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**Beyoncé's *Lemonade*:
“A winner don't quit”**

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Abstract

Beyoncé's latest album has become an instant social phenomenon worldwide. Given its innovative poetic, visual, musical and socio-politic impact, the famous and controversial African American singer has taken an untraveled road—both personal and professional. The purpose of this essay is to provide a close reading of the poetry, music, lyrics and visuals in four sections from Beyoncé's critically acclaimed *Lemonade* (2016).

To this end, I have chosen what I believe are the most representative sections of *Lemonade* together with their respective songs. Thus, I focus on the song "Hold Up" from Denial; "Daddy Lessons" from Accountability, "Freedom" from Hope, and "Formation," where Beyoncé addresses topics such as infidelity, racism, women's representation, and racism and inequality. I analyse these topics through a close-reading and interpretation of Warsan Shire's poetry (a source of inspiration), as well as Beyoncé's own music, lyrics, and imagery.

From this analysis, it is safe to say that *Lemonade* is a relevant work of art that will perdure in time, since it highlights positive representations of African-Americans, at the same time Beyoncé critically denounces the current racial unrest lived in the USA.

Key words: Beyoncé, *Lemonade*, Warsan Shire, infidelity, racism, women's empowerment, police brutality, New Orleans, visual album, Black Lives Matter.

1. Introduction

As an English Language and Literature student, and professional musician,¹ I have always been interested in the Anglophone societies and cultures, but especially in the African-American and the American culture, particularly music. Thus, I decided to write this essay integrating literature and cultural studies. I believe that popular contemporary music is a topic that is often overlooked in academic studies, yet something that is very influential in our everyday lives as cultural consumers. In my opinion, worldwide known African-American pop singer Beyoncé (née Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter), and her latest visual album *Lemonade* (2016) is the perfect example of this phenomenon: a provocative, controversial, and path-breaking visual album that has gained the attention of renowned publications and music critics all over the world, at the same time it has generated innumerable think-pieces and has occupied television-show segments in programs of all kinds. However, perhaps because of its recent release, there has not been a real, in-depth analysis of Beyoncé's *Lemonade*—as far as the lyrics, the visual material, the social context, the rewriting of the African presence in the US, or Beyoncé's re-visiting of canonized literary works, such as Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, among others—despite its obvious influence in American pop culture, the Anglophone cultural landscape, and beyond.

The aim of this essay is to analyse the artistic foundation that *Lemonade* is based on—Warsan Shire's poetry, Beyoncé's music and lyrics, and the imagery shown in the visual album—as well as the main topics that Beyoncé addresses in *Lemonade* (infidelity in African-American communities, racism, social justice, mis-representations and empowerment of women of African descent, and police brutality), that are quite relevant in the current political climate in the USA.

1 I studied classical music theory and performance at Conservatorio Profesional de Música de A Coruña, and at Conservatorio Superior de Música de A Coruña. I am currently part of a pop band (Say My Name) as a singer, songwriter, producer and vocalist. We released an album titled *Say My Name* (2015).

To do so, I will focus on what I believe are the most representative sections of *Lemonade*'s themes. The organisation of this essay in sections (also called sequences) follows the structure in *Lemonade*, where each section is differentiated by its title (i.e: "Hope"), and is comprised of a poem, a song (music and lyrics), and visuals. Thus, the sections/sequences that I will deal with are titled "Denial: 'Hold Up,'" "Accountability: 'Daddy Lessons,'" "Hope: 'Freedom,'" and "Formation."

2. Methodology

Lemonade is a visual album, that is, it follows the continuous narrative flow of a film rather than that of a music video. Thus, the sections in *Lemonade* are only divided by the titles that appear on the screen ("Anger," "Denial," "Accountability," "Hope," etc.). Each of these sequences contains a different poem and song, while the visuals are continuous throughout the sequence.

For the purpose of this essay I have followed Beyoncé's own organisation of the sections in *Lemonade*, and, therefore, I have divided my essay in different sections according to the title of the sequence I have analysed, and the corresponding song: "Denial: 'Hold Up,'" "Accountability: 'Daddy Lessons,'" "Hope: 'Freedom,'" and "Formation."

For each section I have provided a close-reading of Warsan Shire's poems in relation to Beyoncé's own lyrics, as well as analysed the music and images, in that order, and, therefore, following Beyoncé's own structure in *Lemonade*. The main topics in each section relate to the content of the poems, the music, and the visuals. Thus, in "Denial: 'Hold Up,'" I explain how Beyoncé addresses her husband's infidelity. Further on, in "Accountability: 'Daddy Lessons,'" I focus on the autobiographical content of this section, where Beyoncé deals with her relationship with his father as well as patriarchal gender roles. Later on, in "Hope: 'Freedom,'" I explain Beyoncé's activism as a supporter of *Black Lives Matter* and her stand against racism, as well as exploring her obsession for showcasing positive

representations of African-American women. Finally, in “Formation,” I observe Beyoncé’s most controversial song to date, as well as her condemnation of police brutality towards the African-American community.

Although Beyoncé is a prolific and influential artist, there have not been many academic works that have studied *Lemonade* thus far, and therefore, all the interpretations of Shire’s poetry and Beyoncé’s visual album are my own.

In the appendix section, I include the original poems by Warsan Shire as well as the lyrics of Beyoncé’s songs.

3. Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* (2016)

Lemonade is a very layered piece of art. In this visual album, Beyoncé acts as the editor: she gathers, researches, constructs and finally, performs all the different art forms contained in this piece. From the spoken word² to the choreography every single detail has been moulded by Beyoncé’s hands.³ MeLo-X,⁴ who co-wrote two songs in *Lemonade* (“Hold Up” and “Sorry”) states that: “[Beyoncé]’s hands on with everything, and that “She gives direction on everything and is very involved with the whole process. It’s inspiring to see an artist on that level be able to just still have an eye for certain things and an ear.” (*Pitchfork*)

The other relevant protagonist that I will focus on is British-Somali writer Warsan Shire,⁵ who has heavily influenced Beyoncé’s work and has even contributed to *Lemonade* by editing and rewriting⁶ her own poems to fit the visual album’s narrative. Shire’s work is

2 Spoken word is “A form or genre of poetry intended to be performed to an audience; frequently attributive.” (OED). I have decided to use this term as the poetry recited by Beyoncé is indirectly part of a performance. Some of the poems featured in *Lemonade* were originally written as spoken word by Warsan Shire, since she shared recordings of herself reciting them.

3 When I mention Beyoncé I am referring to Beyoncé herself as well as to the entire team that has contributed to *Lemonade* (songwriter, producers, directors, costume designers, and choreographers)

4 MeLo-X is a Jamaican-born singer and multimedia artist.

5 Warsan Shire is a 29-year-old, Somali poet based in London. In 2013, she was named Young Poet Laureate for London by the London Legacy Development Corporation.

6 Shire is credited in *Lemonade* under “Film Adaptation.” Thus, we deduce that she is the one responsible for the adaptation of her own poems.

defined by her female protagonists, many of them drawn from her own life experiences as well as from the experiences of other women who have made an impact on her life. Shire mainly focuses on the topics of love, and women and adultery, which is why her poetry has resonated with Beyoncé and made its way to shape the narrative of *Lemonade*. In fact, Shire is also the inspiration behind the organization of *Lemonade* in different sequences as well as their titles (i.e. “Accountability”). Following the theory of the “stages of grief,”⁷ most of the poems in *Lemonade* echo Shire's “the seven stages of being lonely.”

3.1 Denial: “Hold Up”

“Denial” is the second sequence in *Lemonade* and it features the song “Hold Up.” In this sequence, Beyoncé explores the uncertainty and consequent paranoia derived from suspecting her husband’s unfaithfulness. Each sequence in *Lemonade* begins with the spoken word.

In this case, Shire reworks her poem “For women who are difficult to love.” Shire's original poem presents an “untamed,” independent and powerful woman, whose significant other can not “handle”: “You are a horse running alone / and he tries to tame you / compares you to an impossible highway / to a burning house.” However, the woman tries to change her personality, in order to please her significant other: “and you tried to change, didn't you? / closed your mouth more / tried to be softer / prettier / less awake.” In Shire’s poem the speaker hints that these attempts at making him stay will not be successful, and, instead, advises the addressee to “let him leave.” The poem ends on an ambiguous note, reassuring and empowering the addressee but, at the same time, the female protagonist is uncertain of her capability to be loved.

7 The theory of the 5 stages of grief was popularized by Kübler-Ross, who “adapted Bowlby and Parkes’ theory to describe a 5-stage response of terminally ill patients to awareness of their impending death: denial-dissociation-isolation, anger, bargaining, depression, and, finally, acceptance. The stage theory of grief [...] has been generalized to a wide variety of losses, including [...] adults’ reactions to marital separation” (Block et al., 2007).

This is where Beyoncé picks up and begins the spoken word version of the poem. Instead of presenting an untamed individual, she describes someone vulnerable, willing to do anything to avoid her partner's infidelity. She elaborates on the change in the speaker's behaviour by creating an analogy when she uses different ways of religious atonement and prayer: "Fasted for sixty days," "Abstained from sex," "Confessed my sins and was baptized in a river / got on my knees and said amen," "I sat alone and begged and bent at the waist for God," "[...] and plugged my menses with pages from the Holy Book." These practices are intertwined with references to self-induced physical submission and harm: "I whipped my own back and asked for dominion at your feet," or "I swallowed a sword." As in Shire's original poem, it seems that the female voice in Beyoncé's song is wondering about her significant other's faithfulness.

The spoken word from "Denial" prefaces the second song in *Lemonade*: "Hold Up." The lyrics in "Hold Up" echo the sentiment of the original poem and the reworked spoken word. The first verse, chorus and refrain all fit perfectly with the uncertainty presented in the spoken word section. Beyoncé sings she has "kept it sexy, kept it fun," but she "smells" his "secrets." These two lines summarize the whole concept of the spoken word and poem. No matter how hard she tries to change and please her partner, she still feels there is nothing she can do to make him faithful.

However, the second verse and the outro contrast with the theme of the spoken word and align more with Shire's original closing of the poem. In both, Beyoncé boasts that no one would stand by him other than her if it were not for his successful and lucrative career. This proves that they [Beyoncé and her husband Jay-Z] are "made for each other," and that that is the reason why she is still trying to make this relationship work.

Even though "Hold Up" 's topic is directly related to Shire's "For women who are difficult to love," the song holds a lot of different references to songs by other artists as well

as a song by Beyoncé herself. In fact, the chorus of the song stems from a lyric that Ezra Koenig (Vampire Weekend)⁸ tweeted. In turn, Koenig reworked the lyrics from “Maps” by the Yeah Yeah Yeahs.⁹ The idea of this song was then sent to producer and DJ Diplo,¹⁰ who was working on *Lemonade* at the time. The final line of the second verse, “Me sing se” (“I sing that”), establishes another connection between lyrics and music. Since “Hold Up” is a dancehall and reggae inspired song (a growing trend in pop music, used by artists like Drake and Rihanna), this Jamaican patois expression adds to the “calypso feel” of the song. (*Genius*) The outro of “Hold Up” is also a reference to “Turn My Swag On” by Soulja Boy, a wildly sampled and referenced track that Beyoncé uses to build the transition between the vulnerable and fragile lover in the beginning of the song to the unapologetic woman at the end. These final lyrics also serve to set the tone for the following track “Don't Hurt Yourself,” in which Beyoncé Knowles calls out her partner, and presents herself as a powerful woman (“you ain't fucking with no average bitch, boy”).

In terms of music, the inspiration for the song is very straight-forward. The main sample is from Andy Williams' “Can't Get Used to Losing You,” which appears muffled through the whole song with the exception of the chorus. The muffled effect it is often used to recreate the sound of music underwater, which directly relates to the visuals that I will discuss further on. The second relevant influence in this song is dancehall music, particularly found in the use of the horn and drum scheme/beat. In “Hold Up,” Beyoncé references a previous song of hers, “Countdown” by using the same drum pattern during the bridge of “Hold Up.” This reference is particularly significant because, in its original context, it plays while Beyoncé sings “if you leave me you are out of your mind.” Thus, Beyoncé is adding to the whole lyrical concept of “Hold Up” without using any lyrics.

8 Ezra Koenig is the lead singer of Vampire Weekend, an indie rock band based in New York City.

9 The Yeah Yeah Yeahs is an American rock band. The song “Maps” is included in their 2003 album “Fever To Tell.”

10 Thomas Wensley Pentz, known as Diplo, is an American producer and DJ. He has worked with artists like M.I.A., Justin Bieber, and Rihanna.

Furthermore, in an interview with *Pitchfork*, the Jamaican singer and composer MeLo-X, who co-wrote and is featured in the backing vocals of “Hold Up,” explains the inspiration behind these vocals:

I kind of put a bunch of ideas down. A bunch of harmonies, a bunch of different layers, and she kept a lot of that in. In the second chorus you can hear my vocals under hers coming in. It's cool that she kept that. I was just putting that there to create a vibe. I had like in my mind, I was thinking of Bob Marley and his backup singers, he had his wife, and how they would harmonize to a lot things that he did. So I took to that approach with the background vocals that I did.

As critics agree, in the visual album of *Lemonade*, the visuals are just as important—if not more—than the actual music. The imagery used in this film is not left to chance, quite the contrary, it has been chosen carefully and a lot of attention has been paid to the details. In this case, the clearest inspiration for the whole “Denial” sequence has been the goddess Oshun, one of the main *orishas* from the Yoruba religion. According to J. Fandrich, “the Yoruba religion is generally regarded as one of the most salient surviving traditional African belief system in the New World.” As a result of the slave trade and the African Diaspora, the Yoruba religion and traditions are patent in countries such as Cuba, Brazil and Haiti, where these long-lived traditions have mingled with and adapted to the colonialists’s imposition of Catholicism. This is particularly evident in Cuba, where Santería, “the Spanish neo-Yoruba religion,” still has thousands of followers.

However, for Beyoncé, it is the New Orleans ancient Vodoo tradition that serves as her inspiration. This vertient of the Yoruba religion was brought to the Americas, and particularly to New Orleans, by Haitian immigrants. If we take into account that Beyoncé’s family on her mother's side comes from a creole background established in Lousiana, that explains why the

singer is constantly praising her mother's roots. The heavy presence of *voudou* in Louisiana's culture is most likely one of the reasons why Beyoncé became acquainted with the Yoruba goddess Oshun. Thus, according to the legend, Oshun takes her name from the river Oshun in Nigeria, which makes sense, considering she is the goddess of rivers and sweet water, as well as the goddess of love and children (Houlberg). Traditionally, Oshun is usually represented wearing yellow and gold or copper, both in the Diaspora and in Nigeria (with the exception of Trinidad, in the Caribbean, where she wears pink) (Keller).

If we take into consideration all this, we can clearly see that in “Denial” Beyoncé aims to personify Oshun. Right from the first scene, she is shown in a room filled with water, where she takes off black clothing to reveal the gold jewellery, and copper clothing that she is wearing underneath. In doing so, Beyoncé shifts from an average person to goddess status, by drawing a comparison between herself and Oshun. On close inspection, every detail of her characterization draws us to Oshun. Furthermore, Beyoncé goes as far as to wear golden and metallic make-up, and even golden nail polish. As a matter of fact, the colour yellow is predominant in the entirety of this segment: there is always something yellow in every frame.

As for the presence of the water, it serves as a metaphoric vehicle in Beyoncé’s visual transformation. At first, she is drowning in the water. She is shown in a state of unconsciousness, “levitating” (as the poem notes). This shot could be a metaphorical approach to the literal meaning of “Denial”: “The suppression of a painful or unacceptable wish or of experiences of which one is ashamed” (OED). Thus, we can conclude, Beyoncé is “in denial” of her husband’s infidelity. Later, just when the first chords of “Hold Up” start playing in the background, she opens the doors, letting all the water leave the building. This “release” of water could be interpreted as a shift in her behaviour. She has had enough and she is walking out the door—both metaphorically and literally—finally abandoning the previous

state of denial. According to some interpretations, the building she leaves is said to represent the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.¹¹

Only a few seconds later, Beyoncé grabs a baseball bat from the hands of a boy in the street. From this moment onwards, she will channel artist Pipilotti Rist and her 1997 video installation “Ever is Over All.” In this video, Pipilotti uses a giant flower to destroy a car, while Beyoncé uses a baseball bat and furiously crashes cars, security cameras, and fire hydrants alike. The baseball bat itself is foreshadowing a lyric in “Formation,” the last track in *Lemonade*. At the top end of the bat, the inscription “Hot Sauce” can be seen, which allows the *double entendre* of the lyric “I have 'hot sauce' in my bag, swag.”¹² Beyoncé’s attitude throughout “Denial” is also very similar to Rist’s, as Mark Joseph Stern points out in an article for *Slate*: “The exuberant display of female power—the juxtaposition between Rist’s cheerful demeanor and violent actions—is both charming and cryptic. All this makes it a perfect point of reference for Beyoncé, whose work frequently charts the intersection between female power and sexuality.” In this same thread of thought, in “Moving Beyond Pain,” Afro-American critic bell hooks refers to the “Denial” sequence above mentioned and argues that:

Among the mixed messages embedded in *Lemonade* is this celebration of rage. Smug and smiling in her golden garb, Beyoncé is the embodiment of a fantastical female power, which is just that—pure fantasy. Images of female violence undercut a central message embedded in *Lemonade* that violence in all its forms, especially the violence of lies and betrayal, hurts.

As for the location, even though “Denial” appears to have been filmed at a studio, the action is set in what could be a New Orleans neighbourhood. This is revealed by the placement of Mardi Gras beads on the fire hydrant, as well as by the use of the marching jazz

11 After the 2014 Met Ball Gala, celebrated at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City, an altercation in a lift between Solange Knowles (Beyoncé’s sister) and Shawn Carter aka Jay-Z (Beyoncé’s husband) was caught on tape and released on-line. It has been rumoured that this altercation was provoked by Jay-Z’s infidelity.

12 Swag: “a slang word that refers to stylish confidence” (Merriam-Webster).

(funeral) band as background characters. Besides, it should be noted that the majority of the background characters that are witnessing Beyoncé's destruction are African-Americans of all ages. Although this is not relevant to the topic of the song, the use of different types of black people is present throughout the whole film. Undoubtedly, Beyoncé has taken very seriously the fact that the representation of black people in the media is often skewed, and thus, *Lemonade* showcases different hairstyles, skin tones, and clothing from different eras—starting in the Deep South and slavery—particularly those of women's.

Finally, the last forty seconds of “Denial” show Beyoncé laughing hysterically while she advances towards the camera (and the “viewer”) swinging the baseball bat, and assuming a threatening attitude. Suddenly, she hits the camera and the scene turns to black and white that serves as a transition to the next sequence in *Lemonade*. “Denial” ends when Beyoncé gets inside a monster truck. Finally, the kid (and the original owner of the bat) kneels down to look at the broken camera, that might be a personification of the punishment that Beyoncé has inflicted on her husband Jay-Z for his infidelity.

3.2 Accountability: “Daddy Lessons”

“Accountability”¹³ is the title of the sixth sequence of *Lemonade*. The poetry featured as spoken word in this section is, once again, Shire's own revision of her poem “How to Wear Your Mother's Lipstick.” Halfway through the spoken word segment, an audio clip of a male speaking is added. The song featured in “Accountability” is “Daddy Lessons” that is also track number six in the audio album. Throughout “Accountability” the topic of infidelity is subdued, while the spotlight is on the complex relationship between Beyoncé and her father, Mathew Knowles. This topic is explored through the lens of the expression of masculinity and femininity, particularly, in southern and black communities.

13 “The quality of being accountable; liability to account for and answer for one's conduct, performance of duties, etc.” OED

Shire's poem describes a daughter who finds her mother's lipstick and puts it on. What is usually regarded as an innocent way for children to explore what they perceive adulthood looks like, in this case, it is framed by a failing relationship and the "disappointment" of the mother. This context is much more detailed and gruesome in the original poem where scenes of domestic violence and abuse are graphically and sexually described: "Your mother was most beautiful when sprawled out on the floor / half naked and bleeding."

The spoken word segment opens with the fourth line in the original poem: "You find the black tube inside her beauty case, where she keeps your father's old prison letters." The fact that the mother keeps both her make-up and her partner's letters from prison in the same box is very significant. One way to interpret this duality might have to do with the fact that the content of her partner's prison letters is, nevertheless, dear to her heart; something that makes her feel better, just like using make-up and beautifying her face. However, we must not forget that we are dealing with an African-American family and that, given the ongoing racist unrest, many black American children have a parent (or both) who are serving a sentence in prison, and they live with that reality. Not only that, but the endemic criminalization of black people—black men in particular—has led to violent confrontations between the black community in the US and the police, and, in numerous occasions, black males have been murdered by the police for no apparent reason(s). Beyoncé has taken a stance against police brutality both in her personal life and in her work, as we will see in other tracks on this same album, such as "Freedom" and "Formation."

Going back to Shire's poem, the narrative voice continues by stating: "You desperately want to look like her" and, thus, begins to draw parallels between the mother and the child ("You look nothing like your mother / You look everything like your mother"). Accordingly, the child might physically look like her father, but later in life she will experience what her mother has gone through. This gender parallel is further explored in the second half of the

spoken poetry, where the speaker goes from addressing an impersonal “you” to addressing the poetic voice’s mother.¹⁴ The next few lines of the poem are especially characterized by the tone, which is almost instruction-like and rather impersonal at times: “How to wear your mother's lipstick/ [...] you must wear it like she wears disappointment on her face.” The final two lines of this first half of the poem echo the sentiment of “Denial” as well as that of the song “Hold Up,” where the speaker (Beyoncé, in this case) feels that she must restrain and tame herself. While in Shire’s poem, the comparison between the mother and the daughter continues. At the core of the poem, the father’s comparison between mother and daughter stems from a simple and ordinary gesture, such as that of wearing lipstick, but ends by questioning women’s self-love and/or apparent outrageous behaviour: “Your mother is a woman / and women like her can not be contained.”

Concerning the second half of the spoken word based on Shire’s poem, and as mentioned above, these words are told from the point of view of the unnamed daughter who addresses the mother with a term of endearment, “Mother dearest.” Here, the daughter reflects on the topic of women's submission to men. Like her mother, the daughter is facing similar troubles with the male figures in her life. Thus, she is trying to redeem the pain caused to both mother and daughter when the poetic voice urges her mother to give some advice about how to handle men: “Teach me how to make him beg / Let me make up for the years he made you wait.” Through a series of rhetorical questions, we are hinted at the different ways this woman—and women in general—have been historically abused, not only physically, but mentally too:

Did he bend your reflection?

Did he make you forget your own name?

14 Writer Jamaica Kincaid, in her brief text “Girl,” mirrors these gender oriented instructions. In her case, it is the mother who teaches her daughter “how to please a man,” “how to wash her father’s shorts,” “how to iron his father’s shirt,” “how to cook his favourite meal,” or “how not to become the whore she is meant to become.” All this instruction in domestic chores prepares the little girl, any girl, for the new man in her life—whether a lover or a husband.

Did he convince you he was a God?

Did you get on your knees daily?

Do his eyes close like doors?

Are you a slave to the back of his head?

Am I talking about your husband or your father?

While the first few lines might be dealing with the early stages of a relationship (being “blinded” by love) or the relationship a child has with their parents (the parents are seen as the centre of a child's universe, as “gods”), the next lines deal with the abuse and abandonment suffered by the woman. This is shown in line four: “Did you get on your knees daily?” This line can also be interpreted in two different ways. First, as the description of repeated sexual abuse. Second, as a common use of the expression “to get on one's knees” or asking for forgiveness or begging for something. The climax is reached in the last line of the poem. Throughout the poem, we are lead to believe that the man causing all the suffering is the partner. However, by asking the question “Am I talking about your husband or your father?” we are shown that this is a problem that transcends generations and that is almost cyclic: the daughter witnesses her father's abuse and infidelity, and now she is the one who becomes the target of her husband's brutal treatment.

Just at this point, the spoken word is interrupted by an audio clip of a man speaking. In this clip, the man explains how inspiring has been for him to meet former US President Barack Obama. For him, seeing someone from “Chi-raq”¹⁵ who would end up becoming the President of the United States has made him realise that he, too, can do whatever he sets his mind to. In this euphoric state, he even thinks he could be the next “Spike Lee.”¹⁶ These ideas of becoming whatever we want to be and of being able to accomplish our goals and dreams are reinforced and will appear, once again, in the song “Formation” where in a similar thread

15 Nickname used for Chicago, comparing the city to Iraq due to its high crime rates.

16 Spike Lee is an African-American film director whose work deals with relevant issues for the African-American community.

of thought, and following Benjamin Franklin's *rags to riches* ideology, Beyoncé seems to believe in the black American Dream¹⁷ when she sings "I might just be a black Bill Gates in the making."

As mentioned earlier, black representation is an issue that Beyoncé has consciously tackled throughout her career, and *Lemonade* is no exception. The audio clip included in "Accountability" makes it clear that someone who comes from a conflictive background, a violent community, and/or an impoverished area can, nevertheless, succeed in life. This "uplifting the race" philosophy, a constant and an obsession within the African American community since post-slavery times, has inspired, and still does, thousands of people of African descent even if they inhabit the most dilapidated and dangerous neighbourhoods, whether in rural or urban America.

The song featured in "Accountability" is titled "Daddy Lessons." Musically, this record is quite straightforward. Once again, we find a combination of Beyoncé's roots in the use of a country inspired guitar. We also find a characteristic snare and percussion rhythm, as well as a "yee haw"¹⁸ (Texas), and a brass ensemble (New Orleans). However, despite its simplicity, the use of country music took Beyoncé's fans—and the African-American community at large—by surprise. According to journalist and music critic Kelefa Sanneh, historically, country music has had "a connection to rural Southern white culture, even though today's performers and fans are often neither Southern nor rural." This proves Beyoncé's musical ability to make any music genre her own as well as her desire to pay respect to her ancestors from Alabama, Louisiana, and Texas.

As for the lyrics, the song remains close to the topics explored in Shire's poem, at the same time it shows the similarities between patriarchal roles and behaviour: that is, those of

17 Playwright Lorraine Hansberry explores the topic of the black American dream in her play *A Raisin in the Sun* (1959).

18 "An expression of enthusiasm or exuberance, typically associated with cowboys or rural inhabitants of the southern US" (OED).

the husband, and the father, respectively. Besides, Beyoncé's "Daddy Lessons" also subtly defies gender. Throughout the song, the daughter is associated with male attitudes and activities that have been traditionally ascribed with hypermasculinity. In the first verse we note the contradictory juxtaposition between "daddy's little girl"—she is soft, she needs her father's protection, and she is vulnerable—and "daddy made a soldier out of me"—now, in contrast, she is strong and tough as a soldier is expected to be, she has learned the necessary skills to defend herself, and, as a consequence, she can take care of herself. From this moment onwards, we see that the daughter partakes in what society generally perceives as "masculine" activities: "we rode motorcycles / blackjack, classic vinyl." In the song, these are all requirements to become a "tough girl" who is ready to fight men back, to speak out loud, and to avoid men who might try and take advantage of her. As "Daddy Lessons" makes it clear, in her father's eyes, the daughter is responsible for and takes care of the women in the family as any first-born male should typically do. Thus, the father does not hesitate to command his daughter in the following terms: "Take care of your mother / watch out for your sister." This all comes together in the chorus, where, both, masculinity and traditional southern stereotypes are combined to create the quintessential country girl anthem:

With his gun and his head held high, he told me not to cry

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

With his right hand on his rifle, he swore it on the Bible

My daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

He held me in his arms and he taught me to be strong

He told me when he's gone, "Here's what you do

When trouble comes in town and men like me come around"

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

First, as we can see, the daughter is told not to cry, which aligns with the idea of masculine toughness presented in the verse. In fact, the saying “boys don't cry” is often used as an example of how men have been historically told to repress their feelings, since feelings and emotions are associated with femininity. Second, there's a repeated allusion to guns and shooting that in the American culture is often associated with southern imagery. Guns and fighting are images that prevail not only in the chorus, but also in the second verse. It goes as far as saying “Daddy made me fight, it wasn't always right / but he said 'girl, it's your second amendment'.”¹⁹ Thus, reinforcing the “soldier-daughter” ideal, the father makes his daughter stand up for herself, regardless of the situation. The same thing happens with the line “he swore it on the Bible.” American southerners, and particularly African-American southerners, are thought to be very religious, to the extent that there exists a term, “Bible Belt,” to refer to the geographical area of the most traditional and conservative Southern states.

This recurrent binary approach to femininity and masculinity is very well summed up by bell hooks, a militant African American feminist and a controversial voice in favor of the marginalized, in her work *Black Looks: Race and Representation*: “In our southern black Baptist patriarchal home, being a boy meant learning to be tough, to mask one's feelings, to stand one's ground at a fight—being a girl meant learning to obey, to be quiet, to clean, to recognize that you had no ground to stand on” (87). Following hook's definition of masculinity, “Daddy Lessons” seem to contradict those stereotypical and long-lived patriarchal roles. In this case, Beyoncé is the one that takes on these masculine stereotypes,

19 “The Second Amendment of the United States Constitution reads: “A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.” Such language has created considerable debate regarding the Amendment's intended scope. [...] some believe that the Amendment's phrase “the right of the people to keep and bear Arms” creates an individual constitutional right for citizens of the United States.” (Strasser)

and somewhat rebels against the feminine roles that would have been assigned to her if her father had raised her in a more traditional way.

If we go back to the lyrics, though, the line “when trouble comes in town and men like me come around” alludes to the main theme of “Accountability” and it will be paraphrased once again before the final chorus when Knowles sings: “My daddy warned me about men like you / he said 'baby girl he's playing you'.” If we interpret these last words from a biographical perspective, we could say that the “you” Beyoncé is singing about in the line “my daddy warned me about men like you,” could be an allusion to Jay-Z since he has been accused of cheating Beyoncé. As we know from Beyoncé’s biography these lines might echo the singer’s personal relationship both with his father and with his husband. In both cases, she first loved and trusted “the two men in her life,” yet she later felt that, for different reasons, both her father, and her husband had betrayed her. This idea will be reflected in the visuals, along with different representations of masculinity and femininity in black, southern communities.

In “Accountability,” during the first half of the spoken word, images of different girls appear on the screen: they are playing around a house; one girl is playing with dolls, another girl is jumping on a bed, and a third girl is intently listening to what her mother (Beyoncé) is saying while tying her hair up. These scenes are mixed with images of women who belong to different generations: a young girl²⁰ and an elderly woman.²¹ As the spoken word is interrupted by the audio clip of the man talking, a young black man who is driving a car appears on screen. His image is intertwined with images of his family in the porch of a house. Through these images we can further hear what he has to say: he is from the “hood” and meeting the (former) President has made him care about himself and his family. When the second half of the poem begins the images of girls and women who belong to different

20 Louisiana native and Oscar-nominated actress Quvenzhané Wallis.

21 “Renowned as the queen of Creole cuisine, New Orleans’ Leah Chase is 93 years old and this year will receive the Lifetime Achievement Award at the annual US cooking awards, the James Beards.”

generations (a child from the 50s or 60s, a girl from the 2010s, women arguing in the 60s or 70s) appear on screen. Interestingly enough, from this moment onwards images of men from different generations and ages show up too.

Just as the song begins, we see different men playing the trumpet, as well as a young man dancing, followed by the image of a man throwing punches. These images will set the tone for the rest of “Daddy Lessons” as the screen shows different boys, girls, women and men of all ages, which will give us a very broad view of a typical southern town, but also offer images of different types of fathers and daughters.

When the guitar and drums come in, Beyoncé appears in Fort Macomb (New Orleans) wearing a creole-style dress and hairstyle, once again, evoking her New Orleans creole heritage. Next to her, is blues guitarist Little Freddie King.²² Further on, images of a young girl who is riding a horse with her father are followed by images of Beyoncé riding a horse by herself, thus, highlighting her “country” roots which explains her choice of exploring country music, a genre she has never tried before.

As the second verse begins with “daddy made me fight, it wasn’t always right,” the song is abruptly stopped by a home video of a very young Beyoncé sitting with her father. In some way, both the poem and the song reflect on Beyoncé’s relationship with her father, Mathew Knowles. From the inception of Beyoncé’s early career, her father took care of her, he was her first manager (as well as Destiny’s Child’s) and he was one of her main supporters throughout her subsequent years as an iconic singer. However, they parted ways professionally in 2013. It is rumoured that the reasons for this break-up were not only because of Knowles’ desire to gain total control of her career, but also because their personal relationship had suffered due to her father’s infidelity. Nevertheless, and despite the professional separation, the domestic video included in the album is followed by another one where Mathew Knowles is playing with his granddaughter Blue—Beyoncé’s first daughter.

22 Little Freddie King is an American blues guitarist from New Orleans.

Towards the end of the song, the video shows a funeral, a clear reference to New Orleans and Louisiana. These types of funerals are very characteristic of the area since they essentially “parade” the casket, while musicians play music and people dance along in a celebratory mood.

To sum up, “Accountability” reflects on father-daughter relationships, at the same time it provides different and contradictory visions of masculinity and femininity in southern USA, with New Orleans' landscape and culture as a backdrop. Furthermore, “Accountability” continues addressing, in a more subdued way, the topic of infidelity, present throughout *Lemonade*.

3.3 Hope: “Freedom”

The tenth and second-to-last segment of *Lemonade* is titled “Hope.” In this sequence Beyoncé recites Shire’s poem “Nail Technician as Palm Reader.” Unlike Shire’s previous poems included in the video album that are adapted or transformed, on this particular occasion Beyoncé’s spoken voice literally renders the words of this poem.

The song featured in “Hope” is the tenth track in the album, “Freedom.” In “Hope,” Beyoncé recreates a utopian matriarchy, set in a time (post-slavery and nineteenth-century), and space (the Southern states) heavily influenced by the aesthetics of Julie Dash’s *Daughters of the Dust*,²³ and the film adaption of *Beloved*, a novel written by Toni Morrison.²⁴ In “Hope” the focus shifts dramatically, and instead of highlighting personal/intimate experiences, Beyoncé changes the perspective and narrates from a much more broader point of view. In doing so, the singer turns herself into a vessel filled with the voices of African-American

23 *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) is an independent film directed, written, and produced by Julie Dash. This film follows three generations of Gullah women who live in the island of St. Helena.

24 *Beloved* (1987) is a novel by American writer and Nobel prize winner Toni Morrison. This novel is set in post-slavery America, and it tells the story of Sethe, a former slave who escapes to the northern—and abolitionist—states. Here she will live in a house that it is believed to be hunted by Sethe’s dead daughter’s ghost, Beloved.

women, young and old, and pleas for a better future where “Freedom” is not just shout out and demanded, but an essential and inalienable right.

Written in first person, Shire’s poem begins describing what at first seems a very ordinary visit to the nail technician, but it suddenly turns into a mystical and prophetic palm reading experience:²⁵

The nail technician pushes my cuticles
back, turns my hand over,
stretches the skin on my palm
and says *I see your daughters*
and their daughters.

It is precisely these last two lines in Shire’s stanza that set the tone for the whole sequence, both in Beyoncé’s song as well as in the visuals in “Hope.” In my opinion, Beyoncé’s own reading and interpretation of Shire’s poem places “hope” in the “*daughters and granddaughters,*” that is, the future generations of women, that will continue to fight to put an end to all forms of (black) women’s oppression.

We find a new turn in the second stanza, where Shire begins to dig deeper into this surreal setting when she describes a rather surrealistic dream filled with disturbing images where the poetic voice gives birth through “a slit” in her stomach:

That night, in a dream, the first girl emerges
from a slit in my stomach. The scar heals
into a smile. The man I love pulls the stitches out
with his fingernails. We leave black sutures
curling on the side of the bath.

25 “The art or practice of supposedly interpreting a person's character or predicting their future by examining the palm of their hand.”

In my reading of Shire's poem, the first girl is born as a result of the nail technician's prediction. Thus, childbirth, a biological action that is often utterly painful, and a biblical curse on women, turns into something pleasurable: "the scar heals into a smile." It should be noted that, unlike the previous sequences that I have analysed from *Lemonade*, the speaker's partner is no longer portrayed as a negative character, but rather as a supportive lover. Interestingly enough, the fact that he "pulls the stitches out / with his fingernails" reminds us of the nail technician. Contrary to the anger we find in previous stories of men's infidelities and carelessness, the pronoun "We" appears for the first time as a clear indication of partnership and empathy between the woman giving birth and the man *she* "loves." Thus, as the poem makes clear, both of them are involved in the process of childbirth. Despite the physical pain involved, while she is the one that gives birth through the slit in her stomach, the lover remains by her side (both physically and emotionally), and he even pulls the stitches out.

Lastly, Shire's final stanza carries on with the general surrealism of the poem, blurring the lines between dreams and reality. Accordingly, there is a transition from the birth of the first girl, that takes place in a dream, to the birth of the second girl, that, in my reading, takes place in real life, and refers to the moment the speaker wakes up:

I wake as the second girl crawls
head first up my throat –
a flower, blossoming
out of the hole in my face.

As it occurs in Shire's poems, the imagery in this final stanza is utterly powerful. The second girl's birth is literally presented as an awakening ("I wake as the second girl crawls"). While the first girl "emerged," therefore, came out from the womb, the second girl crawled. That is,

she struggled trying to move outwards until she got out of the woman's throat "head first," to finally blossom in the speaker's mouth.

Although there are many possible interpretations of this poem, I believe that in the context of "Hope," that is, if we look at it as a sort of a utopian matriarchy represented by different women of colour of various ages and walks of life, this poem echoes Beyoncé's awakening as a feminist and social justice activist. Thus, according to my reading, this awakening is also linked to the actual birth of Beyoncé's first daughter, Blue Ivy, born in 2012. Furthermore, in an interview with Oprah Winfrey in 2013, Beyoncé explains how she "envisioned" the birth of her daughter, and how she immediately felt a strong connection with her. The singer goes as far as to state: "My daughter introduced me to myself."

If we take into account this statement and, after a close reading and an analysis of the possible double meaning of the words in Shire's poem, I come to the conclusion that the "Hope" sequence means a coming-of-age moment for Beyoncé, both as a social activist and as an artist. Consequently, the birth of the first girl could symbolise the moment of realisation when Beyoncé becomes aware of the higher purpose of her art and her indisputable influence in the music world. The word "emerge" ("the first girl emerges / from a slit in my stomach") apart from besides having the literal meaning of "appearing by coming out of something or from behind something," it also has the symbolic meaning of "becoming known, especially as a result of examining something or asking questions about it" (CED).

However, the second girl's birth could symbolise Beyoncé taking action and deciding to create a work like *Lemonade*, where she voices her opinions on the political and racial turmoil that have recently taken place in the United States. Thus, the "second girl crawls / head first up my throat" represents the moment these ideas—creating a project that would showcase African-American women and their historical and ongoing struggles—can not be kept as a private matter any longer, and, therefore, "crawl" ("to move or progress very

slowly” [OED] “head first up [her] throat”. These ideas will blossom (“develop and become stronger [CED], as a “flower [...] / out of the hole in [her] face,”—her mouth and her voice— as poetry and songs, and, ultimately, as Beyoncé's own album *Lemonade*.

The song “Freedom” featured in this tenth sequence of *Lemonade*, works as the perfect example of how Beyoncé uses her work to express her own views on the need for social justice. This is reflected not only in the lyrics, but also in the music. The music in “Freedom” is comprised mainly of samples. The first sample, which works as the foundation for the whole song, is “Let Me Try” by Kaleidoscope.²⁶ This sample provides “Freedom” of its characteristic psychedelic sound, lead by a Hammond organ.²⁷ Sampling music from the 70’s is a very common practice in hip-hop. The use of “Let Me Try” adds to the already multiple genres of music we find in *Lemonade*, which enables Beyoncé to further explore the possibilities of hip-hop. However, there are two more samples featured in “Freedom” that although they are sonically overpowered by “Let Me Try” they serve as a reminder of the topics that Beyoncé tackles here: that is, the historical struggle of black Americans towards equality and freedom. These samples are “‘Stewball’ lead by Prisoner ‘22’ at Mississippi State Penitentiary at Parchment (1947-1948)” and “‘Collection Speech / Unidentified Lining Hymn’ by Reverend R.C. Crenshaw and Congregation (1959). Both samples are part of Alan Lomax’s²⁸ unique and valuable field recordings. As for “Stewball,” it is a prison work song,²⁹ while “Collection Speech / Unidentified Lining Hymn” is a recording of a Reverend and the congregation of a Southern Baptist church. Even though both these samples are used as background vocals, they carry great power and symbolism. The use of “Collection Speech /

26 Puerto-Rican psychedelic funk band from the 1960s (Rolling Stone)

27 “A type of electronic organ. [...] Named after Laurens Hammond (1895-1973), an American mechanical engineer” (OED)

28 Alan Lomax (1915-2002) was an American musicologist who gathered and compiled up to 17,000 folk songs from all over the world.

29 “Traditionally a participatory art form, these songs were typically sung while groups of 10-30 prisoners performed tasks such as chopping and hoeing. With origins reaching back to their West African ancestry as well as during the era of African American slavery, work songs served the purpose of alleviating the mundane nature of repetitive tasks as well as providing a forum for the song leader to keep the group together through rhythms and lyrics.” (Folkways-Smithsonian)

Unidentified Lining Hymn” is yet again proof of Beyoncé’s Southern roots. In fact, the vocal melody in “Freedom” is reminiscent of gospel music. The use of a prison work song in a song titled “Freedom” is, obviously, quite significant given the history of slavery in the US, and the fact that statistics show that black Americans are incarcerated five times more than white people (*The Guardian*). Therefore, Beyoncé repeatedly reminds her audience (both black and white) the reasons why she is asking for freedom. According to the NAACP (National Association for the Advance of Colored People), 1 million out of the 2.3 million people incarcerated in the USA are African-Americans. More often than not, black men and women haven been the target of so-called anti-drug campaigns (“War on Drugs,” or “Get Tough on Crime” policies) which have only lead to more arrests and longer sentences than their white counterparts when convicted for the same crimes.

Thus, when analysing the lyrics in “Freedom,” the symbolic nature of “Stewball” and “Collection Speech / Unidentified Lining Hymn” gather greater significance. Right from the first verse, Beyoncé presents herself as a powerful entity, a force that will confront the elements:

Tryna rain, tryna rain on the thunder

Tell the storm I'm new

I'ma walk, I'ma march on the regular

Painting white flags blue

Lord forgive me, I've been running

Running blind in truth

I'ma rain, I'ma rain on this bitter love

Tell the sweet I'm new

Here, the first references to revolution appear with the sentence “I’ma march on the regular / painting white flags blue.” Marching has been one of the most common non-violent

methods of protesting and it was especially significant during the Civil Rights Movement of the sixties, with marches such as the ones in Selma-Montgomery (1965), and Washington (1963). On their part, white flags symbolise surrender and, thus, “painting” them blue is Beyoncé’s way to state that she will not stop and ask for a truce. The following lines that appeal to the “Lord” are once again a reference to the religious musical nature of “Freedom,” while “running blind in truth” represents Beyoncé’s sudden realisation of the situation of inequality experienced by black Americans. To conclude this verse, Beyoncé “rains” on “bitter love,” that is, she overcomes an infidelity, which is the prevalent topic throughout *Lemonade*.

Moreover, to emphasize her active role in politics, and, following the previous lines, Beyoncé sings in the chorus:

Freedom! Freedom! I can't move
Freedom, cut me loose!
Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?
Cause I need freedom too!
I break chains all by myself
Won't let my freedom rot in hell
Hey! I'ma keep running
Cause a winner don't quit on themselves

Here, Beyoncé demands the need for physical freedom (“I can’t move,” or “cut me loose”), but this can also be interpreted as demanding freedom in terms of equality. Notwithstanding, Beyoncé makes it clear that she will not stop until she is granted freedom; she will keep fighting until she reaches her goal (“I break chains all by myself,” or “I’ma keep running / Cause a winner don’t quit on themselves”). It is this feeling of female empowerment and independence that Beyoncé wants to portray through “Freedom.” In this sense, according to

Carla Marie Williams,³⁰ one of the co-writers of “Freedom,” Beyoncé “is a visionary herself, so she started helping us find the direction of the song. She wanted it to be a female anthem, and we wanted to address certain issues.” (*Fader*)

The second verse continues addressing the relevance of freedom to African-Americans, from the time of slavery to the Civil Rights movement:

I'ma wade, I'ma wave through the waters
Tell the tide, "Don't move"
I'ma riot, I'ma riot through your borders
Call me bulletproof
Lord forgive me, I've been runnin'
Runnin' blind in truth
I'ma wade, I'ma wave through your shallow love
Tell the deep I'm new

The first two lines refer to the Negro spiritual “Wade in the Water,” that describes the biblical episode of the escape of the Israelites from Egypt. Furthermore, the line “Tell the tide don’t move” could also be an allusion to the Israelites (slaves) crossing the Red Sea, once God parted the water. Moreover, this song is closely connected to the Underground Railroad, as for many slaves the only way to safely escape was crossing the rivers. As a matter of fact, the film adaptation of Morrison’s *Beloved*, that I have already mentioned as an inspiration for the “Hope” sequence, describes how the main character, Sethe, a slave woman, runs away across the Ohio River that separated the southern states (pro-slavery) from the northern ones (abolitionists). Following these lines, Beyoncé refers once again to an activity linked to revolutionary movements when she sings “I’ma riot, I’ma riot through your borders.” The next line, “Call me bulletproof,” would not only be interpreted as a reflection of an

30 Carla Marie Williams is a songwriter, known for songs like “Runnin’” (interpreted by Naughty Boy ft. Beyoncé) and “The Boy Does Nothing” (interpreted by Alesha Dixon).

unstoppable Beyoncé, but it can also be a reminder of how Dr. Martin Luther King and Malcolm X were fatally shot and assassinated. Finally, Beyoncé addresses her overcoming of a toxic relationship when she contrasts “shallow” love, that is, superficial, and “deep,” meaning real, true love.

We should also add that although the song “Freedom” features a verse by Kendrick Lamar³¹ in the audio version of *Lemonade*, this verse is cut in the audiovisual version. A possible explanation for this absence might be found in Beyoncé’s intentions for both the song “Freedom” and the “Hope” sequence to be representative of a female empowerment anthem. However she leaves Lamar’s final words in the audiovisual version of *Lemonade*, which echo the sentiments of pleading for freedom that are found throughout the song and, as a result, it makes this verse sound like a prayer:

What you want from me?

Is it truth you seek? Oh father can you hear me?

What you want from me?

Is it truth you seek? Oh father can you hear me?

Hear me out

As I have mentioned above, Beyoncé’s main objective for “Hope” is to showcase different types of African-American women and use this sequence, together with the song “Freedom,” to show positive representations of themselves in the media to future generations of black women who might lack self-confidence. In this thread of thought, in an interview for *Elle* magazine, Winnie Harlow, a model starring in “Hope” comments on Beyoncé’s vision for this sequence:

I thanked her. She told me that she should be the thankful one. And I told her while of course I'm grateful she asked me to be here and I'm sure she was

31 Kendrick Lamar is a Grammy-Award winning rapper from Compton, California. His music often addresses topics of social justice and life in marginalized communities.

thanked for that already, I was more so grateful for her acknowledging me as a strong hard working woman like herself and for supporting us along with the acknowledgement, for inspiring us all, especially as Black women. She was elated. Her eyes literally lit up. She told me that's exactly what she wants from this and she feels even more responsible now that she has Blue to show Blue representation of herself in the world. I thought that was amazing.

Black representation matters and Beyoncé knows it. In an era when we are constantly bombarded with images, it is surprising that the “default” for media is still always white, especially in a country as diverse as the United States. Nowadays, more than ever, the music industry is not only based on actual music, but on the “content” that artists produce: every single is followed by a music video, Youtube views count towards sales figures of songs and albums, and the potential of “virality” of an image or video is considered by executives in the offices of record companies. Furthermore, this is particularly evident for hip-hop, trap and r&b artists. For unknown artists, producing a popular music video might be the difference between “anonymity” and fame. One might think that black, independent, up-and-coming artists would take into account the lack of representation in the media of people like them and do something to change it when they have the opportunity to produce their own visual content. However, for the past few years, there has been a growing concern about the lack of diversity and colourism of women featured in these videos. Not only are these women light-skinned, but they are also portrayed as sexual objects for the male gaze. Even Beyoncé has faced criticism when she was pushed as the lead singer in Destiny’s Child.³² One of the participants in “Color Stories: Black Women and Colorisms in the 21st Century” complains:

Kelly [is] not even looked at, in Destiny’s Child she doesn’t really get the focus, but Beyoncé gets all the focus because she’s more appealing to the

32 Destiny’s Child was an American girl group that rose to fame in the 90’s in which Beyoncé was the lead singer.

white and the black, the entire United States, all the cultures, ‘cause she is fair skin and [...] more appealing to both cultures, but Kelly [...] a lot of people find Kelly to be really, really attractive, ‘cause she is dark skinned [...] but she doesn’t get all the limelight. (in Wilder)

This statement shows that women are aware of how colourism affects them and how the representation of African-American women is skewed and often unrealistic in order to appeal to white audiences. Thus, Beyoncé takes a step further with *Lemonade*, and especially in “Hope,” where she introduces images of non-sexualised women of all ages, with different hairstyles, light and dark skinned, and all of them share the same setting. We could say that the women featured in “Hope” are representative of Beyoncé’s intended vision of showcasing people from all walks of life. They are together. They show the power of matriarchy—still prevalent in different African countries. These are “anonymous” black women, mothers whose children have been victims of police brutality, but also singers, models, dancers, athletes, activists, and actresses.

Thus, the “Hope” sequence begins with an image of a large group of women, all dressed in white and beige tones, preparing for a feast: they are cooking, laying the table and conversing happily with each other. As Shire’s “Nail Technician as Palm Reader” is recited by Beyoncé, the singer appears, once again, inside Fort Macomb. While we hear Beyoncé’s voice saying “I see your daughters / and their daughters,” a group of young women who are wearing white and occupy a wooden stage—where Beyoncé will perform later in the sequence—appear on screen. The imagery of Shire’s poem continues to be represented in the visuals in “Hope” when Beyoncé climbs (“crawls”) out from the darkness inside Fort Macomb, to the light outside the fort, as the words “I wake as the second girl crawls / head first up my throat” are heard. This scene could also be connected to the idea mentioned earlier

in this essay: that in this context, Shire's poem is used to represent Beyoncé's realisation of her social and political role and life purpose, thanks to, in part, the birth of her first daughter.

"Hope" continues by showing all the women and children who are sitting down in benches placed opposite a stage, as if they were waiting for a performance to begin. For the first time, we see some of the famous women that will appear all throughout "Hope." First, there is Zendaya [Coleman], with her hair in big, long, braids. This actress, singer, dancer and activist, became popular, apart from her Disney Channel fame, for responding to racist comments towards her, after she wore dreadlocks to the Oscar's Gala. Another actress and feminist activist featured in "Hope" is Amandla Stenberg, who wears her hair natural, afro-style, along with actress Quvenzhané Wallis, singers Chloe & Halle (wearing thin braids) and Ibeyi (wearing an afro), together with Beyoncé's daughter, Blue Ivy. Model Winnie Harlow, who suffers from vitiligo, plays also a key role in "Hope." Finally, sitting on the front row are three of the so-called "Mothers of the Movement," that is, the mothers of black, young men who have been recently murdered by the police: Sybrina Fulton (mother of Trayvon Martin), Gwen Carr (mother of Eric Garner) and Lesley McSpadden (mother of Mike Brown).

While all the women are seated, Beyoncé shows up and starts singing "Freedom," followed by images of ballet dancer Michaela DePrince. These images are intertwined with views of all the women in a forest, either standing or sitting on trees, as well as images that are reminiscent of the ones in "Accountability," with actress Quvenzhané Wallis. After these shots, we are once again shown portrayals of community and sisterhood through the images of all the women sitting down and eating together. From this point forward, model Winnie Harlow appears on and off, wearing a golden thorn crown, which inevitably makes the spectator draw parallels between the sacrifices black Americans have endured to better the lives of future generations, just like the "sacrifice" Jesus made when he was crucified to free

Christians from sin. “Hope” ends with a medium shot of Beyoncé sitting on a tree that turns into a long shot of the rest of the women.

To sum up, through “Hope,” Beyoncé brings forth multiple figures of black female empowerment, at the same time she clearly states her views on the injustice of racism and the criminalization of the African-American community in the current political landscape of the US.

3.4 Formation

“Formation”³³ is the final track in *Lemonade*. Unlike the previous sequences, “Formation” follows the characteristics of a traditional music video, but it does not include poetry. As a matter of fact, “Formation” serves as an epilogue for *Lemonade* as it appears just before the credits of the visual album. I have decided to include this final song because I believe that it perfectly summarises the spirit of *Lemonade*. That is, “Formation” manages to encompass all the topics that Beyoncé deals with in the rest of the visual album: police brutality and the “Black Lives Matter” movement, subversion of gender roles, her ancestry and origins, sisterhood, and an emphasis on representing African-American individuals.

Although “Formation” is the last song in *Lemonade*, it was released as a single before the visual album came out. The date of its release (6 February, 2016—during Black History Month in the US) is quite significant when we dig deeper into the lyrics and images. Besides, the day of its release coincides with the birthdays of Trayvon Martin³⁴ (5/02/1995), and Sandra Bland³⁵ (7/02/1987), respectively, both victims of racial profiling and police brutality.

33 “Formation” won a Grammy for “Best Music Video,” and was nominated for “Song of the Year” and “Record of the Year.”

34 Trayvon Martin died in 2012 after being fatally shot by a neighbourhood-watch volunteer, who followed and attacked Martin for deeming him “suspicious”.

35 “[Sandra] Bland died in the Waller County jail in July last year [2015], three days after being arrested on suspicion of assault after a state trooper pulled her over for failing to signal a lane change. Her family questioned the official account, in a rural county with a long history of racism, that she had hanged herself.” (*The Guardian*)

“Formation” was produced by Mike Will Made It,³⁶ and Beyoncé. The lyrics were written primarily by Beyoncé, with the collaboration of Swae Lee (Rae Sremmurd) and Asheton Hogan. Mike Will explains how the song came to life in a lecture at The Red Bull Music Academy in Montreal:

She wrote her verses, Swae Lee came with the, “OK ladies, now let’s get in formation,” and then she added more stuff like those horns, the live effect to the beat, she wanted that. It was a whole collaborative effort. (*Genius*)

Keeping in mind that Mike Will produced the song, it seems inevitable that the beat of “Formation” is heavily influenced by trap³⁷ music. Like Mike Will highlights himself, it was Beyoncé’s idea to bring in the brass ensemble in the chorus, so predominant in New Orleans’ jazz and folk music. The samples used in “Formation” are not musical ones, but recordings of two performers: Big Freedia³⁸ and Messy Mya.³⁹ It is Messy Mya’s voice that introduces “Formation” with: “Bitch, I’m back by popular demand.” Since this was Beyoncé’s first solo song release since 2013, the words by Messy Mya could not fit better: Beyoncé chooses to release “Formation” and comes back due to her fans’ worldwide acclamation for new music. Messy Mya’s words are followed by the first verse of the song, where Beyoncé half-raps/half-sings:

Y'all haters corny with that Illuminati mess
Paparazzi, catch my fly and my cocky fresh
I'm so reckless when I rock my Givenchy dress (stylin')
I'm so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces
My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana
You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama

36 Michael Len Williams II, known as Mike Will Made It is a music producer, known for his trap-influenced compositions.

37 Subgenre of hip-hop that has adopted different characteristics of EDM and electronic music, such as the use of 808 machine drums or the use of high speed tempos.

38 Freddie Ross, known as Big Freedia, is a New Orleans rapper, famous for popularizing “bounce” music.

39 Messy Mya is a New Orleans youtuber and rapper

I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros

I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils

Earned all this money, but they never take the country out me

I got hot sauce in my bag, swag

First of all, Beyoncé denies the rumours of her belonging to the *Illuminati*⁴⁰ and swiftly changes the subject in the second line, where she asks paparazzi to photograph her in cool attire. Shouting out outrageously expensive brands or things in hip-hop songs is a very common practice. This is a way for rappers to show off the money they make and their expensive lifestyle. Following this hip-hop trope, Beyoncé boasts about wearing Givenchy clothes. However, the next line (“I’m so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces”) does not refer to a fashion label or *Haute Couture* designer, but to Jay-Z’s own music label, Roc-A-Fella records. Thus, Beyoncé states that she wears her husband’s custom jewellery as a way of showing that they “belong” to each other. Beyoncé continues by addressing, once again, her Creole and Southern ancestry (“My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana / You mix that negro with that creole, make a Texas bama”), and keeps emphasizing how influential these two places have been in her personal life as well as in her career. Interestingly, she uses the words “Texas bama” to refer to herself. Beyoncé appropriates the word “bama,” which in its origin it had quite a derogatory meaning: “an unsophisticated or unfashionable person, specifically one who is a native or inhabitant of the rural American South” (OED 2017). Thus, instead of hiding or shying away from her Texan and rural upbringing, Beyoncé uses the term “bama” with pride. This sense of pride continues throughout the following lines. In them, the singer shines a light on black physical feature, that have been historically mocked and ridiculed by white supremacist and racist individuals. However, this has never been an innocent practice, but an explicit derogatory political and social racist statement. As activist, bell hooks

40 The *Illuminati* is considered to be a secret masonic cult. Many artists and celebrities have been rumoured to belong to this group.

denounces in *Black Looks: Race and Representation*: “From slavery on, white supremacists have recognized that control over images is central to the maintenance of any system of racial domination” (2).

As a consequence, the lack of positive and accurate representations of people of colour has lead African-American communities to long for or aDJust to an unattainable “white” standard and to internalise intra racism and self-loathing. Therefore, when Beyoncé sings “I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros / I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils,” she is speaking positively of these features by associating them with words and people that represent success, like the Jackson Five, as well as she wishes her “baby” daughter would like her “baby hair and afros” as much as Beyoncé does. Finally, the last two lines (“Earned all this money but they never take the country out me / I got hot sauce in my bag, swag”) allude to her rural origins, by referencing the saying “You can take the girl / boy out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl / boy.” The last line (“I got hot sauce in my bag, swag”) also refers to one of the staples of southern cuisine, that is, hot sauce. However, “hot sauce” holds a double meaning that connects “Formation” to the visuals in “Denial”: the baseball bat that Beyoncé uses to smash cars during “Hold Up,” has the inscription “hot sauce” on the top. Therefore, Beyoncé could be referring, tongue-in-cheek, to the fact that she carries either a baseball bat or a typically southern condiment in her bag.

“Formation” continues with the voices of Big Freedia and Messy Mya, precluding Beyoncé’s repetition of the first verse:

Oh yeah, baby, oh yeah I, ohhhhh, oh, yes, I like that

I did not come to play with you hoes, haha

I came to slay, bitch

I like cornbreads and collard greens, bitch

Oh, yes, you besta believe it

These lines accentuate Beyoncé's dominance in the music business ("I did not come to play / I came to slay⁴¹, bitch) at the same time she celebrates typical southern cuisine ("I like cornbreads and collard greens, bitch"). The repetition of the first verse is followed by the chorus, which opens with the next lines that carry hidden and complex meanings:

I see it, I want it, I stunt, yellow bone it

I dream it, I work hard, I grind 'til I own it

I twirl on them haters, albino alligators

El Camino with the seat low, sippin' Cuervo with no chaser

In the chorus, Beyoncé reflects on race and depicts herself as a hard-working woman. First, she addresses her light-skinned complexion ("yellow-bone it"). Concerning the issue of "colour bleaching" or "whitening" among people of African descent, Beyoncé has faced criticism for years from those who claim that her lighter skin tone is the result of using bleaching products since the so-called "yellow" has never been and it is not her *natural* skin colour. While her light-skinned colour may be one of the reasons why she has been able to appeal to mainstream US, she has acknowledged this privilege and has used her power to show her audience the diversity of the African-American community, as far as skin colour is concerned. Even though she is "yellow-boned," Beyoncé conforms to Western standards of beauty, but the singer brings to the front other less "desirable" features, such as afro hair or wide noses, as we have seen in the first verse. Therefore, in doing so, Beyoncé promotes self-love and encourages the love for blackness by setting positive images for all African-Americans, whether male or female.

Following with the analysis of the chorus, we could say that the second line is, to a certain extent, a reference to the topic of the American Dream: "I dream it, I work hard, I grind til' I own it." That is, she is successful because she works hard. Once again, Beyoncé changes the subject in the following lines, to address, once more, race issues: "I twirl on them

41 "Greatly impress or amuse (someone)" (OED)

haters, albino alligators / El Camino with the seat low, sippin' Cuervo with no chaser.” This time, Beyoncé states that she does not care about her most vicious critics. Here, “albino alligators,” due to the proximity to the word “haters,” could very well be a term to describe her white detractors.

It is quite probable that Beyoncé might have foreseen the impact that the lyrics and the music video of “Formation” would make on some sectors of American society. When “Formation” was released, followed by a performance in the Super Bowl half-time show (which included dancers decked in Black Panther inspired outfits), a movement called for the boycott of Beyoncé. Thus, the people behind the so-called “Boycott Beyoncé” group, who claimed that the singer’s song and music video promoted violence and anti-police sentiments, organised a protest in New York City. According to *The Atlantic*, only three people attended this unsuccessful protest. In an interview with *Elle*, Beyoncé responds to these accusations, and explains the purpose of a song like “Formation”:

Anyone who perceives my message as anti-police is completely mistaken. I have so much admiration and respect for officers and the families of officers who sacrifice themselves to keep us safe. But let's be clear: I am against police brutality and injustice. Those are two separate things. If celebrating my roots and culture during Black History Month made anyone uncomfortable, those feelings were there long before a video and long before me. I'm proud of what we created and I'm proud to be a part of a conversation that is pushing things forward in a positive way.

When Beyoncé mentions that the people who feel uncomfortable about her celebration of her roots has harboured those feelings “long before” her, she seems to be in conversation with bell hooks, and some of the issues that the critic and activist has also addressed: “all

social manifestations of black separatism are often seen by whites as a sign of anti-white racism, when they usually represent an attempt by black people to construct places of political sanctuary where we can escape, if only for a time, white domination” (15).

The second half of the chorus insists on the idea of being hard-working and succeeding at everything in life. Interestingly enough, it also acts as a call for women’s unity:

Sometimes I go off (I go off), I go hard (I go hard)
Get what's mine (take what's mine), I'm a star (I'm a star)
Cause I slay (slay), I slay (hey), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
All day (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
We gon' slay (slay), gon' slay (okay), we slay (okay), I slay (okay)
I slay (okay), okay (okay), I slay (okay), okay, okay, okay, okay
Okay, okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, 'cause I slay
Okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, 'cause I slay
Prove to me you got some coordination, 'cause I slay
Slay trick, or you get eliminated

As it can be noticed the alternation between the pronouns “I” and “we” is quite significant. To a certain extent, the alternation of the sentences “I slay,” and “We gon slay” serve as a mantra, repeated over and over through the chorus and the second verse, until women would finally believe that they “slay,” that is, that women will succeed despite the obstacles. The next lines (“okay, okay, ladies, now let’s get in formation / [...] prove to me you got some coordination”) voice Beyoncé’s call to unity where she uses military-related vocabulary like “formation” and “coordination.” Finally, in the last line, Beyoncé plays with the pronunciation of “eliminated,” since she makes it sound like “e-LEMONADE-it,” referencing her album *Lemonade*. Since “Formation” was released months before *Lemonade*,

we could interpret the singer playing with pronunciation as some sort of clue for Beyoncé's fans.

If we move to the second verse, we observe that Beyoncé continues drawing from hip-hop tropes but, instead, it subverts the gender roles that are often attributed to both men and women in hip-hop culture:

When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster, cause I slay
When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster, we gon' slay
If he hit it right, I might take him on a flight on my chopper, I slay
Drop him off at the mall, let him buy some J's, let him shop up, 'cause I slay
I might get your song played on the radio station, 'cause I slay
I might get your song played on the radio station, 'cause I slay
You just might be a black Bill Gates in the making, 'cause I slay
I just might be a black Bill Gates in the making

At this point, it is relevant to remind that in hip-hop culture, the man is typically the one that brags about his wealth and “spoils” his love interest by buying her things or taking her to luxurious places. As a matter of fact, the first two lines of this verse, were originally written by Slim Jxmmi⁴² (who is not credited as a songwriter), and followed this trope to perfection: “If you fuck me good, I’ll take your ass to Margiela.”⁴³ Instead, Beyoncé changes this cliché and writes from a female point of view at the same time she changes a luxurious fashion brand for a restaurant chain in the US: “When he fuck me good I take his ass to Red Lobster.” Beyoncé continues spoiling her lover by taking him on expensive dates and lavishing him with gifts, such as riding a helicopter, taking him on shopping sprees, or even using her power in the music industry to get a song played on the radio: “I might take him on a ride on my chopper”

42 He is part of the trap/hip-hop duo Rae Sremmurd along with Swae Lee.

43 Maison Martin Margiela is a Haute Couture brand.

or “I might let him buy some J’s⁴⁴, let him shop up,” and “I might get your song played on the radio station.”

The last two lines (“You might just be a black Bill Gates in the making, cause I slay / I might just be a black Bill Gates in the making”), go hand in hand with the recurrent topic of representation and the American Dream: if we work hard, we will become successful. This topic has been previously addressed in “Accountability,” where its intended purpose is to have a positive role model for men (Spike Lee in “Accountability,” or Bill Gates in “Formation”). However, in “Formation,” the figure of Bill Gates serves as a representation of success for both men and women —black and white alike— since Beyoncé herself is placed in the position to become the next “black Bill Gates,” that is, one of the richest (and most charitable) persons in the world.

Later, after singing the chorus for the last time, Beyoncé finishes the song by acknowledging her influence in society and popular culture (“You know you that bitch when you cause all this conversation”), and advises the audience to let their success speak for them without boasting about it, acting nice and being respectful to other people (“Always stay gracious, best revenge is your paper”). As the music fades out, we can hear some audio taken from “Trouble the Water” (2008), a documentary about the social consequences of Hurricane Katrina: “Girl, I hear some thunder / Golly, look at that water, boy, oh lord.” These last lines refer to the hurricane that destroyed New Orleans. Without doubt, they bring some depth into the more urban images that are shown during “Formation.”

Overall, in *Lemonade*, the visual aspect of the sequence is closely connected to the lyrics. “Formation” opens with Beyoncé on top of a police car that is floating in a dangerously flooded area. This image alone transports the audience to the aftermath of the Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, a natural disaster that made the headlines at the same time it

44 This is the common nickname for Air Jordan shoes/sneakers. Air Jordan is former basketball player Michael Jordan’s shoe line and it is produced by Nike.

questioned issues of racism and the treatment of the black population as *second-class citizens*. We are shown the impact that the hurricane had in the community by the use of images of flooded neighbourhoods and areas, that alternate with non-flooded locations. These medium and long shots are followed by images of people that would most likely have inhabited these neighbourhoods: black men dancing, a reverend and his congregation during a service, young black women at a beauty supply store, an elderly black woman, a black man riding a horse, etc. All of these close-ups and medium shots of ordinary people show Beyoncé's desire to introduce her audience to the many different types of African-Americans that are part of New Orleans, and southern USA in general. Her insistence on dealing with human, social, and geographical diversity is something that we have seen as an essential part of *Lemonade*, that does not go unnoticed, together with the constant references to Beyoncé's Texas, Alabama and New Orleans roots. Therefore, in "Formation," Beyoncé also uses images of what New Orleans is most well-known for: Mardi Gras.⁴⁵ Throughout the "Formation" sequence we are witness to some of Mardi Gras's most iconic rituals and aesthetics such as the parades, the marching bands, the beads and masks, and a Mardi Gras Indian dancing. This inclusion is interesting because Mardi Gras Indians have been an essential part of New Orleans' Mardi Gras counterculture. Every year, groups of Mardi Gras Indians⁴⁶ parade the streets, wearing their characteristic costumes made entirely of feathers and beads while they sing and dance along to their own music. The importance of the Mardi Gras Indians is extensively explained by George Lipsitz:

The working class blacks who create the Mardi Gras Indian tribes collectively author an important narrative about their own past, present, and future. Drawing upon the tools available to them—music,

45 "Mardi Gras" is the name of the Carnival celebrations in New Orleans.

46 "Mardi Gras Indians are Black Carnival revelers in New Orleans, Louisiana, who dress up in suits for Mardi Gras influenced by Native American ceremonial apparel." (n.p.)

costumes, speech, and dance—they fashion a fictive identity that gives voice to their deepest values and beliefs. (102)

There are other relevant images that reflect Beyoncé’s lyrics “Formation.” Therefore, when she sings “paparazzi” we see a group of men taking photos with vintage cameras; when Beyoncé says “I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros,” a close up shot of her daughter Blue Ivy, appears on screen. The same process is repeated after Beyoncé says “bama,” and a male basketball team wearing jerseys with the inscription “BAMAS”⁴⁷ are shown, and once again when Beyoncé sings “El Camino [...],” the camera captures her inside a Chevrolet El Camino car. Finally, as we hear the words “I dream it,” an image of a man holding a newspaper with Dr Martin Luther King on the cover is shown, making it clear that, the lyrics refer to Dr King’s “I Have a Dream” speech.

As stated above, Beyoncé’s insistence to provide representations of human diversity permeate the visual imagery. As in other *Lemonade* sequences, Beyoncé channels a nineteenth century creole as well as an upper class woman, and she is surrounded by other women and men who fit the same aesthetic. Beyoncé also recreates an eighties-style music video, from the big hairdos and eccentric fashion of the time, to the quality of the images that seem to have been filmed with an analog camera. This music video approach can also be seen in some of the dance scenes during “Formation,” where Beyoncé is accompanied by an “army” of dancers who wear an afro. As in “Hope,” the presence of large groups of diverse black women united and “getting in Formation” is quite significant. These women are all unique in some way—they all have different hairstyles, from cornrows to afros—yet they are all moving in unison, a clear way to show that no matter our differences, if we unite, we can change things—we can even change the world as it is today.

Moving to the last scenes in “Formation”—and perhaps the most controversial— we find the ones that criticize police brutality. As mentioned earlier, this is an issue that Beyoncé

47 The term “bamas” is nowadays also used to refer to the students of the University of Alabama.

is very passionate about and has dealt with at length throughout *Lemonade*. This particular scene depicts a riot. A young boy wearing a hoodie is dancing in front of a line of police officers in riot gear and uniform. This scene could be reminiscent of Trayvon Martin's death by neighbourhood watch volunteer George Zimmerman, who fatally shot Martin for seeming suspicious because he was wearing a hoodie that covered his head. This scene culminates with the boy raising his hands up as a sign of surrender along with the riot police squad raising their hands up as well. Once again, this scene is reminiscent of one of the chants *Black Lives Matter* use in protests: "Hands up, don't shoot!" This moment is followed by an image of a graffiti that reads "Stop shooting us" that graphically and accurately reflects the current racial tensions that have been going on in US for the past few years.

Along with "Formation"'s literal and metaphorical cyclic spirit, this sequence ends the same way as it started: Beyoncé is sitting on top of a police car that slowly sinks in the middle of a flooded New Orleans neighbourhood. Beyoncé is completely alone, surrounded by nothing but water.

4. CONCLUSION

From the close-reading of Warsan Shire's poems, the analysis of Beyoncé's music and lyrics, and the interpretation of the visuals in *Lemonade*, it is safe to say that this visual album is an innovative, well-informed, and—already—an iconic work of art that without doubt has shaped the course of American music. Moreover, *Lemonade* is a window into the lives of African-American women today.

Through poetry, music, and film, Beyoncé addresses in *Lemonade* issues of racism, infidelity, black representations in the media, police brutality, and gender equality by providing references and images that highlight African-American history, often overlooked by mainstream America. This visual album does not only serve as an encyclopedia of African-

American history, but it also serves as a political statement, since Beyoncé condemns racial injustice by appearing alongside the Mothers of the Movement or questioning Americans's racist blindness to natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, as well as pleading for social equality in songs like "Freedom" and "Formation." Overall, *Lemonade* is a celebration of blackness. From the praises to afro hair and wide noses, to the overwhelming number of positive images of African-American men and women of all ages that appear in the visual album, Beyoncé preaches self-love and self-confidence.

All in all, with *Lemonade*, Beyoncé takes a stand against the inequality that African-Americans have historically endured. Interestingly enough, the African-American community she presents is lead by women who do not feel defeated or tired of fighting for equality. They are resilient and they will carry on with the fight for freedom like their mothers and grandmothers have done before them. Life gave them lemons, but African-American women made lemonade.

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Appendix 1

3.1 Denial: “Hold Up” (page 6)

POETRY

For women who are difficult to love by Warsan Shire

and you tried to change didn't you?
closed your mouth more
tried to be softer
prettier
less volatile, less awake
but even when sleeping you could feel
him travelling away from you in his dreams
so what did you want to do, love
split his head open?
you can't make homes out of human beings
someone should have already told you that
and if he wants to leave
then let him leave
you are terrifying
and strange and beautiful
something not everyone knows how to love.

Spoken Word (Beyoncé)

I tried to change, closed my mouth more
Tried to be soft, prettier, less awake
Fasted for sixty days, wore white, abstained from mirrors
Abstained from sex, slowly did not speak another word

In that time my hair I grew past my ankles
I slept on a mat on a floor
I swallowed a sword
I levitated into the basement
Confessed my sins and was baptized in a river
Got on my knees and said amen
And said Ameen
I whipped my own back and asked for dominion at your feet
I threw myself into a volcano
I drank the blood and drank the wine
I sat alone and begged and bent at the waist for God
I crossed myself and thought I saw the devil
I grew thickened skin on my feet
I bathed in bleach and plugged my menses with pages from the Holy Book
But still inside me coiled deep was the need to know
Are you cheating on me?

LYRICS: "Hold Up"

Hold up, they don't love you like I love you
Slow down, they don't love you like I love you
Back up, they don't love you like I love you
Step down, they don't love you like I love you
Can't you see there's no other man above you?
What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you
Hold up, they don't love you like I love you

Oh, down, they don't love you like I love you

Something don't feel right because it ain't right

Especially comin' up after midnight

I smell your secrets, and I'm not too perfect

To ever feel this worthless

How did it come down to this? Scrolling through your call list

I don't wanna lose my pride, but I'mma fuck me up a bitch

Know that I kept it sexy, you know I kept it fun

There's something that I'm missing, maybe my head for one

What's worse, lookin' jealous or crazy? Jealous or crazy?

Or like being walked all over lately, walked all over lately

I'd rather be crazy

Hold up, they don't love you like I love you

Slow down, they don't love you like I love you

Back up, they don't love you like I love you

Step down, they don't love you like I love you

Can't you see there's no other man above you?

What a wicked way to treat the girl that loves you

Hold up, they don't love you like I love you

Slow down they don't love you like I love you

Let's imagine for a moment that you never made a name for yourself

Or mastered wealth, they had you labeled as a king

Never made it out the cage, still out there movin' in them streets

Never had the baddest woman in the game up in your sheets

Would they be down to ride?

No, they used to hide from you, lie to you

But y'all know we were made for each other

So I find you and hold you down

Me sing se

Appendix 2

3.2 Accountability: “Daddy Lessons” (page 12)

Poetry

***How to Wear your Mother’s Lipstick* by Warsan Shire**

You must wear it like she wears disappointment on her face

You must hide the surprise of tasting other men on your lips

Your mother is a woman and women like her cannot be contained.

You find the black tube inside her beauty case, where she keeps

your fathers old prison letters,

you desperately want to look like her,

film star beauty, you hold your hand against your throat

your mother was most beautiful when sprawled out on the floor

half naked and bleeding.

You go to the bathroom to apply the lipstick,

somewhere no one can find you

your teeth look brittle against the deep red slickness

you smile like an infant, your mouth is a wound

you look nothing like your mother

you look everything like your mother.

You call your ex-boyfriend, sit on the toilet seat and listen to
the phone ring, when he picks up you say his name slow
he says i thought i told you to stop calling me
you lick your lips, you taste like years of being alone.

Spoken Word (Beyoncé)

You find the black tube inside her beauty case
Where she keeps your father's old prison letters
You find the black tube inside her beauty case
Where she keeps your father's old prison letters
You desperately want to look like her
You look nothing like your mother
You look everything like your mother
Film star beauty
How to wear your mother's lipstick
You go to the bathroom to apply the lipstick
Somewhere no one can find you
You must wear it like she wears disappointment on her face
Your mother is a woman
And women like her can not be contained
MALE VOICE: I even met the president one time, man
I ain't tell you that?
Yeah, I met the president, you know
Before I met him, you dig, I didn't see myself going nowhere
I ain't really...I ain't...you know...
I ain't really didn't care if I lived or died

Now I feel like I gotta live man, for my kids and stuff, you know

He...he from the hood just like me

He from Chi-Raq, you know

I'm from New Orleans

You know that give me inspiration

On I can be whatever I wanna be

Like you know

Whatever I wanna be

You know I'll probably be the next Spike Lee and shit or something

You understand what I'm saying?

BEYONCÉ: Mother dearest let me inherit the Earth

Teach me how to make him beg

Let me make up for the years he made you wait

Did he bend your reflection?

Did he make you forget your own name?

Did he convince you he was a God?

Did you get on your knees daily?

Do his eyes close like doors?

Are you a slave to the back of his head?

Am I talking about your husband or your father?

LYRICS: "Daddy Lessons"

Yee-haw

Oh, oh, oh

Texas, Texas (oh, oh, oh) Texas

Came into this world, daddy's little girl

And daddy made a soldier out of me

Oh, oh, oh

Daddy made me dance and daddy held my hand

Oh, oh, oh

And daddy liked his whiskey with his tea

And we rode motorcycles

Blackjack, classic vinyl

Tough girl is what I had to be

He said, "Take care of your mother

Watch out for your sister"

Oh, and that's when he gave to me...

With his gun and his head held high, he told me not to cry

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

With his right hand on his rifle, he swore it on the bible

My daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

He held me in his arms and he taught me to be strong

He told me when he's gone, "Here's what you do

When trouble comes in town and men like me come around"

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, oh, oh

Oh, oh, oh

Daddy made me fight, it wasn't always right
But he said, "Girl, it's your second amendment"
Oh, oh, oh
He always played it cool, but daddy was no fool
And right before he died he said, "Remember..."
He said, "Take care of your mother
Watch out for your sister"
And that's when daddy looked at me...
With his gun, with his head held high, he told me not to cry
Oh, my daddy said shoot
Oh, my daddy said shoot
With his right hand on his rifle, he swore it on the bible
My daddy said shoot
Oh, my daddy said shoot
Cause he held me in his arms and he taught me to be strong
And he told me when he's gone, "Here's what you do
When trouble comes in town and men like me come around"
Oh, my daddy said shoot
Oh, my daddy said shoot
Oh, oh, oh (x4)
My daddy warned me about men like you
He said, "Baby girl, he's playing you, he's playing you"
My daddy warned me about men like you
He said, "Baby girl, he's playing you, he's playing you
Cause when trouble comes in town and men like me come around"

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

"Cause when trouble comes to town and men like me come around"

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Oh, my daddy said shoot

Appendix 3

3.3 Hope: "Freedom" (page 21)

Poetry

***Nail Technician as Palm Reader* by Warsan Shire / Spoken Word (Beyoncé)**

The nail technician pushes my cuticles

back, turns my hand over,

stretches the skin on my palm

and says *I see your daughters*

and their daughters.

That night, in a dream, the first girl emerges

from a slit in my stomach. The scar heals

into a smile. The man I love pulls the stitches out

with his fingernails. We leave black sutures

curling in the side of the bath.

I wake as the second girl crawls

head first up my throat –

a flower, blossoming

out the whole in my face.

LYRICS: "Freedom"

Tryna rain, tryna rain on the thunder

Tell the storm I'm new

I'ma walk, I'ma march on the regular

Painting white flags blue

Lord forgive me, I've been running

Running blind in truth

I'ma rain, I'ma rain on this bitter love

Tell the sweet I'm new

I'm telling these tears, "Go and fall away, fall away"

May the last one burn into flames

Freedom! Freedom! I can't move

Freedom, cut me loose!

Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?

Cause I need freedom too!

I break chains all by myself

Won't let my freedom rot in hell

Hey! I'ma keep running

Cause a winner don't quit on themselves

I'ma wade, I'ma wave through the waters

Tell the tide, "Don't move"

I'ma riot, I'ma riot through your borders

Call me bulletproof

Lord forgive me, I've been runnin'

Runnin' blind in truth

I'ma wade, I'ma wave through your shallow love
Tell the deep I'm new
I'm telling these tears, "Go and fall away, fall away"
May the last one burn into flames
Freedom! Freedom! I can't move
Freedom, cut me loose!
Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?
Cause I need freedom too!
I break chains all by myself
Won't let my freedom rot in hell
Hey! I'ma keep running
Cause a winner don't quit on themselves
Freedom! Freedom! I can't move
Freedom, cut me loose!
Freedom! Freedom! Where are you?
Cause I need freedom too!
I break chains all by myself
Won't let my freedom rot in hell
Hey! I'ma keep running
Cause a winner don't quit on themselves

[Kendrick Lamar]

What you want from me?
Is it truth you seek? Oh father can you hear me?
What you want from me?
Is it truth you seek? Oh father can you hear me?

Hear me out

Appendix 4

3.4 Formation (page 33)

LYRICS

[Intro: Messy Mya]

Bitch, I'm back by popular demand

[Beyoncé]

Y'all haters corny with that Illuminati mess

Paparazzi, catch my fly and my cocky fresh

I'm so reckless when I rock my Givenchy dress (stylin')

I'm so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces

My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana

You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama

I like my baby hair with baby hair and afros

I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils

Earned all this money, but they never take the country out me

I got hot sauce in my bag, swag

[Interlude: Messy Mya + *Big Freedia*]

Oh yeah, baby, oh yeah I, ohhhhh, oh, yes, I like that

I did not come to play with you hoes, haha

I came to slay, bitch

I like cornbreads and collard greens, bitch

Oh, yes, you best believe it

[Beyoncé]

Y'all haters corny with that Illuminati mess
Paparazzi, catch my fly and my cocky fresh
I'm so reckless when I rock my Givenchy dress (stylin')
I'm so possessive so I rock his Roc necklaces
My daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana
You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama
I like my baby heir with baby hair and afros
I like my negro nose with Jackson Five nostrils
Earned all this money but they never take the country out me
I got hot sauce in my bag, swag
I see it, I want it, I stunt, yellow bone it
I dream it, I work hard, I grind 'til I own it
I twirl on them haters, albino alligators
El Camino with the seat low, sippin' Cuervo with no chaser
Sometimes I go off (I go off), I go hard (I go hard)
Get what's mine (take what's mine), I'm a star (I'm a star)
Cause I slay (slay), I slay (hey), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
All day (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
We gon' slay (slay), gon' slay (okay), we slay (okay), I slay (okay)
I slay (okay), okay (okay), I slay (okay), okay, okay, okay, okay
Okay, okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, 'cause I slay
Okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, 'cause I slay
Prove to me you got some coordination, 'cause I slay
Slay trick, or you get eliminated
When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster, cause I slay

When he fuck me good, I take his ass to Red Lobster, we gon slay
If he hit it right, I might take him on a flight on my chopper, I slay
Drop him off at the mall, let him buy some J's, let him shop up, 'cause I slay
I might get your song played on the radio station, 'cause I slay
I might get your song played on the radio station, 'cause I slay
You just might be a black Bill Gates in the making, 'cause I slay
I just might be a black Bill Gates in the making
I see it, I want it, I stunt, yellow bone it
I dream it, I work hard, I grind 'til I own it
I twirl on them haters, albino alligators
El Camino with the seat low, sippin' Cuervo with no chaser
Sometimes I go off (I go off), I go hard (I go hard)
Get what's mine (take what's mine), I'm a star (I'm a star)
Cause I slay (slay), I slay (hey), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
I slay (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay), I slay (okay)
We gon' slay (slay), gon' slay (okay), we slay (okay), I slay (okay)
I slay (okay), okay (okay), I slay (okay), okay, okay, okay, okay
Okay, okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, I slay
Okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, 'cause I slay
Prove to me you got some coordination, 'cause I slay
Slay trick, or you get eliminated, I slay
Okay, ladies, now let's get in formation, I slay
Okay, ladies, now let's get in formation
You know you that bitch when you cause all this conversation
Always stay gracious, best revenge is your paper

Girl, I hear some thunder

Golly, look at that water, boy, oh lord

Appendix 5

Figure 1: *Lemonade* (Cover)



Figure 2: Poet Warsan Shire



Figure 3: *Your Family, Your Body*, front cover.

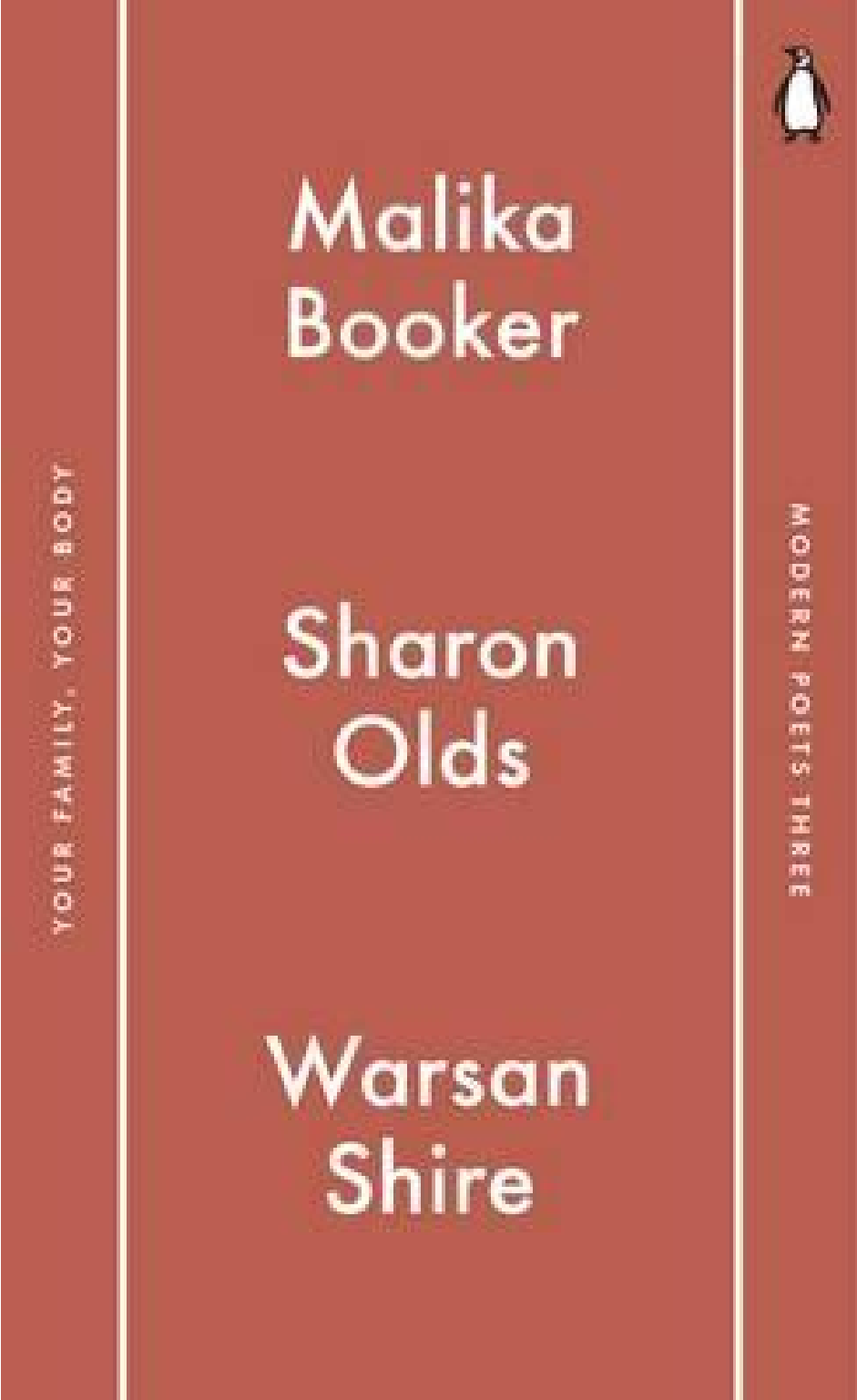


Figure 4: Beyoncé in “Denial”



Figure 5: Beyoncé surrounded by water, channeling Oshun, during “Denial”



Figure 6: Beyoncé accompanied by Little Freddie King, at Fort Macomb.



Figure 7: A young Beyoncé with her father, Mathew Knowles.



Figure 8: Beyoncé riding a horse during “Daddy Lessons”



Figure 9: All the women featured in “Hope”



Figure 10: Model Winnie Harlow during “Hope”

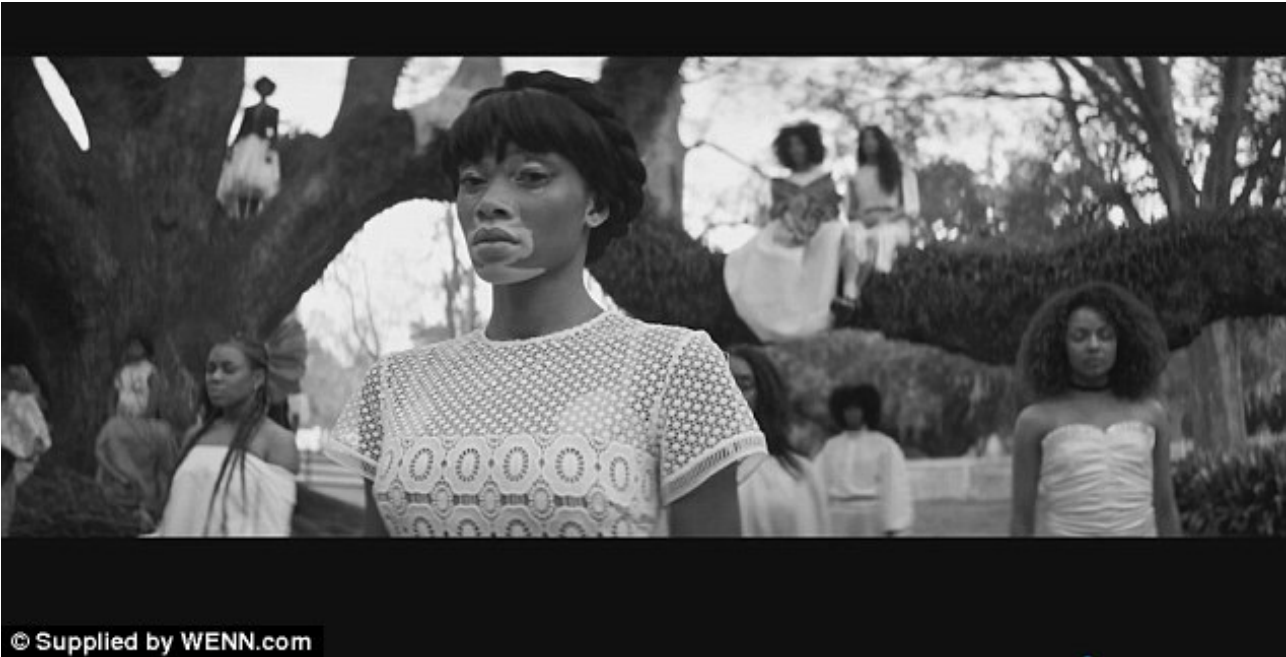


Figure 11: Ballet dancer Michaela DePrince dancing during “Freedom”



Figure 12: Beyoncé and different men during “Formation”



Figures 13 and 14: Beyoncé and her “army” of dancers.



Figure 15: “Hands up, don’t shoot!”



Figure 16: Beyoncé atop a sinking New Orleans Police car.

