

“Let Black be synonymous with glory”:
Pan-Africanism in *Black Is King*



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3967 words

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Introduction

Through the captivating visual storytelling of Beyoncé's *Black Is King*, a powerful exploration of African heritage and self-identity unfolds, inviting the African diaspora to embark on a transformative journey of cultural reclamation. On July 31, 2020, Beyoncé's latest visual album *Black Is King* was streamed on Disney Plus. While it is a visual album, *Black Is King* serves as a companion to the 2019 soundtrack album, *The Lion King: The Gift*, which Beyoncé curated. The story in *Black Is King* draws inspiration from *The Lion King* (2019). It follows the journey of a young African prince who is exiled from his kingdom after his father's passing. Throughout his exile, he embarks on a quest of self-discovery, guided by his ancestors and his subconscious, to reclaim his throne. The purpose of this film is to provide the African diaspora with an opportunity to explore, reclaim, and celebrate their culture and heritage.¹

To begin this discussion, it is crucial to address a key concept relevant to this study: 'Pan-Africanism.' 'Pan-Africanism,' as a concept, originated in the late nineteenth century and has since undergone significant evolution. Its meaning is not fixed, varying depending on the time period and geographical context under scholarly examination. This paper adopted the definition put forth by African Studies scholars Olayiqola Abegunrin and Sabella Ogbobode Abidde:

*[...] Pan-Africanism, is an effort to unite Blacks in order to (1) confront Western domination and exploitation of the continent and its resources; (2) give global Africans the voice, the courage, and the wherewithal to improve their economic, social, and political conditions; (3) to enrich and empower global Africans to take their rightful place in the global system; and (4) to achieve one of the central tenets of the major religions: that all men are created equal, and are not to be exploited, subjugated, and dismissed. In spite of the aforesaid and in spite of the measurable achievements of the past, Pan-Africanism seems, in recent years, to be waning.*²

According to Abegunrin and Ogbobode Abidde, African Americans, Afro-Asians, and Afro-Latinos have shown little interest in the affairs of Africa and its people, displaying indifference and covert apathy. However, there is a growing revival of Pan-Africanism in global African communities.³ As aptly expressed by Rading Biko of *the Standard*, *Black Is King* has reawakened the spirit of Pan-

¹ Beyoncé Knowles, "Making the Gift Beyoncé - The Gift Documentary - Beyoncé the gift (Documentary the Gift)," Beyoncé Music, September 17, 2019, video, 40:44, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daNaICPL_7M&t=1s.

² Olayiwola Abegunrin and Sabella Ogbobode Abidde, "Introduction" in *Pan-Africanism in Modern Times: Challenges, Concerns, and Constraints*, eds. Olayiwola Abegunrin and Sabella Ogbobode Abidde (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), xxiii-xxv.

³ *Ibid.*

Africanism.⁴ This paper argues that *Black Is King* strengthens this resurgence within the African diaspora, especially in the United States, focusing on the twenty-first century as its period and setting.

This research aims to analyze the expression of Pan-Africanism in American popular culture, specifically through the case study of Beyoncé's *Black Is King*. By examining the visual and musical elements, this study seeks to understand how *Black Is King* aligns with the goals of Pan-Africanism, as outlined by Abegunrin and Ogbobode Abidde. The central research question is: How does *Black Is King* portray Pan-Africanism? Through the exploration of two cultural expressions, this paper argues that the message and objectives of Pan-Africanism can be effectively examined. Therefore, the following questions were formulated:

RQ1: How is Pan-African symbolism used in *Black Is King*?

RQ2: How is Pan-Africanism portrayed in the music of *Black Is King*?

Theoretical framework

Scholarship in popular music and cultural studies has examined Beyoncé's exploration of racial and gender identity, but the portrayal of Pan-Africanism in popular culture remains understudied. However, there is growing interest among cultural scholars in Beyoncé's *Black Is King*. Cynthia Dillard's essay, "When Black is [Queen]: Towards an Endarkened Equity and Excellence in Education," delves into the theme of remembrance in *Black Is King* and its potential impact on Black education in the US. Dillard argues that Beyoncé advocates for a return to the African continent, emphasizing the significance of embracing African spirituality and ancestral connections. *Black Is King* not only celebrates Black beauty but also underscores the responsibility of Black educators to teach about the influence of African roots on Black life. Dillard concludes that *Black Is King* urges Black Americans to actively reclaim their identity rooted in the legacy, culture, and spirit of Black people from Africa to America and back again.⁵

In their essay titled "Ancestor is King: The Role of Afrofuturism in Beyoncé's *Black Is King*," scholars Christin Smith and Loren Saxton Coleman explore Afrofuturism's significance. Their research delves into the representation, regulation, and identity of the ancestor in the film, connecting it to the past, present, and future of Black people. Drawing from George Lewis's concept of spirituality as a technology in popular culture media, their study reveals how elements like earth, water, the moon, the sun, and stars serve as conduits to the ancestor. This analysis emphasizes that Afrofuturism goes beyond aesthetics, showcasing Beyoncé's connection between the ancestor, the earth, water, and cosmos, collapsing space and time for the Black diaspora. Smith and Coleman's examination also highlights

⁴ Reading Biko, "Is Beyoncé rooting for Pan Africanist movement with her film *Black Is King*?" last modified in 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/politics/article/2001384003/is-beyonce-rooting-for-pan-africanist-movement-with-her-film-black-is-king>.

⁵ Cynthia Dillard, "When Black Is [Queen]: Towards an Endarkened Equity and Excellence in Education" *Equity & Excellence in Education* 54, no. 1 (2021): 21-24. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665684.2020.1863884>.

Afrofuturism as a lens to explore empowerment, resistance, and imagination within a popular culture by Black artists in the diaspora.⁶

Lastly, in her essay “A Battle or a Conversation: Imagining Africa and Its Diaspora in Beyoncé’s *Black Is King* and *Lemonade*,” Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque conducts a comparative analysis and examines how these visual albums navigate complex themes. They blend “feminist empowerment with hypersexualized female bodies and conservative gender roles, references to the Black Panthers with emancipation through the accumulation of capital, and Afrodiasporic pride with cultural appropriation.”⁷ Efoui-Delplanque argues that *Lemonade* and *Black Is King* challenge the distinction between counter-narratives and the reinforcement of dominant discourses when representing diverse Afrodiasporic and African experiences. These visual albums break free from stereotypical portrayals of Blackness in audiovisual storytelling, offering exciting possibilities for future experiments and interpretations. They provide glimpses of an Afrodiasporic visual language that embraces its kaleidoscopic and non-linear nature.⁸

Methodology

This study employs two research methodologies to delve into various facets of popular culture. To explore Pan-Africanism in visual art, a semiotic analysis is utilized, focusing on the use of symbols and symbolism within this medium. The first chapter of this paper delves into the use of semiotics in *Black Is King*. Textual analyses provide a critical framework for situating a text within its historical, social, and ideological context, enabling the researcher to uncover underlying meanings, implicit patterns, assumptions, and omissions. In line with this, *Black Is King*, serving as the visual companion to *The Gift* soundtrack album, is subjected to textual and lyrical analysis to assess Pan-African sentiments within the songs.⁹ The second chapter focuses on examining the film’s lyrics and their presentation of the Pan-African message, with recurring themes of Black pride and beauty resonating throughout various songs. The film includes fifteen original songs from the soundtrack album. This study made a selection of songs that convey the Pan-African message and excluded the other songs from examination.

⁶ Christin Smith and Loren Saxton Coleman, “Ancestor is King: the Role of Afrofuturism in Beyoncé’s *Black Is King*,” *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 39, no. 4 (2022): 247-259. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15295036.2022.2038386>.

⁷ Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque, “A Battle or a Conversation: Imagining Africa and Its Diaspora in Beyoncé’s *Black Is King* and *Lemonade*,” *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 67, no. 2 (2022): 200. <https://doi.org/10.33675/AMST/2022/2/9>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Elfriede Fürisch, “In Defense of Textual Analysis: Restoring a Challenged Method for Journalism and Media Studies,” *Journalism Studies* 10, no. 2 (2009): 241; and Paul Linden, “Insistency: A New Methodology for Lyrical Analysis,” *MEIEA* 16, no. 1 (2016): 128-129. <https://doi.org/10.25101/16.5>.

Chapter 1: Pan-African Symbolism

Pan-Africanism is a concept that has been explored in the film *Black Is King*, with symbolism being a key element. This chapter seeks to answer the question of how Pan-African symbolism is used in the film. It is argued that Beyoncé has used symbolism to allow African Americans to reconnect with their African heritage and that these symbols are used to evoke a sense of African identity and pride amongst the African diaspora.

Religious and spiritual symbolism

The film incorporates a mix of ancient and spiritual practices that accommodate African spirituality, including three spiritual and cultural forms that are inherent to the African diaspora: biblical stories, ancient polytheistic religious stories, and ancestor worship in African spirituality. Efoui-Delplanque argues that there is a form of cultural and religious syncretism in *Black Is King*.¹⁰ Such is the case early in the film where Beyoncé portrays the ancient Egyptian deity Hathor, goddess of the sky, womanhood, fertility, and love, by sitting on a horse (see image 1).¹¹



Image 1 Beyoncé as the Egyptian deity Hathor in *Black Is King*

¹⁰ Efoui-Delplanque, "Imagining Africa," 205-206; Syncretism is the merging of spiritual and cultural forms from diasporic cultures.

¹¹ Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, "Hathor," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, last modified December 20, 2022, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hathor-Egyptian-goddess>.

The ancestor plays a crucial role in *Black Is King*. In her essay, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” Toni Morrison argues that without a connection to the ancestor, there is no sense of self or freedom.¹² Smith and Coleman build on this by arguing that the ancestor is still seen as an active member of the family in the metaphysical realm of time. That explains the act of the ancestral gaze, which helps the viewer to frame the past and to understand the present.¹³ In addition to this, Dillard argues that Beyoncé invites the viewer of African descent to remember that Black excellence does not start with the mind or body, but with the spirit, which points to the importance of the spiritual relationship with the ancestor in most African cultures.¹⁴



Image 2 Beyoncé portraying Moses' biological mother, Jochebed

Another way to remember the ancestor is through biblical imagery that draws on the Middle Passage. The prime example is the story of Moses, which serves as an important thread throughout the film. In the opening of the film, the viewer sees Beyoncé, portraying Moses' biological mother, Jochebed, placing her baby in a basket on the river, symbolizing the last hope for survival. Later in the film, they are reunited in a spiritual setting, embraced by a large African family. This metaphor, according to Efoui-Delplanque, signifies the Middle Passage, with the river representing continuity amidst adversity and the eventual end of separation. It suggests that people of African descent will find their way 'home' to Africa.¹⁵

In the Christian tradition, Moses was set afloat by his parents, Amram and Jochebed, after the Egyptians took measures to limit the growth of the Hebrew people in ancient Egypt by ordering them

¹² Toni Morrison, “Rootedness: The Ancestor as Foundation,” in *Teaching Black: The Craft of Teaching on Black Life and Literature*, edited by Ana Maurine Lara and Drea Brown (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2008), 56-64.

¹³ Smith and Coleman, “Ancestor is King,” 249.

¹⁴ Dillard, “Endarkened Equity,” 21-22.

¹⁵ Efoui-Delplanque, “Imagining Africa,” 208.

to kill newborn Hebrew males. Moses was discovered and raised by the pharaoh's daughter, but later embraced his Hebrew identity and liberated his people from slavery. Natty Bakhita Kasambala states that the story of Moses has been a beacon of hope for the African American community during times of emancipation.¹⁶ In *Black Is King*, this story also symbolizes hope. Jochebed places her baby in a basket that travels through over a wild stream and is found by Beyoncé, representing the pharaoh's daughter. Beyoncé's portrayal calls upon the African diaspora to return to the African continent. The film's main message is that despite forced displacement and generations raised away from their ancestral land, embracing roots and returning 'home' is still possible.



Image 3 Beyoncé portraying pharaoh's daughter in *Black Is King*

Yellow, white, and blue

In addition to spiritual syncretism, *Black Is King* also incorporates cultural syncretic elements through colors, adding depth to its spiritual syncretism. Colors hold significant meaning across various cultures worldwide. For example, Beyoncé consistently wears yellow in the film, symbolizing Oshun, a Yoruban goddess associated with love, fertility, sensuality, and wealth. Oshun's presence is further emphasized through her mention in the song "MOOD 4 EVA". This deliberate choice connects the film's themes with Beyoncé's practice of the Yoruban Ifa religion, making a statement: by including Oshun, *Black Is King* embraces a fusion of cultural and spiritual influences, enriching its narrative.¹⁷

¹⁶ Natty Bakhita Kasambala, : Coming to America and Modern Massai: the hidden references of Beyoncé's *Black Is King*," *gal-dem*, last modified August 4, 2020, <https://gal-dem.com/coming-to-america-maasai-hidden-references-in-black-is-king/>.

¹⁷ Kasambala, "Coming to America."



Image 5 Beyoncé as the Yoruban goddess Oshun



Image 4 Beyoncé wearing white and covered in white paint in Mufasa's funeral scene

White is a recurring color in the film, carrying symbolic meaning in Christian and African traditions. It represents purity, truth, innocence, and the sacred. In *Black Is King*, the use of white paint holds significance in African spirituality, particularly for the Luba people in the Democratic Republic

of the Congo. They cover royal sculptures and symbols in white powder to establish a spiritual connection with their ancestors.¹⁸ Throughout the film, the prince is covered with white paint by maternal figures, and Mufasa's funeral scene is immersed in pure white. This act of covering bodies in white signifies the ancestral connection in African cultures.

Although the color blue generally represents love, harmony, togetherness, and peace in African cultures, haint blue has a deeper meaning that goes beyond the spiritual. The Gullah people, a distinct group of Black Americans from South Carolina and Georgia, painted parts of their homes in this shade to deceive ghosts. As enslaved captives, they have been able to preserve more of their African cultural heritage than any other group. When the enslaved Gullah captives were brought to the United States, the color gained another meaning. It was believed to ward off evil spirits and was painted on porch ceilings, doors, and shutters.¹⁹ In *Black Is King*, the Blue Man, covered in haint blue paint, silently accompanies the young prince. While the Gullah beliefs differ from the symbolic meaning of the Blue Man's color, viewers and culture commentators agree that this man represents the prince's ancestors and serves as his subconscious guide in life, as he follows from a distance.



Image 6 The 'Blue Man' covering in haint blue paint

Imperialism and decolonization

To empower Afrodiasporic peoples, *Black Is King* revisits former oppressive sites and rewrites the narrative using two tactics. The first involves removing white people from artworks, allowing for a

¹⁸ Callie Ahlgrim, "Beyoncé's 'Black Is King'," *Insider*, last modified August 10, 2020, <https://www.insider.com/black-is-king-beyonce-disney-plus-details-cameos-references-photos-2020-8>.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

different representation.²⁰ For example, Beyoncé places her family in Sandro Botticelli's 'Madonna and Child' painting, recreating the scene. This painting is a product of a Western and European aesthetic that historically excluded Black people. Beyoncé's appropriation of the Madonna archetype aligns with broader efforts to redefine art historical concepts associated with white women.²¹

Subverting the force of dynamics is another tactic to revisit sites of oppression. Black bodies were put in historically white spaces in many of the scenes in *Black Is King*. Kasambala believes that this strategy acts as a statement to disrupt. The idea is that the world is already aware of wealthy Black individuals, but Beyoncé wants to portray the whole range of opportunities available to Black people not only in America but throughout the entire diaspora.²²

A similar theme takes place in the visual performance of "BROWN SKIN GIRL." Black girls are accompanied by Black males to a debutante ball, while Beyoncé sings about the beauty of Black women. In the past, debutante balls in Black communities were attended by light-skinned girls from privileged backgrounds.²³ By displaying the beauty of these women, Beyoncé challenges conventional



Image 7 Still from *Black Is King* with Black girl attending the debutante ball

²⁰ Efoui-Delplanque, "Imagining Africa," 207.

²¹ Alex Greenberger, "The Art of 'Black Is King': Beyoncé's New Visual Album Involves Today's Best Artists and Curators," *ARTnews*, last modified August 3, 2020. <https://www.artnews.com/art-news/artists/black-is-king-beyonce-artists-photographers-curators-1202695943/>.

²² Kasambala, "Coming to America."

²³ Brooke Obie, "Beyoncé's *Black Is King* Offers a Blueprint for Decolonizing Black Masculinity," *Esquire*, last modified August 11, 2020. <https://www.esquire.com/entertainment/music/a33564645/beyonce-black-is-king-symbolism-meaning-analysis-masculinity/>.

beauty standards and sheds light on the historical marginalization of Black women's contributions. Through this visual performance, she brings their stories and experiences to life, reclaiming their place in history and inspiring a new generation to embrace their unique beauty and heritage. This performance serves as a statement of inclusivity, representation, and the importance of embracing one's identity.

Nevertheless, one of the main criticisms of *Black Is King* is its focus on luxury, particularly evident in the visual performance of "MOOD 4 EVA." The scene features the prince being driven by a white chauffeur in a leopard print Rolls-Royce, arriving at a mansion that replicates villa Lewaro, where Madam C.J. Walker, the first self-made African American female millionaire, lived in 1918.²⁴ The following scene shows Beyoncé and her husband, rapper Jay-Z, performing inside the mansion while being served by an all-white staff. This reversal of roles effectively highlights the historical portrayal of African Americans as maids, butlers, and other types of servants throughout the early years of Hollywood.²⁵ By depicting white individuals in these roles, the film disrupts established structures and empowers Black people.



Image 8 Still from the "MOOD 4 EVA" visual performance

²⁴ Nikki Onafuye, "10 important things you probably missed in Beyoncé's Black Is King," *i-D*, last modified August 5, 2020. <https://i-d.vice.com/en/article/m7jx9b/beyonce-black-is-king-cultural-references>.

²⁵ *Is That Black Enough for You?!?*, directed by Elvis Mitchell (2022; Los Gatos, CA: Netflix, 2022), Netflix.

Chapter 2: Pan-African Lyricism

Lyricism is the second aspect of Pan-Africanism that this paper has examined. This chapter aims to provide an answer to the question of how Pan-Africanism is comprehended through the lyrics of the music in *Black Is King*. Similar to Pan-African symbolism, Beyoncé uses her visual album's lyrics to spread many Pan-African messages that aim to uplift Black people and remind them of the significance of their ancestors.

The addressee and a sense of community

To understand *Black Is King*, it is crucial to identify its main addressee. This analysis highlights markers that indicate the African diaspora as the primary audience. In “BIGGER,” the first song of the film, Beyoncé sings: “Bigger than *you*, bigger than *we* / Bigger than the picture *they* framed us to see / But now *we* see it.” Here, Beyoncé uses ‘we’ to represent Black people, challenging the limited perception imposed on them. This aligns with Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque’s view that ‘we’ encompasses both the Black diaspora and Africans on the continent. The film conveys messages to the young prince that resonate with the diaspora. Additionally, Efoui-Delplanque argues that ‘they’ symbolizes the white supremacist power that negates the beauty of Blackness, as Beyoncé asserts in “POWER”: “*They*’ll never take my power.”²⁶

Rewriting the narrative

The songs in *Black Is King* empower the Black diaspora by offering an alternative representation of the African continent and its cultures. Efoui-Delplanque argues that the film challenges the dominant narrative by remembering the ancestors and the ‘motherland.’ The song “BIGGER” reframes the worth of Black people, urging them to realize their significance: “If you feel insignificant / You better think again / Better wake up because / You’re part of something way bigger.” She also calls on the diaspora to rewrite their narrative.²⁷ Noel Rae writes that the Bible was used as an oppressive instrument during slavery.²⁸ Beyoncé references this instrumentalization of the Bible, stating that the African peoples are “Not just some words in a Bible verse.”

In the song “FIND YOUR WAY BACK,” the theme of ancestral connection, as discussed earlier, is prominently highlighted. According to Efoui Delplanque, the song underscores the Pan-African framework that revolves around the narrative of returning to one’s homeland.²⁹ In the chorus, Beyoncé mentions her father urging her to find her way back. This statement, directed towards the

²⁶ Efoui-Delplanque, “imagining Africa,” 211.

²⁷ Ibid., 206.

²⁸ Noel Rae, “How Christian Slaveholders Used the Bible to Justify Slavery,” *TIME*, last modified February 23, 2018, <https://time.com/5171819/christianity-slavery-book-excerpt/>

²⁹ Efoui-Delplanque, “Imagining Africa,” 210.

African diaspora, signifies her call for Black individuals to reconnect with the continent and their ancestral heritage. Cynthia Dillard further interprets the song as a message to Black people who are “seeking wholeness, justice, and freedom” from the oppressive systems of “domination and greed, capitalism, and patriarchy” prevalent in the Western world.³⁰ Dillard’s perspective sheds light on the deeper meaning behind Beyoncé’s lyrics and the aspirations of those she aims to address.

The fourth song, “NILE” combines references to Black history and Black beauty, supporting the significance of Blackness. The crossing of the river Nile symbolizes the Atlantic crossing of enslaved Africans in the Afrodiasporic framework.³¹ Kendrick Lamar also contributes to the song, referencing the Middle Passage with the line: “One time, I took a swim in the Nile / I swam the whole way, I didn’t turn around.” Beyoncé’s verse celebrates Black beauty, “Look at my natural, I’m so exotic,” contrasting ‘natural’ and ‘exotic’ to highlight the inherent beauty of diasporic individuals. The line, “Darker the berry, sweeter the fruit,” suggests that darker-skinned women possess a unique sweetness.³² The closing lines, “Deeper the wonder, deeper the roots,” allude to the enduring struggles of oppression and discrimination faced by Black communities due to colonialism and white supremacy. Despite these hardships, Beyoncé argues that Black people have always persevered.

Black Empowerment

The film’s music serves as a catalyst for promoting Black beauty, pride, and excellence. As mentioned in the previous chapter, one notable example is the song “BROWN SKIN GIRL,” which encourages darker-complexioned women facing colorism challenges by singing: “Brown skin girl / Your skin just like pearls / The best thing in the world / I’d never trade you for anybody else, singing’.” Colorism remains deeply ingrained within African communities worldwide, especially in the United States, stemming from slavery when lighter-skinned individuals were privileged over darker-skinned individuals.³³ Beyoncé acknowledges this history and promotes inclusivity, aiming for a future where all shades of Black beauty are celebrated without prejudice.

Beyoncé parallels Blackness and slavery by emphasizing the physical harm inflicted on Black skin during the era of American slavery with the line, “Same skin that was broken / Be the same skin takin’ over.” By stating that Black skin was physically broken by whips during the era of American slavery from 1619 to 1865, she highlights the enduring strength and resilience of Black individuals.³⁴ Furthermore, Beyoncé addresses the biased portrayal of Black women’s hair in the media, where

³⁰ Dillard, “Endarkened Equity,” 20.

³¹ Efoui-Delplanque, “imagining Africa,” 208.

³² This phrase was first used by Wallace Thurman in his 1929 novel *The Blacker the Berry: A Novel of Negro Life*, referring to how darker berries are more ripe, and thus sweeter than the rest.

³³ Amanda Mitchell, “The Lyrics of Beyoncé’s ‘Brown Skin Girl’ Are A Love Letter To Black Women - And Oprah is Rejoicing,” *Opdrah Daily*, last modified July 29, 2019, <https://www.oprahdaily.com/entertainment/tv-movies/a28485287/beyonce-blue-ivy-brown-skin-girl-lyrics-meaning/>.

³⁴ “BLACK SKIN GIRL,” *Genius*, last accessed January 7, 2023, <https://genius.com/Blue-ivy-saint-jhn-beyonce-and-wizkid-brown-skin-girl-lyrics>.

Eurocentric hair is often favored over natural hairstyles. This harmful portrayal has faced resistance from African American communities, particularly Black women.³⁵ Through her song, Beyoncé uplifts young brown-skinned girls and women, encouraging them to embrace and love their natural hair. By singing: “I love everything about you, from your nappy curls / To every single curve, your body natural,” she celebrates the beauty and uniqueness of Black women’s hair and bodies.

In the film’s final track “BLACK PARADE,” Beyoncé proudly references various elements across the African continent and its diaspora. She mentions “Waist beads from Yoruba,” highlighting the cultural significance of this adornment. Additionally, she acknowledges the wealth of Mansa Musa, the former emperor of Mali, symbolizing the historical prosperity of Africa. These references evoke a sense of pride and connection to the motherland, leading Beyoncé to sing: “Ooh, motherland, motherland, motherland, motherland drip on me,” expressing her deep reverence for the continent and its rich heritage.³⁶

Black Is King encourages Afrodiasporic communities to reconnect with their African roots, as Beyoncé envisions a unified community. However, it is important to recognize that the portrayal of ‘Africa’ in the film is a constructed concept, as highlighted by Efoui-Delplanque. Within *Black Is King*, ‘Africa’ becomes a central topic of discussion among the community. This observation gives rise to terms like *Wakandification* and *motherlandization*, which challenge the objectification of Africa and explore how African American creatives represent the continent culturally. Efoui-Delplanque concludes that the film presents a “melancholic diasporic monologue” rather than a dialogue between individuals of African origin across the continent and its diaspora. While *Black Is King* offers an alternative perspective on Africa and its diaspora, aiming to dismantle prevailing hegemonic narratives, it also revisits certain ahistorical, exoticized, and primitivist imagery that the creators aim to dismantle.³⁷

³⁵ Gail A. Dawson, Katherine A. Karl, and Joy V. Peluchette, “Hair Matters: Toward Understanding Natural Black Hair in the Workplace,” *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies* 26, no. 3 (2019): 389. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1548051819848998>.

³⁶ Efoui-Delplanque, “Imagining Africa,” 205.

³⁷ *Ibid.* 211-212.

Conclusion

Black Is King is filled with Pan-Africa elements and serves as a vibrant celebration of Blackness. This paper focused on the portrayal of Pan-Africanism within the film. To address this, the study analyzed the presence of Pan-African elements through symbolism and lyricism. According to Abegunrin and Abidde, Pan-Africanism aims to unite Black individuals worldwide by (1) challenging Western dominance; (2) empowering Africans to enhance their economic, social, and political circumstances; (3) enabling global Africans to assert their rightful position in the global system; and (4) upholding the fundamental principles of equality found in major religions.

Building on the research project by Raphaëlle Efoui-Delplanque, and Christin Smith and Loren Saxton Coleman, this paper attempted to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on Pan-African elements in the film. *Black Is King* is a powerful statement of the importance of representation for African Americans and it serves as a reminder of the importance of Black culture and heritage. Through visuals, music, and storytelling, the film celebrates the richness of African culture and its importance for people of African descent.

Black Is King utilizes symbolism to emphasize the importance of ancestral remembrance for the African diaspora. By incorporating biblical imagery and revisiting spaces of oppression, the visual album challenges historical limitations imposed on Black bodies. This unification of Black people globally confronts Western dominance and presents an Afrodiasporic aesthetic, countering the notion of African cultures and countries as primitive. The lyrics on the album convey Pan-African messages of empowerment, encouraging the African diaspora to take control of their narrative and embrace their African identity. The overarching message is that Black is beautiful, as highlighted in the songs “NILE” and “BLACK SKIN GIRL,” promoting Black excellence and inspiring young Black individuals to strive for success. This unity among Black people provides them with the psychological tools to improve their economic, social, and political circumstances.

In conclusion, *Black Is King* serves as an important reminder of the ongoing struggle for African American rights and equality. The film features powerful messages about the fight for justice, reclaiming identity, and embracing heritage. Director Beyoncé’s words, “We are all in this together,” resonate deeply. The film also challenges harmful tropes and stereotypes of Blackness perpetuated in the media. By showcasing the beauty and strength of Black individuals, it sends a resounding message about the significance of representation and acceptance. *Black Is King* stands as a compelling call to action and a celebration of Black culture.

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