de genere

Rivista di studi letterari, postcoloniali e di genere
Journal of Literary, Postcolonial and Gender Studies

http://www.degenere-journal.it/
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ISSN 2465-2415

Beyond The Archives of Pain: Diasporic Memories of Ecstasy and the Black Feminine Divine in Beyoncé's *6 Inch*

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Beyoncé's *Lemonade* (2016) is an audio-visual album that intertwines the protagonist's personal experience of betrayal with a history of black female abused sexuality. Journeying across Louisiana's gothic landscapes, from its haunting bayous, swamps and plantations to the vibrant city of New Orleans, *Lemonade* exhumes the unwritten memories of black women's pain from the oblivion of the official records of the Ante- and Post-bellum US South. It re-figures the South away from notions of white nostalgia and turns it into a counter-hegemonic space where memories of erotic expression survive the repeated forms of black female unfreedom and sexual exploitation. As several moments of Afro-diasporic rituality are projected on screen, Beyoncé accesses black diasporic mythology as a submerged epistemological archive for representations of ecstasy that disrupt the Western and Christian flesh/spirit dichotomy. Focusing on the "6 Inch" video, this article will look into the strategic ways its visuals entice readings of Beyoncé's body as the reiteration throughout modernity of the normalized commodification of the hyper-sexualized mulatto women—the "irresistible" Victorian quadroons and octoroons. At the same time, the ritual dimension that saturates the video also discloses a complication of that history of abuse by establishing genealogies between mulatto women and mythical manifestations of black female erotics. Channeling Oshún and Pomba Gira—love goddesses from the West-African and Afro-Brazilian pantheons—Beyoncé's body is deified and made into the recipient of black diasporic counter-memories that illuminate the triangular connection between flesh, erotic motion and ecstatic pleasure. Closing on a flames-engulfed brothel before which Beyoncé and other mistresses stand, the video's Southern scenarios factually historicize black women's experiences of deep-seated misogynoir. At the same time, they also become sites of black feminist theorizing through which Beyoncé reconfigures her relationship to the past by embracing and manifesting an unashamed black female erotic agency in the present.

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In 1982, Ntozake Shange publishes *Sassafrass, Cypress & Indigo*, a political work of fiction that describes the coming to consciousness of three young sisters from Charleston (SC) in the aftermath of the Civil Rights Movement as they travel across the US in search of their identity to finally come back home to the rural South. "Signifying on, in an illuminating gender-specific way, the 'leap to freedom' of the slave narratives" (Elder 1992, 100),[1] the physio-spiritual movement that the story describes reverses the black enslaved people's former South-to-North trajectory in favor of a resignification of the South as the crib of, and the place to return to, "a peculiar African American history of cultural inheritance" (101). This history, one learns, consists of traditionally women-centered spiritual knowledge, of medical roots and foods with healing properties, and of family arts like midwifery and quilt-making. One year later, Paule Marshall publishes *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983), a novel that tells the circumstances that lead Avatara Johnson, a recently widowed black, middle-aged, middle-class woman from NYC, to the Granadian island of Carriacou. Once there, she is guided to the islanders' sacred place and joyfully participates in an ancestral ceremonial gathering that will take her memory back to her childhood when her aunt would tell her all about the legends of Igbo Landing. Overwhelmed by a cathartic process of mourning, on Carriacou Avatara fulfills the "journey towards integration of body and spirit and self-reaffirmation through identification with her racial heritage" (Frey Waxman 1987, 94). Fast forward nearly ten years, African American director Julie Dash releases *Daughters of the Dust* (1991), a movie set at the beginning of the 20th century that chronicles the last day the Peazant family spends together on Dawtah Island – off the coasts of Georgia and South Carolina – before most of them leave to follow the African American great migration up North. Departure, however, is met with an even more pronounced emphasis on what a return to the places of ancestral memories entails as Yellow Mary Peazant sets foot again on the island. A mixed-race former prostitute with a female lover by her side, Yellow Mary incarnates a collective history of racial and sexual abuse as well as its haunting presence in the life of African Americans. Her reappearance in the community is, therefore, as destabilizing as it is timely because it will force everyone to reckon with that history and acknowledge the necessity to properly mourn it in order for the family to move on with their life.

While one could certainly name several more stories in the black tradition that describe similar trajectories, the brief accounts I have given of these creative endeavors already delineate what I believe are two essentially intersected concepts: first, the content and direction of these stories align with a broader project of self-reconstitution through the vernacular tradition that black women thinkers of the 1970s and 1980s espoused in their productions, and which still continues to this very day.[2] Secondly,

[1] As Arlene Elder explains, the slave-narratives comprise a total of roughly 6000 stories by African American men and women who flee the antebellum South in their pursuit of freedom. While each of them presents unique historical and geographical details, they nonetheless share overwhelming similarities in the type of experiences that make up their movement from bondage to freedom (Elder 1992, 100).

[2] The list includes writers such as Alice Walker, Gayl Jones, Gloria Naylor, Toni Cade Bambara and Toni Morrison, all of whom were connected to the pioneering work of Zora Neal Hurston. As Henry Louis Gates, Jr. argues, their connection was established on the basis of the strong affinities they shared with Hurston in the use of "black vernacular speech and rituals, in ways subtle and various, to chart the coming to consciousness of black women, so glaringly absent in other black fiction" (Gates 2006, 196-197).

the works that inform this black feminist tradition read the journeying of post-civil rights black individuals in ways that project an image of the US South as the locus of considerable political empowerment for back women.[3] Specifically, they appear to variously build on the ideas of "wandering" and access to the US South in its potential to expose the scattered dispersion and concealment of black diasporic memories in the interstices of hegemonic US history. Resorting to a multiplicity of forms – from the novel to cinema and the visual arts – black artists return to the places where "definitions of Americanness and African diaspora hinge" and "engage in rituals of collective remembering" (Tillet 2012, 4-5) of their past in order to provide revisionist perspectives of otherwise distorted historical representations of their identities.

It is my contention that the album *Lemonade* (2016) by Beyoncé represents, as well as theoretically expands, exactly one such work. For this reason, my wish in this article is to further elaborate on the latter concept by reading "6 Inch" – one of the music videos included in *Lemonade* – through the lens of this black feminist tradition. Like other post-civil-rights cultural products in its line, *Lemonade* is committed to a narrative of physical and psychic return to the US South that reshapes the ways in which these territories are thought, remembered, narrated and evoked in popular discourse. With specific attention to the antebellum and segregated southern regions of the country, Beyoncé explores the metaphysical potential of journeying in the deep South to reveal the marginalization, misrepresentation, and erasure of black women that occur in the fabrication of America's national identity. She does so, as Salamishah Tillet brilliantly argues, by "claim[ing] and reconstruct[ing] pivotal figures, events, memories, locations, and experiences from American slavery in order to provide interiority and agency for enslaved African Americans and write them into the national narrative" from which they have been continuously excluded (Tillet 2012, 5). *Lemonade* is a visual album that tells in musical, poetic, and cinematic form the psychic journey of an African American woman – played in the visual by Beyoncé herself – through the pains of her partner's infidelity. At the same time, this event discloses patterns of intraracial relationality that resonate with a communal history of black female trauma, and negated erotics and affect that are rooted in the haunting shadow of American slavery. As Sequoia Maner argues, Beyoncé "examines the patterns of violence in intimate relationships as a synecdoche for understanding violence within [the] larger social patterns" (Maner 2018, 192) of misogynoir,[4] patriarchy, and heterosexism. In its return to the sites of slavery,[5] *Lemonade* conjures Louisiana's geography – its plantations, its secluded swamps and bayous, its abandoned forts and the vibrant New Orleans – in a cathartic process of remembrance of private yet also historical grievances. It projects the US South on screen as a performative *and*

[3] It seems to me important to stress how these works' investment in moving back southwards does not manifest itself in the shape on an uncritical romanticized nostalgia of the past. Chronicling the African American woman's *bildungsroman* as she reconnects with her roots does not seem to stand for a modernized version of, say, the "minstrelsy's plantation nostalgia [that] returned Jim Crow to his happy home and affirmed the institution of slavery in happy scenes of the plantation and carry-me-back-to-the-old-plantation songs of ex slaves" (Hartman 1997, 29). For a detailed account on how minstrel shows and melodrama contributed to a romanticized perception of the US South, especially in the antebellum era, see Hartman 1997.

[4] Coined by queer black feminist Moya Bailey, it indicates a type of misogyny specifically directed against black women, for whom race and gender both play a decisive role in the bias (Bailey 2010).

[5] These are the sites of the slave past that Salamishah Tillet theorizes post-civil right artists return to in their works in order to reappropriate histories that have been forgotten, distorted, or erased (Tillet 2012, 9).

transformative platform where black womanhood is portrayed in its socio-historical vulnerability, yet also in search of empowerment through the manifestation of, and access to, divine erotic agency.

This happens via *Lemonade*'s use of an Afro-diasporic spiritual apparatus – its reference to black-oriented symbols, practices, and rituals – that constitutes an alternative epistemological archive through which black women can shape definitions of identity and agency away from the pervasiveness of the Mammy, Jezebel, Sapphire, and Matriarch stereotypes. Read through the lens of black metaphysics, *Lemonade*'s reliance on Afro-diasporic ritual symbolism establishes the feminine divine as a vital source of knowledge about the self and the exploration of one's own erotics. Within *Lemonade*, theophanies with diasporic female deities become the prism through which Beyoncé articulates representations of sexuality that disrupt the Western and Christian dichotomy of flesh and spirit. As I will seek to demonstrate, this reliance on a black mythical femininity that openly reclaims sexual agency provides, as Vanessa K. Valdés argues, "alternative models of womanhood that differ substantially from those found in dominant Western patriarchal culture, namely that of virgin, asexual wife/mother, and whore" (Valdés 2014, 2). In her journeying back through the US South, Beyoncé insists on diasporic spiritual aesthetics that provides divine validation for black women's experience of the erotic. Commitment to specific black diasporic epistemologies that document the woman's ascendence to a status of goddess(es), or an intimate relation with them, in fact, allows Beyoncé to lay claims on black women's right to manifest sexual expressions that are not deemed deviant, indecent, or abhorrent.

In a context where black mythology becomes the cultural prism of women's erotics, the memories of black sexual expressivity embedded in black Atlantic rituals operate a potential reconfiguration of sexuality away from notions of privatization, utilitarianism, and deviance that determine its presence in Western Christian cultures. Contrary to a hegemonic history of black female sexuality that has been predominantly shaped by repression and/or exploitation, the existence of memories where the erotics and spirituality come together provide dynamic spaces in the Southern landscape of *Lemonade* for the articulation of loss in its personal and intergenerational implications. A reflection on black women's experiences of trauma, the protagonist's specific pain translates into the cinematic reflection of a history of black female pornotroping that becomes the object of a politicized act of mourning of black unfreedom in all its perdurable manifestations.[6] At the same time, the influence of Afro-diasporic religions in the visual text allows the music videos from *Lemonade* to show memories of black women's erotics that are deeply creative and recreational in nature.

Focusing on "Emptiness" and "Loss" – two of the many poetic sections that constellate the *Lemonade* narrative – and the following "6 Inch" video, this article examines how Beyoncé's body evokes a history of normalized sexual exploitation in the US South. Simultaneously, an analysis of the rich spiritual symbolism that is deployed throughout the visual will shed light on the hidden Afro-diasporic memories of black female flesh and sexuality that Beyoncé's presence conjures to establish a

[6] A pornographic way of seeing the black female black body that is influenced by facts, fiction and fetishization. In "Mama's Baby", Spillers uses the word with specific reference to the captive female body that is "disrupted [...] by externally imposed meanings" which stunningly span from its becoming "the source of an irresistible, destructive sensuality" to its reduction to a thing (Spillers 1987, 67).

revised relationship to her past and to develop an unashamed black female erotic agency in the present.

Occurrences and Recurrences of History: From the Slave Auctions to Storyville's Brothels

"6 Inch" produces an act of revisionism of Southern historical scenarios that have excluded black women from rejoicing in their own sexual autonomy and pleasure. As happens almost everywhere in the *Lemonade* film, the song's video mimics the process through which thoughts are shaped by our psyche by showing a flow of erratic, scattered images with no apparent consequential order. What emerges is the presentation of dream-like worlds filled with fantastical yet obscure and startling scenes that affect the legibility of whatever synopsis pursued by watchers. At its core, "6 Inch" is a narrative set in a New Orleans's red-tinted nightlife, with quick changes of scenery transporting the audience from the black limousine that initially escorts the woman through the city hallways and private clubs to an old Victorian manor where Beyoncé reminisces various moments of turn-of-the-twentieth-century Southern prostitution along with other black mistresses.

Carefully scrutinized by the camera, Beyoncé's body is loaded with a history of libidinal exploitation that has seen no end since the Middle Passage. From the slave auctions to the early-nineteenth-century quadroon balls and the 1890s Storyville brothels, "6 Inch" conjures memories that inscribe Beyoncé in a genealogy of mulatto women who are bound to the permutable, yet enduring, structures of "racialized exchanges of power and desire" in the circum-Atlantic trafficking of humans (Blanco-Borelli 2014, 67). With reference to colonial and late 1890s New Orleans' history, mixed-race women legally defined as quadroons and octoroons[7] were involved in an always renewing process of commodification of black female flesh that saw its beginnings in the spectacles of the slave auction blocks.[8] As Joseph Roach explains:

> the "fancy-girl" auctions, the sales of quadroons [...] and octoroons proved an exceptionally popular New Orleans specialty, performed in an atmosphere charged not only with white privilege but with male privilege. As anxious buyers bid up the price many times that of a good field hand, the sale of relatively well-educated and relatively white women into sexual bondage raised the erotic stakes higher in a public, democratic spectacle. (Roach 1996, 215)

Likewise, quadroon balls came to represent a structuring reality in the life of 19th century mixed-race women. These balls were, in fact, often the space where negotiations for concubinage – also known as plaçage – were contractualized based on the women's capacity "to mulaticize themselves and [use] the value that their bodies had to wield it as capital and market themselves" (Blanco-Borelli 2004, 79). As such, they were *de facto* the exploitative reflection of a New World libidinal economy that

[7] Before the 1911 "One-drop rule" erased all distinctions among black people – who were by then indistinctively labelled as black – strict racial classifications were in place and strongly influenced people's social relations. Specifically, *quadroon* and *octoroon* were the official terms to designate people who were, respectively, one-fourth and one-eighth black by descent.

[8] The high theatricality of the "staged exhibition of bodies for the purpose of selling them is an obvious enough marketing strategy that marks those bodies publicly as not possessed of themselves as property" while it simultaneously drains human relationship of whatsoever form of sympathy (Roach 1996, 211 and 213).

pivoted around "white male capitalist productions conceived, controlled, and attended by them and for their own material and sexual enjoyment" (78). At the balls, *mulatas*[9] performed their status of precious commodity by adopting "pre-scripted choreographies of racialized and gendered performances [...] as a way to gain greater access to citizenship and personhood" (68) and achieve a relative prospect of choice and mobility.[10]

Showing her body in voluptuous motion while wearing see-through, netted gowns, or dancing in tight black and red bodysuits, Beyoncé activates troubling fantasies that evoke the black body in bondage, thus positioning herself in the continuous act of interlocking a history of subjection to the articulations of seduction as an instrument of economic and social access. Omise'eke Tinsley voices such liminality of subjection and agency by associating the prostitutes of the Victorian manor to a sort of militia in heels. The "Loss" section of the film shows:

> an image of Beyoncé in a high-necked, floor length red-and-black brocade gown, standing in a dark room ominously swinging a red light on a chain. Shadowy and dilapidated, the room's ornate lamps, Georgian fireplace, striped chairs and valanced drapes recall a haunted version of "octoroon parlors" – brothels staffed by light-skinned women of color in turn-of-the-twentieth-century New Orleans. Beyoncé's red light illuminates a cadre of black women in antique clothes, furs and jewelry [...] stationed unsmilingly on chairs and settees much as Storyville prostitutes sat in brothel parlors on display for potential customers. (Tinsley 2018, 80-81)

In the silence that pervades the gothic room, these black women dwell emotionless in decadent clothes as Beyoncé stands in their midst. At each circular swing, the red light projects the women's magnified shadows onto the room walls many times over, accentuating their menacing posture. Their presence is both mournful and haunting.

When slavery was formally abolished in 1865, spectacles of human disposability like the slave auctions and the quadroon balls underwent processes of transformation and displacement. The explicitly sexually abusive features of both events continued at a deeper, more hidden level of articulation in the 1890s parlors, the Southern brothels where mixed-race women engaged in acts of prostitution. Established by city ordinance, Storyville was New Orleans' red-light district from 1897 until 1917 and, as Joseph Roach suggests, it successfully reconstituted the instances of exploitative pleasure that were embedded in the sexual politics of slavery. In the red-light district "the supply of [female] flesh could meet the ever more specialized demand" (1996, 225). Located in the cyclonic center of this human-consuming New World economy, black women have been particularly exposed to the "violent, triangular conjunction of money, property, and flesh" (215). "As theatrical spectacles, [slave auctions] materialize the most intense of symbolic transactions in circum-Atlantic culture: money transforms flesh into property; property transforms flesh into money; flesh

[9] Blanco-Borelli uses the Spanish spelling when focusing on the *mulata* in New Orleans (2014, 81). Within the same geographical settings, I hence use it interchangeably with *mulatto woman*.

[10] Blanco-Borelli notes that *mulatas* negotiated "their spaces of identity given the fact that blackness was synonymous with slave, and slave status did not offer any form of choice, mobility, or freedom" (Blanco-Borelli 2014, 68). In a context where being black equated to being a slave, having the ability to move through the several shades of ambiguous racial identity represented an asset for many women, who could seek economic and social relief for themselves and their offspring through legally binding contractual agreements.

transforms money into property" (id). Similarly, Storyville's marketization of mulatto women entered the legitimate economy of the city, making the mixed-race sex worker an extremely demanded profession.

Merging the present with the Ante- and Post-bellum South, *Lemonade* suggests how such triangular conjunction of money, property and black female flesh is still a tangible issue. And it does so by claiming how very specific historical narratives rooted in slavery's perverse sexual politics have come to define, "regulate, and organize […] sexual expression in the African American community" (Stallings 2015, 17) either through shame, silence and denial, or through the internalized notions of black excess and deviance. Under such circumstances, "the question is not whether slavery still exists" (Roach 1996, 233), but into what forms of black female unfreedom it reconstitutes itself.

Afro-Diasporic Spirituality and Women's Access to the Black Feminine Divine

In a context of reiterated exploitation of female blackness, *Lemonade*'s articulate reference to black-oriented spiritual aesthetics enables a critique on the recursive forms of female exploitation steeped into the mysoginoirist rubric of US history. As Sara Clarke Kaplan argues, "the deployment of symbols, practices, and philosophies of the diaspora religions of black Americas" (Clarke Kaplan 2007, 513) provides a critical way to understand racialized grief as politicized acts of mourning that shed light on the continuous "interrelated losses of body, home, and freedom" (514) of African-descended individuals. Mourning, as enacted within the context of ceremonies of the circum-Atlantic pasts, becomes a militant response to systems of black annihilation dating back to the slave trade and continually renewed by the echo that the Middle Passage and slavery produce in the "processes of racialization initiated through and integrated with the production of and persistence of continuing structures of black unfreedom" (514). As *Lemonade* shows, the violent expropriation of female bodies and their coercion into the sexual economy of the American nation is one such predominant structure of unfreedom. Thus, the performance of Afro-centered instances of rituality in the film becomes an essential tool to critically question Western discourses of black women's subjection by revising their sexual past and simultaneously re-imagining their present and future as autonomous sexual beings.

Shot in a New Orleanian dim, red-lighted, isolated parking lot, the second poetic section that goes by the name of "Emptiness" provides the protagonist with a space of intervention through the enactment of ceremonial rituals. Within minutes from the start of "6 Inch", the music stops to let Beyoncé's voice speak in the role of external narrator. Here, the combination of visuals and poetry establishes a highly ritualized moment of diasporic reminiscence that alters the meaning of female sexual labor portrayed in the video and the song lyrics. With an ascensional movement from the concrete, the camera pauses on a frontal frame of a distant Beyoncé as she is genuflected at the center of a ring of fire. On a closer look, the woman appears immortalized and silent in a strapless red ball gown, her bosom covered by a broad metallic bib necklace, and her head crowned in a bulky bronze headpiece with white vertical spikes going all the way from back to front. The black woman's gaze faces the camera, yet she seems absent and elusive, waiting for supra-human entities to make themselves manifest. In the meantime, the deliverance of a slow, somber-toned, almost sacral, voiceover merges grief with the enactment of sexual pleasure and notions of divinity. We hear her voice recite:

> Grief sedated by orgasm; orgasm heightened by grief. God was in the room when the man said to the woman "I love you so much, wrap your legs around me and pull me in, pull me in, pull me in." Sometimes when he'd have her nipple in his mouth, she'd whisper "Oh My God." That too is a form of worship. (Knowles 2016, n.p.)

As the words suggest, the spirit's presence appears to be felt in a most intimate moment, that of the sexual intercourse with a man. Through the lyrical, yet extremely factual verses that Somali-British poet Warsan Shire created to describe the encounter,[11] not only is this spirit made bearer and enabler of that erotic union, but its enjoyment becomes a divine gift that rightfully belongs to the black woman. Hence, the poetry's levels of signification multiply: described as the active agent in the ignition and continuation of reciprocated pleasure, the woman physically assumes control and repeatedly asks the man: "wrap your legs around me, pull me in, pull me in, pull me in!". In this sense, Beyoncé defies stereotypes about proper feminine passivity in bed – and its association with sexual purity and naivety – and departs from traditionally condoned narratives of predatory male sexuality. At the same time, however, the female proactivity that emerges from the scene also harks back to the expectation and demand of sexual expertise from black women of the early nineteenth-century's quadroon balls and the late nineteenth-century's brothels of Storyville – an expectation that is rooted in, and reiterative of, historical associations of black womanhood with deviance. In a matter of seconds, pain is made to exceed the boundaries of what is meant as private to confound itself in the wrinkles of black American history. Here, pain is not just personal, it is political.

In this recreation of specific New Orleanian settings – the decadent brothel, the parlors, and the boudoir – "6 Inch" clearly bears witness to historically undisputed forms of white male exertion of power and unilateral demand for pleasure. However, Beyoncé also confronts narratives of reiterated bodily exploitation by positioning herself both as the exposer of those libidinal environments and as the unexpected recipient and consumer of the sexual drives that the existence of these places was meant to satisfy. Her voluptuous caramel-skinned silhouette moves in a space of double, contrasting signification: one echoing "the process of becoming and being read as a *mulata* by the [ideological] work that precedes her" (Blanco-Borelli 2014, 66) in the establishment of a culture of erotic consumerism; and another that, instead, responds to the sexualization of her flesh by connecting mixed-race women with the epistemological archives of uninhibited erotic openness that is embedded in the myths of black diaspora divinities. Here, the body of Beyoncé-as-*mulata* embraces a lineage of religiosity that connects mixed-race women to the diasporic orishas Oshún and Pomba Gira.[12]

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[11] The verses featured in *Lemonade* are variously adapted from Warsan Shire's 2012, 2014 and 2015 collections of poems. In particular, the "Emptiness" section of *Lemonade* includes lines from "Dear Moon (the distraction)" (2012), and "Grief Has Its Blue Hands in Her Hair" (2015).

[12] *The Lemonade Reader* (Brooks and Martin eds., 2019) offers an extensive analysis of the Afro-diasporic iconography and folklore echoed in the visual album. Some pieces included in the collection elaborate, in illuminating ways, on the implications that resorting to this folkloric archive has in terms of black female cultural representation. In particular, Tsang's "Signifying Waters" uses the facets that traditionally characterize Oshún "to draw attention to the parallels and synchronicity of the imagery and symbolism crafted in the visual album" (123). Even more interestingly, Jones' "The Slay Factor" locates Beyoncé's fashioning as Oshún into the "dark, ancient, radical, warrior Goddess tradition" inaugurated by Audre Lorde's reflections on Afrekete "that celebrates erotic power and affect (i.e., anger,

The understanding of Oshún as a beautiful mulatto woman cemented itself within the Cuban, and later in the circum-Caribbean, imagery by the 19th century,[13] where her figure was both portrayed as powerfully maternal and as absolutely extravagant and coquettish. It is this Oshún "that coalesced onto the (late) nineteenth-century mulata [...] one that, despite its seductive appeal, was both a social and a sexual threat" (Blanco-Borelli 2014, 73). Academic agreement on the orisha's multifaceted nature points at her embodiment of all reflections of the erotic, from the egotistic love of self to the – sexual and affective – love for the other.[14] Oshún "encompasses the female element, femininity, all that has to do with womanhood [...] Her love for her children, those who are consecrated to her faith and have identified her as their primary guardian *orisha*, is incredibly protective and all-consuming" (Valdés 2014, 9-10). At the same time, popular representations of Oshún depict her as exceptionally superficial and temperamental, and particularly outward and explicit in her sexuality. "Like the experiences of many women [Oshún] has been charged with being coquettish, flirty, and playful [...] descriptors too often seen as the domain of *la mulata* – the mixed race, light skinned black woman in Cuban popular culture who is depicted in art as devastatingly beautiful and a temptress to men" (Tsang 2019, 124 and 127). Because African metaphysics does not operate according to the Western-determined categories of sacred and profane, but comprises both as dialoguing dimensions of life, these two sides of the goddess coexist unproblematically. Ultimately, Oshún's love for pleasure and her proclivity towards many love affairs are integral aspects of an "uncompromised femininity" (Badejo 1996, 1) which destabilizes assumptions of dominance and authority as traditionally male-oriented and rooted in the historical policing of black women's bodies. Contrary to Western social and religious tenets that regulate black women's sexuality, Oshún's power directly stems from her ability to embrace all forms of loving: she can both mother and seduce, both be protective of her children and openly claim her sexual drives, be the keeper of her devotees and simultaneously take pleasure in all things of creation; most of all, she can exert sovereign authority through a female erotic agency that does not succumb to the external pornotroping gaze of the black body.

In an even more explicit way, Pomba Gira has a nature that strikingly resonates with "the enduring trope of the Brazilian women (particularly the mixed-race woman) as the embodiment of tropical sensuality and feminine allure" (Hayes 2011, 48). A source of uninhibited sexuality and insatiable yearn for the carnal pleasures of life, Pomba Gira is addressed in South American folklore as "a woman of ill repute, sometimes a prostitute or a courtesan" (43), and for this reason, she is often turned into "the antithesis of order, morality and propriety" in popular imagination (66). Like in the case of Oshún, Pomba Gira's relation to *mulatas* recognizes the readings of black female bodies as racialized and gendered under pre-existing socio-historical conditions of white male exploitation. However, instead of allowing for a history marking the

rage, fury, etc.) as moral virtues for self-awareness and communal wellness" (98-99). While I do not quote directly from these works for the differing theoretical trajectories and their individual scopes, they have nonetheless contributed significantly to shaping my perception of *Lemonade* as an astonishingly complex work of black feminist theory.

[13] Miguel De La Torre retells the circum-Atlantic voyages of the slave trade that resulted in the mulaticization of Oshún the African orisha through a folktale that manages to represent the spirit's extremely maternal, yet egotistic nature (De La Torre 2009, 113-114).

[14] For further information on Oshún's complex iconography see: Badejo 1996; Murphy and Sanford, 2001; De La Torre 2009; Valdés 2014; Tsang 2019.

black female body as inherently immoral to dictate the terms of her existence, Pomba Gira "encompasses both exploitation and agency" (Clarke Kaplan 2007, 520), thus becoming an epistemological reservoir for black women who are forbidden from raveling in the joys of erotic pleasure. Per Hayes's view, Pomba Gira can be read as a strategic form of social discourse that enables black women to sway from the path of restrictive gender roles and be culturally sanctioned to express what would be deemed otherwise as dysfunctional and illicit. As the scholar explains:

> unlike the "proper" women whose sexuality is controlled by the father or husband, these figures defy this patriarchal system and its accompanying norms of feminine respectability. Because these norms are predicated on channeling a woman's sexuality in ways that maintain a gendered hierarchy, female defiance is conceptualized in erotic terms as a dangerous sexuality that threatens the familial, moral, or social order. Hence [...] it is the dangerous intractability of female sexuality when divorced from its reproductive, maternal aspect that is central to the mythology of Pomba Gira. (Hayes 2011, 47-8)[15]

As divine embodiments of desire, Pomba Gira and Oshún disrupt the representation of Beyoncé's flesh as the exclusive byproduct of racial and gender violence by connoting her very flesh with a threatening sexual agency that is rooted in the orishas' nature. In other words, the goddesses' iconography acts as diasporic re-signifiers of Beyoncé's body, which is instrumental to framing the singer's hurt in the poetry ("grief sedated by orgasm, orgasm heightened by grief ") within a broader pattern of politicized mourning that provides, as Clarke Kaplan explains, a "militant articulation of present and future political desires that is rooted in the unending mourning of past genocide and continuing subjugation" (Clarke Kaplan 2007, 521).

"Outfitted as a divine whore" (Tinsley 2018, 69), Beyoncé's diasporic references resonate with a history of black female exploitation and sexualized bodily prescriptions while encapsulating the potential "to resist embedded master narratives about sex work that [...] pathologize sexual morality and continuitize agency so as to maintain white supremacist capitalist patriarchy" (Stallings 2015, 17). This potential, I argue, lies in the fact that the visuals in "6 Inch" materialize understandings of erotics and pleasure that are embedded within specific Afro-diasporic spiritual traditions which, in turn, defy hegemonic narratives of African American female subjugation.

The diasporic remembrance of Oshún and Pomba Gira through Beyoncé's affiliation to mulatto women perpetuates the mourning of reiterated forms of black female exploitation. Additionally, however, it envisions correctional interventions to the forms of black female suppression by way of accessing memories of black sexual cultures that interlock with, yet also gloriously explode the hegemonic histories of female sexuality. As Beyoncé incarnates these overlapping pasts, she brings to the attention of public discourse a history of Southern coerced indecency and promiscuity that has been both rebuked and fantasized upon, a history of pornotroped black femininity that has been simultaneously generated and demonized by the white male gaze. At the same time, she also pushes the boundaries of black female acceptability and notions of respectability in popular discourse by exercising forms of "sacredly

[15] The figures Hayes is specifically referring to here are those of Maria Molambo and Maria Padilha as two among the most common incarnation of the spirit that made their way through popular folk narrative tradition (Hayes 2011, 44-46).

profane sexuality," which "ritualizes and makes sacred what is libidinous and blasphemous in Western humanism." (Stallings 2015, 10-11).

Theorizing Black Women's Agency through Diasporic Instantiations of Ecstasy

Through the visual manifestation of Beyoncé-as-Pomba Gira/Oshún, the diasporic memories that *Lemonade* brings to the surface "produce new political communities in the context of and in direct opposition to the centuries-long experience of territorial displacement, bodily exploitation, and social genocide" (Clarke Kaplan 2007, 521). In accordance with the narratives of the tragic mulatto, and how her life was suspended between interracial sexual objectification and intraracial despise, "6 Inch" does portray a mixed-race sex worker in a deep state of unrest and emotional turmoil as the woman lays on a decadent chamber's master bed, waiting and grieving towards the end of the song. However, the visuals also significantly revise those narratives by providing black womanhood with the sexual agency and power that were not certainly available to 19th and early 20th century's mulatto women.

The combination of visuals and lyrics generates a modernized image of Southern *mulata* who tips into the sexual prowess of the two orishas in her demand for respect. This demand certainly occurs in terms of adequate payment – she continuously sings about "stacking money, money everywhere she goes" and how "she got them commas and them decimals".[16] But more significantly, it comes in the form of recognition of black women's right to exert freedom over their body regardless of concerns about decency and moral compass that have historically reduced them to silence and shame.[17] In this sense, the several forms through which sex-work is owned in the video exceed the bare provision of historical context for black female exploitation while they give substance to feminist readings that expose the trappings of respectability by celebrating what is instead perceived as deviant, indecent, and immoral.[18] What is

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[16] Since peep-shows collect payment in the form of coins, Beyoncé's verse lays claims on the profession as an activity that makes her rich. Through her hard work, stacking dimes (the song's decimals) eventually leads to the accumulation of money in the order of thousands (the song's commas).

[17] Coined by Evelyn Higginbotham, the expression "politics of respectability" describes how early 20th-century African American women introjected white middle-class tenets about modesty, composure, and sexual purity in the attempt to reject racist stereotypes that portrayed them as inherently immoral, lascivious and indecent, and in this way, to contribute to the uplift of the race (Higginbotham 1993, 14-15). Consequently, their inner lives also underwent a process of shame-induced silence and censorship. Historian Darlene Clarke Hine argues that "a culture of dissemblance" was put in place as a way for black women to protect the sanctity of inner aspects of their life. She defines this culture as a set of behaviors that "created the appearance of openness and disclosure but actually shielded the truth of their inner lives and selves from the oppressors" (Hine 1989, 915). While achieving a self-imposed invisibility was meant for black women to project an idea of extreme morality in the hope of gaining social respect, justice and opportunity for all black Americans (id), this gradually turned into a system in which middle-class black women policed both themselves and the behavior of poor and working-class women and any who deviated from a Victorian norm in the name of protecting the "race".

[18] Hip Hop feminism seems to hold a special place for the type of critical intervention that it enables through the sometimes controversial cultural phenomena that inform current racialized gender politics. While hip hop visual culture has been quite characterized by the exploitation of the black female body as a disposable commodity (see note 21), with hip hop feminism, I am referring to a feminist critique that is distinctively mediated by a hip hop aesthetics, that makes itself manifest in the growing tendency to "fight back" oppression from within the structures of the oppressive systems itself. This has led to the production of a sustained body of work that reflects on how the black body that knows to be sexualized by the (white) male gaze can act in terms of its own search for pleasure and agency. For instance, Nicole Fleetwood theorizes the capacity of black women rappers like Lil' Kim to use the hypervisible nature of

more interesting, Beyoncé seems to validate this "disrespectability" stance by creating a narrative structure that frames sex-work as bearing significant aesthetic qualities that are seldom overlooked within a culture that confines the *ars sexualis* to the realm of perversion.

In the video, Beyoncé' singing of her unapologetic "love for the grind" explodes the notion of sex work as labor in ways that are reminiscent of Lorde's projection of the erotics' intensity to non-sexual domains. As suggested in "The Uses of the Erotic", pleasure is not a question of what black women do, but "how acutely and fully we feel in the doing" (Lorde 1984, 54). Following her insights, I argue that the visual focus on Beyoncé's acts of sex work manifests Lorde's prefigurated expansion of erotic jouissance to a realm where the administering of pleasure can be theorized in tandem with an artistic approach to sexual expressivity. As Stalling notes, what troubles any association of black sex work with the idea of female creativity and leisure is the performative power that characterizes a white capitalist and patriarchal history of naming certain practices.[19] "When stripping is labeled as sex work," the author explains, "it becomes work no matter the space [...]. No matter what attempt is made to better understand, each person in this forum can only regulate the other and others through discourse that dismisses affect and aesthetics" (Stallings 2015, 192). Under such circumstances, perpetuations of sexual narratives that Western theological discernments of eros portray as sinful and indecorous similarly produce an understanding of female sexual activity that does not involve pleasure nor can be meant as leisure for black women. Female sexuality has been conceived only within the utilitarian terms of procreation and thus, as Lorde suggests, reduced to its most pornographic sense—as necessity and labor.

As far as *black* female sex-work is concerned, not only is the idea of labor engrained in the history of slavery, it is also always accompanied by a sense of inherent pathology and stigma that cause traditional research paradigms about sex work to fail in "engag[ing] the affective experiences of racialized bodies" (Stallings 2015, 17).[20]

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black women in pop culture, what she calls "excess flesh" (Fleetwood 2011, 110) by being explicitly graphic and conscious about their sexuality so as to reverse the exploitative dynamics that see male rappers – and the hip hop community at large – always in the position of exclusive consumers. In a similar way, the conceptualization of many forms of "degenerate aesthetics" have been instrumental in the disassociation with the racist, sexist and middle class-inflected tenets of respectability politics. This is the case, for instance, of the *bad bitch barbie* and the *ratchet*. The former is a conceptualization of black female celebrity that "embraces her body while simultaneously using it as a commodity" (LaVoulle and Ellison 2017, 65). As for the ratchet, it is a celebration of what is foolish, ignorant, classless and ghetto that occurs as a result of an "intervention of sliding contemporary politics of respectability currently in place among women (of color)" (Bradley 2013, n.p.). It is "the performance of the failure to be respectable, uplifting, and a credit to the race" (Stallings 2013, 136).

[19] According to Judith Butler, performativity "must be understood not as a singular or deliberate 'act,' but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names" (Butler 1993, 13).

[20] The scholar explains how most research on sex work and sex workers has been predominantly narrated by and through the social sciences, which mostly "investigate the regulation or legalization of sex work, the gender inequities that precipitate participation, as well as the economic realities on sexual market" (Stallings 2015, 18). As such, they maintain "a repetitive cycle of stigmatization and criminalization based on a pathology of sexual morality created by the buyer or market" (19) even when the person writing the account may at one point have been themselves a sex worker. When such is the case, it is often typical that "the individual who performs antiwork activities involving sex must engage melodramatic narratives about sexual morality and/or embrace capitalist work ethic for his or her work to have value – specifically redemptive value" (Stallings 2015,19).

When a history of black sexual terror and violence emerging from slavery imposes itself as the primary informant of sexual stereotypes about black women and as the overbearing moral compass of their choices, this occurs at the expense of black diasporic "memories of sexuality that preceded and followed such terror and violence" (Stallings 2015, 176). These are memories where the emphasis on the sensorium and explicit enactments of eroticized movements, at their core, retain an African ethos of interconnectedness between human flesh and the divine, thus bearing the potential to resist Western heterosexist associations with pornography and deviance. Even in the most heteronormative and guilt-ridden space of the Black Church, Patrick E. Johnson explains, the black body appears as "the one organizing site of multiple and contrasting signifiers" whose motion "conjure[s] and inspire[s] not only a 'holy' spirit, but a sensuous and sexual one as well." When congregants feel the Spirit, "their bodies are flung into motion in ways that transform the sacred body into a very secular body, a body that weds the spiritual with the sensual" (Johnson 1998, 402). As such, he provocatively concludes that black worship might be even paralleled to "a sexual encounter: there is flirting, petting, foreplay, orgasm, and post-coital bliss" (id). From this position of deep erotic intimacy, not only is the dichotomy of flesh and spirit exposed as false, its reiteration in black theological and popular discourse is understood as the weapon through which intra-racial gender hierarchies are kept in place. By mirroring this continuity between flesh and spirit, the memories of bodily motion and sexual expressions that permeate Afro-diasporic religions dismantle heteronormative hierarchies of black individuals that organizations like the Black Church institutionalize.

As we return to the beginning of "6 Inch", the "images of violence of sex work fleshing across the screen in silence" (Tinsley 2018, 76) provide fictionalized evidence of the history of sexual terror and abuse for black women. However, the pervasiveness of that history is shortly after challenged, as—at the end of "Emptiness" and "Loss"—the change of setting into the gloomy red-room of a peep-show blurs the boundary between sex work and female creativity and leisure. Locating the origins of peep-shows in Renaissance Europe, Tinsley suggests how the sex industry has taken over this popular form of travelling entertainment by bringing female flesh to the center of voyeuristic attention. As the scholar rightfully argues, if the European travelling box represented a possibility of escape from the ordinary life by heavily relying on visual artifice, "with the stage as the box and their bodies as mediums, isn't this what peep-show dancers still do for clients?" (76).

Within the narrow space of the peep-show stage, Beyoncé rescripts the function of her flesh as a libidinal spectacle for which clients pay to see its undressing, its touching and its sensual choreographed motions. Her blackness and femininity certainly make it difficult to ignore that the peep-show's mode of scrutinizing and pornotroping is, in fact, evocative of how buyers would have inspected, dissected and assessed the body's worth at a slave auction, and how it echoes/prefigures – with the claim to fame of the hip hop video in the 21st century – the commodification of the black female body/booty in mass visual culture.[21] Indeed, it is as if haunting images of Saartjie Baartman—the

[21] The critical literature about the black female booty's disposability as sexual commodity in hip hop culture is obviously vast. Visual Studies scholar Nicole Fleetwood (2011) argues that the hip hop music video genre has been criticized by and large for its portrayal of black women in extremely reductive representations, thus becoming the symbol of black female undervaluation as individual subjects. The genre is seen, the scholar maintains, "as a medium for the continual circulation and 'global touring' of

Hottentot Venus – multiplied through time and space to renew the sexualization of the black body in bondage over and over again. However, differently from Baartman, Beyoncé-as-peep-show dancer experiences agency via the potential to move and inscribe her motion within a genealogy of Afro-diasporic sacred erotics that has been translated/displaced in current popular discourse by modalities of self-expression that belong in the irreverent archive of black Southern hip hop culture.[22] In her provocative motion lay exactly all the memories of black sexuality that slavery does not encompass, and through which the erotic becomes an aesthetics that goes beyond the white male gaze's pornographic consumption. Through her naked and semi-naked performance, Beyoncé-as-*mulata* can manifest away from silent victimization, and right into a genealogy of racialized religiosity where Oshún and Pomba Gira represent the pinnacle of an uncompromised black womanhood that finds agency within bodacious sexuality. It is true that the explicitly provocative choreographies of a naked/semi-naked body are still produced within the boundaries of capitalist and patriarchal structures. However, the absence of any sacred/profane dichotomy within African-derived metaphysical systems allows to reconfigure the performances of the peep-show dancer – as metonym for erotic activity – outside the gravitational pull of a moralized sexuality and the notion of labor, and within the terms of black female leisure and agency. This is because black motion – which occurs for reasons that go from the psychological or physiological catharsis to the research/expression of pleasure, ecstasy, play, recreation and the development of artistic values – "refuses the moral split between dance as sacred movement, dance as sexual expression and dance as art" (Stallings 2015, 194), which, instead, traditionally pervades Western culture. From this perspective, pole dancing, stripping, peep-shows, as well as other sex work-related activities can confront dominant narratives that associate the latter with pathology by

the black female performing body, in historical referentiality to [Saartjie] Baartman" (Fleetwood 2011, 133). In this commoditizing circularity of black female flesh, Janell Hobson argues that black women's beauty "is intrinsically connected to booty size, which exists in a complex relation of sexualized and racialized meanings" (Hobson 2018, 107). Their body/booty, the author maintains, "continues to signify sexual excess (supposedly conveyed by a large behind) more than black sexual freedoms" (id). According to Aisha Durham, the representation of black women's buttocks in hip hop culture has redressed slavery times-old tropes about innate promiscuous sexuality according to particular class inflections. As the author argues, the "backwards gaze of the insatiable black woman reworks an old racial fantasy of miscegenation, which is made commonsense in the hip hop dreamworld, and is legitimated and given value through organized capital in culture industries, such MTV […]. While colonial discourse suggests that all black women are promiscuous, the hip hop booty bas been reassigned to working class Black women specifically. Rap modifiers about the booty as junk, ghetto, bubble, big, or bootylicious not only assess its physicality, but also its value and its special location for women who possess that body type (read: ghetto)" (Durham 2012, 38 and 41).

[22] The nationalization of bounce represents one such instance of displacement. Popularized on a national scale as club music at the end of the 20th century, bounce emerges as several New-Orleanian traditions were englobed into the emerging hip hop movement. As Christin Marie Taylor writes, "bounce is a product and expression of regionalized black identity that emerged from the global context of the transatlantic slave trade and the proximity of New Orleans to the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico" (Taylor 2020, 63). It "reflect[s] an African call and response tradition, featuring an exchange between the lead performer, who issues a directive statement or expression, and an audience that responds accordingly. In Bounce, it manifests as dancers responding to calls by emcees, musicians, and Djs" (63). While the music consists of "hard-hitting, stanky (raw, busy, erotic), and high energy sounds for clubs and parties [its] dance moves include the twerk, bendova, buck, bust open, wobble, wibble, werk, shake, p-pop, glocka glocka, and pamper shake, among others, which entail bending over, rapid-fire pelvic thrusting and gyrating" (62-63).

relying on epistemologies of erotic performances and expressions whose implications are economic as well as artistic.

When the sample from Isaac Hayes's "Walk on By" (1969) plays in the background, Beyoncé appears on the peep-show scene ready to deliver her erotic spectacle behind the glass window. She dances with purpose, grinding her uncovered hips and shaking her fizzy blonde hair, staring daringly into the camera. Within the enclosed space of the red room, not only does Beyoncé appear as extremely confident, she also fills the scene by rejoicing in the attention that she is demanding from the viewer. The degree of ownership that she exerts over her own motion speaks to the choice of embracing pleasure and desire by way of reclaiming her body as its only legitimate owner, even in its accepted understanding as a sexual commodity.

A glimpse of such sexual agency – in its embryotic form – was already reflected in the "Partition" video from the album *Beyoncé* (2013). There, Beyoncé appeared as a sultry lady in a French castle as she entertained several sexual fantasies upon the ring of the doorbell. Much like in the "6 Inch" peep-show room, in fact, "Partition" has the black woman staging choreographies in the role of a Crazy Horse dancer – from rolling in an embezzled bra and thong to executing different acrobatics on the top of a triclinium in a purple shadowy room. Evette Dionne Brown emphasizes how her sexual power was showcased in these scenes:

> Beyoncé is in a whore-house and she assumes the role of a madame who finds pleasure in her role as the orchestrator of the mansion. Evidenced by the crown that she adorns throughout the video, Beyoncé is ruler of this sexual domain […] She is the maestro, so incorporating BDSM as well as sex work into the visuals […] is an explicit act of agency. (Brown 2016, 186)

However, despite this degree of sexual awareness, "Partition" still revealed a structural problem in the protagonist's access to eros. As much as Beyoncé could envision agency within pleasure, sexual gratification from and through stripping, soft BDSM and pole dancing only came to fruition in the video in the form of a literal fantasy that the woman's double experienced in her lucid dreams. This adoption of a multiple self was ultimately meant to separate Beyoncé from the image of a fully sexual woman, since she would otherwise have been trapped into the myth of black female hypersexuality. Because respectability politics have always made the act of calling attention to black women's erotic domain problematic, the video's effort to split the lady from Jezebel with which Beyoncé's sexual openness would be associated reflected the singer's need for a coping mechanism to survive the black female character's misogynoirist overdetermination.

By channeling the irreverent femininity of Oshún and Pomba Gira, "6 Inch" delves further and with more conviction into Beyoncé's articulation of sexuality, thus undermining the centripetal pull of the male gaze and reducing the shadowy male figures who appear throughout the video to the status of complicit watchers. While the latter surely benefit from the erotic spectacle, the performer unquestionably accesses and administers power both in her volitional enactment and in the enjoyment of the performance, as well as in the erotic tension and intimacy that *she* concedes to the watcher. Ultimately, Beyoncé attempts at a redefinition of the terms through which pleasure is understood so that she cannot only legitimately demand it, but actively decide whether, with whom, and how to share it. Seeking control over her eroticized body, Beyoncé disrupts narratives of externally sexualized black womanhood and

creates one where the black female flesh is willfully sexual and playful with her power. Hers is not a body that can be commoditized without approval and, most importantly, without her consensual participation in, and dictation of, the erotic game.

Such an acknowledgment of black female erotic power is destabilizing, and even threatening when confronted with notions of fragile masculinity.[23] Beyoncé seems conscious of that when the scattered flashes of sex work violence that precede "6 Inch" are abruptly replaced with the multitude of silent and unmoving black mistresses in the attic. There, black female sexuality is turned into tangible menace as Beyoncé, standing in middle of the room, swings the long cord and whispers the words "Every fear, every nightmare anyone has ever had". Unnamed black bodies that a Western history of sexual morality and exploitation has cast into oblivion, these sex workers are exhumed and, with them, the potential to manifest black female pleasure in the present. By the end of the video, the long, dark corridor that takes to the quadroon's chamber is abruptly set on fire, while Beyoncé walks towards the camera in a white lace gown, belting the song's outro "You'll always come back to me" at the top of her chest voice. Mrs. Carter might be ready to see her client now, but that will not happen at the reinstatement of a white male privileged expectation of pleasure. Instead, she imposes herself as "a divine creature to be adored and worshipped" (Tinsley 2018, 102), thus also nodding to specific fantasies of BDSM practices of black women dominating white men.[24] With the whole brothel now engulfed in smoke and flames, Beyoncé is standing with the other prostitutes by the premises, sporting high heels and colorful suits while the divine power she has conjured in body and spirit sees their avenging spells coming to fruition.

As Beyoncé locates specific memories of diasporic female erotic expressivity within a fantastical vision of the Black South, these Victorian brothels turn from the exclusive epicenters of normalized male pleasure and black women's exploitation into the sites of a women-oriented profane sacredness. While they spatialize instances of black sexual terror that call out the imperative to remember as a politicized act of mourning the trauma of unfreedom, these brothels are also made into sanctuaries that reflect black feminist ways of theorizing erotic performances as power. Embodying memories that coalesce female sexuality with Afro-diasporic manifestations of the divine with the purpose of destabilizing "the heteronormative and masculine paradigms of sexual leisure" (Stallings 2015, 198), Beyoncé ultimately inscribes the erotic within the grasp of black women as a source of creative energy and subversive agency.

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[23] Audre Lorde reveals how threatening the erotic can be to heterosexist-based structures of power. "Of course", she writes, "women so empowered are dangerous. So we are taught to separate the erotic demand from most vital areas other than sex […] We have been taught to suspect this resource, vilified, abused and devalued within Western society […]. As women, we have come to distrust that power which rises from our deepest and non-rational knowledge" (Lorde 1984, 55).

[24] Mireille Miller-Young argues that "BDSM fetishism – particularly the fantasy of black women dominating white men – […] queers racial and gender hegemonies by exposing their very constructedness. By creating fantasies that explode assumptions about what constitutes proper gendering of, and appropriate pleasure and pain for the black body, [the black dominatrix] suggests that social power is changeable, and that racialized sexuality can be toyed with for her own ends" (Miller-Young 2014, 273).

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