"BITCH I'M BACK BY POPULAR DEMAND"

Gender Identity and Different Feminist Discourses in Beyoncé's Music

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Abstract

We live in a time when human rights are still not given and minorities, namely anyone who does not belong to the white Western cigendered male universe. Feminism has played a fundamental role in changing regime of patriarchy and achieve equality between humans in all the levels. Throughout the years, feminism has been influencing people according to different societal needs and the changing times. That led to the emergence of several different waves and types of feminism, such as postfeminism, black feminism and popular feminism. Especially, media have played a critical role in the emergence of all those kinds of feminism since they constituted the source of the need of feminism since they function as a lifestyle resource with anything follows, such as the representation of femininity and the female body in different media texts.

In this research I am presenting different notions of feminism and how those evolved throughout the time. Following that I am focusing on how femininity is represented in the popular music industry aiming to understand how different feminist discourses and the female body is portrayed in Beyoncé's music. Beyonce is amongst the most influential personalities worldwide and has been for years a huge supporter of feminism dealing with issues of gender and societal construction of femininity and black womanhood. She along with her husband, Jay-Z, have built a colossus in the global music industry, hence they are always on the spotlight of not only the fans but also the critics. Scholars and theorists of feminism, amongst them the radical feminist bell hooks, have been targeting Beyonce for years with the accusation that she cannot be a representative of feminism because of being hypersexualized, objectifying the female body, idealizing the institution of family and barely having knowledge of black femininity. And all those accusations are built on the base that She is trying to build a feminist persona through capitalist practices.

In this research I am analyzing ten music videos of Beyonce's discography from 2010 to 2016 in order to understand how different feminist discourses are represented in her work through the method of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis through the eyes of Cultural Studies in my attempt to reach to the conclusion of whether and how she manages to promote a balanced kind of femininity and create her own, in a sense, feminism.

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1. INTRODUCTION

"Ladies, are we smart? Are we strong? Have we had enough of this bullshit?", Beyoncé asks the female audience during her Coachella performance urging them to raise their "middle fingers up" (Beyoncé & Burke, 2019). Beyoncé Knowles has always been a performer and singer, who tries and achieves to fight patriarchy through her musical work. Her album "Beyoncé" in 2014 had a huge influence in society and particularly in black women to whom she delivered through her lyrics black womanhood and black women's sexuality (Larasati, 2016). Moreover, her visual album "Lemonade" on 2016 brought significant attention to Black feminists, who identified its important symbolism for the black women's community (Salzano, 2019). But what really constitutes feminism? Should we examine the case of Beyoncé from the feminist perspective or should we employ different offshoots of this movement? In this research, I intend to answer the following question: How are different feminist discourses are represented in Beyoncé's music?

1.1. Academic and Societal relevance

Feminism has always been a domain, which occupies every single tile of the Art mosaic: music, films, paintings, photography etc. However, it is significantly interesting to study the case of music since it constitutes an art that can send messages through lyrics, tones and music videos and that is what makes it intriguing. As Lyn Mikel Brown and Dana Edell (2016, pp.56) distinctively mention "Words on a screen, on a page, on a protest sign are stamped and branded there, still and frozen". On one hand, oral speeches can be lost in the air and time. On the other hand, songs are words in a melody, and melody contains beats and rhythms, which can make people feel intense, move their bodies and, consequently absorb the words into their brains. "We listen to and absorb music, not just intellectually, but corporeally" (Brown & Edell, 2016, pp.56).

Studies on popular music have shown that lyrics on most of the songs of this very genre project the power over, objectification of and violence against women (Bretthauer MS; Zimmerman & Banning, 2008). Thus, we can redefine the relations of

gender since the basis of the audience of popular music are youngsters and specifically adolescents, (Bretthauer MS; Zimmerman & Banning, 2008). This kind of audience is intensely exposed to media, which target their age, such as MTV for traditional media and YouTube for online communication. Specifically, pop music is a genre amongst others under the umbrella of popular culture that is distributed through a variety of media and, as a consequence, women who are employed in this industry have the power to send a number of messages to their listeners (Levande, 2008). Perry (2003) in his study about the identity and image of women in Hip Hop argues that musical artists are versatile, namely the texts that concern them are not only lyrics and notes, but also interviews and videos and all of those together are fused for us to form impressions about them.

But what are the texts that have been observed so far from the work of pop stars, either those concerning lyrics or video clips? When Hurley tries to describe the sexual iconography of such music videos, she talks of women who have long fit shaved legs suggestively touching in an affectionate way their bodies in the same way gameshow models caress cars and appliances. "Flowing hair. Leather, vinyl, chains, lingerie, high heels, stockings, mini skirts and dresses. Bikinis" (Hurley, 1994, pp. 330).

Those are some of the characteristics framing many of the music videos one of the most inspiring and successful divas of the popular music industry, Beyoncé. However, there are several ways to read and decode those characteristics depending on which perspective one views those music videos, and when we talk about Beyoncé we talk about black feminism, post-feminism and neoliberal feminism, notions that I am going to analyze on the next chapter. What we need to keep in mind is that Beyoncé is one of the most powerful women in the industry, which makes her easily capable of saying whatever she wants without considering controversial consequences, which makes her a persona with high influence on the audience who can and does proliferate the cultural circuit (Durham, 2012).

Beyoncé Knowles-Carter constitutes an ofttimes awarded R&B/Pop artist, actress, businesswoman, and international icon and has always been dragging the

attention of celebrity-oriented media and websites, however, she has managed to keep her personal life private. Beyonce had for years been in a relationship with the rapper Jay-Z, but she was actually not ready to admit it. When they officialized their romantic connection by getting married in 2008, she would not talk about their togetherness even when asked directly in interviews. Being so secret of her personal life the audience and media were shocked by the public revelation she did during the August 2011 broadcast of the MTV Music Video Awards (VMAs), that she was pregnant to her first child. The news blew the minds of her fans, who had been "twitting" 8,868 posts per second, hence, creating a new record by taking the first position from the coverage of the soccer match between the U.S. female team against the Japanese one, which reached the score of 7,196 tweets per second (Smith 2011).

Several celebrities in the past have become mothers and projected their pregnant bodies in public, yet Beyoncé has structured certain media narratives concerning black femininity, sexuality, marriage, family and her career before and after giving birth, which are worth interrogating. Beyoncé's music and persona express and raise questions around gender politics, and that is a feature which constitutes her a "representative character"; a figure through which girls and young women, specifically, "organize and give meaning and direction to their lives" (Mask, 2009). Consequently, the way she acts, moves and behaves could be considered as a role model that can be imitated by the audience.

Discussions around Beyoncé's pregnancy and her going in a very short time back to work elicit an occasionally problematic discourse regarding how modern women live (Chatman, 2015). Specifically, women are empowered, autonomous, self-governing citizens and they are able to deal with different things simultaneously along with growing children and having a job, traits which are in essence valuable in a global-capitalist society, which seeks for an active population of not only producers but also consumers. Even though there is a great value in discourses about women's empowerment, when opportunities are projected as unrestricted and unhindered it is likely to happen a deletion of the inherent social context where those opportunities

emerge or shut off. In other words, in order to exemplify this argument, it worth mentioning that when it comes to systematic oppression against women when they suffer from discrimination and sex segregation in the workforce as well as domestic abuse and attacks on reproductive rights, then we cannot talk about female autonomy and empowerment. Discourses like those tend to flourish due to the depoliticized rhetoric of postfeminism (Chatman, 2015).

Postfeminism is very controversial even amongst feminist theories. It is usually described as the "backlash" against feminism (Faludi, 1992), the fusion of feminism with incorporates postmodernism, poststructuralism, and postcolonialism (Brooks, 1997), as well as the time of the history when feminism ends and postfeminism emerges. I draw upon two definitions of postfeminism cited by Angela McRobbie and Rosalind Gill. Angela McRobbie describes postfeminism as a discourse that communicates "a double entanglement" with feminism, whereby "feminism is taken into account in order that it can be understood as having passed away" (2011, p. 179–180). Rosalind Gill shares McRobbie's perspective on post-feminism as "a double entanglement" with feminism, but also categorizes it as a sensibility, in which "notions of autonomy, choice and self-improvement sit side-by-side with surveillance, discipline, and the vilification of those who make the 'wrong' 'choices'" (2007, p. 163). As a discourse and a sensibility, postfeminism embodies the contradictory nature of women's experience now that they have presumably achieved social equality.

1.2.   Research Question and Sub-questions

In this study I analyzed the basic notions of feminism, black feminism and post-feminism from the view of Cultural Studies and I discussed how is feminism represented in the popular music industry. Following this, I examined how these very ideas are established and represented in the popular culture. Moreover, to make this research tangible I studied the case of Beyoncé, being a powerful pop diva fighting against patriarchy throughout her work, and how she manages to promote her idea of femininity and different notions of feminism. Consequently, I choose to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

R.Q.: How are different notions of feminism are represented in Beyoncé's music?

Subquestions: a) How does Beyoncé deal with her black identity?

b) How does Beyoncé represent postfeminist discourses in her work?

c) How does Beyoncé deal with the female body?

1.3. Chapter Overview

To achieve this, I conducted a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on fifteen music videos, including live performances of Beyoncé's work during the period from 2009 until 2016, when she released her most feminist work, going through the visual and lyrical content. Hence, in the following chapter I am going to show you how different scholars and theorists explain and perceive different aspects of feminism. Following this I am explaining what the method I chose for my research is about and why I opted to use Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis discussing, after that, my perception of Beyoncé's ten different media texts. Finally, I am presenting the conclusions I came up with after conducting this research where I also state my personal point of view and opinion about Beyoncé as a feminist persona.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Cultural Studies

In order to analyze this social issue regarding these aspects, the research adopts the lens of Cultural Studies, which enquiries the audience in respect of the interaction it has with the artist. Barker (2008) suggests the "active audience" as the main framework for the audience research. He particularly mentions that "the active audience 'tradition' suggests that audiences are not cultural dopes but are active producers of meaning from within their own cultural context" (Barker, p. 326) and this statement worked as a reaction to the suggestions which wanted audiences to be passive viewers. In other words, the audience makes the meanings of the television products, however, there is diversity between the different audiences, which come from different domestic and cultural context (Barker, 2008).

Cultural studies emerged during the 1980s aiming to interrogate discourses around culture, society and politics (Kellner, 1995). While British scholars had been enquiring youth subcultures, they tried to show the way culture can build up diverse kinds of identity and group membership for the youth. According to cultural studies, media culture can affect the society in a rate that people formulate their mindset and behavior or even their identities. However, societies usually tend to act like tabula rasa and absorb like sponges the dictates of media culture without further processing the information risking to "mainstream" themselves and uncritically adapting to the dominant fashion and values (Kellner, 2018). Nonetheless, on the very opposite there are subcultural groups and individuals, who tend to reject this kind of norms which media culture tries to spread and, hence, create their own identities. For example, those who comply with those norms and espouse fashion codes, behaviors, and political ideologies construct their identities as such to fit in particular social groups in the modern American culture, such as White, middle-class, conservative American men, or lesbian African American women. On the other hand, there are social groups who tend

to follow different codes regarding fashion and behavior which do not fit the mainstream ones, but are against standard models, such as such as punk culture or Latino subcultures (Kellner, 2018).

According to the domain of cultural studies culture should be analyzed within the social relations and system through which culture is produced and consumed and that the study of culture is consequently closely related to the study of society, politics, and economics. Cultural studies demonstrate the way media culture expresses and perpetuates the prevailing values, political ideologies, and social developments and novelties of the era. Subsequently, popular culture industries such television and music are usually liberal or conservative, or occasionally articulate more radical or oppositional opinions and can be contradictory and equivocal as far as their meanings and messages are concerned (Kellner, 2018).

In this study it is important to discuss cultural studies since it provides us tools that enable the audience to read and perceive culture critically. Furthermore, cultural studies has the power to undermine distinctions between "high" and "low" culture taking a wide range of cultural artifacts into consideration, studying domains such as soap operas to literature and opera, and at the same time it does not build up specific elite cultural hierarchies or canons (Kellner, 2018). Scholars in earlier decades had been thinking of culture as something explicitly literary and elitist, whereas media and popular culture emerged as banal and trashy cultural products. However, such distinctions are hard to maintain, thus cultural studies avoids splitting culture into high and low, since such practices may as a facade for normative aesthetic valuations and, often a political program. Storey put it simply when he said that we need to attempt to see beyond the things that habits stand for, to see through the statements to understand their true meanings, since those could mean something absolutely opposite of what we expect them to, and spot the differing pressures of emotion behind idiomatic phrases and ritualistic observances. He adds to that we must comprehend that mass publications are linked to commonly accepted attitudes, and the way they are modifying those attitudes and how they are meeting resistance (Storey, 2019).

The traditional critique of pop music investigates the production, exchange and consumption of pop music as a source of subcultural identity which concentrates on subcultural style, embodiment and belonging (Rojek, 2011) Now, the high/low culture distinction is a trait of the postmodern era. According to Stuart Hall (2013) the blurring between the high and low culture regarding music is conditionally pointed out in the quotation across the difference. In other words, "the pop recycling the classical music and the art re-use of pop are taken to mark an underlying shift of aesthetic sensibility" (Hall, 2013). The distinction is mainly based in one's perception since that gives birth to other distinctions like intellectual and sensual appreciation of the cultural product and to what extent we can disassociate the emotion from the feeling and the body from the mind (Hall, 2013).

However, music does not only concern feeling, but also judgement since the quotations are not plain texts, but they become alive through the performance, and thus are given a meaning. For instance, different songs composed in the pop, rap, or rock music industry may consist of texts akin to each other, but the distinct performing techniques which lie on the different musical backgrounds can give birth to divergent meanings (Hall, 2013). That said, our identity is not something growing in us but external stimuluses which let us invade into imaginative cultural narratives.

In other words, cultural studies gives us the opportunity to critically articulate every kind of cultural texts avoiding bias and it opens the way toward more differentiated political, rather than aesthetic, valuations of cultural artifacts in which one tries to observe critical and oppositional from conformist and conservative moments in a given cultural artifact (Kellner, 2018).

Furthermore, cultural studies pays close attention to issues concerning the representation of race, gender, sexuality, and class and criticizes rhetoric supporting several forms of oppression. Hence, a multiculturalist program can show the way culture reproduces certain forms of racism, sexism, and biases against members of inferior classes, social groups, or alternative silenced lifestyles. Multiculturalism acknowledges the value of distinct sorts of culture and cultural groups, suggesting that every race,

gender, or sexuality that does not apply to the privileged type of human, namely Blacks, Latinos or LGBTQ+, have their own validity and importance in the society (Kellner, 2018). A rebelling form of multiculturalism aims to demonstrate how distinct voices and experiences have been left out of the mainstream culture, and tries to help in promoting diversity regarding opinions, experiences, and cultural forms from groups, which do not belong to the mainstream sphere (Kellner, 2018). It motivates society to filter everything around them and rethink of the norms in the humanities concerning their limits and purposes (Chicago Cultural Studies Group, 1992). Consequently, the conservatives who aim to preserve the existing social values which privilege the White Eurocentric heterosexual male tend to expostulate violently against multiculturalism throughout the history concerning education, arts and the limits of free expression (Kellner, 2018).

Hall (1973) suggests that there is a crucial interconnection between the societal and symbolic structures. In particular, he speaks of a circulation of meanings and ideologies which through what he calls "sign-vehicles" are consumed by the society in which are finally established to create new "sign vehicles"; this practice brings us to the encoding/decoding model (Bødker, 2016). Cultural studies propels a critical multiculturalist politics and media pedagogy that targets to "teach" the society the way power and dominance are "encoded" in cultural texts and how we could use contemporary media for contrasted pedagogical or political purposes (Kellner, 2018). Finally, it is worth mentioning that a critical approach of cultural studies has managed to state the way individuals can abstain from the prevailing encoded meanings and be critical towards them creating their own alternative readings and forming new identities and social relations (Kellner, 2018).

2.2. "Who Run The World?" – Talking Feminism

Adichie (2011) put it simply when she said that thousands of years ago men dominated the world because back then those who survived and could climb the hierarchy were the physically strong ones. However, now, things have turned 180 degrees around and traits such as creativity and intelligence are pivotal to earn the leading role.

Gender and sexualization constitute significant aspects of culture. There are often questions about the conditions under which those two elements exist in society, how they are expressed and to what extent those are appropriate for the conformation of commonly accepted moral codes (Sarikakis & Tsaliki, 2011). Throughout the years feminism has been a movement that examines how civilizations and cultures deal with gender.

Hodgson-Wright (2001) defines feminism in its early time, namely between 1550-1700 as an attempt to content with patriarchy in its many manifestation, which Weedon (1987) defines as "the power relations in which women's interests are subordinated to the interests of men". These power relations refer to sex segregation in the workplace as well as the social pressure of growing a family as the only experience that should fulfill the woman's life targets. In other words, patriarchy is based on the social meaning given to biological sexual difference (Weedon, 1987, p. 2). Societies like our own endemically exist because they are based on patriarchal relations and actions like equal opportunities legislation can only affect things at the margins. This point of view is expressed by radical and socialist feminist as a cultural studies feminist approach. (Strinati, 2004).

However, watching this condition from a different point of view we can observe that not all men are privileged and that such an assumption runs the risk of becoming a generalization. Even back at those times there were blue-blooded women, who used to enjoy more socio-economic power than a male apprentice, however she enjoyed less than a man of equivalent rank, just as the male apprentice enjoyed more power than a woman of a similar social standing (Hodgson-Wright, 2001). Most people think of

feminism as a movement which strives to make women equal to men. Yet, here lies a question that most people do not take into consideration; which men do women want to be equal to? How can we talk about gender equality when there is no equality between people of the same gender as well (hooks, 2015)? Hence, this is a simplistic definition of women's liberation which is basically inherent in a rejection of race and class, which in combination with sexism determine the extent to which an individual will be discriminated against, exploited, or oppressed. In particular, bourgeois white women interested in women's rights issues have been satisfied with simple definitions for obvious reasons since they are privileged when it comes to race or class (hooks, 2015).

On 29 June 1998, the cover of Time magazine featured the infamous question, "Is feminism dead?" (Kelly & Pomerantz, 2009). The feminist movement continues to be one of the most powerful struggles for social justice taking place in the world today (hooks, 2015). Feminism is about women's liberation. Precisely, women who fight against sexism create a collective rebellion discussing with each other, which later leads to the emergence of the feminist movement (hooks, 2015). Nevertheless, sexism, violation, exploitation, and oppression may have reduced radically, but they have not been eliminated yet and with the development of the digital technologies hate speech is easy to spread. Gender relations are a significant part in every aspect of human experience. Subsequently, the experience of gender relations for anyone and the construction of gender as a social category are formed by the interactions of gender relations and other social relations such as class and race. Hence, gender relations have no fixed essence, but they vary both within and over time instead (Flax, 1987).

Feminists researching popular culture have come from a broad range of disciplines but over the last decade the term 'feminist media studies' has come to support several approaches to popular culture that have the political project of feminism at their core. Nowadays feminism has become globally something significantly popular as well as commodified. Feminism is now expressed on T-shirts, in a movie, in the lyrics of a pop song, in an inspirational Instagram post, in an awards ceremony speech. Feminism is "popular" in at least three senses: One, feminism manifests in

discourses and practices that are circulated in popular and commercial media, such as digital spaces like blogs, Instagram, and Twitter, as well as broadcast media (Banet-Weiser, 2018). As such, these discourses have an accessibility that is not limited to academic enclaves or niche groups. Two, the "popular" of popular feminism signifies the condition of being liked or admired by like-minded people and groups, as popularity. And, finally, three, the "popular" is, as cultural theorist Stuart Hall (1998) argued, a terrain of struggle, a space where competing demands for power battle it out. Consequently, popular culture seems to include many different types of feminism and some of these feminisms tend to become more visible than others. Popular feminism is net worked across all media platforms, some connecting with synergy, others struggling for priority and visibility and it has given us the chance to imagine a culture in which feminism, in every form, does not need to be defended; it is accessible, even admired (Banet-Weiser, 2018).

According to popular misogynistic discourse, men are suffering because of women in general, and specifically feminism. Women occupy space, jobs, desire, families, childrearing, and power and for misogynists this condition is considered as taking the power away from men. In this historical moment, popular feminism is in defense against, among other things, structural gendered inequalities. Popular misogynistic discourse assumes a defensive stance against feminism and its putative gains (Gamble, 2001).

Now going back in time, in the nineteenth century women's literary work was considered as inferior to that of men's and that was hypothetically the cause of the emergence of mass culture. Men were linked to high culture and subsequently women embodied the role of the reader, whereas men the one of the writers (Strinati, 2004). According to Modleski (1986) the way we think and feel about mass culture is explicitly linked to notions of the feminine that the need for a feminist critique becomes obvious at every level of the debate. And here lies a concern that women are accountable for the emergence of mass culture and its imminent results to the society since men are

intertwined with art and high culture, whereas mass culture is reflected on women and femininity (Modleski, 1986).

The role of media is more complex in constructing the gender roles. In particular, they do not simply show women in stereotypical roles, but they amplify the process of defining and shaping the fundamental meanings of femininity and masculinity. From this point of view, these are not identities which exist undoubtedly elsewhere, and then come to be deformed by popular culture. They are, in part at least, constructed and reproduced through popular culture by mass media institutions (Strinati, 2004).

Feminist research, in order to support that female audiences tend to be a significant link in the construction chain of textual meanings and pleasures, reacted against the simplistic conception of the process of mass communication as one of linear transmission from sender to receiver. In essence women do not simply take in or reject media messages, but use and interpret them according to their own social, cultural and individual circumstances. I other words, the audience makes sense of the images they see and what we need to highlight here is that the message does not have the total monopoly on meaning (Gamble, 2001).

Here it is worth mentioning that feminist media studies have achieved something significant over the last three decades, namely that it is now impossible to make any sense of the mass media without paying attention to gender. Early feminist media research on women and popular culture thought of mass mediated communications as a considerable source for the general reproduction of patriarchal social relations whether through representation in the text or representation in the labour force (Gamble, 2001).

2.3. "You wake up flawless" – Talking Postfeminism

However, considering Beyoncé as a part of the neoliberal corporate structure, a connection to postfeminism emerges. However, there is no clear definition of what exactly post-feminism represents. According to the popular media, emerged around 1990. Many theorists support that feminism has failed and, hence, is dead (Ebeling,

1990), whereas others believe that it is suffering an "identity crisis" (Kaminer, 1993) which constitutes a foreshadowing of the end. At the same time other theorists speak of the fear of feminism (Hogeland, 1994) or a new-feminist mystique (Friedan, 1991). According to the public discourse, something known as "postfeminism" now exists.

Gerhard (2005) suggests that part of the term's unsteadiness is its contiguous limits with several related, and themselves relatively unstable, terms. According to Coppock and Richter (1995) postfeminism came out of the nowhere. At first, there were different kinds and waves of feminism per se represented by diverse political points of view boosted by respective different campaign strategies. The leap to postfeminism occurred mysteriously. However, in postfeminist society it is suggested that women have 'made it'; that emancipation has been achieved and women have personal and sexual autonomy (Brooks, 2015).

Postfeminism is a concept full of antitheses. Some hate it whereas some other celebrate its emergence which happened by several cultural, academic and political contexts, from popular journalism and media to feminist analyses, postmodern theories and neo-liberal rhetoric. When Genz and Brabon (2009) speak of postfeminism they prefer to ignore the hyphen between the two words in order to credit and endow postfeminism with a certain cultural independence that acknowledges its existence as a conceptual entity in its own right. Nevertheless, the directionality and meaning of the "post" prefix are far from settled, although seems to bring advancement in the foreground insisting on a time "after" feminism (Genz & Brabon, 2009). In particular, "post" could mean an absolute breach, hence, according to Amelia Jones (1990) "what is post but the signification of a kind of termination – a temporal designation of whatever it prefaces as ended, done with, obsolete" (p. 8).

A significant number of people claim that feminism is antiquated, and we should take a step forward and discuss post-feminism. Post-feminism is a statement very tangible in the popular culture, which provides several representations of girls being hypersexualized and girly leading to the emergence of panics and concerns about the sexualization of the female body. In other words, popular culture provides information

which, to an extent, urges girls to learn about sexiness, cuteness, and hotness, absorbing clues from magazines to embrace images that would make them attractive (Gill, 2011). A version of power feminism which is called "do-me feminism" considers sexual freedom as the key to female independence and emancipation (Genz & Brabon, 2009). In particular, Ruth Shalit (1998) argues that:

> the do-me feminist is plucky, confident, upwardly mobile, and extremely horny. She is alert to the wounds of race and class and gender, but she knows that feminism is safe for women who love men and bubble baths and kittenish outfits; that the right ideology and the best sex are not mutually exclusive. She knows that she is as smart and as ambitious as a guy, but she's proud to be a girl and girlish (p. 133).

Consequently, this type of feminist has a totally different relationship with femininity since she is not trapped in nor rejects it as pre-feminists and feminists used to do accordingly (Genz & Brabon, 2009). She is reconciled with her sexuality and does not incriminate sex, but she loves to get involved in a sexual intercourse. For some observers, postfeminism represents a celebratory period of sexual enlightenment in which men and women are exploring their sexual identities in equal and emancipatory ways (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012).

According to McRobbie (2008) in the West there is a new sexual contract for girls, whom having been allowed entry into civic society must now perform a "postfeminist masquerade" where they are subject to more intense technologies of physical perfection and visual display as "feminine subjects" in a current "fashion and beauty" system that privileges oppressive forms of idealized white femininity. This performance involves hyper-sexualized demonstration of sexy femininity or put differently a predominance of porno-chic aesthetic to counterbalance the implication that girls may come closer to the boys' model, given girls' increased presence in and over "success" in education and paid work (Ringrose & Eriksson Barajas, 2011).

Moreover, it is worth mentioning that the pop music industry is "a highly significant part of their everyday lives and pop music celebrities are accordingly a widely

accessed resource for constructing identity" (Gill, 2011, pp.136). Subsequently, the media has become the key site for defining codes of sexual conduct. It casts judgment and establishes the rules of play. Through these numerous channels of communication, feminism is constantly discredited (McRobbie, 2004).

The perception of a modern life nowadays is the sum of empirical regularities and patterns at play in a specific cultural context. Post-feminism has come to signify an analytical term that encompasses these patterns and renders them postfeminist themselves. What Gill (2016) calls 'psychic life of post-feminism' takes the shape of individualism, agency, and choice as driving forces for leading the modern life; the discursive gap between structural inequalities and cultural influence; the shift from the objectification of women to their alleged empowerment within the imperatives of the beauty industries; the focus on women's bodies in an intensified way; and the refashioning of subjectivity based on the make-over paradigm.

While postfeminism incorporates, and naturalizes women's liberation, it suggests that it commodifies in essence emancipation through illustrations of self-reflexive "material girls", young stylish consumers. Problematically in their devotion to a "liberated" performance, women are demanded to engage in continuous, reflexive body projects, tacitly sticking to the cultural "ideals" of femininity perpetuated by the media (Brooks, 2015). According to Brooks (2015) "to be culturally valued as a woman, it seems that one has to be slim, young, and stylish, in correlation with the performance of female celebrities, accomplished postfeminist women".

However, it is worth mentioning that McRobbie (2009) in her research concludes that post-feminism is a wave that undermines feminism by undoing feminism, whereas Faludi along with Wolf put antifeminism on the pop cultural map and did so as avowed feminists (Gerhard,2005).

Beyoncé comes from a specific socioeconomic background which provided her with the means to become an ideal post-feminist subject, having been raised in a middle-class family. However, calling her a postfeminist turns out to be controversial for two reasons (Chatman, 2015). First and foremost, in her post pregnancy life, Beyoncé

has embraced feminism explicitly in interviews and stage, performances and taking part in many campaigns which were created in order to bring global awareness to women's issues. Nevertheless, here we need to interrogate and take into account the numerous ways the media frames her, and she frequently constructs her persona in interviews and through her music, within the discourses and sensibilities of postfeminism. Second, despite the fact that some black feminists argue and insist on postfeminism having nothing to do with black women (hooks, 2000), postfeminism is also perceived by many as the end of feminism (Chatman, 2015).

According to Anita Harris (2004) the ideal postfeminist subject is equal to the so-called "can do girl", who is independent, successful and tries to preserve the consumer life by building up a career. On the contrary there is the "at risk girl", who usually relents in disordered consumption like drugs or sex and is often characterized as susceptible due to circumstances of life like poverty or living in violent and dangerous communities. Hence, Chatman (2015) suggests that this latter type must put forth sufficient effort to overcome personal limitations "due to the contemporary neoliberal discourses that produce a culture of meritocracy". The consequence of all this for black women is that they can hardly become or be characterized as postfeminist subjects due to class and other socioeconomic conditions.

When Beyonce was hosted in the 2011 Harper's Bazaar UK issue she talked of a new definition of feminism saying that she would not set herself in the position of defining it, since she feels that this is being developed in her naturally, reaching the point of constructing it as something she lives for. She finished joking that she needs to come up with a new word for feminism suggesting "bootylicious" (Theobald 2011). Despite the fact that "bootylicious" was mentioned humorously, according to the journalist, it actually applies to what Beyonce attempts to promote through her music, namely women's empowerment through the freedom of the body. Having such an obsession with the body and feeling like maintaining and surveilling it led to her identification as a postfeminist (Gill, 2007). Although it is constitutive for women to accept their physical characteristics, the type of feminism offered by "bootylicious

feminism" (Martin, 2011) lacks of politics regarding women's oppression, such as legislative efforts to find new definitions for the notions of rape, segregation in the workforce, and the battle over providing women with access to contraceptives.

2.4. "Okay ladies now let's get in formation" – Talking Black Feminism

Nevertheless, when we talk Beyoncé, we do not only refer to postfeminism, but also to matters of race, namely black feminism, which she has been blamed as a bad representative of. Black liberation movement and anti – capitalist movements credit and respect the differences in experience of those with the least political power within the movements, particularly that of Black women living simultaneously under gender, racial, sexual, and class oppression. That distinct movement acknowledges the interweaving ways that race, class, gender, and sexuality impact the life outcomes of Black women (The Combahee River Collective, 2014).

According to Du Bois in Collins (2000) race, class and nation are firstly related to the social hierarchies that shaped African American access to status property and power and then to personal identity putting Black political economy in a context of mutually constructing systems of race class and nation. But, what about gender? Black women did not only need to deal with poverty and being second-class citizens but also being females and for Du Bois there were three revolutions at work, namely women, labor and black folk and "black women embodies all three of these revolutions in their historical roles in their family, the community and the labor force" (Collins, 2000). As hooks (1992) argues, black women were taught to overrule their womanhood since the racist and sexist society had conditioned them to underestimate their femaleness; "we were asked to deny a part of ourselves - and we did". They needed to be resilient in order to afford the oppressions, whereas black males were taught to be as tough as possible since they had to stand on their own feet to strive toward their rights and life (Larasati, 2016).

In that case, Black women are erased in the conceptualization, identification and remediation of race and sex discrimination by decreasing inquiry to the experiences of otherwise-privileged members of the group. Specifically, in cases of race segregation,

discrimination is usually viewed in terms of sex - or class - privileged Blacks; in sex discrimination cases, the focus is on race- and class-privileged women (Crenshaw, 1989). However, it seems that Black women are often excluded from feminist theory as well as antiracist policy discourse since both are affirmed on a separate set of experiences that sometimes does not relate to the interaction of race and gender and unless intersectionality is taken into account there will be no specific way in which Black women are subordinated (Crenshaw, 1989).

So, what about feminism when it comes to the combination of womanhood and blackness? Black feminism's foundations concern recognizing social differences and challenging the determinant to the freedom and justice for people of any background. The rebellious force behind Black feminism is the necessary urge to stop the oppression against black women, because they are not able to rely upon the power of whiteness, patriarchy, or generational wealth to elevate their humanity (Davis, 2018). Black feminist theory is an analytic that does not accept the redistribution of the "master's tools" (Lorde, 1984), or colonial mechanisms of domination, to certain members of oppressed groups that would, for instance, let lighter -skinned Black Americans enjoy more white socioeconomic privileges against darker-skinned Black Americans. Rather black feminist theory provides space broad enough for thorough consideration and education on differences within the Black community that mark boundaries of the potentiality of all Black subjects. (Davis, 2018)

Black women have been taught to feel imperfect and inferior by their White masters during the era of slavery, for they subconsciously have built a perspective that black women are unacceptable the way they are (Larasati, 2016). Taylor (1999) also mentions that "the White as the dominant culture has racialised beauty; a beautiful woman according to the Whites is a woman who has features such as fair skin, thin body, light eye color, straight and light-colored hair, small nose, and slight bone structure", traits which are completely contrasting to the Black women's physiognomy which is characterized by dark skin, broad noses, full lips, and kinky hair (Larasati, 2016).

Hence, it seems that color plays a significant role in the identification of a woman's appearance, but Jeffri Anne Wilder (2015) suggests that it defines one's attitude as well. Wilder (2015) refers to the term "colorism", which she defines as "the unequal treatment and discrimination of individuals belonging to the same racial or ethnic minority group (e.g., African Americans) based upon difference in physical features—most notably skin complexion (color), but also facial features and hair texture". We can search for the origins of colorism back to slavery times of the African – American community when the darker – skinned slaves had been operating in the fields doing the hard physical work, whereas the lighter – skinned ones had been working on the interior performing domestic labor within the white master's property (Davis, 2018). It is worth mentioning that the black community even has its own code for the different shades of blackness. In particular, black women have associated lighter and darker shades with specific traits; "blue-black," "purple", "burnt" and other terms associated with darker skin tones were largely attached to negative connotations like "suspicious," "loud," "ghetto," "less intelligent", and "unattractive". In comparison, common terms for lighter skin tones like "redbone" and "high yellow" connoted attractiveness, amiability, and trustworthiness (Wilder, 2015).

Sex and race discrimination have ended up being defined in terms of the experiences of the privileged ones but for their racial or sexual characteristics. In other words, the paradigm of sex discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of white women, whereas the model of race discrimination tends to be based on the experiences of the most privileged Blacks. Consequently, concepts of race and sex discrimination are narrowly tailored to enfold only a few cases, none of which include discrimination against Black women (Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, black women are marginalized in the connection between antidiscrimination law and race and gender hierarchies. Crenshaw (1989) gives a very graphic representation of this condition comparing the hierarchical discrimination to a basement with people who are one on top of the other trying to climb on the top and reach the ceiling. Specifically, she describes an allegory. She suggests that we think of a basement, where all minorities

live according to their race, sexuality, class, age or physical ability. Those people are standing one over the other according to the number of disadvantages the socially obtain reaching the top, where only those disadvantaged by one factor are. Above the ceiling there are only people who enjoy their privileges. The only ones who can climb the stairs and reach the main floor are the less disadvantaged who can say that "but for" the ceiling. The ones on the bottom must struggle more to reach the ceiling and earn a chance to the upper floor (Crenshaw, 1989).

Now Beyoncé has been constantly questioned in terms of gender, racial, and even skin color politics in popular culture industry. Being one of the most successful musical artists and performers of the 21st century with a huge artistic musical and visual material, her work has repeatedly been linked to themes of female empowerment, financial independence, and sisterhood. Furthermore, Beyoncé's music and performances mirror her raising on the South and a loving relationship with Black America. Nonetheless, many critics have paid close attention to the "overly", as they call it, sexual nature of her performances, her advocating marriage and motherhood, the lack of direct engagement with racial politics, as well as her expressed Creole heritage, counterbalancing light skin privilege, and mainstream appeal to call Beyoncé's Black feminist qualifications into question. However, in February 2016 when she released and then performed on Super Bowl Sunday her single "Formation", then a national outbreak came about for its pro-Black, pro-woman message (Davis, 2017).

2.5. "Haunted" – Talking Feminism in Popular Music

Feminism experienced a great backlash on the field of global human rights and managed to form the agenda of those. Thereby popular music has played a major role since by nature it criticizes society's moral codes, hence, we could say that popular music has served feminism as such (Helferich, 2014). However, sexualization and objectification of women in music videos have operated as a constant barrier for the feminist movement, with the postfeminist framework enclosing a criticism about feminism and the idea of its activist act, as it had been taking place so far, not serving

any aim (Walser, 2015). Thus, cultural industries globally are subjects of concern and panic as far as how their products, from music to fashion to entertainment and "High Art", use and encourage the hyper-sexualization of women (Sarikakis & Tsaliki, 2011).

Music is one of the most significant arts in people's life since it plays multiple roles in an educational, social, emotional, even therapeutic level. According to cognitive social learning theory society and media constitute two aspects, which send powerful messages to the society managing to form relationship ideologies (Bretthauer MS; Zimmerman & Banning, 2008). Some people even develop a gender identity while being influenced by role models coming from family, education or media, such as singers or television stars. Nevertheless, speaking of popular music, which is a "youth" genre, we claim that it constitutes a model through which youngsters may form gendered identities, however, feminist theorists assume that power is never distributed equally between sexes, even in the media culture (Bretthauer MS; Zimmerman & Banning, 2008).

Feminist theories consider popular media to be conduits of problematic relationships and attitudes as far as genders are concerned. Specifically, they claim that popular media distribute violent content projecting sexual assaulting behaviors towards women. In other words, they assume that women nowadays need to face the violence by men not only in the society per se, but also in the media since the latter have the power to form identities and develop personalities, as previously said, and this can end up being problematic if popular entertainment distributes information concerning sex, drugs, alcohol, and violence, habits, and attitudes which youngsters are likely to imitate (Bretthauer MS; Zimmerman & Banning, 2008).

Although postfeminism supports and has built its ideals upon women's liberation, it also commodifies emancipation through the images of self-reflexive "material girls", young stylish consumers (brooks, 2015). Media have been perpetuating specific images and cultural ideals of femininity, namely reflexive body projects, which women are required to follow in their adherence to a "liberated" performance.

Apparently, one needs to be slim, young, and stylish, respective to the performance of female celebrities in order to be culturally valued as a woman (brooks, 2015).

Brooks (2015) suggests that the cultural industry uses postfeminism and the respective aspects of age, celebrity culture and gender aiming to the emergence of a regime which represents and privileges a certain kind of femininity, although it celebrates hedonism and choice. Based on Gill's (2007) perspective that living in a postmodern consumer society, gender has been politicised by a regime of representation and thus the body plays the most significant role of satisfaction in an "ideal" gender performance, Brooks (2015) argues that women are in essence obliged to follow "reflexive projects of the self", in a "continuous state of self-creation and bodily maintenance to conform to their generational ideal".

Baudrillard (1970) has emphasized the striking beauty of the female body in the consumerist world, meaning that the cultural industry has institutionalized the discourse of an ideal body. According to Tyler and Bennett (2010) celebrity culture has had a parallel course with everyday life, let alone in contemporary life in which it constitutes a fundamental trait. Consequently, celebrity culture is undoubtedly and inevitably one of the most, if not *the* most, significant factor in forming values in the social life initiating people in a "cultural pantomime" (Brooks, 2015).

Moreover, a number of pop music videos project images of nudity or women in dressed in underwear and that has been linked to soft pornography. According to Levande (2008) pornography has gone mainstream in all of popular culture. However, it is important to focus on women in popular music for two main reasons. First and foremost, pop music is distributed through more media than any other form of popular culture. Living in the contemporary information era, women in pop music are able to transmit encoded information in all forms of media. We see mainly these women through their music video or even their paid partnerships with the commodity market, and when we do not see them, we hear them through their music. As Imani Perry (2003) notes, "The space a musical artist occupies in popular culture is multi-textual. Lyrics,

interviews, music and videos together create a collage, often finely planned, out of which we are supposed to form impressions" (p. 141).

Furthermore, focusing on women in popular music mainstreaming pornography, McDonnell (2004) comes to correlate girl groups with a "petri dish" for feminism. Before the 1996 Telecommunications Act really took hold, female singer/songwriters such as Alanis Morissette, Lauryn Hill, and Tracy Chapman were on the rise. As time passed, and more media mergers emerged, women and music have been represented in a more intense and violent way reaching a level of pornography (Levande, 2008).

Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that audiences are emotionally connected to the artists they admire (Reger, 2007). In particular, feminist events offer a chance for emotional renewal and to connect, or reconnect, to a community and identity. Thus, while listening to music, many people experience a kind of emotional refreshment, a sense of being charged up about being a feminist (Reger, 2007). Consequently, an emotional state expressed in specific contexts, it can cause a change in an individual's behavior and connect him or her to a movement, in which they will after be initiated. In other words, music can play a role in the mobilization and creation of collective identities.

In popular music, there is a certain kind of "femininity" created and proliferated, the representation of which affects how feminist claims are being understood (Helferich, 2014). It has been questionable whether there is space for feminism in popular culture of music and in what way gender is represented in it (Helferich, 2014).

Beyoncé herself once said "I think I am a feminist in a way… It's not something I consciously decided I was going to be". Nonetheless, feminist theorists do not agree with that statement since they believe that the pop star has compromised with patriarchy and supports white supremacist standards of femininity and beauty (hooks, 2016). They, moreover, claim that her commercial existence cannot align with the feminist ideology and others argue that "endowed" with heterosexual privileges by class, color, and body shape she is not able to politically represent women disadvantaged by the same economic, racial, and sexual (Hobson, 2016).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

In order to answer the research question, I am going to conduct a qualitative research. The open and generative nature of qualitative methods allow the exploration and understanding of issues and social phenomena. For instance, there are deeply rooted subject areas which are based in the participants way of knowledge and understanding themselves such as personal values and beliefs. Moreover, qualitative research is of great significance when researching a popular artist, who nowadays constitutes a sociocultural phenomenon. Beyoncé is an artist with great influence on her audience, so exploratory and responsive questioning is required. Finally, the topic I am going to put under examination is feminism and its offshoots in the popular music industry, notions that are very sensitive and delicate, hence qualitative method help approach this issue and the respondents in a careful and observative way (Richie, 2003).

To achieve this, I am going to use the method of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Critical Discourse Analysis emerged from the Critical Theory, which was founded by Karl Marx and Frederich Engels who argued that the ideology and power imbalances in society are directly linked to existing socioeconomic conditions. Horkheimer and Adorno elaborated on that theory and used the term "Cultural Industry" in order to broach mass media effects on society. They argued that media is supplying an ideological illusion and manipulation on people (Atalay, 2015).

Critical Discourse Analysis interprets discourse as a form of social practice. Discourse is socially significant and socially conditioned: it constitutes situations, social identities and relationships between people. Discourse reproduces the social status quo and boosts the transformation of it and the rise of significance of matters of power. Rambling practices may have important ideological outcomes such as producing and reproducing uneven power relations among the society (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) Critical Discourse Analysis aims to make these effects visible.

Discourse as a term is commonly used in various senses such as meaning-making, as an element of the social process, the language related to a specific social field or practice or a way of interpreting aspects of the world respective to a particular social perspective. It is easy to confuse them, so it is preferable to use semiosis for the first, most abstract and general sense, which has the further benefit of claiming that discourse analysis is linked to various 'semiotic modalities' of which language is one amongst many (Fairclough, 2008).

Semiosis is viewed as an aspect of the social process which is dialectically associated with others – hence a "dialectical-relational" approach. Relations between elements are dialectical in terms of being different though not "discrete", which means not fully separate. We could say that each "internalizes" the others without reducing them. For instance, social relations, power and cultural values are in part semiotic, they "internalize" semiosis without being reducible to it. CDA pays attention not just upon semiosis as such, but on relations between semiotic and other social elements (Fairclough, 2008).

This requires CDA to be incorporated within frameworks for trans-disciplinary research. Trans-disciplinary research is a particular form of interdisciplinary research and what distinguishes it is that in bringing disciplines and theories together to deal with research issues, namely it uses "dialogue" between them as a resource for the theoretical and methodological development of each of them (Fairclough, 2008).

In the recent years, scholars have been interested in the issue of multimodality. Different academic disciplines have their interest in specific modes such as sound, image, language, etc. Although these subjects have been under research by different academics, now it is possible to fuse those subjects and bring all means of making meaning together, under one theoretical roof as part of a single field in a unified account, unifying theory (Kress, 2009). Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis represents a shift of focus in linguistic research. Rather looking at language use as an isolated phenomenon, it looks at how language, image and other modes of communication combine to make meaning (Atalay, 2015). Research in Multimodal Critical Discourse

Analysis followed two basic interdependent directions. First and foremost, it focuses on projecting the meaning-making potential of individual semiotic resources, and second, it concentrates on theorizing the interaction between different semiotic resources in multimodal communication (Djanov & Zhao, 2014).

In my case study I am going to conduct a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis on visual and textual content in order to finalize my research. This method of analysis is the most appropriate one for this research since, working on multimedia content, it constitutes the acknowledgement that discourse is not just verbal, but a combination of different modes. (Dennis et. al., 2016). According to Kress, mode is "a socially shaped and culturally given semiotic resource for making meaning" (Dennis et. al., 2016, pp.3). That can be any form of communication such as (moving) image, writing, music, gestures etc. Thus, modes are resources that we use to generate meanings and when it comes to culture these modes can be diverse (Dennis et. al., 2016). Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that Multimodal CDA pays attention to the way power and interest set the foundation for the construction of social reality. In particular, by distancing the researcher from the object of study on purpose, critical analysis enables the discovery of such structures of dominance in particular discourses, and the identification of alternative realities (Dennis et. al., 2016). Furthermore, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis tries to look into the meaning emerging from the incorporated use of semiotic resources and represents the early stages in the change of concentration in linguistic enquiry where the use of language is no longer theorized as an isolated phenomenon (O'Halloran, 2004).

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

The data were collected purposively, though not in advance. Rather the music videos were chosen parallelly with the research. In some cases, the way to collect the sample is hidden behind the logic of sampling per se however, when it comes to theoretical sampling the data are still in the progress of collection, because there is still need of finding what is missing. In other words, in qualitative research the sample is

comprehended as the collection of purposively opted materials in order to structure a body of empirical examples so to be able to research the desirable phenomenon as instructively as possible. Consequently, diversity is achieved, and the variation of the phenomenon can be investigated in detail (Flick, 2007)

In my case, I followed the most relative steps by Patton (2002) for collecting my data. In particular, Patton suggests the *maximal variation,* namely selecting cases that are distinct from each other in order to broaden the range of variation. Apart from the possible differentiation of the data I opted to deal with the most *intense* material, that is those which includes striking content respective to my topic, such as explicit language or images. Finally, what I significantly took into consideration was the material that has raised a number of conflicts especially in academia or the media industries in order to perceive how they view and experience phenomenon that concerns me.

The data to answer the question are comprised of music videos and live performances of Beyoncé during the years 2009 until 2016, when she released her last album "Lemonade". I chose to examine this very period since during those six years Beyoncé has released her most feminist related work, especially her two albums "Beyonce Platinum (2014)" and "Lemonade (2016)" and has gained the power to make strong statements through her music ready to be criticized. The analyzed content, namely the lyrics and the audiovisual products, was derived from online sources and streaming platforms, namely Netflix, YouTube, Spotify and Tidal. In particular, the music videos and live performances that are put under examination are numbered ten in total and are going to be investigated not only as visual, but also as lyrical material. The music videos that are going to be analyzed are from the songs: Video Phone (2010), Run the World (2011)**,** ***Flawless (2014), Partition (2014), Haunted (2014), Drunk in Love (2014), Pretty Hurts (2014), Hold Up (2016), Formation (2016) and Sorry (2016).

3.3. Operationalization

This sub – section aims to show how the utilized tools reflect the conceptual framework. In theory we discussed the concepts of feminism, postfeminism and black

feminism as well as how femininity is displayed in the pop music industry. My theoretical stance derives from readings and researches of feminist theorists and scholars who have been analyzing different waves of feminism and its offshoots throughout the years as well as the representation of gender and femininity in popular music. Those theories and viewpoints have made me understand in detail what the examined concepts are about and have helped me be able to stand critically towards media content, such as music videos in that case, so I can comprehend the interpretations and denotations of it. The detection those concepts into her work of the mentioned period is amplified through the visual and textual content, let alone combined. Following the steps of my method one by one I am able to answer how my theoretical framework applies to my data. In particular, being aware of what different concepts of feminism stand for I am studying different kinds of texts (video, music, lyrics) to critically stand in front of Beyoncé's work and understand whether she manages to interpret the messages and meanings she wants to.

In other words, armed with the theoretical stance I have been developing in the previous chapter I watched the music videos and listened to the lyrics thoroughly to firstly conduct a basic visual and lexical analysis of the content. After that I re-watched the collected data in order to observe more specific semiotics, such as the way the performer stands, poses, gazes and seek for the meanings behind them. Combining those I managed to look behind an everyday pop hit of the international charts and understand how Beyonce and her team work in order to produce content which is meticulous to every single cell of it regardless of whether she finally hits the target or not and see how through it she represents the concepts that have been brought up earlier. Having all these in mind and after approaching the material critically I finally come up with conclusions of whether and how Beyonce eventually manages or not to include postfeminist discourses in her music and sensitize people for black culture and femininity.

3.4. Data Analysis

Conducting a multimodal discourse analysis, I believe that popular discourse can give a unifying ground for efforts to engage in critical multimodal discourse analysis. In particular, I suggest that the theme of popular discourse encourages enquiries of how our semiotic and sociocultural landscapes are reflected in and transformed by popular culture texts such as music videos and phenomena such as fashion, by texts designed to popularize specific institutional discourses such as business or politics, and by omnipresent semiotic practices and technologies such as social media. Furthermore, I argue that critical multimodal studies of popular are likely to help and add something to both MDA, since they motivate the development of tools for empirically relating multimodal communication to social power, and CDA, as they respond to Van Leeuwen's (2013) argument that racist content is usually present in popular culture products like comic strips and advertisements, namely visual texts and not in high cultured texts and that the discourses that must be examined thoroughly and critically are now greatly multimodal and mediated by digital systems think of multimodality as something presupposed. (Djonov & Zhao, 2014).

Now according to Machin and Mayr (2012) there are seven basic steps which someone needs to follow so they can conduct a Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis:

1.   Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis considers basic lexical analysis of the texts. And then uses analysis of individual visual semiotic choices in texts.

2.   Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis looks semiotic resources representing the attitudes of speakers. This is about analyzing quoting verbs, representation of the attitude of speakers through visual semiotic resources such as gaze and poses.

3.   Linguistic and visual semiotic resources available for representing people and naming strategies. Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis investigates the way through language and image, some participants are individualized or

collectivized, made specific, generic, personalized or impersonalized, objectivated, anonymized aggregated and suppressed.

4.   Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis finds out the way linguistic and visual semiotic resources represent what people do. This can be represented in several ways. For instance, some participants are always represented engaging in mental type actions ore material ones.

5.   Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis deals with metaphorical tropes in discourse, i.e., with the issue of how different kinds of metaphors and other rhetorical tropes are used in different contexts to attempt to shape understandings.

6.   Nominalization and presupposition in language is a study area of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis as well.

7.   Trying to analyze modality and hedging in texts and visual communication is another step of Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis. Inspecting a multimodal text through these seven frames ensures to show out how meaning is built up in media texts and the way that people make, use and reuse semiotic choices. By understanding these choices, it may be possible to reveal ideology in media texts and challenge it.

All in all, what I technically did in all the music videos was the following steps, which can be found in Appendix where I cite an example of the procedure: I first listened to the songs and created tables, on the left column of which I added the lyrics and on the right one I added the connotations. At the same time, I was detecting particular vocal attitudes that may have appeared such as sexuality or aggressiveness in the tone. After dealing with the vocal text I moved to the visual one, namely the images. I collected screenshots from the video clips, which I considered to be significant and had something to say on the topic, mainly gazes, poses, body language, in order to understand what Beyoncé culturally represents with her actions. For that I followed a similar procedure, that is placing the selected images on the left giving its connotation on the right. Thus,

through this procedure I managed to conclude to the ideology she represents and challenge it when necessary (see Appendix).

3.5. Credibility and Reliability

In qualitative researches, in order to ensure the credibility, it is significant to ensure that "findings are trustworthy and believable in that they reflect participants', researchers', and readers' experiences with a phenomenon but at the same time [acknowledge that] the explanation is only one of many possible 'plausible' interpretations possible from data" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 302). The present study represents a chronicle of Beyoncé's most feminist work, which I am observing from different point of views in my attempt to exhaust as many questions arising about her inclusion of feminist discourses in her work producing a high rate of objectivity in my results.

Moreover, Lindlof and Taylor (2002) suggest that the triangulation of data is equally important when it comes to qualitative research credibility. In particular, it is considered of great value to derive the data from various sources or from different points in time. In my research this is accomplished by collecting my data from distinct streaming platforms, as I previously mentioned, and throughout a time period of seven years. According to Wodak (2001) there are respectively huge text corpora in the discourse – historical approach as well as several genres and historical data from distinct sources which inevitably means that triangulation can function almost automatically in the discourse-historical approach to critical discourse analysis. Particularly, she refers to four contextual levels of triangulation, namely the internal contexts of specific texts, the relationships between discourses that exist within and between texts in distinct documents and genres, the situational social contexts in which discourses exist, and the larger historical contexts within which individual discourses are attached. Accordingly in my research I investigate distinct but at the same time relative to each other discourses in Beyoncé's discography in which she expresses herself through different music styles even if those are dance or hip hop, which all finally are incorporated in pop, explaining in detail the social and historical background of her music videos denotations. And,

here, we reach the peculiarity of multimodality which gives itself more strength to my research's credibility since it allows me to analyze not only written language, but also animated images (i.e. video) and audio resources. This exact multiplicity that can be found even in a single text can lead us to the semiotic complexity and richness of my describing of this representation.

Now, reliability in qualitative researches concerns the independency of the results from accidental circumstances of their production (Silverman, 2001). Specifically, it refers to replicability, namely the case in which whether a researcher repeats the research comes up with the same results or not. According to Moisander and Valtonen (2006) reliability can be achieved by creating a transparent research process which is done via the detailed description of the research strategy and data analysis as well as through focusing on the "theoretical transparency" by clarifying the theoretical viewpoint from which the interpretations emerge and making clear how this gives birth to specific interpretations and excludes others. Indeed, in the present study I have managed to stay objective towards my data and results since the collection of them did not depend on my taste nor the popularity of each song. Rather I am investigating songs that are either popular or not, have been praised or strictly criticized. In the theoretical framework I have described in detail the theory upon which my research is based so I can make my stance as balanced as possible. Consequently, had someone repeated the same research following the steps I have already described, they would have ended up to the same conclusion.

The importance of this method can be found in the fact that no matter what view one takes of the social, economic, cultural, political and technological world, it is anyway a world in rapid progression and a world where the pace of 'transport' in all these dimensions has speeded up rampantly. The social and political and economic framings globally along with the framings around of the cultural resources being discussed in the semiotic domain have been changed by the pace of transport and the instantaneity of access in many domains (Gee & Handford, 2014).

4. DISCUSSION

4.1. Black Femininity

As mentioned in the theoretical chapters the black community have been suffering for years from oppression regarding political and human rights. Several movements have been founded throughout the years to fight white supremacy but unfortunately, they have drowned. Hence, one could imagine that being a black woman means that you are in the bottom of the social pyramid and you need to fight not only against racism but also against sexism (Collins, 2000).

Formation constitutes a Black Power anthem, the video clip of which was surprisingly released one day before the 50th Super Bowl Halftime Show when Beyoncé also gave a controversial live performance. The release date was not random but very specific and well considered. First and foremost, that date was exactly in between the supposed birthdays of Trayvon Martin and Sandra Bland, whose deaths are well remembered by Afro-American people as victims of brutal law enforcement and racism (Declue, 2017). Moreover, the song constitutes a fitting contribution to Black History Month and a significant issue in the Black Lives Matter movement.

During her performance in the Halftime Show the star and her dancers were dressed in leathers like Black Panthers. The Black Panther Party was founded in 1966 in California aiming to a revolution to fight for equal education, housing, employment, and civil right. It was ruined through tactics like propaganda coming from the FBI characterizing it as a threat to national security (Duncan, 2020). What is also interesting here is that through her outfit with the "X" embedded on it as well as the "X" formation by the dancers she pays tribute to the black civil rights leader, Malcom X who was also shot dead in 1965 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: NFL Super Bowl 50 Halftime Show Live Performance of Formation, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

However, white Americans do not think of Black Panthers in a positive way and observing the black women being dressed in berets and with raised fists they translated that image as provoking violence. This performance had caused the emergence of great controversies due to the clear stance for Black Panthers and that shows that Beyoncé is indeed a performer of great influence.

In the video clip of the song there are visual references to the Katrina hurricane and the damages it caused to the state of Louisiana as well as the police violence against the black community. However, keeping pace with the thematic of femininity, what is striking here is the vocal presence and visual absence of Big Freedia, a queer artist serving the New Orleans hip hop music known as bounce music. The song starts with Messy Mya, who operates in the same genre, and pushes the Beyoncé's "Formation" boundaries of gender, wondering "*What happened at the New Wildins*" (Formation, 2016, line 1). This question could have two different meanings; first it could refer to the unsolved murder of Messy Mya and second to the flood that drowned New Orleans. The

clip is characterized by a haunting atmosphere which produces a seductive sound that captures the spectral reverberations alive in New Orleans, which largely cultivated through the absences of queer voices (Declue, 2017).

"Formation" is dressed in stiff images playing in a sequence of small residences in New Orleans and the city devastated after the hurricane; all this framed by Big Freedia's voice "*I did not come to play wit you ho's*" (Formation, 2016, line 14). Big Freedia introduces a plantation-style porch scene where Beyoncé, surrounded by good-looking black men of various ages in tuxedos and Beyonce is in her black satin top and long, black satin skirt with a wide-brimmed hat with two long blond braids passing her waist. Beyoncé bobs her head intensely to the sound of the sitar (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Formation music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Big Freedia introduces the second verse of the song laughing "*HaHa! I came to slay, bitch*" (Formation, 2016, line 15). The setting is flooded with pastoral and stoic funeral quality, which is rapidly countered with a scene projecting a wig shop where three young black women stand next to each other staring directly into the lens of the camera. "*Formation*" constitutes a visual text, maybe the most important one throughout her work for her to celebrate the majesty, strength, and beauty of black women that brightens the visual album *Lemonade*, hence, questions arise when we listen to Big Freedia but we do not see her (Declue, 2017).

In *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Avery Gordon (2011, p. xvi) describes haunting as "an animated state in which a repressed or unresolved social violence is making itself known, sometimes very directly, sometimes more obliquely." In "*Formation*" the haunting trait is the visual absence of Big Freedia, which reminds us the violence against transwomen, transmen and trans people of color which along with murders was the daily life of those people (Declue, 2017). Consequently, one could argue that this cultural text produces the refusal of visibility and inclusion in black feminism. This video might constitute a message that black womanhood should be reconsidered in order to include transgendered and queer people in black womanhood and the mainstream world.

Moreover, Beyoncé has been criticized for this song and the issues she addresses through that with assertions that she cannot get the feeling of the catastrophe and New Orleans does not constitute her roots (Bertens, 2017). However, Beyoncé comes to show that her personality is formed by diverse identities. In particular, while a scene changes in the video clip, Beyoncé turns to another persona, though in the end she is still the same. In the first verse of the song we hear Beyoncé sing "*My daddy Alabama, mama Louisiana, you mix that negro with that creole make a Texas bama*" (Formation, 2016, lines 7-8) stating her personal history and cultural identity. Despite the lexical text does match the distraction of New Orleans, the compound of lyrics respective to family origins and images regarding to broader history seem to weave Beyoncé's personal narrative together with collective mementos of the flooding (Bertens, 2017).

As mentioned before Beyoncé and her colleagues had been working on the notion of memory while making this video. In particular, the first shot shows us a computer screen where a parental warning is being typed. After that the images break up and we see Beyoncé sitting on a police car. The scene showing Beyoncé in braided hairstyle and fur making circls in an empty parking lot reminds us much of an old VCR record. Specifically, the images are dressed in colour filters and often purple or red shades making the fantasy of a damaged film more vivid. The way the dancers are formed in the parking lot looks like an old-fashioned novice video. The sign "play" is

obvious in the lower right corner, and there is a intense warping and blue hue. Finally, what is interesting here regarding technicality is that the video does not have a certain flow; instead it consists of individual scenes seemingly irrelevant to each other inviting the audience to bring all the pieces together and see the meaning behind this harsh imagery (Bertens, 2017).

hooks (1992) suggests that the western white privileged civilizations not only cannot contain dancing black bodies but also, they attempt to degrade them Specifically, she mentions that the black derriere is wrong and shocking. Such bodies are not "silent" as the female slaves used to be representing mannequins. Black female bodies are used to characterized of shame due to the skin colour and shape (hooks, 1992,).

In the video clip of "Sorry" pro-tennis player Serena William's body and presence has a central role. In general, this song and the album "*Lemonade*" per se is about how unfaithful black men ill-treat their black women. It actually constitutes a song through which black women can feel rebellious and gain power in some way and Beyoncé is the one who leads this rebel (Olutola, 2018). The song starts with a poem just like the song "*Hold up*" and Beyoncé does not appear in the first scenes; instead we see a number of black women sitting next to each other in a bus in total black just like Beyoncé's dancers in the Super Bowl performance, despite the fact that their dark skin itself reflects their African identity. Those women have braided their hair and are painted by Nigerian artist Laolu Senbanjo's Sacred Art of the Ori, which constitutes a sacred Yoruba ritual, also referenced in "*Hold Up*" (Olutola, 2017). Beyoncé appears in this bus only in a few frames with her blonde braids, though she is not painted like her co-passengers (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Sorry music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

After the narration of the poem Serena makes her entrance in the visuals in the Madewood Plantation House in Louisiana in her black bodysuit and cape. The visuals throughout the video do not flee the black and white pattern, which is a motif that creates a contrast between her absolute blackness and the house's whiteness. We can consider here the arguments of the music video's director Richard Dyer's that Western-wise cinematography and photography systems have grown around the privileging of white skin. In Dyer's own words, "In the history of photography and film, getting the right image meant getting the one which conformed to prevalent ideas of humanity. This included ideas of whiteness, of what colour – what range of hue – white people wanted white people to be" (Dyer, 2002, p. 92). Nonetheless, the director took the decision not to include white bodies in the music video.

Moreover, watching the music video one can observe some readings, which render Beyoncé's presence in it problematic. Specifically, we see Serena dancing in the foyer in front of Beyoncé, who is sitting on a tall dark throne, which automatically sets her as the queen. It is odd seeing a black woman celebrating blackness while sat on a throne in a place which could be translated into a prison in case she had been a slave in the past (Olutola, 2018). While singing Beyoncé opts to be loose on the throne instead of representing the typical white body, which we would see straight sat. What is worth mentioning in those scenes is the fact that a muscular dark-skinned black woman with her afro hair is dancing in front of a light-skinned one with blonde braids who will not

leave the throne highlighting her perfection and a Eurocentric neoliberal regime of competition (Olutola, 2018). Serena seems to go down the stairs with high self-esteem giving the impression that the plantation is hers, though it is more than obvious that Beyoncé rules this mansion, since Serena ends up bending down to dance for Beyoncé's pleasure. Despite observing the two black women having fun in a house of white privileged people denotes their audacity to possess such power, the music video falls into the trap of inequality with Beyoncé never letting Serena feel as if they are on the same level (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Sorry music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

However, the contradictions do not stop at the social differences between the two protagonists. I have already mentioned the colour and style differences between Serena and Beyoncé as well as the fact that Serena never sits on the Queen's throne but keeps dancing for her instead. In addition to that, we see that Beyoncé is surrounded by her black dancers, who have a darker skin tone than hers. The pop diva the last five years has formed her own black, mainly female, crew, which has darker skin than her own. Hence, what she has achieved through this practice is to stand with and at the same time be apart from blackness; she never blends in. Such performances definitely serve the capitalist industry, which produces stars for consumption, but what is, subsequently, achieved is the promotion of capitalism through racist and colorist representational practices instead of communal female power, which Beyoncé attempts to perpetuate to the audience (Olutola, 2018). Saturday Night Live (2016) has also taken a position on that with the satirical video "The Day Beyoncé Turned Black", through

which we observe white people in shock experiencing an apocalyptic incident after the release of Beyoncé's *Lemonade* album, which according to the TV show signaled the time when she strictly identified herself as a Black. According to Olutola (2018, p. 101):

> "the persisting element of white patriarchal capitalist self-elevation embedded deep within Beyoncé's brand thus destabilizes the video's intended message of black female solidarity, re-inscribing an aesthetic space in which black female bodies are called to participate in her celebrations of black identity – but not equally".

The video may almost in its whole demonstrate messages and contrasts about black femininity. however, Beyoncé singing this song refers to a defiant breakup. As mentioned in the Introduction, Beyonce in her Homecoming documentary filmed for her Beychella concert invites women to raise their "*middle fingers up*" (Sorry, 2016, line 16), which despite the emotional crack denotes the power to overcome this breakup. Her twist from "*sorry*" to "*I ain't sorry*" (Sorry, 2016, line 1) shows that she has already forgotten about her ex and she is not accepting any apologies from him.

In particular, Beyoncé seems to burst out during her performance of the song "Sorry" in Coachella. During a short sketch she calls her male dancers, puts them in a row like obedient soldiers and asks them to make her laugh. However, they did not manage to amuse her, so she scolds them and tells them again to form a line. At that moment, she is referring to the female audience saying: "*Ladies! Are we smart? Are we strong? Have we had enough of bullshit?*" (Beyoncé & Burke, 2019). Taking an affirmative answer from the audience she immediately sends her message to patriarchy singing "*suck on my balls*". She finishes the video of *Sorry* presented as the Egyptian goddess Nefertiti who represents power and beauty.

4.2. Sexuality and Male Gaze

Now, Gill (2011) has stated that popular culture urges girls to discover sexiness, cuteness, and hotness, absorbing clues from magazines to embrace images that would make them attractive. A version of power feminism which is called "do-me feminism"

considers sexual freedom as the key to female independence and emancipation (Genz & Brabon, 2009). The woman is now reconciled with her sexuality and does not inculpate sex, but she loves getting involved into sexual intercourses. I have already highlighted that some think of postfeminism as a festive period of sexual enlightenment in which males and females explore their sexual identities equally and freely (Burkett & Hamilton, 2012). At this point, Beyoncé comes to respond to anyone who blames her for faking feminism due to hypersexuality in her music videos.

Such an example is "*Haunted*". "*Haunted*" is a text which can be read in distinct ways. First, in relation to the first part of this song, "Ghost", it may refer to Beyoncé's relationship with her image and her past, regarding the "ghosts" or things that keep following her from the past like a shadow. Reading it more broadly it could apply to the ghosts and fears that our contemporary society experience respective to a social and gender identity.

The video clip of *Haunted* seems to give all the space to queerness and it regards the ghosts that used to surround the memories of previous relationships. The video starts with Beyoncé reaching a huge mansion very similar to the "*Partition*" one carrying several baggage predisposing us that she is staying for a long period. She enters the building and drops her luggage and fur down when a butler meets her to light her cigarette. Then she drops the cigarette down and with her haughty attitude starts to climb up the stairs. This very scene, until she is upstairs, demonstrates a woman who is independent, has total control of herself, her actions and anyone around her. When Beyoncé reaches the upper floor, it is soon understandable and obvious that this building constitutes a whorehouse and Beyoncé is the madam of it who directs the mansion (Brown, 2016).

Throughout the video in which she walks through the corridors checking the rooms she wears her crown making it clear that she is the ruler of this sexual domain. As far as these rooms are concerned, every time Beyoncé looks through one is like we are observing totally different scenes. In one room we see a prostitute having sex with a man and on the opposite room a queer individual having a shower (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Haunted music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

One of the first rooms in Beyoncé's house of "horrors" we see some black men playing card games and served by a "sexy" white female dressed in a maid's uniform (see Figure 6). This scene denotes the socially construct fear of black male sexuality which could threaten the purity of the western white woman, while after that we see her seductively engaging them on a table (Bowen, 2013).

Figure 6: Haunted music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

In another room, we see several women wearing black leather suits and one of them sits on a man moving sexually (see Figure 7). This scene can be explicit for the viewer who watches a woman dominating in sex.

Figure 7: Haunted music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

A number of rooms contained unconventional behaviors showing BDSM practices during sexual intercourses, age and race contrasts as well as a man and a woman wearing gas masks. Through those scenes which Beyoncé observes walking through the corridors she and the music video's director, Jonas Akerlund, are willing to demonstrate the fear we have against any kind of sexuality that does not conform with the typical heteronormative practices which define sexual normality as the sexual stimulation resulting from penile penetration (Bowen, 2013). Another fear that dominates the rooms is that of the identity. In particular, in one room we see a man dressed in a feminine way blowing bubbles in the bathtub (see Figure 5), while in another one there is a black muscular woman with short hair (see Figure 8). Through the view of this room Beyoncé wants us to see the fear of identification and putting labels to individuals.

Figure 8: Haunted music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Finishing her course through the corridor, Beyoncé brings up the discourse of black culture through the four black men standing in front of a door staring at her behind their black and white painted masks (see Figure 9) which refer to the criminals of the movie "Dead Presidents" (Hughes A. & Hughes A., 1995). In the U.S. these faces are regarded a menace against the national security and safety.

Figure 9: Haunted music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Last but not least, Beyoncé never takes part in sexual intercourses throughout the video, but she is getting extremely sensual and sexual in her room with her dancers while dancing and mentioning her desires in bed. Although she does not take part in

sexual acts, she makes it clear that she is of this element. She is the maestro of the mansion, hence incorporating BDSM as well as sex work into the video clip is an explicit act of agency (Bowen, 2013).

My haunted lungs, ghost in the sheets

My wicked tongue, where will it be? (Haunted, 2013, lines 6-8)

You want me? I walk down the hallway

You like it? The bedroom's my runway

Slap me! I'm pinned to the doorway

Kiss, bite, foreplay (Haunted, 2013, lines 12-15).

Here Beyonce refers to her wicked tongue implicating her irreverent language or her tongue per se, that is her sexuality. On the very next lines she gets more sexual fantasizing her being with her man on the bed and describing him how she likes it. Again, she likes to be slapped, kissed bitten. Respectively we observe a similar motif in the music video of "*Partition*".

From the beginning of the video Beyoncé is monitored by surveillance cameras and we get to see her both through the camera as if it is the audience who surveil her, and through the television where she stares us intensely, which is an act that insinuates that her gaze is more important than the heteronormative male gaze that usually rules the construction of female pop stars (Brown, 2016); this is a motif that also appears in the music video of *Video Phone*. What Beyoncé tries to achieve through her album *Beyoncé Platinum* is to redefine the engagement with her body, and that is obvious exactly when she pays attention to her own gaze making it the most important. In that song we may read hidden sexual messages throughout the lyrics, which is the dominant trait of the entire album.

In the making of her self-titled album *Beyonce Platinum* she comments on the song "*Partition*":

"It takes me back to being in my car as a teenager. It takes me back to when me and my husband first meet, and he tries to scoop me, and he thinks I'm the hottest thing in the world. I kinda had this whole fantasy of being in the car, and

this whole movie played in my head. I didn't have a pen and paper. I got to the mic, I'm like, 'Oh, press Record'. (Heizerling, 2013)"

The video of *Partition* starts with the depiction of a luxurious countryside mansion. The camera enters the mansion and finds Beyoncé at the breakfast table with her husband, Jay-Z, on the other side reading the newspaper (see Figure 10). The visuals let us know that this constitutes a daydream scenario, in which Beyoncé takes part in an attractive sensual fantasy.

Figure 10: Partition music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Similarly, to most of the music videos produced for pop stars, the way the gendered body is staged in Partition is promptly identified within the scenes (Hansen, 2015). As we are transferred into the fantasy, we see the camera following Beyoncé's curvy body and movements which in a combination with gestures, lyrics, sounds and props create a sexualized audiovisual text.

In the first verse, Beyoncé is depicted performing fellatio on her husband in the back of a limousine inciting the driver to "*roll up the partition*" (Partition, 2013, line 1) due to the sexually explicit nature of the scene which may distract the driver and, hence, cause an accident. Meanwhile, the director is performing a series of fragmented blurring close-ups by a rapidly moving camera revealing tempting gestures between them. According to Carol Vernallis (2004) those very effects and displays put the artist in a sort of temporal isolation, as the viewer feels free to absorb her into their memory.

Representations in pop music videos can both obey and challenge the constructed norms of gender and sexuality. That basically happens due to the conflict between distinct notions of femininity which create pleasure and "opens up gaps in patriarchal hegemony for resistant feminine readings" (Fiske, 1989, p. 118). Consequently, the signifiers respective to the meanings of gendered identity and sexuality can vary in pop music.

It is worth mentioning that the audiovisual power is obvious when these fantasies are motivated, and the pleasures are satisfied. In particular, the video shows us bodies moving, lips kissing, the image of which is amplified through the passionate vocals (see Figure 11). The combination of these with the music and image manages to drag the viewer's attention to the movements and gesture of the body (Hansen, 2015).

Figure 11: Partition music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Passing to the second verse, the director presents Beyoncé's dancers while they are moving mysteriously their hands and legs around touching affectionately the performer. The camera zooms out to present a wide shot as the legs, partly incorporated into the background scenery by virtue of the excessive lighting effects, perform a simple, repetitive choreography.

There have been several feminist critics who characterized Beyoncé as a "fur-wearing stripper", which has also raised debates about her environmental consciousness in combination with her hypersexual presentation in videos such as *No Angel, Yonce and Partition* (Hobson, 2016). In particular, those three videos situate

Beyoncé within racialized and class- based contexts; "*No Angel*" depicts Beyoncé in her fur and lingerie within the "Third Ward" of Houston's low- income black community, whereas "*Yoncé*" positions her on the "streets" surrounded by black supermodels "posing" alongside her as "hood" girls. Nevertheless, "*Partition*" starts with showing abundant wealth before Beyoncé turns into the stripper of her fantasy, whom feminists criticize. With that shift from song to song – video to video – namely from the streets to the mansion keeping the same sentiment she manages to reconfigure the raced and classed meanings of her own black female body in her eroticized self-image (Hobson, 2016). Nonetheless, at this point, Beyoncé comes to respond to anyone blaming her for faking feminism due to hypersexuality in her music videos. Specifically, in her song "*Partition*" she includes Joel's words to Ethan in "The Big Lebowski": "*Do you like sex? Sex, I mean: physical activity, coitus. You like it? Are you not interested in sex? Men think that feminists hate sex but it's an exciting and natural activity that women love*" (Partition, 2013, lines 41-45). However, in order to make this part more sensual and give the preferably extravagant connotations of it she opts to get it sung in French.

In a smart, intriguing use of popular and politic culture Beyoncé refers to her man's ejaculation by saying "*he Monica Lewinskyed all on my gown*" (Beyoncé, 2013, line 9). Here, we see a clear reference to the Lewinsky scandal, according to which Bill Clinton ejaculated on Lewinsky's skirt proving his infidelity via DNA test. In her article with Vanity Fair, Lewinsky mentions: "Thanks, Beyoncé, but if we're verbing, I think you meant 'Bill Clintoned all on my gown,' not 'Monica Lewinskyed'" (Vanity Fair, 2014). Later in the video we see Beyoncé giving a stripping performance to Jay-Z highlighting that "*he likes to call me Peaches when we get this nasty*" (Partition, 2013, line 27), which constitutes a common stripper name implicating the role playing of their situation. Once more Beyoncé tries to trigger feminists by describing in detail what a feminist likes in bed, while she likes to talk trash and call her man "*daddy, daddy*" (Partition, 2013, line 30) showing her preference to sexual submissive practices.
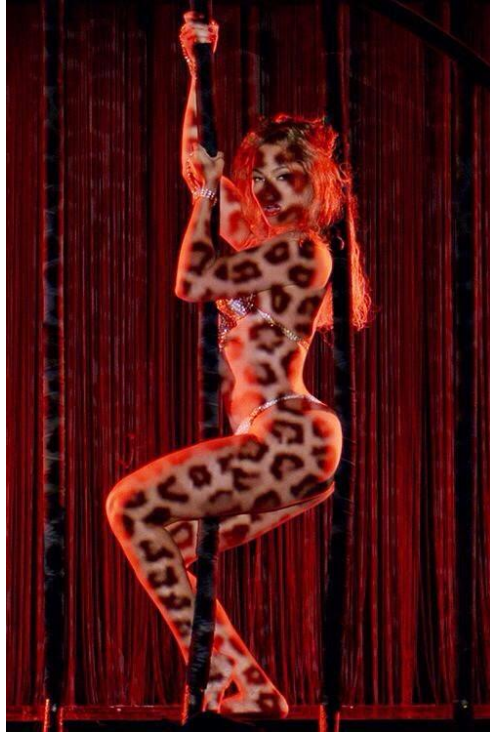
Figure 12: Partition music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Now, in this song we have watched Beyoncé showing all of her sexuality in front of her man who just sits either on the backseat of the car or in the club enjoying her seduction and dance accordingly. However, the motif of the intense male gaze has been present far before this song, when in 2010 Beyoncé introduced us her collaboration with Lady Gaga in "*Video Phone*".

"*Video phone*" featuring Lady Gaga seems to provide us with a dual meaning: the first half of the visuals creates a sense of female objectivity and reinforcement of the male gaze, whereas on the second half we see female power in contrast to male subordination as well as the disruption of the patriarchal politics and the male gaze (Burns & Lafrance, 2017). In the first pre-chorus part we see Beyoncé walking and "*them hustlas keep on talkin'*" (Video Phone, 2009, line 5) in favor of her (see Figure 13).

Figure 13: Video Phone music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Then, she gives them the chance to record her on their video phones. Here lies a contradiction: the men following her record her in the public space where she is walking, but the recorded product can be reproduced and fetishized in a private space immortalizing her image forever through the technology. Nonetheless, our vision gets blurred as far as the control and the power relations are concerned (Burns & Lafrance, 2012). Although the hustlers' male gaze automatically objectifies Beyoncé and puts them in control, Beyoncé is the one who invites them to record her, a move which shifts the balance of power and makes her the subject instead. At this part it may seem that we observe two subjects weaving a dynamic relationship however, we actually have three. In particular, we see how the power relations are built between Beyoncé, the hustlers and mobile technology as well (Burns & Lafrance, 2017). Mobile technology seems to play a significant role in the video clip since it "decapitates" the hustlers and replaces their heads with video phones (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Video Phone music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Now, during the chorus we see Beyoncé is multiplied in the given space letting the viewer experience a fantastical proliferating representation of her body. The video phone seems to give the opportunity to the viewer to enjoy an intimate and private experience of Beyoncé. She is ubiquitous and creates the sense that she is the space and time herself. She is presented as having the absolute control of the camera-gaze since with her moves she manages to dictate the camera's behavior. However, at the same time she is represented as not having the control being an image in a small screen, which the viewer decides to turn on or off (Burns & Lafrance, 2017).

The second verse presents a total change of Beyoncé in comparison with the rest of the song. Now her hair is loose, she is dressed in a long T-shirt and she is holding two toy guns against a man who is tied on a chair and covered with a blue bag (see Figure 15). Here, the motif of the man who is not in control is getting more intense since along with the two inhuman camera headed men there is the hooded man. There is, then, a reversal of the objectification; despite the fact that Beyoncé is presented as accessible for the male gaze, men are now those who get accessible since they are not able to move or are devalued to a mass-produced commodity, that is the camera (Burns & Lafrance, 2017).

Figure 15: Video Phone music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

After that we see Lady Gaga entering the setting; this is the time of the music video when we see a major shift regarding the setting, the behaviors and the vocals as well. In particular, now both Beyoncé and Lady Gaga are dressed in white with white

gloves holding two big plastic guns and the background turns back to cold gray (see Figure 16).

Figure 16: Video Phone music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

While Lady Gaga is singing staring directly at the camera, Beyoncé has her back turned around. Gaga seems to be more aggressive in a motional and sonic way. She immediately identifies the man as her "*phone star*" (Video Phone, 2009, line 37) and that implicates the reduction of him to an image or movie she obtains on her device. Moreover, Gaga's voice is hoarser than Beyoncé's, she is the one who does not miss the chance to fire her gun and looks directly in the "eye" of the camera, traits and moves which makes her a more aggressive player in the game of gaze and power relations (Burns & Lafrance, 2017). Their stylistic options may deliver a message of availability and passivity, but in reality, the two stars manage to seduce the males of the video with their representation of femininity and disrupt the patriarchal politics of looking. Specifically, we see very muscular men dressed fashionably in same suits though with no heads, but with camera-heads instead. They are presented as inhuman, de-individualized and with bare chests as if the two female stars respond to society's effort to objectify women instead (Burns & Lafrance, 2017).

4.3.   Hymn to Feminism and Female Empowerment

Among the characteristics of postfeminism by Gill (2016), the following are recognizable in the data collected: the alteration from the objectification of women to their alleged empowerment within the imperatives of the beauty industries; the focus on women's bodies in an intensified way; and the refashioning of subjectivity based on

the make-over paradigm. Beyoncé has dedicated a large part of her discography to the unfair treatment against women as far as the beauty standards, financial dependence and working conditions are concerned.

"Run The World (Girls)" was released in 2011 as the lead single of Beyoncé's fourth solo record, *4* (2011). It is an up-tempo song built on an intensely accentuated rhythm that originates a military effect (Muchitsch, 2016). Beyoncé is presented in a bleak desert surrounded by a diverse group of stylishly dressed females against a cabal of men in riot gear (see Figure 17). Always the center of attention, Beyoncé dances as she sings about the influence of girls over men.

Figure 17: Run the World (Girls) music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

There is an obvious message of female empowerment in the song's lyrics and this message is amplified in the parts where the "Girls" united shout the answer to the question "*Who run the world?*" (Beyonce, 2011, line 5). The verses depict narratives of female empowerment with notions of traditional femininity, entrepreneurship and capitalism and this represents a significant trait of neoliberal postfeminism (Muchitsch, 2016). It is worth mentioning that regarding the sound of the lyrics there is an intense and expressive military rhythm which frames the female voices that dominates the chorus. However, among the united voices of the "girls" it is easy to distinguish Beyoncé's voice who leads them. Moreover, one can observe her using a different type of language, that is urban street Black everyday slang adding some grammatical details like "*some of them men*" (Run the World (Girls), 2011, line 17), "*make your check come*

at they neck" (Beyonce, 2011, line 19), which are linked to historical and current racism in the United States (Muchitsch, 2016).

The lyrics are then modified to "*Who run the world? Girls. Girls*", which are expressed in a call-and-response motif. Beyoncé starts the song with the rhetorical question "*Who run the world*?", the response to which is obvious: "*Girls*". For once more she does not ignore her roots mentioning how "*they made her, Houston, baby, Texas*" (Run the World (Girls), lines 23-24). She proceeds praising "her girls" who "*rock the latest*" (Run the World (Girls), line 26) implicating the expensive branded clothes they buy not worrying about the money they spend, since they are going to work hard to get their next check. However, she strongly complains about the sex segregation in the workplace, since women have been payed less than men for years even if they occupy the exact same position. On the other hand, women now have more power and can be equally influential, for Beyoncé invites us to "*raise a glass*" (Run the World (Girls), line 51) for all the female graduates who statistically are more than the male ones (Muchitsch, 2016). Then women can work 9 to 5 pace, give birth and then go back to business proving that female can be anything but the weaker sex.

Throughout her song one could say that even though, as mentioned above, she is distinguishable among the others, she changes her voices without losing that uniqueness in her voice. Those different layers of her voice could represent the multi-faceted postfeminist nature of woman to deal with narratives such traditional femininity and sexuality, motherhood, entrepreneurship, capitalism and power at the same time (Muchitsch, 2016).

Two years later Beyoncé releases a new song which came to raise interesting contradictions. By the time "*Flawless*" was written and released it has constituted a feminist anthem for the audiences. During her MTV VMAs 2014 live performance Beyoncé sings this song in front of a huge screen saying "FEMINIST" (see Figure 18) and giving the definition of it: "a person who believes in the social, political, and economic equality of the sexes".

Figure 18: ***Flawless MTV VMAs 2014 live performance, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Through this song Beyoncé invites all women to accept themselves and their bodies as they are and avoid claiming they are flawless. The video starts with a remembrance of Beyoncé's childhood when her hip-hop group "Girls Tyme" had taken part in a talent competition introduced by Ed McMahon on "Star Search". At the moment Girls Tyme starts dancing the scene changes to a black and white sequence in a place with abandoned furniture, where we see Beyoncé sitting on a couch between two Skinheads (see Figure 19).

Figure 19: ***Flawless music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

The entire set reveals that Beyoncé is in a dangerous place; she is surrounded by Skinheads, Punks, she is dressed in a shirt and a pair of jeans-thong wearing a netting to cover her derriere. It seems like she is risking her life to be there implicating her risk to come out as a Feminist pop star nowadays, in a time when pop music industry seeks for

submissive female artists to be always sexually available in a place like Hollywood, where getting political can destroy your developed persona (Keleta-Mae, 2017).

In the first verse Beyoncé looks right through the camera and says:

"I know when you were little girls

You dreamt of being in my world

Don't forget don't forget it

Respect that bow down" (***Flawless, 2013, lines 9-12).

However, she stops immediately moving her lips when the word "bitches" comes up. Such a move denotes that she cannot make up her mind about whether it is right or wrong to pronounce this word since she had been criticized in the past for saying it in the song "Bow Down/ I Been On". The second verse is dedicated to a fifty-second feminist lesson given by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie in TedxEuston (Adichie, 2012). In particular, she mentions that society teaches girls "*to shrink themselves, to make themselves smaller*" (***Flawless, 2013, line 26), by letting them grow and develop themselves though with boundaries; they must stop before they become a threat to the man, that is to surpass him. Society raises girls teaching them that they should aspire to marriage, grow a family and financially support their husbands, but not be successful and independent; those are the very targets women should have in their lives. Adichie says that marriage can be a good thing that could mean mutual love and support, but it is unreasonable that only women should aspire to marriage. Men should first aim to their personal development and success and then it is their choice whether they are getting married or not for their personal fulfillment. On the other hand, women should aim to a perfect marriage otherwise they have failed at life and are stigmatized in contrast to men. Moreover, women do not have the opportunity to have equal sexual life with men ("*we teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are*" (***Flawless, line 39)), otherwise they suffer from slut shaming. In other words, boys are praised for having an intense sexual life and multiple sexual partners, but in case a woman builds such a sexual life, then she is condemned to carry the stigma of "slut" for the rest of her life.

Despite the fact that Beyoncé tells other women to bow down to her perfection, she invites them to reconsider the strength they obtain. For her, the strength derives from her family, learning from failure and challenging beauty standards through her music. After Adichie giving the definition of "Feminist", Beyoncé highlights the fact that every woman nowadays overthinks of how she can be beautiful at all times even when they are on their own, namely posting their photo content on the Internet ("*You wake up flawless, post up flawless, ridin' round in it flawless, flossin' on it flawless*" (***Flawless, 2013, lines 42-45)). After that Beyoncé refers to diamonds implicating her ring. She tells the audience not to misunderstand this ("*Don't get it twisted*" (***Flawless, 2013, line 15)), since this is a ring she bought on her own for herself ("*This my shit*" (***Flawless, 2013, line 16)) and she does not need a man to buy whatever she wants ("*But don't think I'm just his little wife*" (***Flawless, 2013, line 14)). Calling her rock "flawless" she implicates the wedding ring she first wore and sang for in "*Single Ladies*" is priceless. In contrast to the literal "*rock*", that is her diamond, on the very next line she refers to her "*roc*" denoting her husband, Jay-Z, who founded the music records "*Roc Nation*" (***Flawless, 2013, lines 48-49). Nevertheless, the husband is usually characterized as the rock of the family, who vouches the whole family by traditionally working hard and bringing money and food home.

Now, finally, it is worth mentioning what are the implications of the circle the music video makes through the scenes from the competition as well as the three stars in the songs title. The video starts with Ed McMahon presenting Girls Tyme giving us a sense of triumph inclining us towards the victory of the female group. However, the song ends with their defeat by the boy band, Skeleton Crew, who got four stars against three that Girls Tyme got (see Figure 20).

Figure 20: ***Flawless music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

"***Flawless", hence, is a song written in favor of those three stars that made Beyoncé stronger after losing from five white men. This childhood failure could have intercepted Beyoncé and made her feel worthless to keep fighting for her dreams and targets. However, that never happened and now she is the most powerful woman in the music industry.

4.4.   The Female Body

As I have already mentioned postfeminism incorporates, and naturalizes women's liberation and, hence, women in their attempt to devote themselves to a "liberated" performance they are required to conform to the cultural ideals of femininity promoted by the media, which reflect the slim, young, stylish accomplished women (Brooks, 2015). In other words, media produce beauty standards through celebrities and women exposing themselves to such information feel forced to engage.

In the music video of "*Sorry*", as mentioned before, Serena's body drags our interest. Serena's body seems unwilling to comply with the set. In particular, once the camera gives her a gaze, she looks severely back at it challenging the audience to criticize her. Serena highlights her defiance keeping twerking next to Beyoncé, who sits on her throne singing "*Sorry, I ain't sorry*" (Sorry, 2016, line 1). Although this motion of her derriere is usually criticized by the white societies, Miley Cyrus was accepted moving in the same way during her performances (Olutola, 2018). Consequently, the fact that

Serena keeps moving in that way framed by the lyrics "*Sorry, I ain't sorry*" denotes her challenging the white American society, which disparages the blackness while at the same time commodifies it to earn money from it (see Figure 21). Beyoncé challenges the basic notions of how the female body should look like and shows that a big athletic body is equally feminine and beautiful.

Figure 21: Sorry music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

However, Beyoncé has brought up the female body discourse earlier in her album *Beyoncé Platinum* striking with another sonically and visually powerful song concerning physical perfection "*Pretty Hurts*". "*Pretty Hurts*" is a song reflecting on the bias that you must be beautiful to survive in this society:

> "*Mama said, "You're a pretty girl*
>
> *What's in your head, it doesn't matter*
>
> *Brush your hair, fix your teeth*
>
> *What you wear is all that matters*" (Sorry, 2013, line 4-7).

Nevertheless, it is not only about beauty in general but following certain beauty standards which apply to the Western White community. Black traits, such as dark skin broad noses, afro hair, are considered as not accepted for one to be pretty. Consequently, in this video clip we observe Beyoncé's effort to look like a White by straightening her hair and get the perfect teeth so she can have the perfect smile.

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Change in her black appearance is also noticed in other music videos of Beyoncé as well, such as the introduction of Partition, where she has blonde short straight hair. In the song there is the depiction of a mother who would always remind her little girl to be pretty avoiding her mental skills and other talents. Beyoncé having lived a life practicing singing but also taking part in beauty contests she mentions in her interview "Self-Titled 2- Imperfection":

"I have this image of trophies, me accepting the awards, kind of a training myself to be this champion. And at the end of the day when you go through all of the things, is it worth it? When you get the trophy and you like... I basically starved, I have neglected all of the people that I love, I confront to what everybody else thinks I should be, and I got the trophy. What is that mean?" (Beyonce, 2013)

Pretty Hurts shows us how a black woman who struggles to match the normative beauty standards during the preparation for a beauty pageant. Here, a beauty pageant is a symbol of a place where people can judge a woman by several standards. During the quarantine, all contestants force themselves to maintain their perfect silhouette (see Figure 22). They work out, follow strict diets, perform cosmetic surgeries and they consume pills as well. However, there are different beauty standards around the globe such as certain tribes in Africa, whose women stretch their lips because that is what makes a woman desirable.

Consequently, the fact that the contestants "starve" for winning this contest show they are capable of doing anything to change their appearance to match the generalized idea of beauty.

"Blonder hair, flat chest

TV says, "Bigger is better."

South beach, sugar free

Vogue says, "Thinner is better." (Pretty Hurts, 2013, line 18-21).

Figure 22: Pretty Hurts music video, Retrieved from YouTube (Screenshot)

Television and Vogue magazine are very powerful to define what is pretty in our society and what is not. Generally, women's magazines are expected to aim to a diverse audience however, black women are rarely hosted in their pages. For example, despite the fact that Vogue counts almost two centuries in the media and creative industries, the first time it used a black model for its cover was further after its establishment, namely in 1974 and that was Beverly Johnson. On the other hand, the rest of the issue had been addressing women with light skin and long straight hair. As mentioned before in order to be considered as a beautiful woman you need to obtain white characteristics in your physical appearance, however when different civilizations and races intersect, then we meet several distinct types of attractiveness. Consequently, due to the limitless beauty standards, women may just take the decision to start consuming diet pills or get liposuction, wear a lighter shade of foundation or even bleach their skin. The song and music video demonstrate the significance of self-acceptance for Black women since it is impossible to reach the normative standards. The time when Black women wake up to the fact that they are beautiful in their own way, will be the time for them to find their self-definition. Subsequently, the real struggle for Black women is to make themselves look pretty and amplify their self-esteem and not to adjust to the society's beauty standards. Because:

"*When you're alone all by yourself (pretty hurts, pretty hurts)*

And you're lying in your bed (pretty hurts, pretty hurts)

Reflection stares right into you (pretty hurts, pretty hurts)

Are you happy with yourself" (Pretty Hurts, 2013, lines 42-45).

4.5.   Female Subjectivity

Among the so far mentioned discourses in Beyoncé's music, it is obvious that she has also developed media narratives regarding marriage usually finding a way to connect her songs to her relationship with Jay-Z and to female subjectivity being concerned about her identity and her role as a subject, since male experience is usually on the spotlight. (Mask, 2009 & Davis, 2017).

In the song "*Sorry*" Beyoncé dedicates a part to talk about a defiant breakup mentioning:

"*He trying to roll me up (I ain't sorry)*

I ain't picking up (I ain't sorry)

Headed to the club (I ain't sorry)

I ain't thinking 'bout you (I ain't sorry)" (Sorry, 2016, lines 7-10) highlighting that no one can interrupt her peace right now even if that was a romantic interruption. Beyoncé feels now successful enough to even care about him *("I don't give a fuck"* (Sorry, 2016, line 12)) and she tells him to "*suck on my balls*" (Sorry, 2016, line 13), showing now the equivalent disrespect to her man while at the same time using such a phrase is like taking away the power of masculinity from him to use it for her own benefit. As for the "*pause*" (Sorry, 2016, line 13) word in the lyrics, it seems to be a reference to a part in Kanye West's song "So Appalled" sung by Jay-Z and hence she tries to mock him using this word after saying something sexually suggestive.

"*Now you wanna say you're sorry, now you wanna call me crying*" (Sorry, 2016, lines 27-28), says Beyoncé showing her anger being the one to always blame. This line could both refer to society who always blames her for her performances and ideas and to her husband to whom she has been always apologetic, though it seems that now it is his turn to say "*sorry*". Passing to the bridge she looks at her watch noticing that her man should have been at home by then and the fact that he is still out makes her regret

the ring she put on back in the *"Single Ladies"*. Beyoncé has already gone away not feeling sorry, but she highlights that she is not going to be unfaithful. Rather she tells him to call "*Becky with the good hair*" (Sorry, 2016, line 70). Becky constitutes a stereotypical name used by the black community to characterize an average white woman.

Beyoncé's mistrust to her husband is also obvious in "*Hold Up*", but what she tries to show us through it is that feelings do never consider politics, not even logic. "*Hold Up*" is one of Beyoncé's most vigorous love and loyalty tributes to her husband, Jay-Z, in which she highlights the physical and emotional love for him, however she is willing to do anything in order to find out whether he cheats on her. The rage and bitterness that Beyoncé feels is made sonically obvious through the lighthearted and upbeat instrumental.

Beyoncé walks through the streets full of determination holding her "Hot Sauce" bat ready to smash anything that comes in her way dressed in a yellow gown signifying the Nigerian Yoruba river goddess Oshun. Oshun is the only goddess sent to Earth and represents sensuality, love, fertility and water, which symbolizes the "perfect memory". Beyoncé as a contemporary Oshun reacts to her husband's unloyalty with surplus rage and she "give[s] zero fucks and . . . got zero chill" in this song. She says she "*kept it sexy*" (Hold Up, 2016, line 15) referring to her previous normal and stoic attitude, but now she has reached the point where, in her words, "*I'mma fuck me up a bitch*" (Hold Up, 2016, line 14) she crosses the line and starts ejecting curses.

> *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, 2016, line 17-19)

Thus, as she herself mentions, she would rather be crazy and her making that decision means that she can rage without any feeling of guilt. In particular, instead of falling into passive insanity she chooses to embrace this craziness and celebrate it causing chaotic damages to anything comes in her way.

Beyoncé seems to recall the feeling of "Why don't you love me" when she had been suspicious that her husband was not loyal to her though she was physically and emotionally dedicated to him. She idolizes him saying that "*there's no other man above you*" (Hold Up, 2016, line 24) and at the same time she highlights in a way the importance of a commitment and the vows they gave when he treats her in a "wicked way" (Hold Up, 2016, line 25).

The video clip starts with the poem "Denial" written by Warsan Shire, in which Beyoncé narrates her effort to believe anything other than the truth; she even did anything the religion commands in order to commit herself to it, but the question that still torments her is: "*Are you cheating on me*?"

Finally, Beyoncé has been criticized for reinforcing women's objectification and, hence, inferiority through the display of her relationship with Jay-Z. For instance, "*Drunk in Love*" constitutes one of the most controversial songs of Beyoncé, in which her husband Jay-Z participates, since there are different readings behind it. A translation behind the song is the intimate partner violence and if this is the true meaning behind it then it is understood why her feminist feelings have been criticized throughout the time. In particular, Jay-Z's part seems to be very problematic including messages of violence in almost every line of his:

"*Catch a charge I might, beat the box up like Mike*

In '97 I bite,

I'm Ike, Turner, turn up

Baby no I don't play, now eat the cake, Anna Mae

Said, Eat the cake, Anna Mae!" (Drunk in Love, 2013, lines 64-68)

Those lyrics do not even hide the violent content of the song, but give it straight away instead making it easy to visualize the images Jay-Z describes so graphically. It is interesting to take the lines one by one to see the meaning behind them. "*Catch a charge I might*" inclines us towards a potential action of Jay-Z which may get him involved with the police. Indeed, had he committed such actions against his wife in real life as the ones described in the following lines, then he would probably have been in

jail. In particular, dismembering the line "*Beat the box up like Mike*" it is obvious that a very violently sexual message is hidden in it. "Box" stands for the female genitalia, in which a penis ejaculates and when he talks "beating" the "box", he manages to highlight the violence of this sexual action. Here we spot two meanings behind this line. First there might be a connection to Tyson the professional boxer engaged in rough sexual relations highlighting the stereotypical image of the brute negro male. The second meaning comes to remind us the accusation of domestic abuse, which included rape, by Robin Givens against her former husband, Mike Tyson. Thus, both meanings include intimate partner violence.

However, Jay-Z will not stop referencing Tyson when in line "*In '97 I bite*" he refers to the popular bite that Mike Tyson gave to Evander Holyfield during their match in 1997. For once more Jay-Z does not lose the chance to highlight the brutality of his actions. After that, he comes to put on the spot a very distressing remembrance in the musical world. I am referring to the lines:

"I'm Ike, Turner, turn up

 Baby no I don't play, now eat the cake, Anna Mae

Said, Eat the cake, Anna Mae!" (Drunk in Love, 2016, line 66-68),

which constitute a clear reference to Tina Turner's abuse by her former husband. Jay-Z turns wild once again with Beyoncé and he "turns up" out of sexual control or even alcohol and drugs. Now, Anna Mae is Tina Turner's birthname and Jay-Z commands her to "*eat the cake*", that is Beyoncé to perform fellatio.

Nonetheless, what precedes and follows as well as the video clip do not really connect to the theme of domestic abuse, but to desire and sexual excitement. The artistic products do not necessarily imitate the artists' real life and since the Carters' (Jay-Z and Beyoncé's family name) marriage is projected as a happy one, it would be ungrounded to argue that the couple sing for domestic abuse.

On the other hand, there is a group of people who read this song through the point of view of the non-partner violence. In particular, there are parts of the lyrics which reveal that the two stars do not know each other in the song; it is the first time

they meet. Jay-Z challenges Beyoncé "*I wanna see…the shit…I heard.", "back up all of that mouth…'bout you the baddest bitch*" (Drunk in Love, 2013, line 54-58). Those lines make it clear to the audience that this is not about a married couple, but to individuals who meet for the first time ready to involve into a sexual intercourse. As far as the four lines analyzed in the previous paragraphs, putting them under the lens of a hook-up makes more sense to characterize it as a non-partner violence case and depict this image as a never lived experience by the Carters.

Through the song we listen to lyrics consisted of sexually and violently explicit language and images with references to real-life events trying to parley the way they are going to have this very sexual intercourse. These language and images reflect cases of violence against women and when Beyoncé sang those very lines (eat the cake Anna Mae) in the Grammys 2014 the audience was negatively surprised by how easily she said those words raising the anger of numerous feminists. That way Beyoncé manages to give the impression that she takes the responsibility from the for what happens in her song, which is a very usual phenomenon in real life.

5. CONCLUSIONS

5.1. Researching the phenomenon

Reading Beyoncé's performances of gender and femininity is not easy but challenging instead. Conducting this research, I went through her discography from 2010 onwards and chose to deal with her most popular, or unpopular for most critics, tracks examining the images of her music videos and the lyrics per se. Going through distinct mouthpieces of different notions of feminism from traditional and radical to more contemporary ones I delved into feminist theories to obtain a collective and objective point of view. Using the method of Multimodal critical discourse analysis, I went through the suggested steps so that I end up to a reliable outcome.

5.2. Answering the Research Question and Sub-questions

Considering those, throughout my study I have understood that Beyoncé has made it to be a dignified representative of feminism in the popular culture world and this is a great achievement to gain since black women are not among the options to reflect feminism (Guy – Sheftall, 2013). A clear example of it was her VMAs "***Flawless" performance, during which she dared to stand in front of a massive sign saying "Feminist" giving at the same time the definition of it. By not choosing to stand for "Black Feminism" or "womanism" through that sign she opts to represent the entire feminist community and that reflects her huge power and influence towards the society (Hobson, 2016).

It is important to comprehend the significance of what such a pop star has achieved in an era when feminism is suspicious and strongly criticized as an unattractive movement which promotes man-hating and autarchy. At this time Beyoncé has come with all her sexiness, with a husband, who praises machismo, and with her child-raising duties to claim feminism (Hobson, 2016).

Throughout her work Beyoncé asserts individual agency against patriarchy, which is clear and understandable during her performances where she manages to control the gazes. During her HBO documentary, *Beyoncé: Life Is but a Dream* she mentions:

I truly believe that women should be financially independent from their men.

And let's face it: money gives men the power to run the show. It gives men the

power to define value. They define what's sexy. And men define what's

feminine. It's ridiculous (Beyoncé, 2013).

Hence, Beyoncé puts it vice versa building a career and using her financial capital to
promote black womanhood throughout a demonstration of the black female body,
which stars in her painstaking performances (Duan, 2016).

Her work might not be perfect in all the ways as criticism is often levelled at her
career. However, she has managed to create a space in the popular imagery to
reconsider black womanhood and femme identity. Especially through songs such as
"***Flawless", in which she is presented as aggressive and pointing directly to the
viewer as if she says "listen to me, I am talking to you" she shows that being an
aggressive femme regards a position of power that popular culture does not commend.
In the contemporary world it is believed that obtaining and possessing power is
synonymous to masculinity, but being a femme proves that wrong. In order to express
complex distinctness, there is a need of accepting and fusing both queer femininity and
masculinity (Mitchell, 2016).

Although Beyoncé has been strictly criticized, this research states that she has
achieved something significant, that is breaking the walls of academic feminism letting it
out and reachable, thus, creating space for all women to embrace it. As previously
mentioned, "***Flawless" has been a cornerstone in Beyoncé's career introducing the
notion of "feminist" by a black woman, Adichie, who is unknown in those circles.
Through her music she learns, and lives feminism and she never claimed perfection,
since feminism is not about being perfect, but she tries to spread the ideology to as
many women as possible (Cooper, 2016).

Throughout my study I have come to the conclusion that no feminism can exist
without acceptance of the other. And what I mean by that is that studying the notions of
feminism, postfeminism and black feminism aiming to identify elements of those in her
work, I comprehended that those terms are not different but interdependent. Feminism

is an ideology that should include every single kind of femininity from white cisgender women to black queer individuals.

Beyoncé has come to stand for black culture and womanhood with the release of *Lemonade* which reflected black people by broaching a very specific issue that the community experiences, that is a woman's feelings of betrayal, and connecting it with "a historical African-American narrative of triumph over tragedy". Beyoncé has talked a lot about cheating in the very album and this is a commonly known topic in black women's music, namely singing for women who go back to their cheaters believing that love is the solution to every crack in a relationship.

Moreover, we have observed throughout the research that Beyoncé has been working a lot on discussing the representation of the female body. Specifically, in her song "Pretty Hurts" she is dealing with the stereotype that all women should conform with the Western white type of body, that is tall, thin with blonde hair. She has even tried to illustrate that type of woman in her music video of "Partition" by having her hair straight blonde living her life as a Western white woman in her mansion putting a blonde white girl to play her maid instead. However, after that we are transferred into her fantasy where black curvy body with her brown curly hair show that sexuality has no colour nor shape. In "Pretty Hurts" Beyoncé reflects the life of a model who struggles to become what society demands her to be, following practices that leads to decline her black identity. But the outcome of this is the reflection of her image on a mirror at the end of the day, when nothing of this matters and she is not happy with herself trying to motivate women to befriend their bodies and try to evolve mentally, culturally, socially.

Beyoncé seems to be working on her own feminism, her own beliefs. And this practice seems to be influential, meaning she achieves what we previously mentioned: to spread the feminist thought and make everyone think of themselves as feminists.

5.3.   Theoretical implications of the research

In this study I have analyzed distinct works of Beyoncé both visually and lyrically, hence, her performances collectively. The findings are in accordance with what Frith (1996) has referred to as the three different layers of pop musician's performances that

can be present at the same time. Particularly, there is the personal element one puts to their song through their lived experience which weaved with a double enactment of a star personality and a song personality, namely their image and the lyrics representation. Beyoncé has managed to keep all those simultaneously at play either flawed or not, yet no one could deny her meticulous work in everything she has done so far in order to demonstrate her interpretation of feminism. However, it is significant to mention here that patriarchy and capitalism have always and still do rule the media and music industries, thus Beyoncé has never been forced to act in the way she has done so far. She could have sung for empowerment avoiding being that sensual and erotic as well as be equally successful without making statements for black womanhood, yet she never did and she has evolved to a deafening voice which draws great attention to issues of Black women and girls globally giving birth to her own kind of feminism (Tyree & Williams, 2016).

In conclusion, the research dares to agree and disagree at the same time with bell hooks when she suggested that viewers miss the point when they think of *Lemonade* as an album which addresses exclusively black women (Quarshie, 2017). This is the point, where my compliance is located. However, hooks supports her view on commodification and business strategies, mentioning that when something is sold as a plain commodity made to entice the viewers, when those viewers are the whole world since we are talking about Beyoncé, then it is impossible for the album to touch only the black community. With a first reading, this might seem reasonable, but looking behind the words we see a clear discordance with what Beyoncé tries to do all these years. And the results show that one needs power in order to be heard. Power is gained via capitalism, and capitalism leans on financial power. After breaking the walls of patriarchy, which dominates power and capitalism, and managing to become one of the most powerful individuals in the world, Beyoncé has finally the power to spread the word defying the consequences. By breaking the barriers of tradition and radicalism Beyoncé has come to conquer a 100% men's world to make her own game and

propagate feminism throughout a non-feminist industry, and this is something we all need to "bow down".

5.4.   Limitations and Further Research

In this research there have been some limitations concerning the analysis in accordance with the methodology. In particular, the method I have chosen for my research, Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis, suggests seven specific steps that need to be taken during the analysis of multimodal texts. However, those steps did not apply to every single music video that I collected for my research, since not all of them contained metaphors, nominalizations, hedging, or linguistic and visual resources representing Beyoncé's strategy. In the Appendix I have presented the perfect video clip ("Partition") which served the entire procedure, but not all of my data could conform with the suggested steps. For example, in the music video of the song "Drunk in Love", we can observe a controversial lexical text, which has been argued as promoting domestic abuse however, we miss the visual context that could potentially comply with the lyrics. Specifically, we see Beyoncé and Jay-Z trying to involve in a sexual intercourse consensually, thus the pop star's strategy here is not very clear.

Furthermore, another difficulty I experienced with my research concerned the procedure of the data collection. Particularly, during my research for the selection of music videos it was slightly hard to find content relative to my topic that would not only contain lexical text but also visual. For example, there were songs discussing gender and femininity, but there had been no video clip released for them. In addition to that, there were also songs respective to feminism, sexuality and the female body representation, but the music video could hardly keep pace with the lyrics. For instance, those very songs may have depicted the topic I am dealing with perfectly, but the music video would portray Beyoncé and her dancing crew performing a plain choreography. That was a significant limitation, which incepted me from going in depth with multimodal texts, since I could only analyze the linguistic parts of it, but I was unable to deal with the visual parts.

Apart from what was mentioned above, there are certainly several directions for future research since this study has shed light to some of Beyoncé's music videos that are not analyzed in depth. To start with, in order to reach the point of having a clear image of what Beyoncé represents, one should go through her whole history since her early steps in the music industry to what she has become and how. "***Flawless", "Partition" and "Formation" have been some of her more controversial music videos throughout her career, in a sense that though them Beyoncé has tried to reply to all the critics who have been arguing against her persona and her beliefs. Nevertheless, what needs to be done is to work on the broadest possible content of her discography, so that it gets understandable if what she represents and fights for is obvious in her entire career.

Furthermore, most of the feminist scholars and theorists, as mentioned in my theoretical framework, have chosen to follow the traditional and radical way of feminism spotting media texts which in another era would not be accepted and passed politically and socially. By that I implicate that as years and decades go by the political and social contexts change rapidly around us among with the changing ideals. More new theorists should deal with womanhood and the changing femininity having in mind that being sexual or raising children, for instance, can in no way harm feminism. We should, of course, maintain the foundations of this always extremely important movement, but we should also accept that by suppressing women to a certain lifestyle does not conform with feminism per se, thus more distinct and diverse brains should come on the surface to investigate this phenomenon from different points of view.

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8. APPENDIX

Steps taken during the analysis (e.g. "Partition" music video)

Methodological steps	Lexical or Visual Example	Denotation
1. **Basic lexical analysis and analysis of individual visual semiotic choices in texts.**	e.g. lyric: *Driver roll up the partition please, I don't need you seein' Yonce on her knees*	Here, Beyonce asks the driver of the limousine she is in to "roll up the partition" between him and the backseat, because she is performing fellatio on Jay-Z, her husband, and she does not want to be seen.
2. **Semiotic resources representing the attitudes of speakers**		Here, we see Beyonce performing a stripping dance for her husband. She is very sensual, and she is showing us her whole sexuality.
3. **Linguistic and visual semiotic resources available for representing people and naming strategies.**	e.g. lyrics: Hello! Est-ce que tu aimes le sexe ? Le sexe, je veux dire : l'activité physique, le coït. Tu aimes ça? Tu ne t'intéresses pas au sexe? Les hommes pensent que les féministes détestent le sexe mais c'est une activité très stimulante et	The meaning she wants to give us here is that men believe that feminists do not like sex, though it is an exciting and natural activity women love. Through those lyrics Beyonce is

		naturelle que les femmes adorent	individualized refusing to agree with the socially accepted idea that feminists cannot get sexual.
4.	**Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis finds out the way linguistic and visual semiotic resources represent what people do.**	e.g. lyric: *Oh there daddy daddy now you ripped my fur, oh baby baby be sweating out my hair*	Here, Beyonce wants indeed to draw our attention to her and Jay-Z's identity concerning their sexual life through the language she uses, namely they seem to enjoy a dominant – submissive experience, which confuses feminists.
5.	**Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis deals with metaphorical tropes in discourse**	e.g. lyric: *He Monica Lewinsky-ed all on my gown*	This is a metaphor referring to the "Lewinsky scandal" according to which there had been several sexual encounters between Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton. So, by using her name in her song Beyonce wants to denote the

			ejaculation Jay-Z had "on her gown".
6.	**Nominalization and presupposition in language**	e.g. lyric: *He like to call me Peaches when we get this nasty*	Here, we deal with the assumption that the viewer/listener knows the history behind this name and that it constitutes a typical stripper's name.
7.	**Analysis of modality and hedging in texts and visual communication**	e.g. lyric: *Red wine drip, we'll talk that trash*	Here the modality, namely the use of "we will", shows a great certainty of what follows after the "red wine drip". In other words, Beyonce is sure that they "will talk that trash" and she does not use "may talk" instead.