, meaning or function (ibid, pp. 53–54). Finally, Stöckl (2019, pp. 60-61) defines the multimodal genre as a “recurrent classes of texts, that share a given communicative purpose” that is achieved by, e.g., a series of semiotic actions and conventionalized structures – and additionally concludes that multimodal discourse interpretation is genre-based and trans-textual, meaning that “placing multimodal ensembles firmly in the context of a rhetorical situation means to look at them as comparing a rhetor’s goal, rhetorical strategies as deliberate choices and combinations of semiotic resources” (p. 65).

Bateman et al. (2017) coin the term media depiction as a concept when a medial form reproduces another one — they raise examples of a dance being shown as a photograph within a film or reading a newspaper in a browser (p. 126). They also argue that in multimodality it is important to move away from material features to re-use mechanisms across all media — meaning that media can be related to each other in several ways, most commonly by embedding and blending (ibid., pp. 126–127). Embedding means that media and their conventional ways of using semiotic modes are embedded within one another, for instance “a photograph in a newspaper on a website”, and blending when “a TV program uses the combined resources of film and news reports.” (ibid., p. 127).

Bateman et al. (2017) argue the use of depiction in a sense that it is a “methodologically beneficial barrier that prevents treatments of semiotic modes and their combinations unravelling.” (p. 128). Therefore, as I argue above, I also adopt this concept of media depiction for this thesis, as it allows me to engage in a deeper analysis instead of analyzing individual modes, useful, for instance, when tracking allusions to other media, such as to be seen in Chapter 4 when analyzing the construction of identity.

Kress and van Leeuwen (2001) also propose a multimodal theory of communication base that takes into account the social, cultural, and historical productions of different semiotic modes (p. 3). They also claim that discourses are socially constructed knowledges of reality – and that discourses may be realized in various ways through semiotic modes (pp. 4–5), and that discursive actions take place in a variety of practices and multiple modes, “of which human social interaction is one” (p. 25). I elaborate the relationship of discourse and multimodality as a way to realize identity in the Section 2.2.2 below.

2.2.2 Identity as a Part of Multimodality

Many different scholars from various (interdisciplinary) fields have raised a notion that discourses have a great deal to do with identities – for instance, De Fina (2011) argues that “the prime site for the analysis of personal identities within discourse studies has been narrative” and the idea of “self” – and how that “self” is portrayed through language (p. 266). Additionally, Benwell (2006) argues that the understanding of identity is a public phenomenon that is constructed through discourse – i.e., who we are to each other is negotiated in discourse (p. 4).

Moreover, van Leeuwen (2022) claims that identity can be studied from a multimodal point of view, as identities manifest themselves through different uses of, e.g., colours and movements, and “how these uses are socially and culturally valued and regulated” (p. 3). van Leeuwen (2022) additionally introduces the concept of identity design, outlining the goal of how multimodal elements express different identities (pp. 1–4).

van Leeuwen (2022) points out that identity is a complex issue, claiming that it is understood and experienced in a variety of ways depending on the context of place and time – elaborating, however, that in today’s social and cultural life the term “identity” plays a key role (pp. 3–5). He draws two kinds of resources to understanding identity: sociological resources for understanding what identity is and semiotic resources for understanding how identity is expressed (p. 5). I discuss the sociological resources for understanding identity in the Section 2.3 below, especially in the context of what in this paper is defined as ‘Black identity’.

To understand the semiotic point of view of identity, we must investigate the stylistic resources used to express identity, for instance, the way we speak and the way we dress. van Leeuwen (2022) uses four concepts of identity in a way to manifest oneself semiotically: social identity, individual identity, role identity, and “lifestyle” identity (van Leeuwen, 2022, p. 6). The way these identities have been prevalent in the context of place and time have changed – Van

Leeuwen argues that the way they have emerged in the following order: social identity, individual identity, role identity, and lastly the lifestyle identity (van Leeuwen, 2022, pp. 6–23).

Social identity stems from people's place in a pre-existing social order, dealing with the way people are in relation to each other, such as through kinship systems – including also the notion that ethnicity plays a key role in the context of social identity, and that social identity is expressed through stories that describe the world. Additionally, social identity manifests itself semiotically through, e.g., in a way we dress through traditional dress and hair style (van Leeuwen, 2022, pp. 6–8). Individual identity, in a way, is a contrast to the concept of social identity, as it is a way we see ourselves separate from society, including the notion of, e.g., uniqueness (van Leeuwen, 2022, p. 11).

Role identity emerged in the 1950s and 1960s as a counterreaction to the identity as “unique, inward, consistent and autonomous”, defining identity as a social concept that is multiple and changeable. In role identity, van Leeuwen argues that the “expressive equipment” that is used to express identity play a key role in the semiotic expression of identity – for instance appearance (sex [sic], clothing, racial characteristics) and the manner in which identity is expressed (van Leeuwen, 2022, pp. 19–20).

Lastly, lifestyle identity is, too, a form of social identity expressed through the same expressive equipment as role identity. However, the key difference lies in the way that the role identity is characterized by functional roles in institutional settings, the lifestyle identity concerns itself with leisure and consumption (van Leeuwen, 2022, p. 20).

To sum, van Leeuwen argues that in today's complex and multicultural societies the four types of identities mix and merge, offering an example of that in the way that lifestyles may “draw on traditional social styles of dress and decoration” (van Leeuwen, 2022, p. 23). Therefore, in the analysis of this thesis I focus on the characteristics of identity as described by van Leeuwen to apply the multimodal elements to the concept of Black identity, which I elaborate on in Section 2.3.

2.2.3 Multimodality and Music

Not surprisingly, the interest in multimodality has also extended to analyze music in different contexts. One of the most foundational works done on the relation between speech, music, and other sounds has been conducted by van Leeuwen (1999). van Leeuwen (1999) argues that as

recording technology has emerged, the borders between speech, music and other sounds have faded (p. 2). Moreover, van Leeuwen (1999, p. 4) discusses that many contemporary musicians, as well as, e.g., film-makers and multimedia designers, are integrating these three.

Additionally, Forte (2023) has discussed that music is a meaning-making mode that is not in isolation from other modes but rather interacting with verbal and visual modes (pp. 69–70). He additionally discusses music from the point of view of critical discourse analysis, claiming that music allows representation and relations of power, and that music can be used to build and unfold narratives (p. 70).

Forte (2023) concludes that music in its ideational meaning is a complex issue that enriches multimodal contexts in relation to verbal and visual modes. Sometimes music can signal social aspects within the narratives, establish complex relations among participants in the narrative and between the audience and identify social practices — hence, musical meanings are associated to certain values in societies, as they can highlight some meanings and construct meaning in multimodal contexts and contribute to constructions of ideologies (p. 79).

Additionally, many scholars have analyzed multimodally music videos, and how music videos create and contribute to meaning-making. For instance, Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025) have investigated the music video ‘IBA’ from a multimodal point of view. Their central research question is “how do the diverse semiotic resources, including audio, visuals, lyrics, gestures, and symbolic representations, converge within the music video to construct its overarching message and aesthetic appeal?” (Oyebamiji and Olutayo 2025, p. 137). In their study of this specific music video, they argue that the combination of various semiotic elements cultivates immersive and affective environment that challenges the viewer to “grapple with fundamental questions of human experience” (Oyebamiji and Olutayo, 2025, p. 158) — underlining the notion that music videos use multimodality effectively to create meaningful experiences.

2.3 Defining Black Identity

2.3.1 What is Black identity?

In this section, I aim to offer insight on what I mean when discussing the concept of Black identity, building on a theoretical framework from Puhakka (2024). First and foremost, it is important to notice that the concept of identity has been investigated and defined differently in different contexts of place and time, as argued by, e.g., van Leeuwen (2022).

Many researchers in various disciplines have tried examining identity through a vast variety of lenses — in psychology Phinney and Ong (2007) have researched ethnic identity, and in social psychology Sellers et al. (1998) have researched racial identity. In both articles, the researchers aim to define ethnic or racial identities with various concepts and components that are in tight relation to expressing identity.

First and foremost, it is important to notice that many academic studies are not able to define ethnic or racial identity explicitly, as stated by Sellers et al. (1998, p. 23). Both Phinney and Ong (2007) and Sellers et al. (1998) use the terms ethnic and racial identity interchangeably in their articles. Interchangeability between the terms ethnic and racial identity in academic and non-academic contexts is also explored in Squizzero et al. (2026, p. 3). These suggest that it is somewhat impractical to define the concept of ethnic or racial identity, or even to differentiate between the two.

In addition to contesting the terms racial and ethnic, one must contest the intricate relation between the terms *Black* and *African American*. According to Chavez (2020), Black is used when referring to dark-skinned people who are of African descent in spite of their nationality. In turn, African American is used to refer to persons with African ancestry who are born in the United States – although, these terms are used interchangeably. Many academic and non-academic sources are however concerned with the term ‘Black’. Eligon (2020), for instance, argues that the term Black may as a proper noun turn into a “monolithic group” that is deprived of the diversity of experience as Black people are a widely spread group with a varying history. Sellers et al. (1998, p. 19) share a similar view on the matter, stating that Black is a cryptic category of people of African descent — and that African Americans, as well as other Black people elsewhere, could be deprived of their unique experiences, as they are culturally intertwined to the United States.

However, as argued in Puhakka (2024), Beyoncé uses in her song lyrics the term Black, not African American. Sellers et al. (1998, p. 19) define this as a “Pan-African view”, in which everyone with African descent is considered Black — no matter the nationality. This may result in the choice of term Black in Beyoncé’s production. In the results chapter of my bachelor’s thesis, this was manifested by, for instance, with collaborations with and/or references to such artists as Kendrick Lamar, Kevin Aviance, Kevin JZ Prodigy, WizKid, and many more — reinforcing the notion that Black is more inclusive umbrella term, as not all of these artists are from the United States (Puhakka, 2024, pp. 17–19).

Thus, I will refer to *Black identity* when discussing how Beyoncé manifests this concept multimodally⁵, instead of the contestable terms 'racial' or 'ethnic' identity. Both aforementioned terms can be argued for and against. Moreover, the term 'Black' can relate to both race and ethnicity, as stated in both Phinney and Ong (2007) and Sellers et al. (1998). Additionally, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the goal of this thesis is not to define Black identity but to examine its construction in the production pieces — a concept I will discuss further in Section 3.3 dealing with the ethical issues concerning this thesis topic.

2.3.2 What is included in the notion of Black identity?

As described above, it is quite difficult to define the concept of Black identity. However, in this section, I aim to explore some perspectives on the notion of Black identity. In explaining the concept, I utilize both Phinney and Ong (2007) as well as Sellers et al. (1998).

I wish to point out that having used these models in Puhakka (2024), in this thesis, I will shift the focus from descriptive portrayal of identity used in my bachelor's thesis to the multimodal construction of identity — this section therefore focuses solely on some ideas and concepts that may be seen as manifestations of Black identity to familiarize the reader with the term with concrete examples.

Phinney and Ong (2007, p. 271) describe in their model of ethnic identity that it is a multifaceted, multidimensional, and dynamic construct formed by a sense of peoplehood within a particular ethnic group, culture, and setting. Their model includes concepts of, e.g., self-categorization, commitment to the group, ethnic behaviors, values and beliefs, salience of group membership, and so forth (p. 271). Phinney and Ong's (2007) model for ethnic identity is quite an ambiguous model applicable to various ethnic minorities, as it takes into account universal qualities associated with identity rather than local aspects. Therefore, its weakness is that it is not concerned with the unique history of the Black people — and other minorities.

In turn, Sellers et al. (1998) consider the unique identity of the African American people — they define racial identity as a contextual, social construct and as the “significance and qualitative meaning that individuals attribute to their membership within the Black racial group within their self-concepts” (p. 23). In their article, they highlight various concrete examples that

⁵ By the choice of the term Black, I do not wish to harm or dismiss any experiences of African Americans but to use a term which is the preferred term in the production of Beyoncé.

may be interpreted as the foundations for which I refer to in this thesis as Black identity, as discussed above.

For instance, their identity model also includes many aspects of identity, as with Phinney and Ong's (2007). Sellers et al. (1998) argue, for instance, that salience of identity suggests the contextual importance of race, which is dependent on context and self-definition – and in contrast to salience, they also coin the term centrality as a stability of identity across different situations, also accounting to normative perception of race in regard to other aspects of identity (pp. 23–26). Moreover, Sellers et al (1998) also argue that individuals have hierarchically organized identities, e.g., race in relation to gender. Cho et al. (2013) have studied this, and they define the term *intersectionality* as a heuristic concept to challenge the single-axis thinking, as it takes into account dynamics of, e.g., race and gender, and how these different factors in turn affect different forms of oppression (pp. 785–787). Squizzero et al. (2026, p. 8) also argue that intersectionality is important when analyzing identities, as it improves descriptive accuracy as well as avoids racist viewpoints and harming consultants and participants.

Sellers et al. (1998) also use the term 'regard' as an assumption that an individual perception of racial identity in positive–negative valence is deemed as the most crucial meter of racial identity, as societal forces may affect the view on identity, but person's subjective perception is the backbone (p. 23–26). As the last aspect, Sellers et al (1998) contest the term ideology as a part of the identity that challenges the individual views on how the members of the African American racial group should act. (p. 27).

In Puhakka (2024, pp. 12–25) I argued that Beyoncé portrays Black identity in her music, which relates to both identity models — the results were categorized into four different sections that emerged in the data that can be deemed as “components” of Black identity. For instance, Beyoncé uses African American English (AAE) consistently in her music that can be seen as what Phinney and Ong (2007, p. 272) describe as the use of ethnic language as a part of identity — and it has been pinpointed as a key aspect of identity. Green (2002) defines AAE as a variety [of English] that has its own distinct syntactic, semantic, lexical, morphological and phonological patterns — Additionally, Bashir-ali (2006) argues that AAE is an important linguistic and cultural manifestation of identity as it connects Black people with a joint history, and forms a social, cultural, and linguistic allegiance to the Black people.

Additionally, Beyoncé brings up many events that are in relation to racial justice and social equality (Puhakka, 2024, pp. 23–24). This can be seen as a part of what Sellers et al. (1998)

define as the construction of identity that individuals form through their membership within the Black racial group (Sellers et al., 1998, p. 23).

To sum this section, when using the term *Black identity*, I refer to a great number of components and, e.g. cultural and historical, references to what can be deemed as a part of identity. It is important to notice that as a researcher it is my duty to utilize both multimodal analysis and critical discourse analysis to reliably present my results, since it is not feasible to ground the concept of Black identity solely with the two identity models by Phinney and Ong (2007) as well as Sellers et al. (1998) presented here. Additionally, I utilize the concepts discussed by van Leeuwen (2022, pp. 6–23), as van Leeuwen (2022) explores many concrete examples on expressing identity, such as expressive equipment to express identity, and many more.

2.4 Critical Discourse Analysis

Baxter (2010) argues that discourse is a challenging term that lacks proper definition, as different disciplines tend to define it in a variety of ways. Kress and van Leeuwen (2001, pp. 4–5) defined discourses as socially constructed knowledges of reality, as discussed in the Section 2.2.1. Baxter (2010, p. 120) offers a more sociolinguistic and functional definition, defining discourse as ‘language in use’ or ‘language in social context’. Fairclough (2012, p. 10), again, offers discourse as a term that may be utilized in various senses — arguing that discourse can be defined as “(a) meaning-making as an element of the social process; (b) the language associated with a particular social field or practice (e.g. ‘political discourse’); (c) a way of construing aspects of the world associated with a particular social perspective.”

In addition, Gee (2015) examines the concept of “Discourses with a big D” — meaning that combinations of words and material and non-material concepts, such as interactions, values, and clothing, are to create people with socially significant identities (p. 2). Additionally, Gee (2015) discusses that these Discourses interact with each other in complex ways that may change or blend, and that Discourses are about being in a same group in a different ways – for instance, one can be African American in a many different kinds of ways, and these Discourses can mix (pp. 3–4).

Just like identity, discourse is a term that is not easily defined. Rather than contesting the term further, I wish to offer a few of the points of views that have been used to describe discourse, and to discuss how discourses are studied. Studying discourse has multiple approaches, and one of them is critical discourse analysis (henceforth CDA).

CDA has its roots in ‘critical linguistics’, which emerged in the late 1970s in the works by many scholars, including Gunther Kress, who is also known for his works within the multimodal theory, as introduced in the many references in Section 2.2 (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 2). According to Fairclough (2012, p. 9), CDA is concerned with the relation between discourses and other social elements, such as power relations and social identities. Moreover, Baxter (2010) points out that CDA is a methodology that aims to “uncover overt or more often, covert inequalities in social relationships” (p. 126). The goal of CDA is not simply to describe existing realities but to the construction of these realities (Fairclough, 2012, p. 9).

CDA is not considered a coherent theory or a methodological approach in the way of discourse analysis but rather a critical perspective that can be combined with various approaches and various disciplines, such as linguistics and social sciences (Baxter, 2010, pp. 126–127). In spite of not being a coherent theory, there are key features to CDA — for instance, CDA sees language as a social practice, studies the relationship between language and power, includes a committed, emancipatory agenda, draws upon text and context (e.g., examining microanalysis within a ‘critical perspective’), is concerned with interdiscursivity, as discourses are always inflected with other discourses, and utilizes deconstruction, as one of the main goals of CDA is to unravel power relations (Baxter, 2010, pp. 127–128).

CDA inherently includes a diverse range of theoretical approaches, therefore no single study may be deemed as a prototypical CDA (Baxter, 2010, p. 129). This is also argued by Machin & Mayr (2012, p. 4) who claim that there is no homogenous version of CDA.

However, as listed above, there are some key elements that can be rendered as the key elements of which one can recognize a study done with CDA. On the other hand, as there is no clear methodology and/or analytical approach, it has been criticized for being too vague a methodology by some disciplines (Baxter, 2010, p. 129). Additionally, Fairclough (2012, pp. 12–13) argues that CDA is a trans-disciplinary research method, as studies conducted with CDA bring together theories and disciplines, and is used as a “dialogical” tool.

Therefore, CDA can also be utilized in multimodal analyses, as argued by Machin & Mayr (2012) — and according to them, the linguistic field has also begun to develop interest in analyzing meaning-making through visual language (p. 1). This combination of critical discourse analysis and multimodality has also been called multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA). In MCDA, researchers are interested in showing how different modes, e.g., images, and graphics, are also utilized in creating meaning in addition to linguistic elements — and

MCDA is used to identify and reveal these composed communicative choices that are chosen by the authors seeking these multimodal elements to do certain kinds of work for them (p. 9). Furthermore, Forte (2023) argues that CDA can be used in studying music as a mode “in the terms of its possibilities of representation, its functioning with other modes and the relations of power it allows to establish”. (p. 70). He adds that as the basic premise of CDA is to investigate the linguistic choices to evidence unequal power relations, and language is not in isolation from other modes — therefore, communication must be analyzed with multimodal perspective, as discourse is conveyed in different modes (Forte, 2023, p. 70).

All of these elements of CDA and multimodality listed above contribute a vital key role in this thesis, as it is central for me to reveal the meaning-making process behind the different modes through a critical lens. For this reason, I choose to follow the following definition:

“In Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis we will [...] seek to ‘deneutralise’ representations on other modes of communication. We will reveal the kinds of ideas, absences and taken-for-granted assumptions in the images as well as the texts which will also serve the ends of revealing the kinds of power interests buried in them.”

(Machin and Mayr, 2012, pp. 9–10)

3. Data and Methods

In this chapter, I will introduce the data and methods for my thesis. First, I will introduce the reader to my two data sets. Secondly, I will introduce the methods applied to the data. I conclude the chapter by discussing the ethical concerns regarding my study.

3.1 Data

The data of this thesis consists of two culturally significant production pieces by Beyoncé — the Formation music video (2016) and Beyoncé’s Renaissance World Tour (2023). Through the multimodal lens, the two datasets are of a very distinctive type, as they differ in their semiotic resources.

3.1.1 Formation

Formation, a lead single from the album *Lemonade*, was released on February 6, 2016 with an accompanying music video directed by Melina Matsoukas (Beyoncé, 2016). The music video lasts 4 minutes and 47 seconds, and stars Beyoncé, who is seen in various places in New Orleans.

The Formation music video alone has been studied by many scholars — and described in many ways as a significant cultural artefact of Black identity. It has been argued, for instance, that it appeals to a sense of shared identity among the Black community of New Orleans by invoking a sense of group memory, as the music video deals greatly with the flooding of New Orleans in 2005 (Bertens, 2017, p. 91). Additionally, Bertens (2017, p. 91) argues that the music video may seem mysterious and unintelligible to “outsiders”, contrasting between in-group and out-group people regarding how they access this cultural memory. This notion of shared cultural memory sparked also sketches — for instance, the comedy show ‘Saturday Night Live’ aired a sketch on February 14, 2016 called “The Day Beyoncé Turned Black” where white people are desperate over their incomprehension of Formation (Tumino, 2024, p. 133; Bertens, 2017, p. 91).

Beyoncé was also thanked for using her platform for adding her voice to Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement and protesting against police brutality, and, most importantly, for embracing her blackness as she had not been vocal about these issues before (Tumino, 2024, p. 134) — therefore receiving many needling and somewhat bettling titles, as “the day she turned Black”.

Therefore, I argue that it is crucial for this study to include this music video as one part of the data, as it is seen as a turning point in the artistic identity constructed by Beyoncé. Additionally, it offers in a way a contrast to how she has later been vocal about these issues, and how the construction of Black identity differs in her later production, one of them being presented below. For this thesis, the music video was sourced through Beyoncé's official YouTube channel (Beyoncé, 2016)

3.1.2 Renaissance World Tour

As discussed in Section 2.1 of this study, Beyoncé embarked on her Renaissance World Tour (RWT) in 2023. It began on May 10, 2023, and concluded on October 1, 2023, consisting of 56 shows, accompanying her seventh studio album *RENAISSANCE* released in 2022. The total duration of the show lasted between two and a half hours to three hours, and was split into six or seven acts, depending on the tour date. The songs performed on the tour were primarily from *RENAISSANCE* performed in order⁶ with songs from her wide discography performed in between.

After the show, a concert film called *RENAISSANCE: A FILM BY BEYONCÉ* (2023) was released in cinemas on December 1, on the world AIDS day — some fans speculating this being a tribute to her Uncle Johnny, a gay man who passed away from AIDS and was a huge inspiration for her album *RENAISSANCE*, as discussed *RENAISSANCE: A FILM BY BEYONCÉ* (2023).

The tour staging consisted of two separate platforms that are connected with a ramp. The staging also included sculptures, robotic arms, mannequin-horses, tanks, and many more. The clothing, in turn, varied between various outfits styled by Shiona Turini. The setlist presented in Appendix 1 was used in her show on October 1, 2023, in the show in Kansas City that I will present as my data for the RWT part of the analysis of this thesis. As with *Formation*, RWT is a culturally significant production piece by Beyoncé — it is widely deemed as a testament to queer, Black community. Additionally, it is one of the most recent concert tours by Beyoncé, only succeeded by *COWBOY CARTER TOUR* in 2025.

As I stated above, a concert film was released in December 2023. However, as for this study, this specific concert film is not available, as it was only released in cinemas and not later released on, e.g., streaming services. Therefore, I am relying on a user-generated concert video

⁶ *RENAISSANCE* is an album where most of the songs fade into each other, offering rationale for this solution.

on YouTube by Andrew Concerts (2023), as this specific video offers a wide point of view of the stage, essential in this study where multimodal elements, such as spatiality, are in a key role in the analysis. In addition, it is one of the most watched user-generated concert videos from the tour, having over 763,000 views at the time of writing this on November 26, 2025.

3.2 Method of Analysis

This study adopts a qualitative approach to multimodal analysis. The two methods introduced in the background section, multimodal analysis and critical discourse analysis, were both deployed for this analysis.

3.2.1 Multimodal Analysis

The multimodal method of this thesis was deployed with a combination of following the methodology conducted by both Bateman et al. (2017) as well as Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025).

This study primarily relies on the steps of multimodal analysis introduced by Bateman et al. (2017, pp. 229–230). The first phase of the analysis includes choosing relevant materials. For this thesis, the two productions by Beyoncé, Formation music video as well as The Renaissance World Tour, were chosen, as they both are seen as testimonies to Black people and Black culture, as discussed in Sections 2.1 and 3.1.

The second phase of the analysis suggested by Bateman et al. (2017, pp. 229–230) includes conforming the data to the research questions. The two research questions introduced in the Introduction of this thesis were the guiding lines for me in the analysis of this study. Bateman et al. (2017, p. 229) suggest that by considering communicative activities one can analyze meaning-making processes. This is also utilized in this study by offering context to the discourses offered by Beyoncé in the production, and these meaning-making processes are analyzed to their, e.g., historical and/or cultural, contexts. The last phase of the analysis suggested by Bateman et al. (2017, pp. 229–230) includes examining the results of the analysis by drawing out patterns and interconnections.

Bateman et al. (2017) also propose the use of ‘transmodal translation’, i.e., transcoding, as a way to work with multimodal data. They suggest that that includes, for instance, converting a film into a mix of layouts (e.g., a table), texts (descriptions of shots), and images (static screenshots). (p. 148). The combination of layout, text, and images were utilized in the

methodology for this study as well, for both the Formation music video as well as the RWT concert film by Andrew Concerts (2023).

I created an Excel sheet including three columns for both Formation and the RWT. In one column, I put a screenshot from a video, into one column a short description of each screenshot, and into one including general observations of the shot and/or the lyrics sung during the scene. Creating the spreadsheet allowed me to see both the music video and the concert as a whole in a singular spreadsheet, allowing me to notice patterns and emerging themes. For the Formation music video, I captured screenshots from each scene, i.e., when the camera shot changes. For the RWT concert film, I captured screenshots with moments and/or references relevant for my analysis throughout the concert film from a variety of performance segments following the setlist seen on the Appendix 1. Altogether, the raw data consisted of 186 from Formation, and 182 screenshots from the RWT.

This data sampling relies on what Bateman et al. (2017, p. 142) refer to as ‘stratified sampling’, as the themes emerging in the data, seen in Chapter 4, are all chosen according to the criteria of the themes. The data analyzed in this study follows the description provided by Machin & Mayr (2012, pp. 9–10) claiming that in Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis one is interested in deneutralizing representations as well as revealing power interests. As this study also relies on this critical point of view, the data selected must also follow this emancipatory agenda. Thus, by choosing stratified sampling, I aim to scrutinize relevant screenshots that are to shed a light on the gravity of the cause of this thesis, a topic I will elaborate more on in the Section 3.3. below.

In the analysis of the screenshots, I additionally utilized methodology by Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025, p. 142). Their approach was developed to study music video — however, the modes utilized in their study are also applicable to studying the RWT. In their analysis, they captured screenshots from their selected music video, and examined these screenshots with the multimodal analysis. They analyzed the modes listed in Table 1 on the left. On the right, I adapted their descriptions of the modes for the analysis of this thesis.

Table 1. Multimodal analysis of music video by Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025, p. 142), adapted for the scope of this thesis.

Mode	What is analyzed?
Visual Mode	Visual elements within the music video (e.g. compositional layout, colour schemes, symbolic imagery, visual metaphors) to discover the ways in which these semiotic resources contribute to the construction of Black identity.
Auditory Mode	Musical elements (lyrics, vocal delivery, instrumentation, soundscapes) to elucidate the role of auditory resources in shaping the overall meaning-making process.
Gestural Mode	Performers' bodily movements, facial expressions, and embodied performances to discern the significance of gestural communication in the construction and interpretation of Black identity.
Linguistic Mode	Linguistic patterns (choice of language, rhetorical devices, poetic structures) to illuminate the ways in which the textual elements contribute to the dissemination of Black identity.
Spatial Mode	Spatial arrangements, framing, and camera angles* within the music video and the concert to understand how the manipulation of spatial resources influence the viewer's engagement with the narrative of Black identity.

*The analysis of the camera angle cannot be fully utilized in the analysis of the RWT concert film, as it is a user-generated video rather than professionally produced.

I wish to point out that as described in Section 2.2.1, this thesis does not aim to provide a plainly heterogenic analysis of the different modes presented. Rather, I wish to utilize these descriptions of the modes to offer concrete examples of what multimodality enables. In the analysis section, I may refer to individual modes in order to create a coherent picture of the analysis. However, the very core of this study is to examine how these modes come together to create an effective communicative situation, as described by Bateman et al. (2017, p. 9), and how this combination of modes contributes to the meaning-making of the construction of Black identity.

3.2.2 Critical Discourse Analysis

In addition to utilizing the multimodal analysis, I have utilized critical discourse analysis (CDA) in the analysis. The data analyzed with the methodology of multimodal analysis was not sufficient enough to address my research questions, as multimodality allows me to analyze the

structure of data. Therefore, I deemed it to be necessary to also use a methodology of CDA, which I found of a great help also in Puhakka (2024), as it enables a critical interpretation of results in a culturally sensitive manner.

For this thesis, I use the Machin & Mayr (2012, pp. 9–10) definition of multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA), as it allows me to analyze the representation of identity that is constructed through multimodality. Additionally, I utilized the description of CDA provided by Fairclough (2012), as the focus of this thesis, as was with Puhakka (2024), to reveal and study the power relations and social identities that Fairclough (2012) emphasizes as the key elements in the CDA.

Additionally, it is crucial to point out that CDA does not include strict methodological instruments, and it can be applicable to many studies in a moderately free manner. In addition, Baxter (2010) describes CDA as a method that is keen on investigating the language and power, text and context, as well as deconstruction — that are all key elements in this study where my goal is to investigate Beyoncé as an artist who is highlighting the inequalities faced by Black people, and taking into account the historical and cultural structures of being Black, and deconstructing the power relations.

Together both multimodal analysis and CDA form a methodology that allows a broad, interpretative analysis. As both multimodal analysis and CDA can be utilized as qualitative methods (Oyebamiji and Olutayo, 2025, p. 140; Baxter, 2010, p. 124), this study additionally draws on studies conducted of Beyoncé introduced in Chapter 2 to offer a comprehensive understanding of cultural and social references to reinforce the reliability of this thesis.

3.3 Ethical Issues

As a white person examining the construction of Black identity in two culturally significant pieces of production by Beyoncé, a Black artist, I deem it to be crucial to discuss the ethical issues. As a white person, I have not been subjected to racial discrimination or any other forms of racism. As a result, it is necessary to address that my own positionality inevitably shapes the analytical process in this thesis. Additionally, Squizzero et al. (2026, pp. 8–9) argue that when analyzing racial and ethnic identities, researcher should consider their own impact and social roles in regard to the matters they are researching.

The very core of the CDA is to analyze meaning-making as a non-neutral instrument, and therefore the researchers contributing to this field can be seen as participating in the discourses

they study. My interpretations conducted with the help of both multimodal analysis and CDA rely heavily on a deconstruction and reveal inequalities.

My goal is not to define the concept of Black identity as a static concept, and speak on behalf of what is and what is not considered as ‘Black identity’ but rather to examine its construction and representation in the production pieces. Additionally, this concept of what I refer to as ‘Black identity’ cannot be reduced to the analysis and background described in this thesis — rather, it is a multifaceted and multidimensional concept, as all identities, and a groups of people, such as Black people nor any other minorities, cannot be abridged into a thesis, as the history of Black people in the U.S., and worldwide, is unique and to be cherished and appreciated.

Additionally, I would like to point out that academic institutions, including universities, have historically been only privileged for certain voices like white scholars, including myself. I intend to raise the voices in this thesis also, who have historically been marginalized by these institutions. As a result, this thesis relies on scholars who have specialized in these areas, such as Sellers et al. (1998) and their description of the unique history of Black people and African American identity, as well as scholars done their extensive work in both *The Lemonade Reader* (2019) and *The Renaissance Reader* (2025) to rely on Black expertise.

In the scientific community there has been discussion if researchers are only able to speak on their own behalf, as there is always a risk in “misrepresenting the Other” (Agyeman, 2008). This is a perspective I also discussed in Puhakka (2024), and similar to that study, with this thesis I aim to bring awareness of the issues of both Black individuals and Black communities in the United States and globally.

All in all, as I have pointed out, many marginalized individuals have not historically had the access to academic institutions, a concept discussed also by Agyeman (2008) claiming that disempowered groups are not able to access a public forum where their voices may be heard due to various types of systematic discrimination and racist power structures. Therefore, I think it is essential for me to use this opportunity to dedicate both my bachelor’s thesis and master’s thesis to this crucial subject that is still visibly underrepresented in the publications and studies conducted within this academic field in my institution at the University of Helsinki.

4. Analysis

4.1 Formation

In this Section 4.1, I analyze the construction of Black identity in Beyoncé’s ‘Formation’ music video. This section is divided into five subsections, i.e. thematic categories, in all of which I analyze a singular, emerging theme that occurs throughout the video in the multimodal construction of Black identity.

4.1.1 “What Happened in New Orleans?” – Black Collective Trauma

Formation starts with Messy Mya, a deceased New Orleans based YouTube comedian, exclaiming “What happened at the New Orleans?”⁷, indicating that the video to come is based in New Orleans. The quote is complemented with a scene in which Beyoncé is seen on top of a police car emerged partially in the water, presented in Figure 1 below:



Figure 1. Beyoncé on top of a police car (0.05).

Much of the imagery, i.e., the visual mode, seen in the Formation video involves Hurricane Katrina, a natural disaster that affected heavily New Orleans — and especially its Black community. For instance, many New Orleans people were evacuated to Louisiana Superdome, in which many of the refugees fleeing the natural disaster would only end up dying due to lack of proper medical attention and resources (Highsmith, 2019, p. 140).

The disaster resulted in a wide criticism of local and federal authorities, as Black people were blatantly neglected by them — Elliott and Pais (2006) studied the aftermath of the hurricane,

⁷ It is also important to notice that this was exclaimed in a New Orleans local dialect, as seen in the closed captions.

and their results suggest that Black people were more likely to stay in New Orleans through the disaster due to, for instance, inadequate personal transportation (p. 308). Additionally, White, Philpot, Wylie, and McGowen (2007, p. 526) argue that many believe that the slow response from the government was due to racial factors, as a disproportionate amount of hurricane's victims consisted of people of the Black community: "About one of every three people who lived in the areas hit hardest by the hurricane was African American. By contrast, one of every eight people in the nation is African American" (Sherman & Shapiro, 2005, p. 2 [cited in White, et al., 2007, p. 526]).

Therefore, by bringing up the collective trauma that affected the Black community, Beyoncé is likely to bring awareness of the issue of Hurricane Katrina, and its gravity to the Black community. The beginning of the video is not the only time when we see imagery that relates to the collective trauma. For instance, in the video we also see sunken houses and Beyoncé and Black people at the bottom of an empty swimming pool:



Figures 2 and 3. A sunken house (0.19), and Beyoncé pictured with dancers at the bottom of an empty pool (1.34).

In Figure 2, we see a medium-wide shot of a house that is partially sunken under water. All in all, Formation includes many references and imagery that relate to the life of "regular" Black people. Here, the house seen underwater may represent the systematic neglect by local authorities during and in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Additionally, it pictures the reality of many Black people, as a vast amount of people lost their homes in the disaster.

Figure 3, in turn, includes an even more symbolic message. Beyoncé and dancers are seen at the bottom of an empty pool. This may indicate that Black people, and more specifically Black women, were in a way abandoned and neglected by local authorities during the hurricane, i.e., left alone at the bottom of a pool. Standing in an empty, waterless pool, it also offers contrast to the flooded streets, seen in both Figures 1 and 2.

Exploring the collective trauma of the Black people is not pictured only by discussing the events of Hurricane Katrina. For instance, Messy Mya, the person uttering the question in the beginning of the video, was vocal about the gang violence in the Black community, and was likely a victim of the very phenomenon, as he was shot dead in 2010, a day after having posted “I’ll be there soon” on Facebook, in reference to a dead friend (BBC, 2017).

Even bigger systematic collective trauma facing the Black community is the influence of police brutality. Harris (2019, p. 157) claims that *Formation* was at the time of its release interpreted as “a challenge to police brutality against Black people and a show of support for Black Lives Matter”. The matter of police brutality is addressed especially at the end of the video:



Figures 4 and 5. A Black child dancing in front of white police officers (4.02), and a graffiti wall saying: “Stop shooting us” (4.22).

The very first time when we see white people in the video is when the Black child dances in front of an all-white row of police officers. Chaney and Robertson (2013) discuss that at the time of writing their research article, the amount of police brutality was increasingly affecting Black people (p. 481). They also discuss that Black people are contemporaneously subject to being assaulted by the police system, raising examples of the beating of Rodney King and death of Trayvon Martin (p. 481). Therefore, as it affects the Black community all across the United States, Beyoncé brings up the violence as yet another collective trauma that affects the community to this day. The message of the *Formation* is clear, as seen in Figure 5: “Stop shooting us”.

Sharpley-Whiting (2018, p. xxiv) discusses that *Lemonade*, and *Formation* as a part of it, deals with state-sanctioned violence and traumas of racism. As I have presented in this section, events and phenomena linked to the collective trauma of the Black community are prevalent throughout the *Formation* video, dealing with police brutality, gang violence, and systematic abandonment by local and federal authorities in the face of disasters. These events are linked to

shaping Black identity, as Sellers et al. (1998) argue that Black identity can be defined with the qualitative meanings “of being African American, with an emphasis on the unique cultural and historical experiences of African Americans” (p. 18).

4.1.2 “Take What’s Mine” – Reclaiming White Spaces

As I have discussed in Section 4.1.1, Beyoncé brings up a lot of painful experiences causing collective trauma to the Black community. However, through a variety of modes, in Formation Beyoncé brings up a deconstructive narrative to oppressive structures, such as authorities and historical aspects.

For instance, as seen in Figure 1, Beyoncé is standing atop of a New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) police car. Revisiting the picture, we can observe that she is seen crouching on it, centered to the right of the frame, and she is looking at the camera with a somber facial expression. This shot includes many symbols to reclaim white spaces. The police car can be interpreted as an emblem of racialized violence, and authorities who on the whole neglected the Black community during the Hurricane Katrina disaster. Here Beyoncé, an emblem of Black femininity, is placed above the institution that has historically criminalized it. By also being centered vertically in the frame, she is being put into spotlight instead of the symbol of white power structures.

It is also important to notice that as the video progresses, the NOPD police car gradually sinks, and at the end of the video, completely submerges. However, as the police car submerges, Beyoncé remains composed:

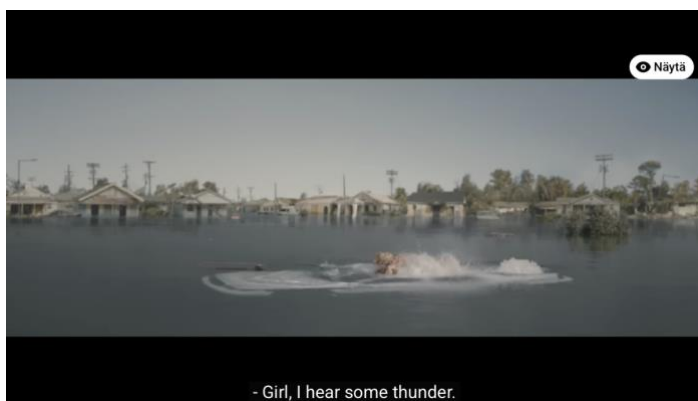


Figure 6. Police car sinking with Beyoncé on top (4.39).

By staying composed and calm, Beyoncé aims to rewrite the disastrous Hurricane Katrina from a tragedy to a testament to Black endurance. As the police car collapsing symbolizes the failure of the authorities, while her presence is an assertive symbol of Black endurance.

The sinking of a police car as a symbol of reclaiming white spaces is not the only symbol related to this topic in the video. For instance, with Figure 3 in 4.1.1, I argued that it functions as a symbol of Black abandonment. However, this may also indicate a more reconstructive message. Black people were banned from many public pools, due to, e.g., Jim Crow laws, all across the United States, which is still visible in swimming disparity among white and Black people in the United States (Wiltse, 2014). Therefore, by taking up the space that has historically been denied from Black people, Beyoncé and her many backup dancers reclaim the space for them, and symbolically to the whole Black community.

In addition to reclaiming the pool, Beyoncé reclaims a whole Southern plantation mansion:



Figures 7 and 8. Beyoncé sitting in a room in a plantation house (0.30), and Beyoncé dancing in the hallway of a plantation house (0.37).

Southern plantation mansions may be interpreted as one of the most loaded white spaces in the history of the United States, as the plantation mansions were built on enslaved labor, and fortified slavery. Hobson (2019, p. 39) points out that Beyoncé “dances, prances, twerks, and lets loose in the spaces once associated with racial and sexual oppression”. By taking up space in an unapologetic manner, Beyoncé aims to reclaim a dark piece of history that still affects Black people to this day, as Black bodies move in a place where they were once enslaved and brutalized. It is also important to notice that the absence of white bodies removes the plantation from its original hierarchy, shifting the power balance from a history centering whiteness to centering being Black — i.e., “take what’s mine”, as expressed through the auditory mode.

Spatiality as a way to reclaim historically white spaces is not limited indoors, physical spaces. It is important to notice that white spaces are also culturally bound through, for instance, proper

femininity and refinement. This is seen throughout the video in many ways, but for instance, in Figure 7, we see Beyoncé with a Victorian, haute couture outfit, which is also referenced through auditory mode with singing about “Givenchy dress” while maintaining a composed, upright posture. Hobson (2019, p. 36) points out that Beyoncé has avoided the “loud-mouthed and unattractive Sapphire stereotype”. Therefore, by reclaiming imagery once associated only belonging to white bodies, she aims to reclaim that refinement is not inherent of whiteness but rather performed — and does this with intentional exaggeration to reject the ideology behind it.

Reclaiming white spaces is not only limited indoors, as hinted above. Beyoncé, and other Black people, in the Formation video reclaim spaces outdoors. This is seen, for instance, through a sea of Black people “getting in formation” through “second-line jazz parades in the streets of the segregated black city [of New Orleans] (Hobson, 2019, p. 38).

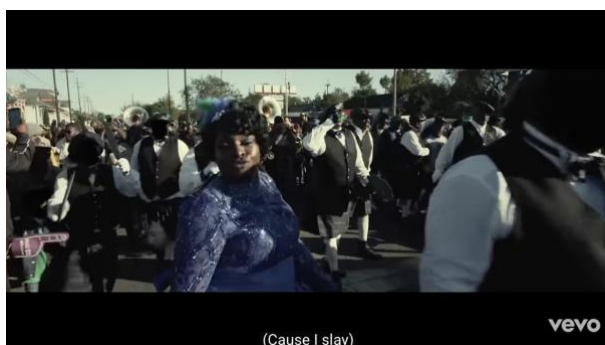


Figure 9. A Black woman pictured among other paraders (2.52).

Historically, public streets have been, and unfortunately still are, sites of racial violence and areas where Black people have been surveilled and restricted. By turning streets into spaces filled with all-Black crowds, Beyoncé aims to assert the right of Black people to be seen and reclaiming streets to the whole of Black community — a theme I elaborate on further in the section below.

4.1.3 “My Daddy Alabama / Mama, Louisiana” – Black Community

As foreshadowed above, Formation can be interpreted as an ode to the Black community, from close family to all Black people. This is executed through various modes in the video. For instance, Blue Ivy, Beyoncé’s daughter, is seen in the video playing in the plantation house with other children:



Figure 10. Blue Ivy playing with other Black children in the plantation house (0.35).

As stated above in Section 4.1.2, plantation houses have historically been restricted from Black people — and symbolize a dark period in the history of the United States. Simmons (2019, p. 49) claims that enslaved mothers were not able to protect and keep their own children, as many children were bred only to become slaves. Many slave-children also suffered from high mortality rates. By portraying Black children centered in a room once filled with people who wanted to enslave these children, Beyoncé once again shifts the power balance from white-centered past to Black-centered present — and future, as children represent it. The children are also portrayed with their natural hair, expressed also through auditory mode: “I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros”.

The continuity of bloodline was not something promised to slaves. Beyoncé does not only portray bloodline from her children, but also from her own parents, as seen below:



Figures 11 and 12. A painting in the plantation house (0.39), and another painting in the plantation house (0.41).

Figures 11 and 12 are a prime example of embedded media (Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 126–127) — one semiotic mode is used within another, as here a painting is used within a music video. Ford (2019, p. 197) points out that historically, these types of paintings have only been accessible to white people, and claims that Malina Matsoukas said to Ethan Tobman, a painter behind these very paintings that “This is not a house the slaves are working in [...] This is a

house where slaves are the masters”. This message is also strengthened through the auditory mode, as Beyoncé sings: “My daddy Alabama / Mama, Louisiana”. Sharpley-Whiting (2019, p. xxiii) discloses that Matsoukas has said that Beyoncé aimed to show the historical impact of slavery, and how it affects Black families, and that Black men and women are not socialized to be together. All these examples contribute to the deconstructive narrative, and strengthens Black people’s right to bloodline all the way from elders to children.

Blood relatives are not the only Black community that is visible in the Formation video. Additionally, we see many “regular” Black people in the video. For instance, in Figure 9 we see a Black woman centered in the shot, and through linguistic mode Beyoncé connects the African-American English word ‘slay’ to the frame of the woman — a theme I will elaborate on further in Section 4.1.5.

There are also references to many famous people in the video. For instance, Messy Mya is seen through the auditory mode, as stated in Section 4.1.1. Additionally, we see, for instance, Martin Luther King Jr. (MLK):



Figure 13. A Black man holding a newspaper of Martin Luther King Jr. (3.30).

In this particular scene, a Black man is holding a newspaper titled ‘The Truth’ with MLK on the cover with a headline “More Than A Dreamer” — referencing his famous “I have a Dream” -speech — this, again, is an example of embedded media (Bateman et al., 2017, pp. 126–127). Here Beyoncé aims to center the narrative from being just a dreamer, as MLK was also a radical, resilient figure in the fight for civil rights. Additionally, the message that relates to his famous speech is strengthened through the auditory mode, as Beyoncé sings “I dream it, I work hard” — as MLK did.

The meaning of community is not portrayed only throughout different individuals but through the community as a whole. This is seen, for instance, through A Black Congregation:



Figure 14. A Black congregation (3.51).

Elliot and Pais (2006, pp. 313–314) discuss that Black people relied heavily on religious faith in the aftermath of the difficult emotional times after Hurricane Katrina. Therefore, a Black congregation was a place where many people found solace — as many people lost important members of their community. Therefore, as *Formation* is somewhat a narrative of Hurricane Katrina and its impact on the Black community, Beyoncé includes imagery relating to Black community as a whole to highlight the importance of it.

To conclude this section, in *Formation* Beyoncé includes the whole of Black community into the video, highlighting the meaning of family as well as other regular and famous individuals within the community. Phinney and Ong (2007) defined the meaning of peoplehood in formation of identity, and this relates very much to the data presented here. The message of MLK, as well as Beyoncé’s utterance “dream it, work hard”, is also still very evident even within the Black community. Another famous Black freedom fighter, Malcolm X, said: “the most disrespected woman in America is the Black woman” (Morgan, 2019, p. 80). I move on to study this theme further in the following Section 4.1.4.

4.1.4 “When He Fuck Me Good I Take His Ass to Red Lobster” – Shifting Power Balance within the Black Community

As stated in Section 2.3.2, Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013, pp. 785–787) define *intersectionality* as a heuristic term taking into account dynamics of, e.g., race and gender, and how these affect the different forms of oppression (pp. 785–787). This is also a theme Beyoncé explores in *Formation*, where Beyoncé does not only rework power relations between Black and white people, but also between within the Black community. A prime example of this is when Beyoncé is standing outside the plantation house:



Figures 15 and 16. Beyoncé pictured in front of the plantation house (3.01), and Beyoncé pictured in front of the plantation house (3.06).

In these Figures 15 and 16, we are able to see many ways she reworks the balance. Through the spatial mode, Beyoncé is seen standing alone in the foreground, and directly facing the camera. On the other hand, the Black men are behind her in the background blurred. Oftentimes, men are often framed as leaders whereas women are only provided to support the men. Here the balance is shifted, where Black men serve as servants for Beyoncé, who is seen as the one in command.

Beyoncé is also shifting the power balance through gestural mode. She has her middle fingers up in the air, and her face is assertive. She is also wearing heavy jewelry and her eyes are not seen properly, indicating defiance. As stated in Section 4.1.2, Beyoncé has avoided the “loud-mouthed and unattractive Sapphire stereotype” (Hobson, 2019, p. 36). Beyoncé in a way defies this stereotype by literally raising a middle finger at the expectation which Black women hold within and out of the Black community, and raises authority through gestures.

During this scene, Beyoncé sings the following lyrics: “When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster / When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster / If he hit it right, I might take him on a flight on my chopper”. She sings about tropes that have traditionally been associated with masculine behavior, as in offering food after successful sexual interaction, and owning superficial, expensive objects, such as a helicopter. Ford (2019, p. 198) also raises these lyrics by stating the following: “When I was in college in Atlanta, girls would come back to our dorm bragging about getting ‘caked’ at Red Lobster by some random thug dude. In ‘Formation,’ it’s King Bey doing the cakin’.”

Therefore, by singing these profane lyrics with aristocratic imagery of heavy jewelry and plantation houses, Beyoncé intentionally creates a contradiction between the two. This may signal so-called respectability politics (e.g., Gipson, 2019), which has targeted Black women more. However, here Beyoncé asserts Black women’s power by taking control of these tropes,

and shifting power balance, as Beyoncé as a woman here decides whether or not her (male) companion has satisfied her enough — rejecting the narrative that women are the one to please men.

To conclude this section dealing with the instance of “taking his ass to Red Lobster”, Beyoncé aims to reshape and rewrite the internal power dynamics of the Black community by elevating the Black female leadership through a variety of modes. This reshaping of historical power imbalances is something the following, last Section 4.1.5 deals with.

4.1.5 “We Gon’ Slay” – Black Future

As foreshadowed in Section 4.1.3, in Figure 9 we see a woman centered in the shot with accompanying lyrics through the auditory mode with ‘Cause I slay’. This combination of slay with pictures of ordinary Black people is prevalent throughout the video, as the word ‘slay’ is mentioned fifty times in the lyrics of Formation. Two more instances of ‘Cause I slay’ is presented below:



Figures 17 and 18. A Black woman pictured close up (3.00), and A Black priest (3.51).

In Figures 17 and 18 we again see two ordinary Black people accompanied with the lyric ‘Cause I slay’. By presenting ordinary people with a “flamboyant” word ‘slay’, it creates a slight contradiction between the visual and auditory mode, as many are used to hearing the word ‘slay’ in a manner where it is associated with “high beauty standards” — Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.a) defines slay as “to impress someone very much or to be very good or impressive”. Moreover, slay in this meaning originates from AAE (Chery, 2022). Therefore, by picturing regular people with ‘slay’, Beyoncé promotes Black beauty that is associated with everyday people that also the Black people seeing the music video can relate to.

The word ‘slay’ collocated with a future tense “gon’” is also used in the video when younger members of the Black community appear, as seen in Figures 19 and 20 below:



Figures 19 and 20. A Black child in a costume (2.32), and a young Black urban cowboy (3.03).

By using the auditory mode utterance “We gon’ slay” paired with imagery of young, Black people presented in the foreground, Beyoncé highlights the meaning of Black future. More interestingly, both scenes include a Black boy/man. Many young Black men, including such as Trayvon Martin and Michael Brown, have been killed in the hands of the police, as elaborated in Section 4.1.1. By associating the word “gon’” with these individuals who are subject to brutal lynchings in the eyes of the police, Beyoncé aims to shift the balance from the narrative to a hopeful future, where they can “be very good or impressive”, as defined by Cambridge Dictionary (n.d.a).

The message of a better tomorrow is also conveyed through other ways. As *Formation* deals with Black collective trauma, it also deals with many joyous occurrences associated with Black culture. For instance, we see many local New Orleans traditions:



Figures 21 and 22. A marching band (3.15), and a Black man with a Mardi Gras attire (3.20).

In Figure 21, we see members of a second-line jazz parade, and in Figure 22 a Black man with Mardi Gras attire. Both are manifestations of a local Black culture (Hobson, 2019, p. 38) — and both are filled with joy, and at the heart of them is the Black community. In addition, frames associated with these events both hold again a rejoicing message, as in Figure 21, Beyoncé once again urges to slay. In turn, Figure 22 is associated with the lyric: “You just might be a Black

Bill Gates in the making”. This again sheds a light for a better tomorrow, as Black people still are overrepresented in the poverty statistics in the US (Shrider, 2023).

To conclude this section, Beyoncé encourages the Black future by urging the members of Black community to “slay”, and promotes the Black culture as a joyous artefact. Jones (2019, pp. 98–110) examines the so-called “*slay* factor” in *Lemonade* as a whole, and states that in *Formation*, slay is “a way of being in the world that encourages Black women to command the moment and claim their power by self-possession” (ibid., p. 106). Jones (2019) summarizes this with a title: “the future is Black and feminist” (p. 105).

4.2 The Renaissance World Tour

In this Section 4.2, I analyze the construction of Black identity in Beyoncé’s Renaissance World Tour (RWT) concert. This section is divided into four subsections, i.e. thematic categories, in all of which I analyze a singular, emerging theme that occurs throughout the concert in the multimodal construction of Black identity.

4.2.1 “They’ll Never Take My Power” — Black Joy and Resistance

”Rooted in Black queer joy” is how Allred (2025, p. 37) describes Renaissance. Joy is a pervasive theme emerging throughout the concert from start to end, which is rooted in Black resistance. First and foremost, it is important to notice that the whole of Renaissance, both the album and the world tour, stem from Black house music and ballroom — and from an urge to reclaim house music as an original Black artform (Brooks and Jones, 2025b, p. 1). Additionally, Brooks and Jones (2025b, p. 2) point out that Black queerness is at the very core of house music. Therefore, a key element in the multimodal construction of Black identity in the RWT is house music, which is seen in many ways. For instance, many interludes include references to house music, as does “Motherboard” interlude:

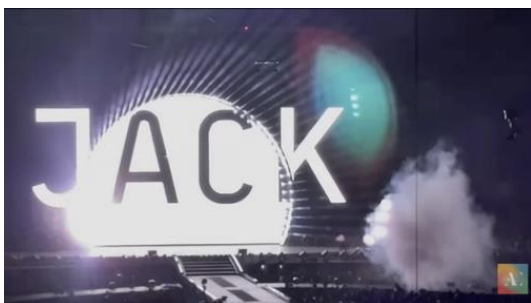


Figure 23. “Motherboard” interlude begins (46.27).

During the “Motherboard” interlude, a voice in the background declares: “Jack boldly declared: Let there be house. And house music was born! I am, you see, I am the creator, and this is my house”, which is followed by a video interlude consisting of various house music samples. By doing so, Beyoncé pays homage to many Black house icons. For instance, the voice in the background is Chuck Roberts, a deceased Black house music multitalent. Additionally, the interlude in question (and many others) holds many references through gestural mode to house music, as for instance through hand gestures:



Figure 24. “Motherboard” interlude (47.06).

Peñate (2025, p. 15) points out that DeFrantz (2004, pp. 16 [cited in Peñate, 2025, p. 15]) calls these “physical building blocks” *corporal orature*, which means “movement with speech to describe the ability of black social dance to incite action. In this articulation, social dance may contain performative gestures which cite contexts beyond the dance”. Thus, by using gestures that are associated with ballroom and house music, Beyoncé acknowledges the meaning of them in their creation. As stated in the beginning, house music is inherently joyous, but emerged from groups that have been from an intersectional lens discriminated against in various ways. Joy is seen also in other gestures, such as facial expressions:



Figure 25. Beyoncé performing PURE/HONEY (2.10.47).

PURE/HONEY is deemed to be the track from Renaissance that embodies the opulent ballroom culture (e.g., Barry Jr, 2025, p. 70). Therefore, it also embodies the joy that is included in the

ballroom — Ballroom culture emerged from Black, and Latino, LGBTQIA+ communities, outside the norms of legality and social acceptance (brown, 2025, p. 9). The ballroom scene also acted as a safe space for queer people within the AIDS crisis (Peñate, 2025, p. 17). Beyoncé acknowledges the ballroom as a safe space, and therefore signals this with associating joy through her facial expressions during the PURE/HONEY performance. Hand gestures associated with the BLM movement are also seen throughout the RWT. This is seen during I'M THAT GIRL and MY POWER:



Figures 26 and 27. I'M THAT GIRL performed (32.20), and Blue Ivy joining the stage during MY POWER (1.09.26).

A clenched, raised fist is one of the most renowned symbols of the BLM movement, often seen at protests, in artwork, and on signs. Both songs where the fists are seen raised also hold a message that can be interpreted to be dedicated to Black people. In I'M THAT GIRL, fists are raised when Princess Loko's, a deceased Black Memphis rapper, "Still' Pimpin'" sample plays in the background. During MY POWER, after Blue Ivy emerges on stage, Beyoncé sings "This that kinfolk, this that skinfolk / This that war / This my bloodline" and after that the song cuts for a moment as Beyoncé and Blue Ivy stand side by side, and after that precedes: "On the frontline / ready for war".

Moreover, both songs repeat a certain phrase — in "I'M THAT GIRL" we can hear the phrase "Please, motherfuckers ain't stopping me", and in MY POWER "They'll never take my power". Both messages of these songs, associated with the gesture clenched, raised fist include the notion of Black Joy, as the messages of the songs are empowering, and the fist symbolizes resistance and hope. Moreover, by presenting Blue Ivy with the message of "bloodline" and "ready for war", she includes her own family as the personification of Black Joy. However, the RWT includes much more references to Black family, and other members of Black community — a theme I elaborate in the following section.

4.2.2 “Uncle Johnny Made My Dress” — Black Community

As with Formation music video, the Black community plays a central role also in the RWT. This is seen in the songs, in the visuals, and through audience participation. For instance, Beyoncé’s Uncle Johnny is heard in the song HEATED.



Figure 28. Beyoncé performing HEATED (1.53.55).

Betts (2025, pp. 49–50) points out that Beyoncé told upon the release of RENAISSANCE that she dedicated the album to her late Uncle Johnny, as he is said in the lyrics: “Uncle Johnny made my dress / That cheap spandex, she looks a mess.” Beyoncé’s Uncle Johnny was an openly gay, Black, HIV-positive man, who passed away due to AIDS related complications⁸. Beyoncé has also dedicated an award earlier to her late Uncle Johnny when accepting GLAAD’s Vanguard Award, which is given out to allies promoting LGBTQ+ equality, saying that Uncle Johnny was “the most fabulous gay man I’ve ever known, who helped raise me and my sister.” (Betts, 2025, p. 56). This also solidifies the legacy of RENAISSANCE and the RWT as a dedication to Black, queer culture. Fans are a renowned symbol of queer, ballroom culture. As the song HEATED is performed, the stage is also filled with robotic arms waving fans, as seen in Figure 28 above — but also fans are seen with fans:



Figure 29. HEATED begins (1.51.40).

⁸ As told in Section 3.1.2, the concert film for the RWT was released on December 1st, on World AIDS day.

The meaning of the audience as a part of the construction of Black identity, and culture, is a cornerstone during the RWT. Betts (2025, p. 62) describes HEATED performance as following: “As millions of people chant Uncle Johnny’s name in unison to the beat of synchronized clacking fans, we are reminded of the power of popular culture to reshape public space, discourse, and perceptions. We are also reminded that queer people enrich children’s lives and that our communities need us.” Indeed, by fans also “clacking fans”, a symbol of queer culture mixed with the message of a Black, gay man “Uncle Johnny” as a trusted adult who, e.g., helped Beyoncé with dresses for her photoshoots (Betts, 2025, p. 52). I argue that the HEATED performance at the RWT acts as a real multimodal testimony of Black identity, combining the audience participation, song lyrics, a fierce performance, and references of Black queer culture through fans.

The audience partakes in the construction of Black identity throughout the show. One of the most renowned elements of the RWT that included the audience was the so called “Mute Challenge”, done during the song ENERGY:



Figure 30. The Mute Challenge performed during ENERGY (54.42).

Richards (2025, p. 149) describes the use of the Mute Challenge as “Black woman [Beyoncé] operating Black queer aesthetics”. During the song ENERGY, lyrics go: “Look around everybody on mute.” After this, the audience braces themselves to be completely silent for as long as possible. The audience is encouraged to participate in the challenge by gestures, such as hushing fingers and facial expressions. Harrison (2025, p. 27) points out that this so-called “call and response” has been used as far back as 1580 in many regions across Africa, therefore Beyoncé honoring her Black roots. Additionally, Richards (2025, p. 164) points out that the challenge reminds of “Black queerness [that] has been forced into hiding”, as the audience as a whole is urged to remain on mute — it is a re-examination of who is powerful and who has the control (ibid.). In this sense, Beyoncé, a Black woman, exercising “Black queer aesthetics”, has the control — a concept not historically accurate.

Auditory mode is used also in many other ways when participating the audience in the construction of Black identity. For instance, Beyoncé uses “vocal glitch” (McGee, 2025) in I’M THAT GIRL by altering the tempo, chopping up the words, and repeating the same lines of the Princess Loko sample throughout the song. McGee (2025, p. 126) states: “Vocal glitch causes the audience to pause, digest, and think through what they just heard. This reflective moment re/centers Black women’s intersectional relationship with/between time, body, and agency.” Therefore, auditorial devices play a central role in the construction of identity by involving the audience as well, not only the performers. These notions of identity construction are not only deployed to “empower” the singers and dancers but “they also embody the values of the Black audience that acknowledges them” (Peñate, 2025, p. 17).

The acknowledgement of the audience is also tested through many other ways. For instance, the whole concert is “narrated” by Kevin JZ Prodigy, a queer ballroom icon, who is deemed as the “vocal embodiment of the *Renaissance* Tour” (Barry Jr, 2025, p. 81). This is, again, a dedication to the Black queer community, and a way to “embody the values of the Black audience that acknowledges them”, as stated by Peñate (2025, p. 17) above. Kevin JZ Prodigy’s narration of the tour therefore embodies the history, the presence, and the future of the ballroom scene. Kevin JZ Prodigy uses, for instance, many chants associated with the ballroom:

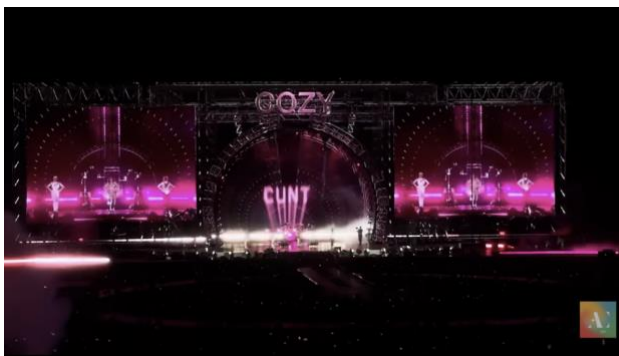


Figure 31. Dance break at the beginning of COZY with Kevin JZ Prodigy chanting in the background (34.56).

During the COZY dance break, Kevin JZ Prodigy is chanting in the background: “Cunt to the feminine what oh! / Cu-, cu-, cu-, cu-, cu-, cunt now, cunt to the feminine what oh! / Brr, brr, brr, brr, brr.” The inclusion of the ballroom chants throughout the concert is again a homage to the powers that inspired both the album and the tour.

As the members of the Black community are mentioned and/or involved through the lyrics (e.g., Uncle Johnny), by audience participation, and through auditory devices, as Kevin JZ Prodigy,

it still leaves an open question about the role of Beyoncé in all of this. The word “mother” is pervasive throughout the RWT — Kevin JZ Prodigy utters it as a welcome chant, as indicated in the Introduction chapter, and as well as with visual mode through “Motherboard” interlude mentioned in Section 4.2.1. Barry Jr (2025, p. 68) indicates that the figure of the “mother” embodies the universal idea of care and connection. Taking into account the grave history of the Black people, as discussed more in depth in the Section 4.1.1, Beyoncé transcends herself into a caring figure. Additionally, when pronounced as “mutha”, in trans and queer lexicon it is understood as “the person who steps up to offer guidance, protection, family, and a loving space to those who have been rejected [...]” (brown, 2025, p. 10). Therefore, Beyoncé acts as the “mother” of the “safe space for liberation”, as described by Peñate (2025, p. 17), shifting the power balance from a grave history of Black [and queer] people to a safe space inside a stadium. The concept of spatiality is also discussed in the following Section 4.2.3.

4.2.3 “Move Out the Way!” — Spatial Reclamation

Peñate (2025, p. 13) argues that Beyoncé employs space as a way to reshape historical sceneries and moments by expressing Black subjects’ agency through spatiality. This is evident in Formation, as discussed in, e.g., 4.1.2, but also in the RWT. The design of the stage used in the RWT itself is also a construction piece of Black identity:



Figure 32. Ballroom dance break (2.16.50).

The stage design itself includes a “runway” which is used throughout the concert but plays a vital role during the Ballroom dance break (between PURE/HONEY and SUMMER RENAISSANCE, see Appendix 1). Peñate (2025, p. 17) argues that the stage design is a continuous evidence of Beyoncé’s spatial signification. During the ballroom dance break, the dancers strut the runway performing different “categories” that is narrated by Kevin JZ Prodigy, whose meaning as a ballroom icon has been discussed above. Therefore, the stage is also a testimony to Black queer ballroom culture where dancers “perform” the ballroom culture.

The stage as a Black space also acts as a semiotic space which allows dancers to dance. For instance, as stated above, during the ballroom dance break, dancers perform different categories. However, the dancers are also using the stage as a tool to perform spatial reclamation in other ways. This is seen also during the performance of the song MOVE:



Figure 33. MOVE performed (1.49.17).

The song MOVE opens with the line by Beyoncé, and featuring artists, Grace Jones and Tems, saying: “Move out the way! / I’m with my girls and we all need space!” Black women demanding space through the auditory mode is one way to reclaim space for those who have historically been oppressed, but this is strengthened through spatial arrangements on stage. Beyoncé and dancers are all spread out on stage, literally demanding space. Hobson (2019, p. 39) points out that in the Formation music video Beyoncé “dances, prances, twerks, and lets loose in the spaces once associated with racial and sexual oppression”. This also relates to the stage performance on the RWT, as they are quite literally doing the things listed by Hobson (2019). The stage is filled with all-Black dance crew, strengthening the message of spatial reclamation for Black people, and dancers are dancing in an almost “aggressive” manner, claiming space in a non-apologetic manner.

Spatiality can also relate to arrangement of elements in space, as stated by Kress, 2010 (cited in Oyebamiji and Olutayo, 2025, p. 141). Therefore, also the order of songs plays an important value to the construction of identity. This is seen for instance in the songs in Act III (see Appendix 1) that includes songs that all pay homage to the Black identity and Black community. For instance, the song BLACK PARADE was released as a result of unright lynching of George Floyd in 2020. The following song, Savage (Remix), is a dedication to Black women, while the preceding song, MY POWER, has been discussed earlier in Section 4.2.1. The name of the Act III, opulence, means the quality of being expensive and luxurious (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.b). All of this is a way to shift the power balance to an “opulent” future, without necessarily reminding the audience of the grave past of the Black community, as RENAISSANCE and the

RWT are intended inherently “rooted in Black queer joy” (Allred, 2025, p. 37). Act III also begins with no other than performance of Formation, which includes the hopeful message of Black future, “we gon’ slay”, as discussed in Section 4.1.5. There are also many other joyous messages included in the RWT about Black future, to be discussed in the following Section 4.2.4.

4.2.4 “We Are the Renaissance” — Black Future

Intersectionality plays a valuable role in the construction of Black identity during the RWT. As stated throughout this section, the RWT is rooted in the Ballroom culture and house music that was pioneered by Black, queer people — also known as those people many of whom died to racial discrimination as well as, e.g., the AIDS crisis, as Beyoncé’s Uncle Johnny. However, the message of the RWT is not as somber as the past but rather hopeful about the future. This is seen, for instance, in the representation of queer Black people during the concert, seen for instance during the Ballroom dance break:



Figure 34. Ballroom dance break (2.16.43).

The dancer seen in Figure 34 is Darius Hickman, an openly queer, Black dancer. Hickman is wearing a pink dress with bows, while also being centered on both sides of the screen, as he is waiting to walk down the runway. The scene is accompanied with Kevin JZ Prodigy chanting in the background: “We are the Renaissance! We are the Renaissance!”

Harrison (2025, p. 30) argues that “Beyoncé welcomes queer inclusivity by parading a dance crew of queer and non-binary dancers on stage nightly, paying homage to what has been seen in the ballrooms since the 1990s”. Moreover, Beyoncé is not only welcoming queer and non-binary dancers, but mainly Black queer dancers, such as Darius Hickman. This is a clear message of intersectionality among Black people. By filming Darius Hickman on two large screens, accompanied with Kevin JZ Prodigy’s chant of “We are the Renaissance”, the message

is quite visible — future belongs to the Queer and Black people, and they are the change, i.e., the Renaissance.

Additionally, Maroun (2025, p. 86) argues that Renaissance is dealing with futurism that is not centralizing heterosexist, reproductive models but developing a “future to the present moment” that is constructed in communion with a queer Black past. Additionally, Maroun (2025, p. 86) argues that “Renaissance posits a queer Black present and future outside of normative structures of being in order to dismantle the ‘cis-tems’ that have framed Black narratives like those in [...] Lemonade (2016)”. Therefore, the RWT is also a way for Beyoncé to dismantle the past imagery of excluding the non-cis Black people.

As mentioned in Section 2.1, Marcus (2023) described the RWT as “a dazzling, Afrofuturist fantasia”. Hobson (2025, pp. 176–177) points out that Afrofuturism has been theorized by various scholars but two elements stand out in theories: the preoccupation with the future, i.e., through time travel and what they reveal about racial progress as well, and reflecting on the Black experience through sci-fi/fantasy metaphors, i.e., contrasting invasion/colonialism and robot labor/enslaved labor. These themes are also visible on the RWT, for instance through Loop the Sample interlude:

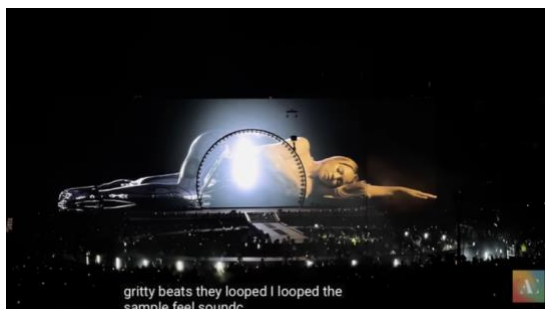


Figure 35. Loop the Sample interlude (27.15).

During the interlude, Beyoncé’s voice can be heard in the background, narrating the interlude:

“[...] Loop the Sample, release. Loop the sample, be free. Blessed all the hands that touched the machine. Anointed, is the floor where all are free. Sonic singularity, future, liberty, come with me through my portal, my insanity where I am home, my renaissance, my house of chrome, where I’m reborn, where you at?”

The quote above holds many references that can be studied in light of Afrofuturism. For instance, the quote “loop the sample, be free” can be interpreted as the very core of Afrofuturism, where past, present, and future are all intertwined in the imagery, as Maroun

(2025, p. 86) discusses the core of Renaissance. This is also discussed by Brooks and Huff (2025, p. 191) who claim that reimagining past, present, and future is a way for Afrofuturist feminism to couple normative boundaries of race with, e.g., gender and sexuality.

The concept of “sonic singularity” is discussed by Hobson (2025, p. 176) who argues that this line includes the concept of rethinking “Black womanhood, community, space, and time beyond futurity”. Therefore, the concept can be deemed as an ode to the Black community in light of Black future, highlighting the importance of unity, i.e., singularity, through music.

The imagery seen in Figure 35 also includes what Hobson (2025, pp. 176–177) discussed as contrasting enslaved labor with robot labor. In the interlude, Beyoncé is turned into a chromatic robot. Therefore, she contrasts the past of the Black community, who was enslaved labor to a robotic Afrofuturism. However, Beyoncé does this in a way where she, a Black woman, is seen lying vertically on a huge screen, claiming all of the space on the screen. Therefore, she is centered in the shot, again centering “Black future”. Loop the Sample interlude also contains elements from Beyoncé’s song ENERGY, and mashing it up with other songs. (Palmer and Wooten, 2025, p. 138) discuss the concept of mashups as inherently queer-Afrofuturistic practices, i.e., the auditory mode is a way to construct identity.

Brooks and Huff (2025, p. 196) discuss community building as a way for “a liberated Black future” through Afrofuturist work. On the RWT, the community is a central element in the construction of interacting with the idea of a liberated Black future. When Beyoncé turns into a chromatic robot during the interlude, the audience is in awe and chanting. Here, again, the community plays a building block in the construction of identity.

Community as a way of highlighting the Black future is also visible in other ways. Beyoncé has collaborated with the artist Kendrick Lamar in the past, for instance with Freedom, a song from the album Lemonade. Kendrick Lamar has also been vocal as an artist about the issues of the Black community. One of the most renowned songs that can be interpreted as dedicated to the Black community by Kendrick Lamar is “Alright”, and a snippet of it is included:



Figure 36. Blue Ivy and dancers dancing to Kendrick Lamar’s ‘Alright’ (1.10.44).

The snippet of the song can be heard in Act III, between songs MY POWER and BLACK PARADE, songs highlighting the importance of Black community and Black identity, as discussed in Section 4.2.3. The scene also includes powerful imagery through gestural mode. For instance, the dancers strut down the runway, literally moving forward while the snippet is heard in the background, dancing freely in an aggressive, i.e., reclaiming space. Additionally, Blue Ivy, a young member, and the future of the Black community, is centered in the frame. Possibly the most important message of the Black future is however heard through the auditory mode by Kendrick Lamar: “We gon’ be alright.”

5. “You Know You That Bitch When You Cause All This Conversation” — Discussion

5.1 Addressing the Research Questions

The quote in the title of this Chapter is heard toward the end of ‘Formation’. Indeed, Beyoncé has been able to cause ruckus and discussion in both non-academic and academic contexts. The present study has aimed to cause conversation by answering to two research questions:

- (1) How is Black identity constructed multimodally in the production of Beyoncé?
- (2) What kind of differences are there in the multimodal construction between the music video and the concert?

In this Chapter, I aim to form a synthesis of my results, highlighting the most important findings in light of the research questions. As I have analyzed in Chapter 4, Beyoncé constructs Black identity multimodally utilizing the modes presented in Table 1. Both the Formation music video as well as the RWT hold many similarities in the construction, as well as differences.

In their core, both Formation and the RWT are concerned with what Stenglin (2011, p. 56) calls “bonding”, a concept also useful in multimodal research. Stenglin claims that bonding is “concerned with interpersonal meaning in space but focuses on affiliation [...] It explores ways of building togetherness, inclusiveness and solidarity through connection” (ibid.). Stenglin also explores bonding icons, i.e., “a social emblem of belonging” (ibid.) — bonding icons can be deemed, as for instance, buildings, leaders, and symbols.

Thus, the five thematic categories explored in Formation music video and four thematic categories studied in the RWT can also be deemed as bonding icons — they all are ways to create connection to and within the Black community by bringing up themes that create affiliation with the Black identity.

Firstly, one major theme I have not yet taken into account under Chapter 4, is the use of AAE. Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025) suggest that linguistic mode is separate from auditory mode, highlighting the linguistic patterns. Previous studies, such as Eberhardt and Vdoviak-Markow’s (2020), have suggested that Beyoncé utilizes AAE as a part of performative persona (p. 76). This was also evident in both production pieces — Beyoncé uses AAE in her lyrics, as also

discussed in Puhakka (2024), but also outside the lyrics. For instance, by including such artists as Big Freedia in *Formation*, shrieking “I did not come to play with you hoes / I came to slay bitch” (seen during 1.07–1.14), and Kevin JZ Prodigy as the “narrator” of the RWT, she utilizes the use of AAE as a way to construct identity.

AAE is also visible through the visual mode. For instance, as seen in Figure 31, a pink text with ‘CUNT’ is seen in it. Richards (2025, pp. 159–160) discusses that “Cunt” has been traditionally used to describe Black Trans bodies in the Black ballroom culture — highlighting the use of Black subcultures AAE.⁹

Another theme that is emphasized in both *Formation* and the RWT is the use of Black community in the construction of identity, as discussed in Sections 4.1.3 and 4.2.2. Community is seen in its wide sense in both production pieces. From the small circle, Beyoncé underlines the meaning of immediate family in the Black community. For instance, Blue Ivy is seen in the plantation house playing with other Black children in the *Formation* music video (Figure 10), as well as dancing on the stage with dancers during the RWT (Figures 27, 36). In a wider sense, Black community is seen as including everyone who is Black — from those regular people who “slay” in the *Formation* music video (Figures 17–21) to the audience participation, as seen in the RWT during HEATED performance when audience chants the name of Beyoncé’s Uncle Johnny (Figure 29).

Both production pieces also bring attention to the issues Black people face. For instance, support for the BLM is visible. In Figures 4 and 5, in the *Formation* music video, a Black child dances in front of the police officers, accompanied with the graffiti saying “Stop shooting us”, one of the most central messages of the movement. In turn, in the RWT Beyoncé, Blue Ivy, and dancers are seen with clenched fists during various points in the concert, also a symbol of the support for the movement (Figures 26, 27).

Baxter (2010, pp. 127–128) discusses deconstruction as a way of unraveling power relations. Shifting power balance was also visible in both pieces. This was also seen as deconstructing power balances within the Black community. For instance, in Section 4.1.4, I discussed Beyoncé shifting power balance from the male-centered narrative in the *Formation* music video (Figures 15, 16). In turn, the RWT focuses more on the representation of Black queer people, who have historically been also oppressed and neglected, e.g., during the AIDS epidemic — in

⁹ It is important to notice that in many English varieties the word ‘cunt’ is considered highly offensive, as in British English.

the RWT we see “queer Black femmes” (Brooks and Jones, 2025b, p. 2) represented in a joyous way, such as during the ballroom dance break (Figures 32, 34).

There are also many differences in the construction of Black identity. One of the most striking differences is the point of view of which the identity construction differs is the lens through which the lives of the Black people are portrayed — in both joy and sorrow. As I have discussed in Section 4.1.1, Formation deals with Black collective trauma, varying from the disastrous Hurricane Katrina to the history of Jim Crow laws and even further to slavery. This portrayal may be due to various reasons. For instance, as argued by Tumino (2024, p. 134), Beyoncé had not been vocal about these issues before, it may be possible that Beyoncé intentionally wanted to bring awareness of these issues by highlighting them in the Formation music video — only bringing awareness to the joyous side could have possibly been deemed as performative.

However, the RWT in its core is about joy, as it is rooted in Black queer joy (Allred, 2025, p. 37). Therefore, the perspective is also divergent from the one in Formation. The RWT in turn brings attention to Black queer subcultures, such as house music and ballroom culture. It is true that these were born as a result of oppression and discrimination, such as the 1990s ballroom scene that was evoked among the AIDS crisis (Peñate, 2025, p. 17). However, Renaissance is about the positive side, as stated by brown (2025, p. 9): “This [RENAISSANCE] is the music of Black, femme and LGBTQIA+ communities whose lives are and have been in danger for most of human history, stealing joy back from a world that is always trying to convince us we don’t deserve to exist [...]”. Therefore, the RWT as a whole can be deemed as a safe space for these people — “Beyoncé declared that she wanted the people gathered in her name to find a safe space for liberation” (Peñate, 2025, p. 17), bringing the attention from a grave history to a joyous, safe space.

The RWT also allows a different type of references to other members of the Black community that the Formation music video is not able to provide. For instance, the auditory mode is utilized when referencing other members of the Black community, such as Kendrick Lamar’s song ‘Alright’ (Figure 36) as well as Chuck Roberts’ narration (Figure 23). Formation music video does not provide this, as the music video only includes ‘Formation’ track. This may be self-explanatory but I find it rather interesting that the RWT is able to provide references in a way that the music video as a genre is not — Stöckl (2019, p. 47) references this as “material/medial affordances”.

Another difference in the construction of identity is the participation of the viewer in Formation and the audience in the RWT. As I have stated in Section 4.2.2, the audience participates in the construction of identity, whereas in Formation the viewer does not have a similar role. This is due to the interactive nature of the concert. For instance, Richards (2025, p. 164) discusses the Mute Challenge (Figure 30) as a way in which negotiation, i.e., the construction, occurs through the audience.

The concept of spatiality was also discussed in both contexts of Formation and the RWT. Spatial mode as a way to construct Black identity also differs, mostly due to the deviating genres. In Formation, spatial mode was utilized mainly with working with camera angles, and spatial arrangements (e.g., Figures 15, 16) while in the RWT working in the spatial mode was done on stage arrangements. For instance, dancers' choreography as a way to use space in an "aggressive" manner can also be interpreted as a way of using spatial mode (Figure 33). However, frame arrangements were also used to highlight (queer) Black people in the RWT, e.g., when centering Darius Hickman on frame (Figure 34).

As both production pieces can be deemed as a dedication to Black identity, and moreover to Black culture, it is important to point out that both pieces deal with different types of Black subcultures. Ford (2019, p. 197) argues that while Formation stretches across the diaspora, the aesthetic is also (hyper)local, i.e., the culture of east Texas/western Louisiana. This is done by presenting the region in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina (e.g., Figure 2) as well as Mardi Gras celebration (Figure 22). In turn, the RWT is dedicated to ballroom culture and house music, stemming from Black queer subculture (Richards, 2025, p. 148). Pinpointing the different local cultures and subcultures is also a way to deny the notion that Black people is a monolithic group but instead with a variety of cultural notions — a concern raised by Sellers et al. (1998, p. 19) who argue that Black is an ambiguous category of people of African descent.

5.2 Beyoncé as a Capitalist

One major theme I wish to address as worth mentioning in light of the results is positioning Beyoncé as a capitalist. In its core, Beyoncé's fanbase Beyhive consists of queer Black femmes (Brooks and Jones, 2025b, p. 2). As the RWT was a celebration of these people, it is important to note that Beyoncé gained noticeable monetary value from the tour — it is the highest grossing Black female tour of all time (Hobson, 2025, p. 175).

Many other scholars have previously also brought awareness to this issue. For instance, Celeste (2015, p. 2) claims Beyoncé has benefitted from the capitalism and its power structures of the music industry when capitalism has controlled the imagery of Black women. Harris (2019, pp. 155–156) discusses that the use of radical imagery as a way of marketing commodified Black bodies was addressed by, e.g., bell hooks, a feminist scholar renowned for raising critical discussion about Beyoncé. However, Harris (2019, p. 156) also argues that *Lemonade*, and *Formation* as a part of it, is about the importance of representation and the power of popular culture.

Additionally, I would like to point out that many scholars have studied Beyoncé’s performative persona, for instance Eberhardt and Vdoviak-Markow (2020) who argue that the use of AAE as a linguistic resource is a way to construct a performative persona (p. 77). Moreover, it is important to notice that all performances that link to Beyoncé are carefully constructed, also hinted in the title of this thesis with the homonymic phrase “production of Beyoncé”. As Beyoncé is a capitalist utilizing from capitalistic power structures, as discussed above, it is important to point out that the references to Black identity, many of them addressed in the present study, do not necessarily emerge only due to Beyoncé being “a liberating voice of unapologetic Blackness” (Eberhardt and Vdoviak-Markow, 2020, p. 77), but for monetary reasons where Beyoncé’s performative persona is carefully constructed through more or less subtle references and hints.

Additionally, referencing Beyoncé as a “liberating voice of unapologetic Blackness” (ibid.) includes many contradicting undertones. Shrider (2023) addresses that Black people are still overrepresented in the poverty statistics, while Forbes says that Beyoncé’s net worth is 780 million U.S. dollars. Is Beyoncé really the person to embody the liberating voice of the Black community as a whole, when capitalistic structures have throughout history exploited Black people through, for instance, slavery?¹⁰

Moreover, in January 2023, Beyoncé performed in Dubai for 24 million US dollars (Harrison, 2025, p. 24) — again raising conversation about Beyoncé’s position as a powerful Black woman who has undeniable advantage from capitalist power structures. As in 2022 she had just released the “queer mega-anthem”, she was now performing half a year later in a city notorious for its anti-LGBTQ+ policies and politics (ibid., p. 25). The contradiction is quite clearly visible, and

¹⁰ I would like to remind the reader that I, as a white person, cannot speak for the Black community. The arguments posed here are only to evoke questions about economic inequality.

Harrison (2025, pp. 29–30) also refers to this dilemma as rainbow capitalism, i.e., Beyoncé profiting off the LGBTQ+ community. The Beyhive is not unanimous on the problem — some were for performing in Dubai, some against it. However, on February 6, 2023, Beyhive had “Dubai soon forgotten” (ibid., p. 25), and were fighting in ticket lines for a chance to see Queen Bey live on the RWT — and they ended up grossing over half a billion U.S. dollars to Beyoncé (Hobson, 2025, p. 175).

5.3 Limitations and Future Research

This thesis has heavily relied on the qualitative methodology. Both production pieces are comprehensive and include many references that can be interpreted as a part of construction of Black identity that were not included in the analysis — as mentioned in Section 3.2.1, the raw data consisted of 186 from Formation, and 182 screenshots from the RWT, and of these 368 screenshots, 36 were included in the analysis as Figures.

This raises immediate questions about the “cherry-picking phenomenon”, that critical discourse analysts have been criticized (e.g., Baker and Levon, 2015), i.e., why were these 36 chosen for a close scrutiny. Firstly, many scholars, such as Machin and Mayr (2012, p. 8) discuss the meaning of details in the light of Multimodal CDA, arguing that buried meanings and ideologies are revealed by attention to detail. The present study has also focused on details as a way of constructing Black identity — therefore, it would have been nearly impossible due to limited time and limitations in the length of the master’s thesis to include all 368 screenshots.

Additionally, in the course of applying methods to the data, five distinct thematic categories emerged in Formation and four in the RWT. Bateman et al. (2017, pp. 229–230) suggest examining the data by drawing out patterns. Therefore, I reason that the analysis provided in the present study is not cherry-picking but rather used to bring into light the interconnections within the production pieces and between them.

Although, it may be possible that more thematic categories could have emerged in the analysis of this present study. As hinted above, limitations in the length of the master’s thesis have made it impossible for me as a researcher to shed light on more ways in the construction of Black identity. However, the thematic categories shown in the present study were not randomly cherry-picked. They were sorted according to themes that have emerged in earlier research in both the Lemonade Reader (2019) as well as the Renaissance Reader (2025), as the themes

were prominently discussed in both interdisciplinary collections. Therefore, the reliability of this study relies on its solid basis in earlier studies conducted on Beyoncé.

On the other hand, if one were to continue in the footsteps of this thesis in an academic context that allows a more comprehensive study (e.g., a doctoral dissertation), I encourage to include more thematic categories. The thematic categories were somewhat conflated during some occasions, and I argue that using more thematic categories with more examples from the data the reliability of this study could be even sturdier.

Moreover, the comparative nature of this study could also be applied to studying the multimodal construction of Black identity from a temporal point of view. Beyoncé as an artist has been active since the early 1990s with beginning her career as a member of Destiny's Child, and it could be interesting to see future research in comparing how the construction of identity has developed over time. This aspect was also somewhat visible in the present study, as Formation music video is from 2016 and the RWT from 2023, but focus was rather on the differences of the production pieces from other points of view.

I would like to conclude this Chapter by discussing the phenomenon also discussed in Puhakka (2024, p. 25). The aim of this thesis was not to form a picture of Beyoncé's Black identity but rather the construction of it through the multimodal lens in two different culturally significant production pieces. A person's identity is a highly personal, vast theme that cannot be boiled down to a thesis.

6. “This A Reminder” — Conclusion

The quote seen in the title of this chapter could be heard echoing throughout the stadiums when Beyoncé performs *COZY* on the RWT, a song dedicated to Black people, no matter if they are “dark brown, dark skin, light-skin, beige, fluorescent beige”, as said in the lyrics. I, in turn, would like to use this Chapter to remind the reader of what has been covered in the course of this thesis.

This interdisciplinary study has studied the construction of Black identity in two culturally significant production pieces by Beyoncé. The present study has utilized multimodality, a way in which different meaning-making modes come together in the construction of Black identity. Following the Bateman et al. (2017) as well as Oyebamiji and Olutayo (2025) methodologies, the study has provided relevant information about the construction of identity.

The ‘Formation’ music video includes references to the history of the Black people in the United States, reclaims spaces that have historically been white-dominated, discusses the meaning of community in the construction of identity, shifts power balance within the Black community as well as focuses on the future of the Black community.

The RWT, in turn, also includes a deconstructive narrative to the Black identity, pinpoints the meaning of community in the construction of identity, uses spatiality as a way to reclaim authority as well as discusses the future of the Black community — through both Afrofuturism as well as the community at large.

Both the music video and the concert include similarities in the construction of identity as well as differences. The deviations are heavily influenced on the differences of the material/medial affordances (Stöckl, 2019, p. 47). For instance, the RWT deploys the audience in the construction of Black identity in the way the ‘Formation’ music video is not able to do. The differences are also rather dependent on the context in which they are born in — Formation is heavily influenced by the local New Orleans culture, while the RWT focuses on Black queer subcultures.

The present study hopes to have filled a gap in two academic contexts — in the lack of multimodal research within the Beyoncé scholarly study as well as in comparing two quite

divergent cultural productions by Beyoncé. Despite the limitations in length, I have been able to address the findings in light of the earlier research conducted on Beyoncé.

More importantly, also in the non-academic manner, I hope to have shed light on the life of the Black people to the reader. The rights of the Black people are still globally targeted. Black people have a dark history in regard to, e.g., slavery, which still affects, for instance, the socioeconomic aspect of their lives. They are also being subject to unjust killings by the police and other authorities. However, Black people also have a community and culture that is rich, varying, and beautiful — it is joyous and filled with a hope for a better future.

To conclude this thesis, I, acknowledging my academically challenging position as a member of the Beyhive, am still highly anticipating the final Act III in the trilogy of *RENAISSANCE* (2022) and *COWBOY CARTER* (2024). I cannot wait to be welcomed to “Mother’s Mind” once more.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Renaissance World Tour setlist

Opening Act

1. Dangerously in Love 2
2. Flaws and All
3. 1 +1 / I'm Goin' Down
4. I Care
5. River Deep, Mountain High

Act I – Renaissance (“Opera Intro” and “Loop the Sample” Interludes)

6. I'M THAT GIRL
7. COZY
8. ALIEN SUPERSTAR
9. Lift Off

Act II – Motherboard (“Motherboard” Interlude)

10. CUFF IT / CUFF IT (WETTER REMIX)
11. ENERGY
12. BREAK MY SOUL / BREAK MY SOUL (THE QUEENS REMIX)

Act III – Opulence (“Opulence” Interlude)

13. Formation
14. Diva
15. Run the World (Girls)
16. MY POWER
17. BLACK PARADE
18. Savage (Remix)
19. Partition

Act IV – Anointed (“Anointed” Interlude)

20. CHURCH GIRL

21. Get Me Bodied
22. Before I Let Go
23. Rather Die Young
24. Love On Top
25. Crazy in Love

ACT V – Anointed Part II

26. Love Hangover [Backup singers]
27. PLASTIC OFF THE SOFA
28. VIRGO’S GROOVE / Naughty Girl
29. MOVE
30. HEATED

Act VI – Memories Run Through My Wires (“Memories Run Through My Wires” Interlude)

31. THIQUE
32. ALL UP IN YOUR MIND
33. Drunk In Love

ACT VII – Mind Control (“Mind Control” Interlude)

34. AMERICA HAS A PROBLEM
35. PURE/HONEY / Blow

Ballroom Dance Break

36. SUMMER RENAISSANCE