

# Black Feminism in America

An Overview and Comparison of Black  
Feminism's Destiny through Literature and  
Music up to Beyoncé

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# Table of Contents

Dankwoord.....	I
Table of Contents .....	II
Introduction .....	1
1. A Short History of American Suffragettes during First-Wave Feminism.....	2
1.1. Colored Females on Their Pathway to Liberty.....	5
1.1.1. A Black Woman’s Question: Ar’n’t I a Woman? .....	5
1.1.2. The First Black Female Authors and Their Search for Recognition .....	9
1.1.3. A Woman’s Voice in Slave Songs.....	15
2. Transition from First to Second-Wave Feminism .....	18
2.1. The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper .....	18
2.2. Zora Neale Hurston’s <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> .....	21
2.2.1. Issues of Class and the Inferior Position of Black Women within Matrimony .....	21
2.2.2. Sexism and Oppression on the Basis of Gender .....	23
2.2.3. Addressing Black Women’s Issues via Black Tradition and Heritage.....	25
2.3. Bessie Smith’s Liberating Blues and Billie Holiday’s Emancipated Jazz .....	27
2.3.1. Attacking America’s Class Hierarchy and Capital System .....	28
2.3.2. Black Women’s Feelings towards Love, Matrimony and Sexuality .....	32
2.3.3. Two Different Ways to Address Black Women’s Race Issues .....	40
3. Black Feminism or Womanism during Second-Wave Feminism.....	42
3.1. Hurston’s <i>Their Eyes Were Watching God</i> as Inspiration to Walker’s <i>The Color         Purple</i> .....	44
3.1.1. Focus on Disadvantages due to Intersectionality of Race, Class and Gender .....	44
3.1.2. A Womanist Bildungsroman: Similarities and Differences .....	47
3.2. A Womanist Message in Disco and Soul.....	56
3.2.1. Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive” .....	56
3.2.2. Aretha Franklin’s Demand to Think about Respect.....	58
4. Beyoncé’s Interpretation of Third-Wave Feminism.....	63
4.1. From Patriarchal to Feminine Power: Class, Money and Possession .....	64
4.2. Girl Power, Womanism and Beyoncé’s Fierce and Contradictory Feminism...	71
4.3. Colored Women’s Sexual Agency, the Feminine Black Body and Hip-Hop Feminism .....	82

<b>Conclusion</b> .....	92
<b>Works Cited</b> .....	93
<b>Primary and Secondary Literature</b> .....	93
<b>Songs: Lyrics and Online Video Clips</b> .....	102
<b>Bijlage 1: Samenvatting</b> .....	iv

## **Introduction**

Beyoncé's latest self-titled album (2013) that "marks her public 'coming out' as a feminist" (Weidhase 123, "Beyoncé") causes great controversy among women who question the superstar's allegiance to feminism. In order to find out whether their concern is well grounded, this dissertation ascertains whether Beyoncé's music can be linked to and to what extent it is influenced by the American feminist heritage. Due to Beyoncé's Afro-American identity, the presented paper will zoom in on black feminism. Consequently, only black women's themes and/or theorizing are analyzed within the three traditional feminist waves as well as two other significant black (female) artistic or literary movements, more specifically the Black Woman's Era and the Harlem Renaissance.

Additionally, this dissertation will not only elaborate on prominent colored female representatives, writers and/or singers within each period, but will also zoom in on the similarities and differences of the three historical waves and the artistic or literary movements in order to thoroughly understand the black feminist message in Beyoncé's music. Although the presented paper divides black feminism's evolution artificially into historical periods, one should keep in mind that feminist waves and other black (female) movements should not be considered as "discrete, isolated periods" (Gilley 188).

# 1. A Short History of American Suffragettes during First-Wave Feminism

Although American feminism has flourished since the nineteenth century, economic and ideological events from the previous epoch such as the Industrial, French and American Revolution already underlie this social change (O'Neill 3-4). These revolutions do not strive for the rights of women, but they do raise questions of equality and lifestyle (O'Neill 4). Apart from these developments, a far more important ideological tendency is crucial to the origin and further expansion of American feminism, more specifically the enlightenment ideals of Benjamin Franklin. In "Speech of Miss Polly Baker" (1747) Franklin expresses his "progressive views of women" (Baym et al. 234) since he accuses American society of the juridical unfair treatment of females ("Speech of Miss Polly Baker"). Despite Franklin's critique, men continue to strongly dominate this revolutionary period, whereas women are still deprived of their public and private rights. Consequently, "women [are] not [allowed to] vote (...) [and] their legal identity [is] merged with their husband[s'] [through marriage], so that they [can] not own property or keep themselves any wages they might earn" (Baym et al. 166).

Since 1837 American Victorianism, which is named after Britain's *female* ruler Queen Victoria, changes general ideals of family and marriage which positively influences the development of feminist ideas (Howe 507). Within the domestic sphere the focus shifts to "the exaltation of motherhood" (Howe 530) and "the socialization of the children" (Howe 530). Since Victorian women are considered to be their children's "agent[s] of cultural transmission" (Howe 530), they start to take interest in education and literature. Consequently, this schooling does not only "[open] up important professional opportunities (...) [, but also encourages] the modernizing liberation of women from their traditional subjugation" (Howe 530). Victorian men, however, fear that these growing literate and knowledgeable women will turn into a threat for society, but "[d]espite traditional [male] notions that imaginative literature and creative

writing [can] be especially harmful to women by inflaming imaginations and undermining their moral place in the private domain of the home, women [find] ways to enter the literary market” (Baym et al. 453).

Within marriage American females “[argue] for women’s rights on the basis of such Victorian values as individual autonomy, self-development, subordination of sensuality, contractualism (...) and the work ethic” (Howe 531). Transcendentalism, which dates from 1836, corresponds with this Victorian concept of marriage since it postulates the idea of maximal individual freedom and offers the opportunity for each individual to explore their potential (D’haen et al. 67, 69). Although American women still largely obey patriarchal and domestic rules, “the nation’s most liberalized married women’s property act [passes in 1839], which [makes] it legal for women to maintain control over the property they [bring] to their marriages” (Baym et al. 456, “Married Women’s Property Acts”). In other words, since 1837 Victorian women and female supporters of transcendentalism already try to enforce their public and private rights, which concurs with the notion of feminism.

Even though American women try to achieve more independency after the late 1830s, it is only in 1866 that they can express their feminist thoughts and ideals via a social movement called the American Equal Rights Association (AERA), which also supports the rights of other minority groups (“American Equal Rights Association”). It is no coincidence that this union is founded only one year after the American Civil War (1861-65) (Hassler et al.). This war, which is the result of a dispute about the abolition of slavery between Northern progressives and Southern plantation owners, is not only supported by abolitionist groups who demand equal rights, suffrage and freedom for black slaves, but also by women who feel inspired to do the same. In fact, both white middle-class females and “[w]omen from many social groups [, such as] African Americans (...), [start to] wr[i]te for publication” (Baym et al. 1269) not only because they consider “authorship as a possible career” (Baym et al. 1269), but also because

written media such as “magazines [provide] an important public space for exploring new perspectives on gender and women’s rights” (Baym et al. 1270).

This unanimity among women comes to an end when the Senate approves both the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868, providing “citizenship and equal civil and legal rights to [male] African Americans and slaves who ha[ve] been emancipated after the American Civil War” (“Fourteenth Amendment”, O’Neill 16), and the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870, granting enfranchisement for all black male slaves (Parrott-Sheffer). These amendments cause dissension within the AERA since a group of suffragists opposes these adjustments. “[The] shocked disbelief [of some AERA-members] that [white] men [will] so humiliate them by supporting votes for Negroes but not for [white] women [also] demonstrate[s] the limits of their sympathy for black men [and women], [and drives] these allies further apart” (O’Neill 17). As a consequence, a group of feminists splits off from the AERA and form their own movement in 1869 called the National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) (O’Neill 18-19, “National Woman Suffrage Association”). Although the remaining feminists of the AERA, who rename their movement the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA), are more conformist and acquiesce in the decision of the Senate, they too refuse to give up their struggle for suffrage (“American Woman Suffrage Association”). Since these two unions have the same goal, viz. obtaining the right to vote, it comes as no surprise that “in 1890 (...) they [merge] as the National American Women Suffrage Association” (“American Equal Rights Association”).

In conclusion, the strategy of the AERA-feminists to cooperate with minority groups such as (former) black slaves in order to strengthen their ideas of liberation, suffrage and equality backfires since their white patriarchal political leaders only focus on the human and constitutional rights of colored men. Thus, after the Senate has approved the Fourteenth and the Fifteenth Amendment and consequential both the NWSA and the AWSA emerged, these feminist unions, which consist largely of white middle-class women, change their manner of



striving for suffrage and decide to focus on their demands only. Therefore, they refuse “to acknowledge the basic rights of black women” (Izgarjan et al. 415). Although there are two historically distinct feminist associations from 1869 until 1890, they are actually very much alike:

[white] women [of both suffrage movements] become supporters of patriarchy [since] they subscribe to power games whose aim is to win dominance through the subjugation of others [e.g. black women] which can take many forms such as racism, sexism and classism (Izgarjan 421).

Since “white women refus[e] to support the struggle of black women for their rights” (Izgarjan 415), the real opposition within first-wave feminism does not relate to the two suffragette movements, but to females of different race. Here lies the root of the distinction between white and black feminism.

## **1.1. Colored Females on Their Pathway to Liberty**

### **1.1.1. A Black Woman’s Question: Ar’n’t I a Woman?**

Sojourner Truth (1797-1883) can be considered as one of the most important women of first-wave feminism (“Sojourner Truth”). Since feminism consists mostly of white bourgeoisie females, it is remarkable that Truth, a former black slave, can speak up for this movement. Although colored women are outnumbered in suffrage associations, there are several reasons why white feminists let her vindicate women’s rights. First of all, “middle-class women (...) [can] not easily defend themselves against the ideology of true womanhood because they still [believe] in (...) chivalry and domesticity (...) [and] they [are] not used to speaking up to men in public” (Stewart xxxvi). Secondly, white women consider Truth’s participation as the perfect opportunity to make the “white woman’s and the slave’s condition analogous” (Zackodnik 57)

so they can make their call for emancipation just as righteous as the request to abolish slavery. Apart from these two reasons, white feminists also see Sojourner Truth as the perfect candidate to justify the feminist message because she disobeys both white and black patriarchal authority. Not only does she break with “the tradition of former slaves taking their masters’ names [, but she also parts from the tradition] of married women taking their husbands’ names” (Stewart xliii). The name ‘Sojourner Truth’ has been chosen by her alone on account of spiritual reasons (Stewart xxxviii).

One of Sojourner Truth’s most memorable speeches “Ar’n’t I a Woman?” dates from 1851, long before one could speak of a social feminist movement, when it was not self-evident, especially for a former female slave, to address gender issues (Stewart xxxiv). Curiously enough, there are two completely different types of Sojourner’s speech. *The Anti-Slavery Bugle’s* version, for example, emphasizes black and white females’ agreement to achieve suffrage and parity (Stewart xxxiv, Zackodnik 50). In this speech version, Truth states that she embodies “a woman’s rights” (qtd. in Stewart xxxiii) meaning that she defends the rights of all women. Sojourner thus represents herself as a “symbol of intersection of race and gender” (Zackodnik 49) in order to bring together both white and colored females. Consequently, Truth claims that she – like all other women – has “as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man (...) [, she] can carry as much as any man, and can cut as much too (...) [and she is] as strong as any man that is now” (qtd. in Stewart xxxiii). Although Sojourner Truth focuses on the intersectionality of race and gender, there are still some issues that refer to her former life as a black female slave such as the labor on the plantation fields and her illiteracy: “I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed (...) I can’t read, but I can hear” (qtd. in Stewart xxxiii, Zackodnik 55). The version in *History of Woman Suffrage*, however, differs stylistically from Sojourner’s previous speech since the language is adapted to a “crude Southern dialect” (Stewart xxxiv) and some fragments such as “ar’n’t I a woman?” are

added (Stewart xxxiv, Zackodnik 50). Although *The Anti-Slavery Bugle*'s version can be considered as her authentic speech as Truth is born in New York and therefore has no Southern accent, it is far more interesting to analyze why the version in *History of Woman Suffrage* differs so much from Sojourner's original speech (Stewart xxxiv).

Unlike her original speech in which Truth considers race and gender as intersectional, the unauthentic version brings the friction of these issues to the fore: "niggers of the Souf and de women at de Norf all a takin' 'bout rights" (Truth 133-134). A second difference deals with the animated description of the body that vividly represents three different images for which Sojourner Truth stands. First of all, Truth represents her body as "masculinized" (Zackodnik 54) to stress the (physical) equality between men and women: "ar'n't I a woman? Look at me! Look at my arm! [And she bared her right arm to the shoulder, showing her tremendous muscular power]" (Truth 134). Secondly, she wants to stress that the body of a black female slave can work as hard as any man's body: "I have plowed, and planted, and gathered into barns, and no man could head me – and ar'n't I a woman? I could work as much and eat as much as a man (when I could get it), and bear de lash as well – and ar'n't I a woman?" (Truth 134). Finally, Truth focuses on child-birth as the one occasion where women are superior to men and where their physical strength reaches its peak: "I have born thirteen children (...) Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had nothing to do with him" (Truth 134-135). Although all these bodily images are also presented in the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*'s version, they are more vividly described in *History of Woman Suffrage*.

In summary, both the animated depiction of the body and the use of a Southern dialect contribute to a less cultivated and intellectual image of Sojourner Truth. Along with the second-rate representation of the African-American woman, the separate illustration of race and gender-issues also enlarges the gap between white and black females. This is due to the white

feminist Frances Gage who adapts Sojourner's original speech in 1863 and reissues a new version in the *History of Woman Suffrage* (Zackodnik 50). Since Gage is

trapped in her paternalistic view of slaves [like so many other white feminists, it is hard for her to recognize Sojourner Truth as] (...) the rescuer (...) of women and slaves of her generation (...) who [is] a sister of strength and grace and a commanding force in antebellum reform (Stewart xl).

These details show how even the most liberated white feminist can be trapped in her own prejudices and indicate that even though black women like Sojourner Truth play an important role in counteracting these preconceptions, colored females still have a long way to go to improve their social conditions in a predominantly white American world.

Truth's other statements uttered during the first convention of the AERA in 1867 can be considered as progressive since she explicitly pleads for black females whose inhuman situation has often been forgotten by white feminists (Zackodnik 65). First of all, Truth opposes the Fifteenth Amendment because she fears that if black men gain more power and influence via suffrage, they will exercise this power to further victimize women of their own race (Zackodnik 67): "there is a great stir about colored men getting their rights, but not a word about colored women; and if colored men get their rights and not colored women theirs, you see the colored men will be masters over the women, and it will be just as bad as it was before" (qtd. in Stewart xliii). Truth's second declaration during the AERA convention deals with the black women's right of ownership. Although white women could already rely on the Married Women's Property Act of 1839, which has given them the right to earn and own material goods, colored women are excluded from property activities ("Married Women's Property Acts"). That is the reason why Truth emphasizes that all "working women [, including colored females,] deserv[e] control of their earnings [, their body and properties]" (Zackodnik 67). In her third announcement Truth denounces the idea of "suffrage tied to literacy and property

qualifications” (Zackodnik 68) since that would exclude women of color: “[y]ou know children I don't read such small stuff as letters. I read men and nations. ... What a narrow idea a reading qualification is for a voter! ... And there's that property qualification! Just as bad” (qtd. in Zackodnik 68).

In conclusion, the commencement of black feminism and its future materialization in literature, music and literary studies is largely due to Sojourner Truth and her liberating speeches (Zackodnik 49). Her idea of intersectionality, for example, will be an important literary approach during the twentieth and twenty-first century, especially within black feminist studies, in order to better “[understand] human life and behavior rooted in the experience and struggles of marginalized people [, e.g. black women,] (...) [and to better understand that] phenomena [like race and gender] cannot be analytically understood in isolation from one another” (Collins et al. 2).

### **1.1.2. The First Black Female Authors and Their Search for Recognition**

Although African-American literature already originates in 1773 due to Phillis Wheatley, it is only during American Victorianism that black female writers focus on their inferior position within society (Gates “Life of a Slave Girl” vii). Both Harriet Wilson’s *Our Nig; or Sketches from the Life of a Free Black* (1859) and Harriet Jacobs’s *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written By Herself* (1861) can be considered as the most influential antebellum prose writings that have contributed to black feminist thought (Ellis xi, Smith xxvii). Even though both autobiographies are published and deal with the colored women’s situation before the outbreak of the Civil War, the books’ authors and protagonists live in two completely different worlds. Jacobs, for example, narrates her atrocious life as a colored slave girl in the South, whereas Wilson focuses on a free “black woman’s expanding consciousness in a racist Northern

antebellum environment” (Gates “Life of a Slave Girl” xii). Nevertheless, the fundamental problems of these oppressed African-American women remain the same.

Since the white ruling class imposes general literary conventions and genres on American writers, and since slave narratives of colored men are the only African-American prose influence in the literary discourse, black female writers such as Wilson and Jacobs have to find a new way to express themselves. In order to create a black female narrative, they combine aspects of the slave narrative with issues of the sentimental novel, a genre typically related to the white women’s situation and sentiments (Gates “To Be Raped, Bred or Abused”). Black female writers such as Wilson and Jacobs integrate the sentimental theme of “sorrows, trials and sufferings” (Ellis 77) induced by breaching Victorian domestic values such as chastity, piety, marriage and family relationships as well as sentimental rhetoric, e.g. addressing the reader as “gentle” (Ellis 87) or “virtuous” (Jacobs 55), ambiguously into their black female narrative (Smith xxxi). On the one hand, they use these issues “to build a bond of sisterhood” (Stover “Social Discourse” 134) with Northern white women in the hope that these females will turn against the “‘patriarchal’ institution of Southern slavery” (Stover “Social Discourse” 134) and “Northern racial [and sexist] influence” (Ellis 12). On the other hand, Wilson and Jacobs adjust “the dominant codes of [Victorian white] womanhood” (Pittman 48) to the situation of antebellum black females in order to attack the daily problems they are confronted with.

In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs uses the sentimental theme to show the deprivations of enslaved females like her autobiographical protagonist Linda Brent. Slavery and its constraining laws does not only prevent Linda from marrying a free black man, but also forces her into premarital intercourse with a white male (Jacobs 37, 53-55). Furthermore, she experiences her white superior’s continual sexual harassment and his psychological and physical abuse as he reduces her to property and threatens to sell her children (Jacobs 27-28, 76-77, 82). Jacobs does not only expose atrocities of Southern white male supremacy which

clashes with Victorian domestic values, but also “subverts the genre of popular sentimental fiction [by] chastis[ing] the Northern white woman (...) whose status as lady and mother, and ‘whose [home and body are] protected’ by European American law and custom” (Stover “Social Discourse” 148, 145). For example, when Linda Brent flees to the Northern side of the Mason-Dixon Line, she bitterly realizes that “being ‘free’ and living in the North [neither] protect [a black women] from attacks upon her virtue” (Stover “Social Discourse” 143), nor stop “racist incidents” (Stover “Social Discourse” 150).

Although Wilson focuses on a free Northern colored woman during the antebellum period, sentimental problems related to marriage and family can also be found in *Our Nig*. Wilson’s autobiographical protagonist Alfrado/Frado Smith is not only abandoned by her mother, but also maltreated by her white adoptive family who regards her as a servant (Ellis 1). They abuse her psychologically, e.g. by calling her “our nig”, which is an abbreviation for the offensive word ‘nigger’, and physically so badly that “her health breaks down and she never recovers” (Ellis 1). Moreover, both Frado and her white mother Mag Smith are deserted by their African-American husbands. Additionally, Frado’s poor physical health eventually leads to “an enforced separation from her child” (Ellis 19). Although Wilson uses sentimental elements in her autobiography to attract Northern white women’s attention, she also “subtly critiques sentimentalism” (Ellis 16) and thus its reading audience. Wilson wants to show these females that although black women like herself are free in the North, they still suffer from racism, classism and sexism, and are sometimes “treated as badly as many Southern slaves of the time” (Ellis 1).

Apart from using the sentimental theme and rhetoric, Wilson and Jacobs also focus on characteristics of the slave narrative since it is the only genre that describes the “consciousness and identity [of African Americans] as individual [and] as a group” (Ellis 4). As this genre is entirely influenced by male values, Jacobs and Wilson deliberately choose to highlight issues

that relate to the enslaved black female's situation such as the "emphasis on family life and maternal values and (...) the difficulties of fugitive [and free female] slaves in the North" (Baym et al. 819, Smith xxix). Apart from these innovative themes within the American slave narrative, Wilson's *Our Nig* and Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* also adopt more conventional aspects related to this genre such as religion, authorship and the maltreatment of blacks.

First of all, both autobiographies show that religion can provide comfort since Linda Brent as well as Frado Smith find solace in going to church where they enjoy singing (Jacobs 71, Ellis 80). Nevertheless, Jacobs and Wilson also expose "the hypocrisies that Christianity tolerates" (Ellis 9-10) as their protagonists question God's righteousness and agreement with white supremacy (Jacobs 17, Ellis 85). Furthermore, both narratives focus on the biblical reference to the Garden of Eden in order to expose and/or attack the inferior role of black women in society. These writings specifically focus on the biblical imagery of the snake that relates to "Northern abolitionists [who] us[e] the symbol of the serpent to represent the evils of slavery" (Stover "Rhetoric and Resistance" 145). In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Linda's master, Dr. Flint, has several characteristics that relate him to a snake-like creature (Stover "Rhetoric and Resistance" 146). For example, the way in which Dr. Flint tries to seduce Linda in having sexual intercourse with him parallels with the biblical snake that tempts Eve into eating the forbidden fruit (Stover "Rhetoric and Resistance" 143). Although Linda avoids falling into her master's trap, she does engage in a premarital affair with the white Mr. Sands. Once again the woman has sinned, but this time an explanation is given:

[i]f slavery had been abolished, I, also, could have married the man of my choice (...)[.]  
I wanted to keep myself pure (...)[.] I tried hard to preserve my self-respect; but I was struggling alone in the powerful grasp of the demon Slavery; and the monster proved too strong for me (Jacobs 54).



According to Jacobs, the serpentine Dr. Flint, who embodies patriarchal slave society, terrorizes Linda's life so excessively that she considers her sexual relationship with Mr. Sands as the only way to escape the hardships of slavery (Stover "Rhetoric and Resistance" 130). In other words, the snake-like creature Dr. Flint is to blame for the shame and downfall of Linda. In Wilson's *Our Nig*, "Mag's fall from grace under the charms of her young lover [also] mirrors Eve's seduction under the spell of the serpent in the biblical Garden of Eden" (Stover "Rhetoric and Resistance" 129). In contrast to Jacobs's autobiography, Wilson describes the downfall of a *white* woman (i.e. Mag Smith) that is caused by the seduction (and later abandonment) of her *black* lover. Due to their sinful interracial relationship, their mulatto child is cursed and suffers the same misfortunes as her mother since she is also tempted and deserted by an African-American male. *Our Nig* thus shows that both white and black females can be victims of the same forms of male seduction and misuse.

Secondly, the question arises to what extent the work is written by the black author herself. *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* is not only "[w]ritten by [h]erself" (Yellin xxvi), but is also "not endorsed by prominent white males" (Yellin xxiii), which enlarges the authenticity of the narrative. Apart from "the truthfulness of her tale" (Yellin xxvi), which Jacobs confirms in her preface, she also "uses the first person" (Yellin xxvi) which is typical of autobiographical slave narratives. Paradoxically, Jacobs writes under the pseudonym of Linda Brent which instantly diminishes the reliability of her work since her reading audience can neither identify the author, nor verify her actions. As a fugitive slave, however, Jacobs has no other choice since she fears the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 "ruling that all citizens, including those in Northern states where slavery ha[s] been abolished, [are] subject to punishment if they [aid] fugitives" (Yellin xvii). The "disturbing distance (...) between the writer and the 'author'" (Ellis 14) can also be found in Wilson's *Our Nig*. This "alienating device" (Ellis 14) thus exposes a general problem of authorship that black (female) writers face within white

patriarchy. Like Jacobs's autobiography, *Our Nig* also uses an autobiographical first-person narrative and "[problematizes] [t]he relationship between [the author] Wilson and [the writer] 'Our Nig' by the appearance of the racist epithet 'Nig'" (Ellis 14). Unlike Jacobs, Wilson's narrative is "written [and thus influenced] by a white supporter of slavery" (Ellis 12) which explains why *Our Nig* focuses on women of both races and why mainly the black man is to blame for the protagonists' misery. In conclusion, even though colored female authors like Jacobs and Wilson enter the literary domain to articulate black women's hardships, they do not address them bluntly since dominant white male society is still a force to be reckoned with.

Thirdly, both autobiographies focus on the maltreatment of female blacks, which can be considered as a supplement to traditional American slave narratives since the genre traditionally only focuses on colored men's sufferings (Smith xxix). *Our Nig* as well as *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* use typical themes of the black male narrative such as racism, hard work and punishment to express black women's sorrows. In these narratives, the protagonists are physically and psychologically abused on account of their color, their master's/employer's discontentment or because they try to communicate (Ellis 10, Stover "Social Discourse" 140). Nevertheless, they "[offer] resistance to [their] tormentor[s]" (Ellis 80): Frado uses violence to defend herself, Linda neglects her master's prohibition to communicate with her first black lover and they both decide to escape from/leave their oppressors (Ellis 19, 80; Jacobs 41-42). Via these narratives, both Jacobs and Wilson thus attempt to give the antebellum black woman a voice and highlight the horrible circumstances she has to face (Ellis 10).

The major difference between Wilson's *Our Nig* and Jacobs's *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* deals with the issue of class. As a farm servant, Frado belongs to the white working class, which means that her "work is not carried out within the institution of slavery" (Ellis 5), and that she has more liberty than her enslaved counterpart Linda. Although Frado resembles black women's progress within America's power structure, she only belongs to the lowest class

of American society and is still maltreated by her white superiors. Wilson's novel thus focuses on the intersection of "race, class and gender discrimination" (Ellis 8) and argues that even free black women in the North suffer from "[r]acism and sexism [that] enable the persistence of class inequalities, and class distinction [that] in turn socially reinforces discrimination on the basis of gender and race" (Ellis 9).

### **1.1.3. A Woman's Voice in Slave Songs**

Apart from the autobiographical writings of free(d) black women like Harriet Ann Jacobs and Harriet Wilson, enslaved men and women also find a way to express themselves, more specifically via songs in which they "illustrat[e] the[ir] feelings, opinions and habits" (Allen et al. xii). Like black literature, "[s]lave songs (...) hold a (...) foundational position in the American canon" (Krasner 760) as enslaved blacks do not merely copy European music, but blend the white spirit and mode of singing with African rhythm (Allen et al. viii). Therefore, black music can be considered as the first music genre that originally developed in America. Although black slaves are the inventors of this first American music style, the creators' names remain unknown for several reasons. First of all, creators of slave songs are often illiterate and unaware of how to write music. Therefore, they can only transmit their jingles orally which makes the songs subject to continual change in terms of rhythm and lyrics. Consequently, it is impossible to retrieve their date of creation. Apart from this limitation, slaves also avoid authorship in fear of being punished by their oppressors (Krasner 761). Finally, since a collective group of enslaved men and women create these songs spontaneously, it is hard to verify its true inventor(s). Normally,

[a] leading singer starts the words of each verse, often improvising, and the others, who 'base' him (...) strike in with the refrain, or even join in the solo, when the words are familiar. When the 'base' begins, the leader often stops, leaving the rest of his words to

be guessed at, or it may be they are taken up by one of the singers. And the 'basers' themselves seem to follow their own whims, beginning when they please and leaving off when they please, striking an octave above or below (in case they have pitched the tune too low or too high), or hitting some other note that chords, so as to produce the effect of a marvelous complication and variety (Allen et al. v).

Since slave songs are anonymous, it is difficult to ascertain a feminist reading. In, for example, "No Man Can Hinder Me" (n.d.) (Allen et al. 40-41) a black as well as a black female interpretation is possible depending on whether the "[m]an" is considered as solely white or not. The song's lyrics elaborate on how Jesus cures handicaps such as blindness, dumbness and being cripple which parallels with the limitations enslaved men and women experience. On the plantation fields both male and female slaves are not only physically, psychologically and sexually abused, which results in mutilation and the inability to move or work, but are also kept in the dark about what goes on in the world. In *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs also mentions that slaveholders lie about the "deplorable condition" (Jacobs 43) of runaway slaves in the North in order to discourage slaves of absconding from Southern plantations. Apart from being ignorant and battered, slaves also have to hold their tongues and do as they are told by the plantation owners. Since slave women are victimized by both white and enslaved black males, this song can also be analyzed from a black feminist point of view as is the case in the autobiographies of Jacobs and Wilson. Overall, the song's lyrics metaphorically express the slaves' optimism that one day white patriarchal society will be cured from its 'handicap' of racism and sexism and that black men and women will be able to speak freely, walk without the fear of being whipped and discover what the world really looks like.

Apart from a possible feminist reading in "No Man Can Hinder Me", the Victorian notion of family links up certain slave songs to Jacobs's and Wilson's black women's literature. Like these authors, the jingle "I'm Gwine To Alabamy" (n.d.) (Allen et al. 145) also focuses on

the sentimental theme of sorrow as a result of a broken family relationship. Since mother and child are separated from one another in the past, the grown male or female slave tends to go and “see [his/her] mammy” (Allen et al. 145 line 2) who lives in the North, more precisely on the Tombigbee in Alabama. The thought of restoring this family relationship brings about a melancholic feeling of deep longing: “I wish I had her with me / (...) / (...) I’d like to see my mammy” (Allen et al. 145 line 6, 9). Additionally, the song “There’s A Meeting Here Tonight” (n.d.) (Allen et al. 36) focuses on restored family bonds in a more general sense as it elaborates on the nocturnal meetings of slaves who meet up in the wilderness to sing and pray which, consequently, strengthens their unity of being one big black clan (Nielson 111). Since enslaved blacks suffer from numerous broken family relationships, they consider their fellow slaves as family. Throughout this song the “individual is [thus] reminded that he [/she] is still somebody’s ‘brudder’ [or ‘sister’] and that he [/she] therefore act[s] with the collective support and protection of his [/her] family” (Nielson 113). Moreover, the jingle has a call-and-response structure which “symbolically reproduces the protective environment of collectivity” (Nielson 114) and strengthens the unified power of enslaved blacks. Hence, the emphasis on (sorrows caused by) broken family relationships is not only an essential sentimental theme, but is also important among slaves in order to deal with their collective predicament of family suffering (Nielson 113).

## **2. Transition from First to Second-Wave Feminism**

After first-wave feminism, Afro-American female writers or singers of the Black Woman's Era (1890-1910) and the Harlem Renaissance (1918-37) continue to address colored females' hardships (Gates "Life of a Slave Girl" xvi, Hutchinson). Although these literary periods are not strictly related to a specific feminist wave, they do have considerable influence on the mentality of colored women and the further development of black feminist thought. During the Black Woman's Era, for example, colored writers like Anna Julia Cooper frame black (and white) female oppression in American society (Robinson et al. 190, Gates "Life of a Slave Girl" xiii). Additionally, African-American novelist Zora Neale Hurston and colored female singers such as Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday focus on "the representations of Afro-American women's senses of self" (Demaray et al. 32) as well as the maltreatment of black females in American patriarchy during the period of the Harlem Renaissance. Unlike slave songs and black female prose, Hurston, Smith and Holiday write real "protest [literature and] songs" (Hobson "Everybody's Protest Song" 445) since their writings and music no longer "mask outrages through sentimentality" (Hobson "Everybody's Protest Song" 445) and completely reject "white [female] middle-class values" (Ryan 25).

### **2.1. The Voice of Anna Julia Cooper**

In her work *A Voice From the South: by a Woman from the South* (1892) Anna Julia Cooper emphasizes that at the end of the Victorian era colored women still suffer from male domination and the repudiation of white feminists (Washington "A Voice From the South" xxvii). Since Cooper has "to deal with [her] own class privilege" (Washington "A Voice From the South" xlvii) as a teacher and has to adjust her work to her white female audience by addressing their disadvantages as well, she only partially succeeds in tackling everyday problems of black women in America's ostensibly democratic society (May 77; Washington "A Voice From the

South” xxxii, xlvi). Nevertheless, Cooper achieves her objectives to address colored women’s intersectional issues related to class, gender and race, which are also fiercely discussed during the Harlem Renaissance.

First of all, Cooper’s *A Voice From the South* focuses on the issue of class that affects Victorian women of both races. According to Cooper, both black and white men oppose the education of women because schooling accelerates “social uplift” (Washington “A Voice From the South” xxx) and consequently confers more power and authority on females within American society. Additionally, American patriarchy does not allow middle- and upper-class women to continue to work when they are married (Washington “A Voice From the South” xxxii). In her work Cooper does not only encourage women to react against these male-conditioned notions, but also pleads for their ameliorated situation through “higher education [instead of marriage, which she considers as] the essential key to ending women’s physical, emotional, and economic dependence on men” (Washington “A Voice From the South” xlvi). Although Cooper “sees herself as the *voice*” (Washington “A Voice From the South” xxx) for, inter alia, black and white working-class women, she fails to represent this group. Unlike the middle class to which Cooper belongs, “poor and uneducated” (Washington “A Voice From the South” xlix) married women face different problems. They do not only have to labor after they are wed in order to survive, but are also forced to perform mindless activities in factories so that they form no danger for patriarchal American society. Unlike Cooper who tries to empathize with both black and white women “across all social categories” (May 87), artists of the Harlem Renaissance are only interested “to ‘uplift’, advance, and educate the black [working-class] community” (Baym et al. 1842).

Secondly, in *A Voice From the South* Cooper zooms in on American patriarchy’s demeaning attitude towards the female sex. She comes to the conclusion that men sexualize both black and white women and expect females to “merely look pretty and appear well in

society” (qtd. in Washington “A Voice From the South” xlvii). “Since women’s behavior [and appearance can] be sexualized [by men], [black and white males believe that females have] to be (...) repressed” (Washington “A Voice From the South” xxxvi). Therefore, men oblige (particularly married) women to withdraw from the public sphere and take on domestic duties. Furthermore, Cooper “rejects the idea that women [are] the cause and root of ‘licentiousness’” (May 84). In other words, she refuses to believe that women provoke men’s sexual objectification and states that males and church leaders “formaliz[e] women’s degradation” (May 84). Moreover, the right to vote discloses gender discrimination in America. Contrary to black and white men, women of all color have no suffrage right and therefore have a less privileged status within society. Although the Nineteenth Amendment passes in 1920 and officially “[extends] the right to vote to [all] women” (Smentkowski et al.), colored females are still excluded from enfranchisement in reality (“Rights for Women”). Contrary to white women, who achieve more political power within society through this suffrage right, black females still suffer from the drawbacks that originally disadvantaged women of both races. This moves African-American women of the Harlem Renaissance to tackle the unremitting discrimination based on gender as well as “the [persistent] exoticizing or sexualizing of black women” (Baym et al. 1842), and induces them to strive for equal human rights (Baym et al. 1841-1842).

Thirdly, Cooper emphasizes that African-American females are “confronted by both a woman question and a race problem” (qtd. in Washington “A Voice From the South” xlv). Although all women face sex discrimination, the race issue keeps on setting white women against black females, which results in, for example, upper- and middle-class white women’s “sympathy (...) for ‘[white] working girls’ [and their neglect of] black working women who [are] confined to the most menial and strenuous physical labor” (Washington “A Voice From the South, xlv). This disparity only aggravates after the Senate approves the Nineteenth Amendment since white women subsequently “[join] the [male] oppressor under the pretense



of sharing power” (qtd. in May 86) and actively participate in race discrimination. Even though African Americans still face “racism, segregation [by the Jim Crow laws], and racial violence (...), a black American presence [becomes] powerfully visible in American cultural life” (Baym et al. 1841), i.e. the Harlem Renaissance. During this movement, female singers and writers seize the opportunity to tackle prejudices against and disadvantages of black women. Since African-American women are marginalized because of their intersection of race *and* gender, or race *and* class, female writers and singers of the Harlem Renaissance focus on issues of classism, sexism and racism.

## **2.2. Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God***

Female writers like Zora Neale Hurston “raise important questions about Afro-American women’s senses of self in white America in the twenties and thirties” (Demaray et al. 32) and focus on the incessant disadvantages related to the intersection of class, gender and race that persecute black women even after the turn of the century. Although the predominantly male Harlem Renaissance movement “articulat[es] the hopes of racial uplift” (Baym et al. 1852), Zora Neale Hurston “[does] not write to ‘uplift her race’” (Baym et al. 2123), but rather highlights the inferior position of colored women within the black community (Demaray et al. 32). By giving “critique of southern African American folk society” (Baym et al. 2124), she avoids censorship of her “well-off white (...) sponsors” (Baym et al. 2123) and hopes to sensitize her powerful white female audience to aid oppressed black women in their fight for equal rights.

### **2.2.1. Issues of Class and the Inferior Position of Black Women within Matrimony**

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), Hurston stresses the inferior position of African-American women within marriage and black community (Baym et al. 2124). Since it is difficult

for single colored women to improve their social position, these females are susceptible to male-conditioned notions that consider matrimony as the only way for women to achieve power, protection and respect (Washington "A Voice From the South" xxxii, xlvi). In this novel, the financial situation of black protagonist Janie Mae Crawford ameliorates as she climbs her way up the social ladder through her first two marriages (Washington "Their Eyes Were Watching God" xiv). However, within these matrimonies Janie does not live on equal terms with her husband and is neither respected nor protected from his violence.

Janie's first wedding is arranged by her grandmother Nanny who, as a former slave, is only concerned in Janie's "economic security" (Crabtree 60-61, Hurston 15). Therefore, Nanny forces Janie to marry farmer Logan Killicks, who owns land, instead of the "trashy nigger (...) Johnny Taylor" (Hurston 12). In other words, Nanny divides the working class of the black community into two subclasses and coerces Janie to wed the man who possesses the most (Hurston 12-13, 20, 22). Although Nanny wants Janie to go "to school" (Hurston 13), she eventually succumbs to the male-conditioned idea that she can only protect her grandchild through marriage (Hurston 15). Ironically, it is the limited freedom within matrimony from which Janie and other black women have to be secured.

After leaving Logan Killicks, Janie remarries a self-made man called Joe Starks who will see about their social uplift to the upper class since "he becomes mayor of the first all-black town incorporated in the United States" (Crabtree 62, 47). Despite Janie's self-determination to wed Starks and her "broader range of experience and interactions with people (...) in the town [Eatonville]" (Crabtree 62), "[Janie] essentially exchanges one form of servitude for another" (Crabtree 62). Although Janie now belongs to the upper class, she still feels like a servant or a slave who has to obey her imperious master: after Killicks expects her to plough the field, Starks forces her to work in a town's store (Hurston 26, 44, 51). Like Nanny, Joe Starks is aware of a class hierarchy within the black community and makes a distinction between the rich upper

class to which he and Janie belong, and the “trashy [working-class] people” (Hurstun 5) of Eatonville.

After Joe Starks deceases, Janie has all his money and possessions at her disposal. Although she initially mourns for her dead husband, she eventually realizes that she “loves [her] freedom” (Hurstun 89). When Janie meets Tea Cake, she falls in love for the first time and remarries. Since she wants to escape her duties and expectations as the mayor’s wife, she decides to live a more elementary life with Tea Cake in the Everglades “where she is free to choose to work” (Crabtree 60). During her marriage to Tea Cake, Janie does not only willingly labor among the working-class population, but also finds peace since this matrimony provides the love, “vitality and freedom” (Crabtree 60) Janie needs. In conclusion, “the need of [Janie’s] first two husbands for ownership (...) and upward mobility (...) [correlates] with the suppression of self-awareness in their wife” (Gates “Their Eyes Were Watching God” 187), whereas “Tea Cake expands Janie’s horizons literally and figuratively” (Crabtree 57).

### **2.2.2. Sexism and Oppression on the Basis of Gender**

Like Cooper’s work, Zora Neale Hurston’s novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* tackles the objectification and sexualization of black women. In her book, Hurston describes how the black male population of Eatonville looks at colored women like Janie:

[t]he men noticed her firm buttocks like she had grape fruits in her hip pockets; the great rope of black hair swinging to her waist and unraveling in the wind like a plume; then her pugnacious breasts trying to bore holes in her shirt. They, the men, were saving with the mind what they lost with the eye (Hurstun 2).

When Starks notices that the town’s men sexualize Janie, he decides to restrain her freedom by “order[ing] [her] to tie up her hair around the store” (Hurstun 52). After Joe Starks’s demise and her marriage to Tea Cake, Janie is finally free to do and wear whatever she wants. Since

Janie wants to “achiev[e] equality with men” (Crabtree 60), she exchanges her womanly dress for overalls, but “even wid dem overhalls on, [she] shows [her] womanhood” (Hurstun 4).

Furthermore, the men of Eatonville deliberately omit women from the political sphere. When Joe Starks, for example, starts to build and organize a new town, he intentionally leaves out women: “us menfolks g[e]t to call people together and form a committee” (Hurstun 33). Starks rather associates women with the domestic sphere: “[t]hank yuh fuh yo’ compliments, but mah wife don’t know nothin’ ‘bout no speech-makin’. Ah never married her for nothin’ lak dat. She’s uh woman and her place is in the home” (Hurstun 41). In other words, the inferior position of colored women is not only noticeable within the black community of Eatonville, but is also reflected in the matrimony of Joe and Janie since “Joe [speaks] out without giving [Janie] a chance to say anything one way or another” (Hurstun 41).

Moreover, Hurston focuses on the “difficulties of expressing sexuality because of the oppressive stereotypes of asexual femininity” (Demaray et al. 33). As a sixteen-year-old girl Janie responds to new sexual feelings and kisses Johnny Taylor. Her grandmother does not only disapprove this sexual behavior, but also exaggerates the situation by comparing Janie with a tramp (Hurstun 13). Nanny thus supports the male-conditioned notion that decent women should neither have nor express amorous feelings. In order to restrain these emotions, Nanny arranges Janie’s marriage to Logan Killicks and persuades her to wed him under the false pretense that “[h]usbands and wives always [love] each other [since] that [is] what marriage [means]” (Hurstun 20). When Janie eventually finds out that she has no sexual or affectionate desires towards her husband, she turns to her grandmother and discovers that Nanny does not consider love or sexuality as important aspects of a relationship: “[y]ou come heah wid yo’ mouf full uh foolishness on uh busy day. Heah you got up prop tuh lean on all yo’ bawn days, and big protection, and everybody got tuh tip dey hat tuh you and call you Mis’ Killicks, and you come worryin’ me ‘bout love” (Hurstun 22).

On top of all that, Hurston shows that sexual, emotional and physical abuse towards black women are rife in American society. Because of Nanny's negative past experiences, she comes to the conclusion that "menfolks white or black [make] a spit cup outa [colored women]" [sic] (Hurston 19). As a slave, Nanny has had to endure the atrocities of bondage such as her white master's rape, which leads to the birth of Janie's mother. After the abolition of slavery, Nanny refuses to marry a black man since she "[does not] want nobody mistreating [her] baby" (Hurston 18). However, despite Nanny's precaution, a black school teacher manages to violate her daughter (Hurston 18). These wretched memories induce Nanny's distrust of men and explains why she almost immediately thinks that Janie is physically abused by her husband when Janie utters complaints about her marriage to Logan Killicks (Hurston 21). Although Janie is not physically abused by her first husband, Joe Starks does "sla[p] [Janie's] face" (Hurston 67). Additionally, he verbally humiliates her, for example, by comparing her intellect (and that of other black females) with that of "chillun and chickens and cows (...) [because, according to him,] they [too] don't think none theirselves" [sic] (Hurston 67). Like Joe Starks, Tea Cake also panders to male-conditioned notions: "[h]e had whipped Janie. (...) Being able to whip her reassured him in possession. (...) He just slapped her around a bit to show he was boss" (Hurston 140). Additionally, Tea Cake also justifies his actions on account of his jealousy: "Janie is wherever *Ah* wants tuh be. (...) *Ah* didn't wants whup her last night, but ol' Mis' Turner done sent for her brother tuh come tuh bait Janie in and take her way from me. (...) *Ah* beat her tuh show dem Turners who is boss" (Hurston 141).

### **2.2.3. Addressing Black Women's Issues via Black Tradition and Heritage**

Unlike the I-protagonist in the narratives of Jacobs and Wilson, Janie's voice "shift[s] from third to a blend of first and third person (known as 'free indirect discourse')" (Gates "Their Eyes Were Watching God" 187). Although the use of an omniscient third person seems to

minimize Janie's involvement, Hurston deliberately employs the alteration in point of view to make clear that colored women can "choose when and where they wish to speak [and to show that] while many women [have] found their own voices, they also [know] when it [is] better not to use it" (Washington "Zora Neale Hurston" xii, xi). Hurston's novel is also imbued with ideas of African-American orators like Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Du Bois, which she specifically applies to the black woman's situation. Janie's growing self-consciousness, for example, can be linked to Booker T. Washington since she too lifts her "veil of ignorance [and oppression]" ("Tuskegee University"). Although Janie still literally and figuratively hides "behind her veil" (Hurston 84) at the funeral of her dominant husband Joe Starks, she eventually opposes the male-conditioned idea of both her grandmother and two former husbands to live "under a cloak of pity [and suppression]" (Hurston 85). Additionally, the

usage of a *divided* voice, a double voice unreconciled (...), a verbal analogue of her double experiences as a woman in a male-dominated world and as a black person in a nonblack world [can be considered as] a woman writer's revision of W.E.B. Du Bois's metaphor of 'double consciousness' (Gates "Their Eyes Were Watching God" 193).

As Hurston pays great attention to find a unique black woman's voice within a predominantly male artistic Harlem Renaissance-movement, her novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also focuses on "self-definition, feminism and Blackness expressed through the folk experience" (Crabtree 66). First of all, she wants to "demonstrat[e] her closeness to the collective spirit [or voice] of the African-American oral tradition" (Washington "Zora Neale Hurston" xii). In order to address Afro-American women and stimulate *their* collectivity within the colored community, Hurston's female protagonist voices the folkloristic element of the black vernacular. Furthermore, Hurston frequently refers to other folkloristic elements such as African-American music, rhythm and dancing that is considered to be a spontaneous and liberating experience. Due to the African-American sphere of dancing and (jazz and blues)

music in the Everglades, Janie finally shifts from “object to subject” (Gates “Their Eyes Were Watching God” 187) and feels liberated.

### **2.3. Bessie Smith’s Liberating Blues and Billie Holiday’s Emancipated Jazz**

Apart from Hurston’s literary contribution, Harlem Renaissance singers such as Bessie Smith (1898?-1937) and Billie Holiday (1915-1959) also make their voices heard in order to expose black women’s hardships (“Bessie Smith”, “Billie Holiday”). African-American music genres like blues, especially embodied by Bessie Smith, and jazz, particularly known due to Billie Holiday, become very popular during the 1920s. Since these music styles emanate from slave songs that originally formulated “the pain of the slave (...) and [his/her] attempts at freedom” (Hobson “Everybody’s Protest Song” 445), jazz and blues form the perfect media to express the sorrows of colored women who are still victimized and denied equal rights.

Since jazz comes from blues and blues, in turn, emanates from slave songs, there are only slight differences between these three music genres (Schuller, “Blues”). Firstly, although both jazz and blues take over the “call-and-response trope [of slave songs], (...) the singer [now] performs both the call and the response through the repetition of the first line and, in effect, creates ‘a communal style of singing ... in the expression of a single person’” (Rutter 75). Instead of unifying all colored slaves via songs, black female singers of the Harlem Renaissance such as Smith and Holiday use the “communal function” (Rutter 81) of the slave songs’ call-and-response trope to mainly address and unite African-American women.

Secondly, since lyrics of slave, jazz and blues songs are “sung by one person and heard, remembered, revised, and resung by another, [these songs] belon[g] as much to the second performer as to the first” (qtd in Rutter 75). Songs like “Ain’t Nobody’s Business If I Do” belong to the African-American musical heritage and are deliberately covered by Smith (1923)

as well as Holiday (1949) to honor and carry on the black heritage (“Ain’t Nobody’s Business Music Video”).

Thirdly, unlike slave songs, the lyrics of jazz and blues artists have a clear “sociopolitical function” (Rutter 76) since they “open rebellion against [the] social codes” (Ryan 15) of American society. Harlem Renaissance-divas like Smith and Holiday “highlight [their] independence[,] (...) self-sufficiency and right to public expression” (Ryan 24) via lyrics in order to “urge [their black female] audience to indulge in similar behavior” (Ryan 15).

Finally, although all three music genres originate via “vocal improvisation” (Hobson “Everybody’s Protest Song” 445) and tackle black people’s difficulties and sorrows, jazz is generally considered to be more sophisticated. On the one hand, this is due to the lack of vernacular which characterizes slave and blues songs (Rutter 71-72). On the other hand, jazz complicates “the prototypical AAB blues rhyme scheme” (Rutter 76) that has developed out of the call-and-response trope.

### **2.3.1. Attacking America’s Class Hierarchy and Capital System**

Coming from a poor working-class family, both Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday use their musical and writing talents to draw attention to the “few opportunities [black women have] to advance honorably, socially and economically” (Pittman 59, Purnell 446, “Bessie Smith”). In “Ain’t Nobody’s Business if I do”, which is recorded by both Smith (1923) and Holiday (1949), these singers accuse American society of forestalling black women to progress and of preventing them to utter their opinion freely (“Ain’t Nobody’s Business Music Video”): “There ain't nothing I can do or nothing I can say / That folks don't criticize me” (“Ain’t Nobody’s Business Lyrics” line 1-2). Nevertheless, both singers encourage African-American females not to be intimidated by their hostile environment and to express their free will and opinion: “But I'm goin' to do just as I want to anyway / And don't care if they all despise me” (ibid. 3-4).



Moreover, in their personal lives Smith as well as Holiday deliberately react against white American upper and middle class's social codes by publicly using "food, alcohol, marijuana [or] sex" (Ryan 15, 21, Pittman 57). They also regularly refer to these elements in their lyrics in order to show their "resistance to restrictive social norms" (Ryan 20).

Additionally, America's class hierarchy, in which African-American women are generally poor and belong to the lower working class, comes to the fore in Bessie Smith's "Backwater Blues" (1927) ("Backwater Blues Music Video"). In this blues song Smith compares a natural disaster (i.e. a thunderstorm) with America's destructive and negligent politics towards black females (Rutter 75):

When it rains five days and the skies turn dark as night<sup>1</sup>  
.....

Then trouble's takin' place

In the lowlands at night  
.....

There's been enough trouble

To make a poor girl wonder where she wants to go  
.....

When it thunders and lightnin' and when the wind begins to blow  
.....

There's thousands of people

Ain't got no place to go

Then I went and stood upon some high old lonesome hill  
.....

---

<sup>1</sup> As Smith repeats the first line twice, she uses the renewed call-and-response trope.

I can't move no more

There ain't no place

For a poor old girl to go (“Backwater Blues Lyrics” line 1, 3-4, 7-8, 13, 15-17, 26-28).

Like Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the storm “expose[s] how the consequences of a natural disaster (...) are compounded by America’s racial [and sexist] caste system” (Rutter 75): “[t]he lake was coming. They had to reach the six-mile bridge. It was high and safe perhaps. (...) So they reached the bridge at Six Mile Bend and thought to rest. But it was crowded. White people had preempted that point of elevation and there was no more room” (Hurston 155-156).

Smith also wants to show that even if black females would receive an ameliorated social and economic status like her, they should not crave for middle and upper class’s greed and wealth. In “Nobody Knows You When You’re Down and Out” (1929) Bessie criticizes America’s capitalist system that deliberately overlooks those who are “[d]own and [o]ut” like most African-American women (“Nobody Knows You Music Video”):

Once I lived the life of a millionaire

Spendin' my money, I didn't care

I carried my friends out for a good time

Buying bootleg liquor, champagne and wine

Then I began to fall so low

I didn't have a friend and no place to go

.....

Nobody knows you

When you're down and out

In my pocket not one penny

And my friends, I haven't any (“Nobody Knows You Lyrics” line 1-6, 9-12).

In “God Bless the Child” (1941) Billie Holiday “addresse[s] issues of economic and social class” (Purnell 456) such as the remaining financial gap between the white well-off and colored poor that harms colored females in particular (“God Bless the Child Music Video”):

The[m] that's got shall get

Them that's not shall lose

.....

Yes, the strong gets more

While the weak ones fade

Empty pockets don't ever make the grade (“God Bless the Child Lyrics” line 1-2, 7-9).

Like Smith, Billie Holiday criticizes capitalist society that centralizes around profit and progress:

Money, you [got] lots of friends

Crowdin' 'round the door

When you're gone and spending ends

They don't come no more (ibid. 13-16).

Additionally, Holiday warns her black female public to gradually climb up the social ladder and to do it independently:

Mama may have, [p]apa may have

But God bless the child that's got his own

.....

Rich relations give

Crust of bread and such

You can help yourself

But don't take too much (ibid. 4-6, 17-20).

### 2.3.2. Black Women's Feelings towards Love, Matrimony and Sexuality

Due to their inferior position within society and matrimony, colored women are silenced and prohibited to ventilate their emotions about men's maltreatment. To stop African-American females' impotence, "Smith use[s] [her] expressive freedom (...) to open up dialogues about [poignant] issues central to black women's lives" (Ryan 16). Therefore, Smith's blues songs articulate black women's silenced grief about men's public adultery. In her song "A Good Man is Hard to Find" (1927) Bessie is confronted with her (fictitious) adulterous husband and expresses her melancholic mood ("A Good Man Music Video"). Via this song Bessie wants to represent a more generalized condition of colored females who face men's infidelity:

My heart is sad and I'm all alone

My man [treats] me mean

I regret the day that I was born

And the man I ever seen

My happiness is less today

My heart is broke, that's why I say

Lord, a good man is hard to find

You always get another kind

Just when you think that he's your pal

You look and find him foolin' round some old gal ("A Good Man Lyrics" line 1-10).

Likewise, Billie Holiday wants to express black women's emotionality and "deals with various elements of love relationships [such as] the intrinsic (...) sorrows" (Purnell 458) caused by adultery. In her jazz song "My Man" (1948) Holiday struggles with her conflicting feelings towards her (fictitious) adulterous husband ("My Man Music Video"). Although she knows her husband is disloyal, she still loves him and rejects the idea of leaving him. Via this song,

Holiday shows black women's emotional sufferings when men treat females disrespectfully and misuse their love:

It cost me a lot

But there's one thing that I've got

It's my man

.....

Two or three girls

Has he

That he likes as well as me

But I love him

I don't know why I should

He isn't true

.....

He'll never know

All my life is just despair

.....

What's the difference if I say

I'll go away, [w]hen I know

I'll come back on my knees someday ("My Man Lyrics" line 1-3, 10-15, 19-20, 25-27).

Additionally, Holiday's jazz song "Mean to Me" (1937) focuses on black women's emotional neglect and public humiliation induced by their husbands ("Mean to Me Music Video"):

You're mean to me

Why must you be mean to me<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> The first line is repeated several times and accords with the renewed call-and-response structure in jazz and blues.

Gee, honey, it seems to me  
You love to see me cryin'  
.....  
I stay home  
[E]ach night  
When you say you'll phone  
You don't and I'm left [all] alone  
.....

You treat me coldly  
Each day in the year  
You always scold me  
Whenever somebody is near [d]ear

[I]t must [b]e great fun to be mean to me (“Mean to Me Lyrics” line 1-4, 6-9, 11-15).

Overall, Holiday concludes that “[w]hen a woman loves a man / (...) / [it is] (...) a one-sided game that they play” (1938) (“When a Woman Loves a Man” line 4, 14, “When a Woman Loves a Man Music Video”).

Apart from adultery, Bessie Smith’s blues songs also focus on the consequences for women who are left by their husbands. In “Baby Won’t You Please Come Home” (1923) Bessie draws attention to financial problems that African-American women face when they are deserted by their breadwinning husbands (“Baby Won’t You Music Video”): “Landlord getting’ worse, I’ve got to move May the first / Baby won’t you please come home, I need money / Baby won’t you please come home (“Baby Won’t You Lyrics” line 24-26). Additionally, Smith stresses that black women should not blame or devalue themselves when they are deserted by their husbands. In “After You’ve Gone” (1927) Bessie expresses her self-

assurance by saying that she has been a good wife to her husband and by warning him that he will miss her once he walks out the door (“After You’ve Gone Music Video”):

There'll come a time, now don't forget it  
There'll come a time when you'll regret it  
Someday, when you grow lonely  
Your heart will break like mine and you'll want me only  
After you've gone, after you've gone away

.....

You'll feel blue, and you'll feel sad

You'll miss the best pal you ever had (“After You’ve gone Lyrics” line 13-17, 20-22).

Via her lyrics Bessie thus wants to enjoin other black women to adopt her confident attitude and self-appreciation.

Furthermore, Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday “call attention to ‘domestic violence in the collective context of blues [and jazz] performance’” (Ryan 16). Their song “Ain’t Nobody’s Business if I Do”, for example, does not only encourage black women’s freedom of speech, but, paradoxically, also discloses why these females are reticent about physical abuse within the domestic sphere. Since colored females are often indoctrinated by their husbands, they adopt the male-conditioned notion that all events within the domestic area are “[n]obody’s [b]usiness”:

I’d rather my man would hit me  
Than to jump right up and quit me

.....

I swear I won’t call no copper

If I’m beat up by my poppa (Ain’t Nobody’s Business Lyrics” line 17-18, 20-21).

Holiday's "My Man" also addresses intimate partner violence and black women's impotence to do something about it: "He isn't true / He beats me too / What can I do" (My Man Lyrics" line 18-20).

Moreover, "blues singers like Smith form a potential threat to socially acceptable behavior" (Ryan 17) like marriage. Her song "Young Woman's Blues" (1926), for instance, criticizes the restrictions matrimony imposes on black women. Instead, Bessie wants colored women to follow their passions so they can experience the same sexual liberation as men ("Young Woman's Blues Music Video"):

(...) [M]y man had gone away

(...) [H]e left a note readin' (...)

[']No time to marry, no time to settle down'

I'm a young woman and ain't done runnin' around

.....

Some people call me a hobo, some call me a bum

.....

I'm as good as any woman (...)

.....

I ain't gonna marry, ain't gonna settle down

.....

(...) I'm a good woman and I can get plenty of men ("Young Woman's Blues Lyrics" line 2-5, 7, 9, 11, 14).

On top of all that, Bessie Smith has recorded three songs with "sexually explicit lyrics that fram[e] lovemaking in terms of food and consumption" (Ryan 15), i.e. "Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl" (1931) (1), "You've Gotta Give Me Some" (1928) (2) and "Kitchen Man" (1929) (3) ("Need a Little Sugar Music Video", "You've Gotta Give Me Some Music Video",



“Kitchen Man Music Video”). There are several reasons why Bessie Smith uses “eating (...) as a metaphor for sexual contact” (Ryan 17). First of all, Bessie’s metaphors agree with Du Bois’s concept of double consciousness as her black female audience read her lyrics figuratively whereas her white listening public only assumes a literal reading (Hobson “Everybody’s Protest Song” 446). Secondly, since domesticities such as cooking and housekeeping are usually associated with women, references to food and consumption create “a communal” (Ryan 17) or unifying feeling among females. Smith sexualizes these aspects of “the domestic aura” (Ryan 22) to reveal colored housewives’ erotic feelings. Thirdly, Smith expresses her “openness (...) [about] sexuality” via these food metaphors to “provide a new model of the politics of the body for (...) African-American women” (Ryan 18). Since “black women [‘s bodies are] variously seen as asexual, out-of-control, or oversexed” (Ryan 18) by other men, Smith turns the tables on them by using food metaphors to refer to her sensual body “as a central source of agency” (Ryan 28):

(1) I need a little sugar in my bowl

I need a little hot dog between my rolls

.....

Move your finger, drop something in my bowl

I need a little steam-heat on my floor

.....

It’s dark down there looks like a snake

C’mon here and drop somethin’ here in my bowl (“Need a Little Sugar Lyrics” line

5-6, 18-19, 22-23).

(2) I want a piece of your good old meat

.....

I crave your round steak, you gotta give me some

Sweet as candy in a candy shop

Is just your sweet sweet lollypop

.....

I love all day suckers, you gotta give me some

To the milkman I heard Mary scream

Said she wanted a lots of cream

.....

Hear my cryin' on my bended knees

If you wanna put my soul at ease

You[‘ve] gotta give me some (“You’ve Gotta Give Me Some Lyrics line 6, 8-10,  
12-14, 17-19).

(3) I love his cabbage gravy, his hash

Crazy 'bout his succotash

I can't do without my kitchen man

Wild about his turnip top

Like the way he warms my chop

.....

Oh, his jelly roll is so nice and hot

Never fails to touch the spot

.....

His frankfurters are oh so sweet

How I like his sausage meat

.....

Oh, how that boy can open clam

No one else can touch my ham

.....  
When I eat his doughnuts

All I leave is the hole  
.....

Why, he can use my sugar bowl

Oh, his baloney's really worth a try ("Kitchen Man Lyrics" line 9-13, 19-20, 22-23, 25-26, 28-29, 31-32).

Finally, Billie Holiday wants to end colored women's "anxieties of respectability" (Hobson "Everybody's Protest Song" 444) and advocates "optimism, assertiveness and/or self-empowerment" (Purnell 458) via songs like "Now or Never" (1949) and "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" (1955) ("Now or Never Music Video", "Please Don't Talk Music Video"). In "Now or Never" "Billie makes unequivocal demands on her lover for commitment (...) [and expresses] a sense of power and control over her destiny" (Purnell 459):

Hey fat daddy make up your mind  
.....

It's got to be yes or no, it's either you stay or go

You can't leave me on the shelf, you gotta commit yourself

It's either you will baby or won't fall in love with me ("Now or Never Lyrics" line 1, 15-17).

In "Please Don't Talk About Me When I'm Gone" Billie pleads that men should respect females even after a broken relationship:

Please don't talk about me when I'm gone

Though our friendship ceases from now on

And listen, if you can't say anything real nice

It's better not to talk at all, that's my advice

We're parting, you go your way, I'll go mine, it's best that we do  
Here's a kiss, I hope that this brings lots of luck to you  
Makes no difference how I carry on  
Just don't you talk about me when I'm gone ("Please Don't Talk Lyrics" line 1-8)

### **2.3.3. Two Different Ways to Address Black Women's Race Issues**

Although both Bessie Smith and Billie Holiday address race issues, Smith wants to uplift her race whereas Holiday focuses on (past) racial atrocities. In "Young Woman's Blues", Smith argues that dark-colored females are equivalent to light brown and white women: "I'm as good as any woman (...) / I ain't no high yeller, I'm a deep killer of brown" ("Young Woman's Blues Lyrics" line 9-10). At the same time, Smith "deliberately emphasize[s] (...) differences between herself and [her] white audiences (...) [by referring] to [her] skin color" (Ryan 26-27). In this blues song, Smith "obviously [presents her] darker skin (...) as [a] sig[n] of power" (Ryan 28) since, as a black female, she does not have to obey white social norms: "I ain't gonna marry, ain't gonna settle down / I'm gonna drink good moonshine and rub these browns down" ("Young Woman's Blues Lyrics" line 11-12).

In "Strange Fruit" (1939) Billie Holiday exposes the Southern barbarity of lynching during the slavery period ("Strange Fruit Music Video"). Although slavery has been abolished and black males have suffrage, Billie bitterly realizes that racism and racial executions still live on in America through organizations like the Ku Klux Klan. Since this organization revives during the Harlem Renaissance and is "partly [fueled] by a romantic nostalgia for the old South" ("Ku Klux Klan"), Billie's "Strange Fruit" still addresses current issues:

Southern trees bear [a] strange fruit  
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root  
Black bodies swinging in the southern breeze

Strange fruit hanging from the poplar trees

Pastoral scene of the gallant south

.....

Scent of magnolias, sweet and fresh

Then the sudden smell of burning flesh

Here is fruit for the crows to pluck (“Strange Fruit Lyrics” line 1-5, 7-9).

Via the metaphor of the black body as “[s]trange fruit hanging from the poplar trees”, Holiday also “links the lynching scene to [her personal] experience of racism (...) [and] her own struggles as a [black] woman and an artist” (Hobson “Everybody’s Protest Song” 447).

### 3. Black Feminism or Womanism during Second-Wave Feminism

After the two World Wars of the twentieth century “people’s lifestyles [change] (...) [and] reveal different kinds of (...) women (...) with new aspirations (...) [and] possibilities for action” (Baym 2255-2256). Like first-wave suffragettes, postwar feminists strive for more “personal freedom and individual self-expression” (Baym 2256). These “women [once again] organiz[e] to pursue their legal, ethical, and cultural interests” (Baym 2258) and consequently congregate to form second-wave feminist organizations from the 1960s to the 1980s (Brunell et al.). However, unlike the nineteenth-century suffragette movements, black feminist organizations originate alongside and develop separately from white ones (Roth 46). While second-wave white “[f]eminists (...) [are] mostly interested in issues of contraception and abortion” (Izgarjan 312), their colored counterparts still struggle for enfranchisement and the end of “racial discrimination, poverty and family and community violence” (Izgarjan 312, “Rights for Women”). In conclusion, black feminism’s commencement can be considered as the historical outcome of both white suffragettes’ failure to support African-American women and the empowerment of female colored authors or singers of the Black Woman’s Era and the Harlem Renaissance. Additionally, black feminism is triggered and reinforced by American patriarchy’s enduring injustice towards females, and white women’s persistent racial attitude and “insensitiv[ity] to the economic survival issues” (Roth 48) of colored women.

As a second-wave colored feminist, American author Alice Walker (1944) terms the concept of black feminism ‘womanism’ to create “an alternative to dominant patriarchal and [white] feminist models” (Izgarjan et al. 308-309, “Alice Walker”). She defines womanism as follows:

1. From *womanish* (Opp. of “girlish”, i.e., frivolous, irresponsible, not serious.) A black feminist or feminist of color. (...) Usually referring to outrageous, audacious, courageous or *willful* behavior. Wanting to know more and in great depth than is

considered “good” for one. Interested in grown-up doings. Acting grown up. Being grown up. (...) Responsible. In Charge. *Serious*.

2. *Also*: A woman who loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually. Appreciates and prefers women’s culture, women’s emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and women’s strength. Sometimes loves individual men, sexually and/or nonsexually. Committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female. Not a separatist, except periodically, for health. Traditionally universalist (...). Traditionally capable (...).”
3. Loves music. Loves dance. Loves the moon. *Loves* the Spirit. Loves love and food and roundness. Loves struggle. *Loves* the Folk. Loves herself. *Regardless*.
4. Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender (qtd. in Torfs 18).

In her novel *The Color Purple* (1982) Alice Walker combines this womanist definition with the debasement of black women on the basis of (their intersectionality of) class, gender and race (“Alice Walker”). Although this novel is set in a pre-World War period like Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, *The Color Purple* perfectly mirrors women’s unaltered postwar experiences with domestic violence (including marital rape and incest) and questions patriarchy’s conventional image concerning female sexuality, family, marriage and womanhood (Izgarjan 304, Sundqvist 6, Brunell et al.).

### 3.1. Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as Inspiration to Walker's *The Color Purple*

#### 3.1.1. Focus on Disadvantages due to Intersectionality of Race, Class and Gender

Since "Walker has accurately interpreted much of the message in Hurston's [*Their Eyes Were Watching God*]" (Saunders 1988, 1), it comes as no surprise that her novel *The Color Purple* addresses similar issues such as the degradation of colored women within black society on the basis of (their intersectionality of) class, gender and race. In *The Color Purple* it is protagonist Celie who has to face her husband's prejudice towards ordinary African-American women like her: "[y]ou black, you pore, (...) you a woman. Goddam (...) you nothing at all" (Alice Walker 213).

Both Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker disclose colorism towards African-American females within the black community. Since some African-Americans prefer a light skin color over a dark one, they too are guilty of debasing people on the basis of their complexion. In *The Color Purple*, for example, Celie's colored sister-in-law Carrie claims that female blues singer Shug Avery is "[n]ot so pretty [because she is] too black" (Alice Walker 21). Additionally, Celie's father-in-law called Old Mr.\_ does not understand what people find beautiful about Shug Avery since "[s]he [is, after all, as] black as a tar" (Walker 56). Furthermore, after Celie's stepson Harpo is deserted by his wife Sofia Butler, his new "yellowish girlfriend" (Walker 86) Mary Agnes (also called Squeak) wonders whether Harpo "really loves [her], or just [her light skin] color" (Walker 102). In Hurston's novel, colored female Mrs. Turner, one of Janie's friends in the Everglades, discloses the issue of colorism since she takes pride in her near-white physical appearance: "[h]er nose was slightly pointed and she was proud. Her thin lips were a source of pride. To her way of thinking all these things set her aside from Negroes" (Hurston 134, 136). Additionally, Mrs. Turner has only become friends with Janie because of her "coffee-and-cream complexion (...) [and even reproaches her]



for marrying a man as dark as Tea Cake” (Hurston 134). Furthermore, Mrs. Turner openly defends white people’s racism and blames her darker brothers and sisters for white society’s persistent injustice towards her race:

A can’t stand black niggers. Ad don’t blame de white folks from hatin’ em’ cause Ah can’t stand ‘em mahself. (...) Ah hates tuh see folks lak me and you mixed up wid ‘em. (...) Always cuttin’ de monkey for white folks. If it wuzn’t for so many black folks it wouldn’t be no race problem. De white folks would take us in wid dem. De black ones is holdin’ us back (Hurston 135).

Apart from focusing on colorism, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* as well as *The Color Purple* zoom in on the inferior position of colored women within matrimony and black society. Like Janie’s grandmother, Celie’s stepfather Alphonso (also called Pa) does not only deprive a female relative (i.e. Celie) of education, but also forces her into a loveless conservative patriarchal marriage (Walker 9-12, 66). As a consequence, Celie is robbed of a self-reliant existence within marriage and society: “I don’t have nothing to offer and I feels poor” (Walker 15). Additionally, in both novels black husbands adopt traditional white male’s notions that “a woman need[s] to be at home” (Walker 86). Overall, Janie as well as Celie feel enslaved in their marriage and in society, but, contrary to Janie, Walker’s main character echoes the spirit of slavery in more detail. For instance, Celie addresses her husband as Mr.\_ instead of calling him by his first name which parallels the way Jacobs’s slave protagonist Linda speaks to her male superiors (either addressing them as Dr. or Mr.). Furthermore, Walker either portrays Celie as a house servant or describes her travail “in the field (...) [, e.g.] chopping cotton” (Walker 27, 3, 21, 29), which refers to the numerous slaves who have worked on the cotton fields before the Civil War. Moreover, Walker echoes Sojourner Truth’s statement that a black woman “can do as much work as any man” (qtd. in Stewart 1991, xxxiii) through Alphonso who has to concede that Celie “ain’t no stranger to hard work (...) [and] can work like a man” (Walker 9). This part

of Truth's speech "Ar'n't I a Woman?" perfectly connects with Walker's intention to defend the equality between the sexes (within the black community).

Next to colorism and black women's inferior position, both authors also highlight sexual, physical and emotional abuse towards colored females within black society. In Walker's *The Color Purple*, Celie already faces domestic violence at a very young age. Her stepfather Alphonso does not only ravish fourteen-year old Celie, but also threatens that she "better not never tell nobody [about it] but God [or] it [will] kill [her] mammy" (Walker 1, 1-2). Apart from sexual and emotional abuse, Alphonso also physically maltreats Celie due to his jealousy: "[h]e beat me today cause he say I winked at a boy in church. (...) He beat me for dressing trampy but he do it to me anyway" (Walker 6-8). Additionally, Walker focuses on the (originally sentimental) theme of sorrow as a result of broken family relationships. After Alphonso separates Celie from her two newborn babies, her husband Albert also forces Celie to part from her cherished sister Nettie (Walker 3-4, 14-16, 18, 69). In her marriage to Albert, Celie once again has to perform sexual intercourse against her will: "I don't like it at all. (...) He git up on you, heist your nightgown round your waist, plunge in. Most times I pretend I ain't there. He never knows the difference. Never ast me how I feel, nothing. Just do his business, get off, go to sleep" (Walker 81). Furthermore, Albert maltreats Celie and imputes his physical abuse to her gender: "Harpo ast his daddy why he beat me. Mr.\_ say, Cause she my wife. (...) He remind me of Pa" (Walker 23). Moreover, Albert abuses Celie emotionally since he deliberately hides Nettie's letters so Celie would believe that her sister has forgotten all about her (Walker 122, 129, 134, 150-152). To conclude, like Janie's grandmother, Celie adopts male-conditioned notions "in the hope that doing so [she] will [be] at least shielded (...) from harm [or shame]" (Sundqvist 6). For instance, when Harpo asks his father Albert for advice about how to make his wife Sofia more obedient, Celie interferes and encourages Harpo to "[b]eat her" (Walker 38).

### 3.1.2. A Womanist Bildungsroman: Similarities and Differences

Alice Walker's *The Color Purple* can be considered as a womanist Bildungsroman since her novel focuses on a black female protagonist (i.e. Celie) who undergoes "personal change" (Sundqvist 2) towards a womanist attitude in "three stages, or crucial events" (Sundqvist 4). First,

[t]he protagonist must suffer loss and/or discontent early on in the novel, followed by constant conflicts between what the protagonist needs and wants and the norms of [her] society. Finally, the [womanist] Bildungsroman ends with (...) 'an assessment by the protagonist of [her]self and [her] new place in society' (Sundqvist 4).

Although *Their Eyes Were Watching God* also deals with a black female protagonist who develops (through three marriages), the novel cannot be labeled as a *womanist* Bildungsroman since Hurston's book does neither accurately embody Walker's womanism, nor agrees with all phases of the womanist Bildungsroman. The question then arises to what extent *Their Eyes Were Watching God* is similar to or different from Walker's womanist definition and Bildungsroman *The Color Purple*. Since Walker's fourth womanist definition solely refers to the "focu[s] on the color dimension of [b]lack feminism [or womanism]" (Kumar et al. 167), which agrees with "the strong color of purple (...) [contrary to] the weaker lavender" (Izgarjan 414) that symbolizes white feminism, only her first three definitions are interesting to analyze in more detail.

#### 3.1.2.1. Walker's First Womanist Definition

In *The Color Purple* Celie already embodies part of Walker's first womanist definition at a very young age. Since she is "forced to take on her mother's role, both when it comes to doing housework and becoming her mother's sexual substitute to her Pa" (Sundqvist 5), she has to act grown up, serious and responsible (Sundqvist 5). Along with the deprivation of

childhood, the loss of her two babies and her sister eventually lead to Celie's identity crisis whereby she adopts a patriarchal male-conditioned attitude (Sundqvist 5, Walker 38). Celie thus acts grown up and serious according to male expectations, but fails to realize that she is also responsible for her own happiness. After marrying Albert, Celie meets Harpo's wife Sofia and blues singer Shug Avery, and is confronted with their assertiveness, independence and loving emotions (Sundqvist 4). Although Celie seems to repel Sofia's attitude, she actually yearns for Sofia's brave and daring attitude:

[y]ou told Harpo to beat me, [Sofia] said. (...) I say it cause I'm a fool, I say. I say it cause I'm jealous of you. I say it cause you do what I can't. What that? she say. Fight. I say. (...) All my life I had to fight. (...) But I'd never thought I had to fight in my own house. (...) I loves Harpo, she say. (...) But I'll kill him dead before I let him beat me (Walker 42).

Like Sofia, Shug does not only "avoid being controlled by men" (Sundqvist 9), but also shows her "outrageous, audacious, courageous [and] *willful* behavior" (qtd. in Torfs 18) since she maintains power over men like Albert and reacts against society's norms in order to do whatever she pleases. Their behavior does not only inspire Celie, but also affects Harpo's new girlfriend Squeak who stands up for herself one day and demands that Harpo calls her by her real name (i.e. Mary Agnes) (Walker 102). After Celie's "constant [inner] conflicts between what [she] needs and wants [on the one hand,] and the norms of [her] society [on the other hand]" (Sundqvist 4), she eventually decides that she "want[s] to know more [about the world] and in great[er] depth than is considered 'good' [by patriarchal society]" (qtd. in Torfs 18). With Shug's help, Celie "liberate[s] herself from (...) [the] traditional gender roles [of domestic mother and obedient wife that is] dictated by society" (Sundqvist 13) since she sticks up for herself against her husband, leaves him and moves to Memphis with Shug (Walker 183, 206-209, 212). In Memphis Celie finally turns into a grown woman as she is in charge of her own

life and business which ultimately leads to a positive “assessment [towards] [her]self and [her] new place in society” (Sundqvist 4, 15; Walker 221, 261): “I am so happy. I got love, I got work, I got money, friends and time” (Walker 222).

In *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, Walker’s first womanist definition also applies to Janie when she marries for the third time. By then Janie does not only act grown up because she has reached the age of forty, but also behaves bravely since she follows her heart and takes accountability for her actions. By marrying Tea Cake, Janie is finally in charge of her own life which is represented by the “overalls” (Hurston 1990, 4) she wears. Likewise, in *The Color Purple* Celie’s business in “pants” (Walker 152-153) symbolizes her independence and emancipation. Unlike *The Color Purple*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* does not apply the idea of sisterhood in order to achieve a womanist behavior in the end. Despite everything Celie goes through, she feels joyful in the end because her sisters (i.e. Nettie, Sofia and Shug) have “help[ed] her liberate (...) from the patriarchal values that [have kept] her down” (Sundqvist 2; Walker 122, 152). Janie, however, puts her trust in one ostensibly impeccable man who initially helps her “to resist patriarchy” (Sundqvist 2), but eventually succumbs to patriarchy’s tolerance towards physical abuse. Therefore, Janie

has to kill him in the end, although Hurston has made the development ambiguous by first having a rabid dog bite this third husband, causing him to go insane. Hurston has forced [the reader], through Janie’s act of self-defense, to take in the fact that some married women have had no recourse but to save themselves by violent reaction (Saunders 1).

Unlike *The Color Purple*, *Their Eyes Were Watching God* ends rather pessimistically since Janie’s lover does not only succumb to male-conditioned notions that justify violence towards women, but also dies. Additionally, when Janie returns from Eatonville, she realizes that she stands all alone with her liberated attitude and has no female friend or sister to fall back on.

### 3.1.2.2. Walker's Second Womanist Definition

Celie also embodies Walker's second definition of womanism as she first of all "loves other women, sexually and/or nonsexually" (qtd. in Torfs 18). Since Celie faces negative sexual experiences with men early on in life, she "takes refuge from her oppressors [and seeks] the company of [other] wom[e]n" (Sundqvist 5): "I don't even look at mens. That's the truth. I look at women, tho, cause I'm not scared of them" (Walker 6). After Celie develops a friendship with Sofia and Shug based on mutual respect and love, she becomes more intimate with Shug as she "helps [Celie] discover her sexuality" (Sundqvist 9, Walker 81-83). Although Celie sexually prefers women over men, she oppresses her first homoerotic feelings towards Shug since lesbianism is taboo within American patriarchy. As an extravagant blues singer, Shug is not only open-minded about sexuality and masturbation, but also starts a lesbian relationship with Celie so that she will finally experience love (Sundqvist 2; Walker 77, 81-83, 117-118). Although Shug sincerely adores Celie, she still loves men and eventually chooses to have a heterosexual relationship: "I know how you feel about men. But I don't feel that way. (...) [S]ome men can be a lots of fun" (Walker 257). Even though Celie feels hurt by Shug's decision, she does not resent her because, as a woman(ist), she realizes that Shug should be free to choose whom she loves: "But I'm a woman. (...) Whatever happens, whatever you do, I love you" (Walker 257). Apart from Celie's (non-)sexual friendships, she also cherishes her sister Nettie and two children. Since Walker "considers motherhood essential in the experience of being a woman" (Torfs 20), she intentionally zooms in on the close bond between Celie and one of her children, more specifically her daughter Olivia. Although Olivia is taken away from her as a baby, Celie immediately recognizes her child when she is in town doing grocery shopping: "I seen my baby girl. I knowed it was her. She look just like me and my daddy. (...) She got my eyes (...). I think she mine. My heart say she mine" (Walker 14).

Secondly, Celie undergoes two changes with regard to her “emotional flexibility (values tears as natural counterbalance of laughter), and [her] strength (...) [in order] to surviv[e]” (qtd. in Torfs). Early on in life, Celie discovers that men do not care about female emotions. For example, when Celie cries during Alphonso’s first sexual abuse, her emotional expression only leads to a more violent reaction since “[h]e starts to choke [her], saying [: ‘You] better shut up and git used to it [’]” (Walker 2). This eventually leads to Celie’s “deadness of mind” (Sundqvist 7) later on in life when she is married to Albert: “He beat me like he beat the children. Cept he don’t never hardly beat them. He say, Celie get the belt. (...) It all I can do not to cry. I make myself wood. I say to myself, Celie, you a tree” (Walker 23). However, when Shug appears in her life, Celie can finally ventilate her pent-up feelings and frustrations. This female presence does not only comfort Celie, but also allows her to “cry” (Walker 83, 117) so she can process past traumas and get ahead in life. In other words, at the beginning of Walker’s novel “Celie survives by being a victim, by recognizing that fighting back causes one more problems than not” (Sundqvist 8), but eventually all her sisters (i.e. Nettie, Sofia and Shug) stimulate her to be a strong woman who dares to stand up against men in particular and patriarchal society in general.

Thirdly, in the end Celie can be considered as a universalist since she “commit[s] to (...) the wholeness of entire people, male *and* female” (qtd. in Torfs 18). For example, in Memphis Celie starts to manufacture trousers that “can be worn by anyone, regardless of sex” (Sundqvist 13, Walker 278) and purposefully names her business “Folkpants Unlimited” (Walker 221, Sundqvist 13). Furthermore, when Celie notices that Albert changes his misogynist attitude, she no longer abominates him: “I don’t hate him (...). [L]ook like he trying to make something out of himself. I don’t mean just that he work and he clean up after himself (...). I mean when you talk to him now he really listen” (Walker 267). Additionally, after Albert rejects patriarchal black society’s disparaging attitude towards colored females and their activities, both Celie and

her former husband unite as friends (Saunders 1): “When I was growing up, [Albert] said, I use to try to sew along with mama cause that’s what she was always doing. But everybody laughed at me. But you know, I liked it. Well, nobody gon laugh at you now, I said. Here, help me stitch in these pockets” (Walker 279). Before they can unite as friends, Celie first has to leave Albert so she can take time to heal from his past mental, physical and sexual abuse. Since Celie only periodically separates from a male for health, Celie can still be considered as a universalist. Moreover, Walker shows that marriage can also reconcile both men and women. For example, when Nettie is taken in by the colored married couple Corrine and Samuel, the adoptive parents of Celie’s children (i.e. Olivia and Adam), she is astonished that “there are colored people in the world who want us [, i.e. black women,] to know [, w]ant us to grow and see the light[.] They are not at all mean like Pa and Albert, or beaten down like Ma was. Corrine and Samuel have a wonderful marriage” (Walker 138-139). On top of all that, Walker applies a transnational, and thus universal(ist), point of view since she “ma[k]e[s] links between the struggles of African-America[n] [women like Celie] and those of oppressed [females] abroad” (Roth 52) such as Adam’s wife Tashi who belongs to the Olinka tribe (Saunders 1). Like Celie, Tashi is denied education by the patriarchal Olinka community and therefore Nettie states that “[t]hey [are] like white people at home who do [not] want colored people to learn” (Walker 162): “[t]he Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. (...) A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something” (Walker 161-162). Apart from men’s refusal to give black women education, both patriarchal communities indoctrinate colored females such as Celie and Tashi to consider men’s abuse as part of their womanhood. The Olinka tribe, for instance, persuade and push Tashi to both “scar her face [and take part in] the female initiation ceremony [during which women cut] pieces of themselves” (Walker 245), and make her believe that only then she will achieve “womanhood” (Walker 195). However, the reverse is true: Tashi



is not only ashamed of her female body, but also feels that she has lost her own identity (Walker 248).

Walker's second definition does not apply to *Their Eyes Were Watching God* since Hurston focuses on a black female protagonist who solely tries to love other men. Although Janie does climb up the social ladder, she is not really "committed to survival" (qtd. in Torfs 18) as she does not have the courage to leave her abusing husbands. Moreover, the novel shows a rather pessimistic view since neither a united and harmonious black female community based on sisterhood nor an equal relationship between both sexes can be obtained. Finally, contrary to Hurston, Walker extensively elaborates on the protagonist's emotions and therefore applies an epistolary novel to "presen[t] an intimate view of the character's thoughts and feelings [via letters] without interference of the author ("Epistolary novel"). As this "method is most often [used as] a vehicle for sentimental novels" ("Epistolary novel"), Walker's epistolary novel echoes Jacobs's and Wilson's autobiographies that also use aspects of the sentimental genre to address black women's sorrows.

### **3.1.2.3. Walker's Third Womanist Definition**

According to Walker's third definition, a womanist inter alia "[l]oves music (...) [,] the [s]pirit[,] love[,] (...) roundness[,] the [f]olk [and] herself." (qtd. in Torfs 18). First of all, as a blues singer, Shug Avery does not only embody her musical passion, but also makes sure that Celie experiences the liberating effect of blues. By dedicating a song to her, Shug helps Celie to "emancipate herself [from] the internalized oppression that has dehumanized her" (qtd. in Sundqvist 9, Walker 77). Apart from reaching out to Celie and encouraging her to love music, Shug also stimulates Mary Agnes "to sing in public" (Walker 120). Likewise, Hurston's novel shows that the musical sphere in the Everglades does not only free Janie, but also unites her with the local colored community.

Secondly, like Jacobs's and Wilson's autobiographies, Walker's novel criticizes Christian religion. Walker, for example, shows that "the Bible [does not provide Celie] hope and consolation, [but only gives her] further orders on how to feel and act" (Sundqvist 10): "Couldn't be mad at my daddy cause he my daddy. Bible say, Honor the father and mother no matter what. Then after while every time I got mad, or start to feel mad, I got sick. Felt like throwing up. Terrible feeling. Then I start to feel nothing at all" (Walker 44). When Celie finally decides to abjure Christian religion in which "God (...) act[s] just like all the other [men]" (Walker 199) in her life, Shug convinces her to adopt "a pantheistic [faith]" (Sundqvist 10). According to Shug's religious conviction, God can be considered as a spirit that "is inside [Celie] and inside everybody else [. Shug also believes that] God [is not] a he or a she, but [an] It" (Walker 202). Shug thus "offers a more integrative vision of religion resting upon the premise of equality of all beings and celebration of both male and female" (Izgarjan 313). Since Celie is persuaded that the spirit is present in all people, she stops addressing her letters to God and speaks to Nettie instead: "Dear Nettie, I don't write to God no more. I write to you" (Walker 199). Like Celie, her sister Nettie also "rids herself of [the general white] oppressive man-God figure and emerges into a distinctly non-Christian discovery of God" (Sundqvist 11, Walker 140-141): "God is different to us now, after all these years in Africa. More spirit than ever before, and more internal. Most people think he has to look like something or someone (...) but we don't. And not being tied to what God looks like, frees us" (Walker 264). Contrary to *The Color Purple*, Hurston's novel neither criticizes Christian religion, nor advocates a more spiritual religion.

Thirdly, since Celie grows up in an environment antagonistic to black women, Shug has to teach her how to love again (Walker 31, 66). Celie values Shug's sisterly affections since her love makes Celie feel less resentful, for example, towards Albert: "I know you [, i.e. addressing

Nettie,] wonder why I don't hate him. I don't hate him for two reasons. One he love Shug. And two, Shug used to love him" (Walker 267). Additionally,

in the end Celie is full of love and happiness after being reunited with her sister Nettie. Re-discovering the only love she can remember from her childhood can be seen as a symbolic representation of the full circle Celie has completed: she is back at the place where her family's old house used to be, only it has been torn down and replaced by a new house (Sundqvist 14).

Apart from loving others, Celie also has to learn to cherish herself despite her unfavorable characteristics. Although she initially "hate[s] the way [she] look[s] [and] hate[s] the way [she is] dress[ed]" (Walker 77), she eventually embraces her negative qualities and starts to appreciate herself and her existence: "I'm pore, I'm black, I may be ugly and can't cook (...). But I'm here" (Walker 214). Likewise, in *Their Eyes Were Watching God* it is only in her final marriage that Janie finds out the meaning of true love and starts enjoying her life. Additionally, only a minor form of roundness or circularity can be found in Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God* since Janie moves from Eatonville to the Everglades and back, but never returns to her hometown.

Finally, like Hurston, Walker combines fiction and folklore. Apart from the importance of blues music embodied by Shug Avery, Walker also brings the black vernacular to the fore via Celie to show that uneducated colored women can express themselves through a language of their own. Celie does not only continually apply the black vernacular, but also defends the use of it:

You say US where most folks say WE, [Darlene, one of Shug's friends,] say, and peoples think you dumb. Colored peoples think you a hick and white folks be amuse. (...) Think how much better Shug feel with you educated, she say. She won't be shame to take you anywhere. Shug not shame now, I say. But she don't believe this the truth.

Sugar, she say one day when Shug home, don't you think it be nice if Celie could talk proper? Shug say, She can talk in sign language for all I care. (...) Look like to me only a fool would want you to talk in a way that feel peculiar to your mind [, Celie thought] [*sic*] (Walker 222-223).

Celie thus refuses to adopt white society's rules and norms and instead embodies folkloristic elements related to the colored folk such as the use of the black vernacular (Walker 228). Unlike Janie and Celie, Nettie writes standard American English since she is educated by the black Reverend Samuel who applies white language rules.

### **3.2. A Womanist Message in Disco and Soul**

During second-wave feminism songs of black female singers such as Gloria Gaynor (1949) and Aretha Franklin (1942) "bec[o]me anthems for the (...) women's liberation movements" (Doyle 18-19, Hinds et al. 163, Ritz "Aretha Franklin", Greg). These artists embody two important music genres that either started out as and/or still are a typical African-American music style (Reebee, Ritz "Soul Music"). On the one hand, Gloria Gaynor popularizes underground disco, a "beat-driven style of popular music that [is] the preeminent form of dance music in the 1970s" (Garofalo). On the other hand, Aretha Franklin represents soul music that goes back to "black music's roots [such as] gospel and blues" (Ritz "Soul music"). Additionally, both Gaynor's disco and Franklin's soul music echo Walker's concept of womanism.

#### **3.2.1. Gloria Gaynor's "I Will Survive"**

Gloria Gaynor's disco hit "I Will Survive" (1979) that is "adopted by many [(black)] feminists (...) in the 1970s and 1980s" (Hinds et al. 163, Mitchell) contains aspects of Walker's womanist definition. First of all, like the womanist Bildungsroman, "I Will Survive" addresses Gloria Gaynor's black female evolution towards a more womanist attitude in three stages. Due to her

broken love relationship, an inner conflict occurs between her male-conditioned thoughts and her personal needs. This eventually leads to her new place in society in which she functions as a strong, independent and self-sufficient woman:

First I was afraid, I was petrified

Kept thinkin' I could never live without you by my side

But then I spent so many nights thinking how you did me wrong,

[A]nd I grew strong, [and] I learned how to get along

.....

[N]ow I hold my head up high,

And you'll see me, somebody new

I'm not that chained up little person still in love with you ("I Will Survive Lyrics" line 1-4, 22-24).

Secondly, in "I Will Survive" Gloria Gaynor focuses on her bold and daring demeanor by showing her former lover the door when he returns: "Go on now go, [walk] out the door / Just turn around now, cause you're not welcome anymore" (ibid. 27-28). These lyrics also demonstrate that she finally conducts her own life. Although the song does not explicitly mention that the lover is male, Gaynor certainly addresses the disparity between the sexes and defends equal (heterosexual) relationships based on mutual love: "I'm not that chained up little person still in love with you / And so you felt like dropping in and just expect me to be free / But now I'm saving all my lovin' for someone who's lovin me" (ibid. 24-26). In these lyrics, both the lover's expectation of the black female's subordination and the meaningful word "chained" (i.e. withholding freedom) refer to the colored women's past as a servant or slave controlled by white male society as well as to women's inferior role in patriarchal relationships.

Thirdly, in her song Gloria Gaynor addresses both “women’s emotional flexibility (...) and women’s strength” (qtd. in Torfs 18). Gaynor is not afraid, for example, to show her feelings and clarifies that her emotions go hand in hand with her female strength:

It took all the strength I had not to fall apart  
Kept tryin’ hard to mend the pieces of my broken heart  
And I spent oh so many nights just feelin’ sorry for myself, I used to cry  
But now I hold my head up high” (“I Will Survive Lyrics” 19-22).

Additionally, Gaynor expresses other feelings such as anger and pride: “I should have changed that stupid lock I should have made you leave your key / If I had known for just one second you’d be back to bother me / (...) / But now I hold my head up high” (ibid. 7-8, 22).

Finally, Gaynor’s disco song also zooms in on the theme of love in general since she realizes that she too deserves to be loved: “[N]ow I’m saving all my lovin’ for someone who’s lovin me” (ibid. 26). Additionally, love gives Gloria the strength to struggle:

You think I’d crumble? [You think] I’d lay down and die  
Oh no not I[,] I will survive  
Oh, as long as I know how to love, I know I’ll stay alive  
I’ve got all my life to live  
And I’ve got all my love to give” (ibid. 12-16).

### **3.2.2. Aretha Franklin’s Demand to Think about Respect**

Like Gloria Gaynor’s “I Will Survive”, Aretha Franklin’s songs such as “Respect” (1967), “Think” (1968) and “Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves” (1985) appeal to second-wave (black) feminist movements. These anthems do not only refer to Walker’s womanism, but are also inspired by the call-and-response trope that creates a feeling of solidarity (Doyle 18-19,

Malawey, Ritz “Aretha Franklin”, “Sisters Music Video”). Franklin’s song “Respect”, which can be considered as a

call for recognition and appreciation[,] (...) complete[s] the task [which has] begun by Billie Holiday and [Bessie Smith], converting American pop from a patriarchal monologue into a coed dialogue. Women [are] no longer just going to stand around and sing about broken hearts; they [are] going to demand respect, and even spell it out for [men] if there [is] some part of that word [they do not] understand (Farley 108).

Unlike her predecessors, Franklin does not articulate the whole call-and-response structure, but performs the call to which her backing vocals respond<sup>3</sup>. This renewed form of call-and-response structure also characterizes Franklin’s song “Think”. Furthermore, in the song “Respect”, Franklin shows a brave and daring attitude as she demands respect from her male lover, whom she mockingly calls “mister” (“Respect Lyrics” line 8), and is even prepared to leave him if he refuses to show his appreciation:

(Oo) All I’m askin’

(Oo) Is for a little respect when you get home (just a little bit)

.....

Or you might walk in (respect, just a little bit)

And find out I’m gone (just a little bit) (ibid. 5-6, 48-49).

Moreover, via African-American slang Franklin emphasizes *colored* female’s independence and demand for respect (Kohl). Franklin does not only point out that black females can take

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<sup>3</sup> The backing vocals’ response is indicated between round brackets.

care of business, which is abbreviated to “TCB” (“Respect Lyrics” 35), but also insist that men give “proprs”<sup>4</sup> (ibid. 17) to African-American women (Kohl).

When Aretha Franklin performs her song “Think” in the musical comedy movie “The Blues Brothers” (1980), it becomes visually clear that she addresses black males to first “[t]hink” before they deny colored females their freedom (of speech) (“The Blues Brothers”):

You better think (think) think about what you're trying to do to me

.....

Oh freedom (freedom) (...)

.....

There ain't nothing you could ask I could answer you but I won't (I won't)

I was gonna change, but I'm not, if you keep doing things I don't” (“Think Lyrics” line 3, 11, 13-14).

Furthermore, she emphasizes the importance of the “wholeness of entire people, male *and* female (...) [and thus advocates a] universalist [attitude]” (qtd. in Torfs 18): “You need me (need me) and I need you (don’t you know) / Without each other there ain’t nothing [neither] can do” (“Think Lyrics” 22-23).

Aretha Franklin’s duet with white female singer Annie Lennox called “Sisters Are Doin’ It for Themselves” also embodies Walker’s universalist idea of sisterhood that “includ[es] all women, colored or white” (Izgarjan 312, Farley 108). Since a white as well as a black female singer form a united front on stage in order to elucidate men that “in these times of change” (“Sisters Lyrics” line 5) women are emancipating, the renewed call-and-response trope is no longer needed as the song already embodies females’ solidarity. Additionally, Franklin and Lennox do not sing to disunite the sexes, but to reconcile men and women on the basis of mutual

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<sup>4</sup> The word ‘proprs’ derives from the slang term ‘props’ which means “[d]ue respect, acknowledgment, or esteem” (qtd. in Kohl).



love and respect: “Don’t you know that a man still loves a woman / And a woman still loves a man / Just the same way” (ibid. 36-37). Furthermore, this song does not only show women’s daring demeanor since they stand up against male domination, but also focuses on female’s longing “to know more and in great[er] depth than is considered ‘good’ for [them according to patriarchal society]” (qtd. in Torfs 18). In other words, Franklin and Lennox clearly articulate that women no longer tolerate their inferior domestic and dependent role in society:

So we're comin' out of the kitchen  
'Cause there's somethin' we forgot to say to you, we say  
Sisters are doin' it for themselves  
Standin' on their own two feet  
And ringin' on their own bells (...) (“Sisters Lyrics” 7-11).

Moreover, Franklin and Lennox stress that due to women’s continuous struggle for more independence and freedom, their influence and responsibility has grown over the years:

Now this is a song  
To celebrate  
The conscious liberation  
Of the female state  
.....  
The inferior sex  
Got a new exterior  
We got doctors  
Lawyers, politicians too (ibid. 13-16, 21-24).

On top of all that, the singing duo focuses on female bonding through sister-and motherhood:

Mothers, daughters

And their daughters too

Woman to woman

We're singin' with you" (ibid. 17-20).

## 4. Beyoncé's Interpretation of Third-Wave Feminism

Only a few years after second-wave feminism has altered the American landscape, a new one arises during the mid-1990s (Brunell et al.). Unlike the former, third-wave feminism is more difficult to define as it “celebrat[es] the power and possibilities of contradiction” (Gilley 189). The third-wave feminist movement, for instance, no longer applies a “narrow and static conception of feminist identities [that has] emerg[ed] out of second-wave theorizing and activism” (Peoples 39), e.g. Alice Walker’s womanism, but rather reaches out to “a multiplicity of identity that women [(of color)] embody” (Gilley 189, 191). Nevertheless, “many third-wavers [still] have a past association with (...) [first- and] second-wave feminism. Women of color in the third wave in particular very carefully portray themselves as contiguous with their foremothers and borrow heavily from their theoretical [and/or literary] work” (Gilley 191).

Apart from this renewal, third-wave feminism also uses a different approach to address females of all social layers since the movement no longer focuses on theory or literature to advocate the feminist message, but chooses to “move feminism away from the academy and back into activism” (Gilley 192). This development from theory to practice is visible in popular media as black feminists, for example, start to permeate into hip-hop culture and music (Gilley 187, Peoples 25). Although it seems rather paradoxical that colored feminists “create a space for themselves between the whiteness and/or academically sanitized versions of university-based feminism (...) and the [black] maleness of (...) hip-hop culture” (Peoples 26), they actually try to bridge two opposing worlds divided by class, gender and race.

“While ‘feminism of the ’60s and ’70s [is] obsessed with social change, feminism today is wed to the culture of celebrity (...)’” (qtd. in Gilley 187). Singer-songwriter Beyoncé (1981) and her former female R&B group Destiny’s Child, for instance, do not only highlight the same equivocal aspects that characterize third-wave feminism, but also put feminist theory into practice via their music (“Beyoncé”). Although Destiny’s Child still applies the intersectional

trichotomy of class, gender and race, the group adjusts these central themes to contemporary society and completely renews the latter category as the members of Destiny's Child no longer focus on racial discrimination detrimental to African-American women, but rather try to improve or "uplift" (Peoples 28) the female black body, colored women's sexual agency and their position within black (hip-hop) culture. As Beyoncé starts her solo career, she more fiercely exploits the traditional intersectional trichotomy in order to shock her audience and bring a change in mentality. As she combines conventional themes of class, gender and race with characteristics of third-wave feminism, she still "include[s] (...) generational dimensions" (Peoples 33). Additionally, for contemporary artists like Beyoncé the popular medium of the music video becomes "as important as the message the performer conveys" (Durham 38). Therefore, this chapter will only analyze songs that are visualized by a video clip. Even though not all music videos are interesting to elaborate on, they occasionally give a more thorough insight into black feminist theory, history and activism.

#### **4.1. From Patriarchal to Feminine Power: Class, Money and Possession**

In songs like "Nasty Girl" (2001), "Bills, Bills, Bills" (1999), "Independent Women Part I" (2000) and "Bug a Boo" (1999) Destiny's Child opposes the general misconception of American patriarchy that "imagine[s] black women as lazy, feckless, 'degenerate,' and unwilling to work" (Brooks 201, "Nasty Girl Music Video", "Bills Bills, Bills Music Video", "Independent Women Music Video", "Bug a Boo Music Video"). In "Nasty Girl", for example, the group argues that although there are "sleazy, nasty [and] classless" ("Nasty Girl Lyrics", line 2) girls who "believe they must succumb to the whims and pleasures of men" (Henry et al. 245) and thus accord to patriarchy's demeaning image, they do not represent the majority of females who "(...) try to have some integrity / (...) / [w]ho respect themselves and have dignity" ("Nasty Girl Lyrics" 47, 49).

Furthermore, both “Bills, Bills, Bills” and “Independent Women Part I” focus on the increasing visibility of black middle-class females around the turn of the century and men’s attempt to still use and dominate these emancipated women. In the former song Destiny’s Child denounces lovers who take advantage of money-earning black women: “You’re slowly making me pay for things / Your money should be handling / (...) / You triflin’, good for nothing type of brother” (“Bills, Bills, Bills Lyrics” line 5-6, 13). Although the word “brother” once unified male and female slaves, it now receives negative connotation as black males lack respect for colored women (Nielson 113). Additionally, this song states that emancipated African-American females no longer tolerate the exploitation of their unemployed lovers who do not bring in any money: Can you pay my bills / (...) / I don’t think you do / So, you and me are through (“Bills, Bills, Bills Lyrics” 19, 23-24).

Likewise, the song “Independent Women Part I” focuses on autonomous, self-sufficient females:

I buy my own diamonds and I buy my own rings

.....

Pay my own fun, oh and I pay my own bills

.....

The shoe on my feet, I’ve bought it

The clothes I’m wearing, I’ve bought it

The rock I’m rockin’, I’ve bought it

‘Cause I depend on me

If I wanted the watch you’re wearin’, I’ll buy it

The house I live in, I’ve bought it

The car I’m driving, I’ve bought it

I depend on me, I depend on me” (“Independent Women” line 5, 10, 12-19).

As women have become financially more independent, Destiny’s Child urges women to strive for a balanced “50/50 relationshi[p]” (ibid. 11) in which men should neither profit from women’s earnings (cf. “Bills, Bills, Bills”) nor bribe females with money and presents in order to “control [them]” (ibid. 8): “(...) that cash that he gave you is to front<sup>5</sup> / If you're gonna brag make sure it's your money you flaunt / Depend on no one else to give you what you want” (ibid. 37-39). Furthermore, this song addresses “all [sorts of] women who are independent” (ibid. 20), more specifically female lovers or “hone[ys]” (ibid. 22), “mommas” (ibid. 24) and young “ladies” (ibid. 26), in order to form a united (third-wave feminist) front that will absolve patriarchal American society from its fallacies about women. Moreover, the members of Destiny’s Child emphasize that they too have “worked hard and sacrificed [a lot] to get what [they got]” (ibid. 34) and acknowledge the troubles of ordinary (black) women that “it [is not] easy bein[g] independent” (ibid. 35).

In “Bug a Boo” Destiny’s Child problematizes the idea of the female as property that haunts especially colored women. Although slave owners no longer hold them down, white patriarchy and (black) males still tend to restrain these females. Like “Independent Women Part I”, this song criticizes men who try to control colored females by giving them presents: “So what / You bought a pair of shoes / What now I guess you think I owe you (Owe you)” (“Bug a Boo Lyrics” line 18-20). Additionally, the song foregrounds the persistent male compulsion to dominate African-American women:

[Y]ou be callin' me stressin me pagin' my beeper you're just non-stop

.....

[Y]ou be leavin' me messages [e]very 10 minutes and then you stop by

.....

[‘C]ause 20 minutes after I gave you my number you already had my mailbox full

---

<sup>5</sup> i.e. to dominate/lead a relationship

.....  
(...) [W]hen [I'm] blockin' your phone number

You call me from over your best friend[‘s] house  
.....

[I] can't even go out with my girlfriends without you trackin' me down (ibid. 12, 14, 17, 38-39, 41).

Different from Destiny's Child's singles, Beyoncé's second solo album *B'Day* (2006) expresses a "shrewd and complicated articulation of rage, 'resentment' (...), desperation, and aspiration (...) [and reflects] public and sociopolitical voices of black female discontent [that] remain muted, mediated, circumscribed and misappropriated" (Brooks 184). On this album, "Ring the Alarm" and "Irreplaceable" "[openly question] black women's access to property, ownership, and modes of production" (Brooks 182-183).

While a siren repeatedly resounds in the former song Beyoncé also figuratively "[r]ing[s] the [a]larm" by ventilating her "distress and entrapment (...) [about] black women who have been [incessantly] chastised and punished [by American patriarchy] for 'misbehaving'" (Brooks 182). The song's music video visualizes this persecution of African-American females as Beyoncé is "dragged away by policemen in riot gear, locked in a padded cell, (...) and restrained by interrogators" (Brooks 182, "Ring the Alarm Music Video"). Her anger towards police oppression also clarifies the meaning of the song's refrain: "Ring the alarm / I been through this too long / But I'll be damned if I see another chick on your arm" ("Ring the Alarm Lyrics" line 1-3). Additionally, men's uncomplicated accessibility to money and power still leads to a competition among females as they can only acquire the same status as their male counterparts through a relationship. In the song, Beyoncé angrily states that she will have to cede everything to a female competitor if she leaves her male lover:

She gon' take everything I own

If I let you go

.....

She gon' profit everything I taught

If I let you go (ibid. 11-12, 19-20).

Furthermore, the song focuses on “a woman’s relationship to her goods [as] [f]emale discontent is [also] rooted in lost ‘things’” (Brooks 198):

I don't want you but I want it

And I can't let it go

To know you give it to her like you gave it to me, come on

.....

But this is my show and I won't let you go

All has been paid for, and it's mine (“Ring the Alarm Lyrics” 62-63, 88-89).

“The ‘it’ that Beyoncé laments losing—sex, money, power— is cause for starting a [third-wave feminist] fire” (Brooks 198): “I done put in a call, time to ring the alarm / ‘Cause you ain’t never seen a fire like the one I’m-a ‘cause” [*sic*] (“Ring the Alarm Lyrics” 67-68).

Like “Ring the Alarm”, “Irreplaceable” also addresses issues of property as Beyoncé proclaims that females should exploit their rights of ownership (in this case after a break-up or a divorce):

In the closet that's my stuff

Yes, if I bought it, please don't touch

.....

And, it's my name that's on that jag

.....

Rollin' her around in the car that I bought you



Baby drop them keys (“Irreplaceable Lyrics” line 5-6, 9, 27-28).

In her third album titled *I am ... Sasha Fierce* (2008) Beyoncé needs an alter ego to “[deflate her] overblown [high-class] diva image (...) [in order to still] depict a down-to-earth around-the-way girl from an identifiable place” (Durham 42, “Beyoncé”). In Beyoncé’s music video “Diva”, her alter ego Sasha Fierce embodies glamour and fashion through clothing as well as “hip-hop authenticity and street credibility” (Durham 42) as she smokes big cigars, sets a car on fire and performs her superstar dance moves in a deserted repository sprayed with graffiti (“Diva Music Video”). Additionally, the lyrics also link up the classy diva with the image of a low-class gangster: “(...) diva is a female version of a hustla / (...) / I’m a diva (...) / (...) / I’m a stick up, stick up, you see the mask, where that money (“Diva Lyrics” line 4, 41, 46). The alter ego thus functions to bridge the gap between the African-American high-class superstar and lower-class colored women, who all strive for financial independence and female autonomy:

I’m a diva best believe-a, you see her, she’s getting’ paid

.....

Don’t need him, her bed’s made

.....

All my ladies gettin’ up<sup>6</sup>

I see you, I do the same (ibid. 41, 43, 47-48).

In her final and completely visual<sup>7</sup> self-titled album *Beyoncé* (2013) the song “Pretty Hurts” criticizes that “men still define (...) conventional portrayals of sexiness and white beauty” (Hobson “Beyoncé’s Fierce Feminism” 45, “Beyoncé”). In the song’s music video Beyoncé participates in a beauty pageant in which men judge her appearance (“Pretty Hurts

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<sup>6</sup> i.e. to revolt

<sup>7</sup> Every song is accompanied by a video clip.

Music Video”). Eventually, she loses the contest from her white competitor whose fairness has already been affected by plastic surgery in an attempt to meet patriarchal beauty standards (ibid.). Like the video clip, Beyoncé’s lyrics state that the obsession of physical “perfection is a disease of [the patriarchal American] nation” (“Pretty Hurts Lyrics” line 17) that instills this ideal of beauty in women:

Mama said

You’re a pretty girl

What’s in your head

It doesn’t matter

.....

What you wear

Is all that matters (ibid. 4-6, 9-10).

Apart from attacking patriarchal influence over women, Beyoncé also discusses issues of property on her latest album. In her song “Mine” both Beyoncé and her male counterpart Drake want to possess one another as they simultaneously chant: “I just wanna say your mine, your mine / ---- what they heard your mine, your mine” [*sic*] (“Mine Lyrics” line 53-54). Eventually, Beyoncé reverses the roles of power and ownership as she alone claims and constrains Drake: “Long as you know who you belong to” (ibid 55). This conversion is also reflected in her music video in which men show their submission to women by putting on clothes with ‘YOURS’ on the front (Lai 1, “Mine Music Video”). Unlike their male counterparts, females wear ‘MINE’-t-shirts (“Mine Music Video”). Along with Beyoncé who shows “a shot of her naked back [with] the word ‘MINE’ across it [and] arms wrapped around herself (...) [, these females prove that they are in] possession of [themselves]” (Lai 1, ibid.). Additionally, the video clip shows human beings reduced to impersonal property as the “shirts [are] pulled over their faces” (Lai 2). This image *inter alia* links up with the historical past of

slavery in which blacks were detached from their humanity and considered as goods. Furthermore, the conception of property and ownership also relates to marriage as a means to possess the other: “We should get married, we should get married / (...) / I just wanna say your mine, your mine” (“Mine Lyrics” 40, 53; Lai 2).

#### **4.2. Girl Power, Womanism and Beyoncé’s Fierce and Contradictory Feminism**

Destiny’s Child’s third-wave “Girl Power” (girlie, lipstick) feminism” (Gilley 194) incorporates elements of black youth language (i.e. teenage slang) with “girlhood experiences of abuse and reckoning with patriarchal culture” (Gilley 193) in order to address young colored females. Songs like “Say My name” (2000) and “Jumpin’ Jumpin’” (1999), for example, criticize disloyal and neglecting boyfriends in this fashion (“Say My Name Music Video”, “Jumpin’ Jumpin’ Music Video”). In “Say My Name” lead singer Beyoncé assumes that her lover is “at the crib<sup>8</sup> with another lady” (“Say My Name Lyrics” line 24) and states that “[i]f [he] took it there / (...) / [she is] not the one / [t]o sit around and be played” (ibid. 25, 26-27). Eventually her lover has “gotta bounce<sup>9</sup>” (ibid. 62) as a result of his infidelity. Apart from using elements of teenage slang to address black girls who are confronted with neglecting boyfriends, “Jumpin’ Jumpin’” also conveys the idea of girl power as a “combin[ation of] fun [e.g. putting on make-up, partying et cetera] and feminism” (Gilley 193):

Ladies leave your man at home

.....

Last weekend and you stayed at home alone and lonely

Couldn’t find your man he was chillin’<sup>10</sup> with his homies<sup>11</sup>

This weekend you’re goin’ out

---

<sup>8</sup> i.e. home (slang)

<sup>9</sup> i.e. leave (slang)

<sup>10</sup> i.e. relaxing (slang)

<sup>11</sup> i.e. friends (slang)

If he try to stop you, you're goin' off

You got your hair done and your nails done too (“Jumpin’ Jumpin’ Lyrics” line 1, 9-13).

Furthermore, this ‘Girl Power’ feminism also “[fights] women and girls [who are] forced into traditionally gendered modes of (...) behavior” (Gilley 190). Initially, Destiny’s Child’s song “Girl” (2004) shows how females can be unwittingly cajoled into an unequal relationship in which men are “taking advantage of the passion / (...) / (...) [and] walk over [young women’s] hearts (...)” (“Girl Lyrics” line 6, 8; “Girls Music Video”). In the song, one of the female members of Destiny’s Child condones her lover’s disrespect and adopts a stereotypical female attitude as she does not only put the blame on herself, but is also convinced that she depends on her male counterpart:

It ain’t really him, it’s stress from his job

And I ain’t making it easy

I know you see him bugging most of the time

But I know deep inside, he don’t mean it

It gets hard sometimes, but I need my man (“Girl Lyrics” 19-23).

The other members, however, believe in girl power and raise her awareness that she should not be forced into this mode of behavior. In order to liberate their female friend from her restraining relationship, they “recla[im] the word ‘girl’ (...) [that] partially derive[s] from a phrase of encouragement popularized by young American black women in the late 1980s: ‘You go guuuuur!’” (Gilley 190). Eventually girl power overcomes (the taboo on) male dominance and contempt: “Girl, you don’t have to be hiding / Don’t you be ashamed to say he hurt you / (...) / I’m your girl, you’re my girl, we your girls (“Girl Lyrics” 32-34).

Apart from addressing third-wave feminist girl power, Destiny's Child also "transcend[s] generational (...) boundaries" (Brooks 187). Like Aretha Franklin's song "I will Survive", the song "Survivor" deals with second-wave womanism as it focuses on colored "women's strength (...) and their commit[ment] to survival" (qtd. in Torfs 18):

I'm a survivor

I'm not gon' give up

I'm not gon' stop

I'm gon' work harder

I'm a survivor

I'm gonna make it

I will survive

Keep on survivin' ("Survivor Lyrics" line 9-16).

Beyoncé's solo career however "is a far cry from (...) the 'sistah grrrl-power' of early Destiny's Child recordings (...) [that] belt[s] out densely arranged urban anthems with (...) themes of romantic distrust (...) and 'ne'er do well' scrub boyfriends who are roundly criticized and kicked to the curb" (Brooks 183). Although the song "Me Myself and I" that appears on Beyoncé's first solo album *Dangerously in Love* (2003) still focuses on issues such as adultery and women's strength (cf. womanism), she addresses these topics (less girly and) more severely than before ("Me, Myself and I Lyrics" line 8, 26, "Beyoncé"). Additionally, Beyoncé's second solo album *B'Day* (2006) "marks her arrival as an artist unafraid of complicating and disturbing her (...) cultural persona in less conventional ways than the strait-jacketed patriarchal models [has] afforded most contemporary pop divas" (Brooks 184, 191).

For instance, in the duet "Beautiful Liar" Beyoncé and her Latin American female counterpart Shakira reflect a "sisterhood of common experience" (Gilley 191, "Shakira", cf. womanism) as they are rather united than divided by their shared (and thus) adulterous lover.

These artists represent a still operating second-wave aura or “karma” of female solidarity that can unify both black and Hispanic females to fight against the exploitation of men:

Why are we the ones who suffer

.....

He won't be the one to cry

(Ay) let's not kill the karma

(Ay) let's not start a fight

(Ay) it's not worth the drama

For a beautiful liar

Can't we laugh about it (ha ha ha)

(Oh) it's not worth our time

(Oh) we can live without 'em

Just a beautiful liar

.....

(...) [T]he answer is simple

He's the one to blame (“Beautiful Liar Lyrics” 10, 12-20, 41-42).

Furthermore, Beyoncé criticizes male infidelity more powerfully than before. Even though she has already conveyed a fierce “[y]ou can't stay, you gotta go”-attitude (“Ring the Alarm Lyrics” 31) in “Ring the Alarm”, “Irreplaceable” expresses a bolder demeanor towards infidelity. Contrary to “Ring the Alarm”, in which Beyoncé acts rather defenseless towards the situation her adulterous lover has brought her in, the song “Irreplaceable” foregrounds that women are no longer victims of male actions. Beyoncé thus dissociates herself from (first-and second-wave) “victim feminism” (Gilley 188) that “has overstated women's status as victims to the point that it has failed to substantively explore women's agency and the ways in which they strive to and successfully do empower themselves” (Peoples 35):

And keep talking that mess that's fine  
But could you walk and talk at the same time  
.....  
So come move your bags, let me call you a cab  
.....  
So go ahead and get gone  
Call up that chick and see if she's home  
Oops, I bet you thought, that I didn't know  
What did you think I was putting you out for  
Because you was untrue

.....  
Hurry up before your taxi leaves  
.....

Baby I won't shed a tear for you

I won't lose a wink of sleep  
.....

Replacing you is so easy ("Irreplaceable Lyrics" line 7-8, 10, 22-26, 29, 44-45, 47).

Moreover, although the song "Suga Mama" "recalls the sexual candor and assertiveness of Bessie Smith['s blues song 'Need a Little Sugar in My Bowl']" (Brooks 197), it is largely inspired by "third wave [feminism]'s insistence on the ability to embrace contradiction [through, in this case, genderbending]" (Gilley 190). By adopting the ideal of the traditional financial and sexual dominant male, Beyoncé reverses stereotypical gender roles:

Baby what you want me to buy

My accountant's waiting on the phone (on the phone)

.....  
Now take it off, while I watch you perform

.....  
Come sit on mama lap [*sic*] (“Suga Mama Lyrics line 25-26, 30, 40).

This is also shown in her black and white music video in which Beyoncé initially represents an old-time male figure smoking big cigars and wearing a costume along with head, tie and suspenders (“Suga Mama Music Video”). Although the video clip confirms the concept of genderbending that comes to the fore in her lyrics, it also shows Beyoncé’s transition from male- to female-like appearances and behavior (*ibid.*). This additional evolution emphasizes that women no longer have to hide their femininity in order to be financially and sexually dominant.

Apart from focusing on adultery and genderbending, Beyoncé’s third album *I am ... Sasha Fierce* (2008) also questions issues concerning gender equality and marriage (“Beyoncé”). First of all, in the song “If I were a Boy” the artist imagines which benefits men have in American patriarchal society and how their advantage leads to an unequal treatment of the sexes. For instance, unlike women, males do not have to reckon with any societal conventions concerning appearance and sexual behavior:

If I were a boy  
.....  
[I’d] throw on what I wanted then go  
Drink beer with the guys  
And chase after girls  
I’d kick<sup>12</sup> it with who I wanted

---

<sup>12</sup> i.e. to have sex (slang)



And I'd never get confronted for it

'Cause they'd stick up for me ("If I Were a Boy Lyrics" line 1, 4-9).

As men are accountable to no one but themselves, they incline to create a complacent and selfish attitude, which leads to an unbalanced relationship:

If I were a boy

.....

I'd put myself first and make the rules as I go

'Cause I know that she'd be faithful

Waitin' for me to come home (to come home) (ibid. 19, 23-25).

Beyoncé also clearly states that contemporary women no longer tolerate this male neglect and lack of respect, and have emancipated enough to live independently:

It's a little too late for you to come back

.....

Think I'd forgive you like that

If you thought I would wait for you

You thought wrong (ibid. 35, 37-39).

Like "Suga Mama", this song also applies the idea of genderbending as Beyoncé adopts a male mentality. Additionally, her black and white video clip visualizes this concept as Beyoncé and her colored male lover exchange traditionally gendered attitudes ("If I Were a Boy Music Video"). However, in the middle of the music video this reversed perspective is 'normalized' to stereotypical gender roles and consequently raises awareness of existing gender inequality (ibid.).

Secondly, in the video clip of the song "Why Don't You Love Me", Beyoncé resembles Rosie the Riveter as she does not only wear a "red bandanna on her hair (...) [and] a shirt with

(...) sleeves rolled up” (Denise 15), but also handles things herself as she tries to fix a car. As “[a]n American homemaker with the strength and ability to run a house and raise a family [Beyoncé wants to show that these females also have] the strength and ability to take [their] place in (...) industry” (Denise 15). Apart from taking care of the household, women also perform a job in American industry from the Second World War onwards: “Check my credentials / (...) / I even put money in the bank account / Don't have to ask no one to help me out” (“Why Don’t You Love Me Lyrics” line 8, 21-22). However, despite women’s financial independence, physical attraction and growing erudition, men still “bombar[d] [them] with negative messages regarding their self-worth, intelligence and beauty” (Henry et al. 247-248):

I got beauty, I got class

I got style and I got ass

And you don’t even care to care (...)

I even put money in the bank account

.....

You don’t even notice that

.....

I got beauty, I got heart

Keep my head in them books, I’m sharp

But you don’t care to know I’m smart (“Why Don’t You Love Me Lyrics” 18-21, 23, 30-32).

Thirdly, due to the historical demeaning and objectifying attitude towards African-American females, “[b]lack women [find it hard] to exhibit personal pride, which is a major component of a healthy self-identity” (Henry et al. 245). Therefore, Beyoncé decides to set the example for colored females in her song “Ego” as she openly takes pride in herself:

Some call it arrogant, I call it confident

.....

I got a big ego, such a huge ego

.....

I walk like this, 'cause I can back it up

.....

Ego so big, you must admit

I got every reason to feel like I'm that bitch

Ego so strong (...) ("Ego Lyrics" 25, 33, 36, 45-47).

Finally, in her song "Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)" "Beyoncé is reflective of a generation of women growing up with conflicting feelings about the double standards for women crav[ing] [for assertiveness *and*] traditional marriage" (qtd. in Hobson "Beyoncé's Fierce Feminism" 44):

We just broke up

.....

You can't be mad at me

'Cause if you like it

Then you should've put a ring on it

.....

I can care less what you think

I need no permission

.....

'Cause you had your turn

And now you gon' learn

What it really feels like to miss B

.....

Say I'm the one you want

If you don't, you'll be alone

And like a ghost, I'll be gone ("Single Ladies Lyrics" line 4, 14-16, 35-36, 39-41, 67-69)

Consequently, Beyoncé brings "feminist politics into traditional spheres [in an attempt to] disrupt [stereotypical] identities [of feminists who critique traditional marriage,] and complicate the politics of respectability" (Hobson "Beyoncé's Fierce Feminism" 44, Gilley 194).

Although the song "Run the World (Girls)" that appears on Beyoncé's fourth album 4 (2011) seems to fall back on Destiny's Child's girl power, it actually fortifies this form of feminism as the lyrics are accompanied by a military dancehall beat<sup>13</sup> that supports the "political turbulen[t]" (Cooper) feminist message Beyoncé tries to send ("Beyoncé"). Via her lyrics the superstar does not only "empower and encourage solidarity" (Hobson "Beyoncé's Fierce Feminism" 45) among females, but also eulogizes female graduates, young women's assertiveness and their (financial) independence:

Some of them men (...) disrespect us no they won't (...)

.....

This goes out to all my girls (...) who will buy it for themselves and get money later

.....

(...) I'm reppin' for the girls who takin' over the world help me raise a glass for the college grads

(...) [Y]ou can't hold me I work my 9 to 5 betta cut my check

.....

---

<sup>13</sup> This beat derives from Major Lazer's dancehall song "Pon de Floor" (2009) ("Pon de Floor Music Video").

(...) [W]e smart enough to make these millions, strong enough to bare the children, then get back to business [*sic*] (“Run the World Lyrics” 3, 5, 10-12, 14).

Additionally, the song admonishes girls to take over the world via a military call-and-response trope in which Beyoncé performs the call “Who run the world[?]” (Who Run the World Lyrics line 1-2) to which her female adherents respond “Girls” (ibid. 2). Like the lyrics, the music video raises “questions and concerns of [(colored) feminists] who are wary of having their movements controlled and policed in the public eye” (Brooks 201): while queen-like leader Beyoncé rides to the battlefield on horseback, the video clip shows fragments of an advancing male police force, females that escape from cages (which can be interpreted as a metaphor for patriarchal oppression) and young women that are crucified for their feminist revolt.

Although “second-wave feminism’s critique of the housewife role has led to prejudice in feminist circles against marriage and motherhood (...) [, Beyoncé] dispel[s] an unproblematic vision of ‘good’ motherhood” (Gilley 194) on her latest album *Beyoncé* (2013) (“Beyoncé”). In her song “Blue” that features gibbered words of her daughter Blue Ivy, she explains how a child can contribute to female happiness as an infant makes a mother “feel alive” (“Blue Lyrics” line 3), which also accords with Alice Walker’s notion of motherhood.

One of Beyoncé’s latest singles “Grown Woman” (2013) directly refers to Alice Walker’s womanism through a female development towards adulthood: “I remember being young and so brave / (...) / Look at me – I’m a big girl now (...)” (“Grown Woman Lyrics” line 1, 4; “Grown Woman Music Video”). As “the identity development of [b]lack women typically uses the lenses of race and gender to illuminate the multifaceted nature of identity formation within the context of the [b]lack woman’s experience” (Henry et al. 239), the song combines Alice Walker’s womanist theory with African rhythm and language. Via this combination Beyoncé integrates a transnational and thus universal(ist) point of view by which she eulogizes her Afrocentric roots. Being grown-up, Beyoncé also shows her fierce demeanor

and self-determination: “I’m a grown woman / I [can] do whatever I want” (“Grown Woman Lyrics” 11-12).

### **4.3. Colored Women’s Sexual Agency, the Feminine Black Body and Hip-Hop Feminism**

Unlike their feminist predecessors who focus on racism and colorism detrimental to African-American females within white patriarchal society and the male-dominated black community, Destiny’s Child moves into another direction on three different ways. First of all, the group no longer “focus[es] on black sexuality as something that [white or black males] violat[e] [or] suppres[s] (...)[, but rather echoes Bessie Smith’s call for] sexual agency [and] pleasure” (Patton 4). The song “Lose My Breath” (2004), for example, shows that colored females are no longer “victims (...) of sexual violence” (Gilley 188), but have become sexual agents themselves (“Lose My Breath Music Video”). Destiny’s Child does not only openly admit that African-American women seek sexual satisfaction, but also claim that they are no longer afraid to express their sexual discontent towards their male lovers. In other words, women have become “highly sexually evolved beings united by ‘the expectation of and insistence on conducting their sex lives on their own terms and with a new degree of openness’” (qtd. in Gilley 194):

Can you keep up  
Baby boy, make me lose my breath  
Bring the noise, make me lose my breath  
Hit me hard, make me lose my breath  
Ooh, I put it right there, made it easy for you to get to  
Now you wanna act like you don’t know what to do  
.....

Ooh, I'm startin' to believe that I'm way too much for you

.....

Gave you the wheel but you can't drive me

.....

(...) [A] partner that meets me only halfway and just can't prove

Take me out so deep when you know you can't swim

.....

You're movin' so slow like you just don't have a clue

Didn't momma teach you to give affection (“Lose My Breath Lyrics” line 6-12, 16, 20, 30-31, 36-37).

Additionally, the music video shows how colored females of different social classes battle for “the[ir] sexual evolution” (Gilley 194) as the members of Destiny’s Child takes on different roles from “suitwearing [ladies to] (...) [female] hybrid[s] wearing denim and a fur stole [to] ghetto girl[s]” (Durham 41, “Lose My Breath Music Video”).

Secondly, during third-wave feminism a “redefinition of [b]lack identity can be seen in the shift in popular perspective when referring to the [b]lack female body” (Henry et al. 244), more specifically the booty. In the song “Bootylicious” (2001), for instance, Destiny’s Child “redefines ideal beauty (...) through language” (Durham 36) as the group “proudly sin[g] about honoring their curvy figures” (Henry et al. 244, “Bootylicious Music Video”):

Move your body up and down

Make you booty touch the ground

.....

I shake my jelly at every chance

When I whip with my hips you slip into a trance

I'm hoping you can handle all this jelly that I have

.....  
'Cause my body's too bootylicious for ya baby ("Bootylicious Lyrics" line 49-50, 53-55, 60).

Finally, Destiny's Child's song "Soldier" (2004) "challenge[s] the stereotypical demeaning and demoralizing portrayal of black women in hip-hop music and videos (Henry et al. 242-243) as the song's slang, rap and video clip do not highlight "existing ideologies that designat[e] black women as hypersexual and morally obtuse" (...) [, but rather starts a] dialogue with oppressive [black] community norms that deny black women sexual agency" (Peoples 24-25, "Soldier Music Video"). Instead of being a "hypersexual object" (Henry et al. 244), the members of Destiny's Child become sexual agents who will only pick out a "[s]oldier" that meets their conditions:

A rude boy that's good to me, with street credibility

If his status ain't hood, I ain't checkin' for him

Better be street if ya lookin' at me

I need a soldier

That ain't scared to stand up for me

Known to carry big things, if you know what I mean ("Soldier Lyrics" line 19-24).

Even though "big things" can be interpreted as a sexual metaphor for breasts or buttocks, the black and white music video undermines this interpretation as it shows that the words refer to the capability of men to take care of their offspring ("Soldier Music Video"). Additionally, the video clip reproduces a stereotypical hip-hop setting in which colored males wear loose clothing, chains and ride in expensive hopping low riders (ibid.). However, Destiny's Child intends to domesticate these tough men and their culture the same way as they have tamed the savage looking dogs in the video clip (ibid.).



These three topics are more fiercely exploited in Beyoncé’s solo albums. As a result of “the ‘Sex Wars’ in feminism[,] third-wavers [like Beyoncé] place themselves solidly on the pro-sex side of this war” (Gilley 190). Although “black women ha[ve] kept their sexual lives private throughout history [to] protect themselves” (Patton 4), Beyoncé continuously breaks the silence around colored female sexuality. On her first album (2003), for example, the song “Baby Boy”, which is accompanied by Beyoncé’s continuous moaning, sensitizes her listening audience that black females can also have erotic “fantasies” (Baby Boy Lyrics” line 8) or sexual “dreams” (ibid. 10, “Beyoncé”). Additionally, “Naughty Girl” adopts the first two lines of Donna Summer’s song “Love to Love You Baby” (1975) whereby she wants to conduct a generational conversation that shows that colored women of all times crave for sexual pleasure (“Donna Summer”, “Naughty Girl Music Video”, “Love to Love You Baby Music Video”).

On her second album *B'Day* (2006) the song “Kitty Kat” “is infused with the rhetoric of (...) the repossession of (sexual) property [and] the stinging recognition of being [sexually] devalued in a relationship” (Brooks 199, 192):

What about my body, body

.....

You know I hate sleepin’ alone

But you said that you would soon be home

But baby that was a long time ago

.....

Let’s go little kitty kat<sup>14</sup>

.....

No more getting’ it (“Kitty Kat Lyrics” line 24, 32-34, 41).

---

<sup>14</sup> Sexual metaphor that accords with the word ‘pussy’ i.e. female sex organ.

In the music video “Dance For You” that appears on her fourth album (2011), Beyoncé represents a femme fatale who wishes to sexually please her lover (“Dance For You Music Video”, “Beyoncé”). In a black and white setting she “show[s] beauty, class, sensuality, sexual skill, and intimacy” (Patton 5) in front of a white detective (“Dance For You Music Video”). Apart from reclaiming female sexual agency through this impersonation, Beyoncé still addresses the restraining “culture of silence [towards sexual pleasure] that continues to loom in the everyday lives of [b]lack girls and women” (Durham 45): “(...) let me put my body on your body, promise not to tell nobody (...)” (“Dance For You Lyrics” line 7).

This longing for sexual agency culminates in Beyoncé’s final and most erotic album (2013) (“Beyoncé”). Apart from “Blow” and “Rocket” that (implicitly or explicitly) refer to or visualize carnal desires, the songs “Haunted” and “Partition” extend the category of sexual pleasure and agency (“Blow Lyrics”, “Rocket Lyrics & Music Video”). Like many third-wave feminists, Beyoncé “argue[s] vehemently against the policing of desire, including feminist analyses that condemn the politics of sadomasochistic sex play” (Gilley 190). Her open-minded attitude towards the latter comes to the fore in her song “Haunted” that not coincidentally became the soundtrack of the movie *50 Shades of Grey*<sup>15</sup>: “The bedroom’s the wrong way / Slap me, I’m pinned to the doorway / Kiss, bite, foreplay” (“Haunted Lyrics” 43-45).

Furthermore, “Partition” breaks three taboos that relate to (black) female sexuality. First of all, Beyoncé

uses a surrogate voice to express explicitly feminist statements, in French, which translate into ‘Men think that feminists hate sex, but it [is] a very stimulating and natural activity that women love.’ (...) [T]he juxtaposition of [the French] voic[e] [thus] serves

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<sup>15</sup> Movie adaptation based on E.L. James’s BDSM ‘romance’ novel *50 Shades of Grey*.

to elevate both the lyrical female protagonist and Beyoncé from self-sexualizing pop star to [black] female sexual agent (Weidhase 130).

Secondly, her pornographic music video shows that Beyoncé “explor[es] lived sexuality, recognizing the black sexual experience in all its diversity – including (...) porn stars” (Patton 6). Finally, Beyoncé wants to break the taboo of “asexual mummies” (Patton 1) by proving that even though she has become a mother, she can still be very seductive.

After the split of Destiny’s Child, Beyoncé continues to eulogize her black female body and booty in her music videos and lyrics. In her single “Grown Woman”, for example, she reclaims “the buttocks of African women [that] have come to represent exotic beauty and primitive sexuality in the Western imaginary since slavery” (Durham 38). Instead of affirming the patriarchal “derogatory reference [of colored women] whose social value and sexual desirability deriv[e] from [their] booty” (Durham 39), Beyoncé revises this unfavorable connotation by representing the booty as a means to express black female (sexual) power and agency:

And that booty so fat

.....

She got that bum (that bum)

That girl can get whatever she wants

.....

Them boys,

They do whatever she like [*sic*] (“Grown Woman Lyrics” 41, 43-44, 47-48).

Furthermore, in Beyoncé’s single “Check On It” (2006) ‘the booty [emerges] as a site of resistance to shame and self-depreciation often imposed by [w]hite culture and by ‘gangsta’ rap lyrics’” (qtd. in Henry et al. 244, “Check On It Music Video”):

Ladies let ‘em check up on it, watch it while he check up on it

.....  
(...) [Y]ou watchin['] me shake it, I see it in ya face

(...) [Y]ou watch me in amazement”

You can look at it, as long as you don’t grab it (“Check On It Lyrics” 9, 13-15).

Although Beyoncé ‘booty’ dances to “[feel sexually liberated and] empowering” (Gilley 190), she still demands male respect. Additionally, the music video also “visually reiterates a conversation between Beyoncé [, representing colored women of different social classes,] and her male addressee” (Durham 43). At the end of the dialogue rapper Slim Thug submits to Beyoncé’s wishes: “I [I]ike your wiggle and the way that you work it / But no touchin’, just watchin’ you twerk it” (“Check On It Lyrics” 41-42, “Check On It Music Video”). Nevertheless, Beyoncé is still influenced by the patriarchal culture of silence: “If you don’t go braggin['], I might let you have it” (“Check On It Lyrics”, Durham 45).

Like Destiny’s Child, Beyoncé also “bridge[s] the divide between [the male-dominated] hip-hop [culture] and feminism” (Peoples 26). “Upgrade U” that appears on her second album (2006) contains typical hip-hop elements such as rap, “the vernacular (...) [and] the ‘concept of ‘battling’” (Peoples 32, Brooks 197, “Beyoncé”), but combines these aspects to bring a universalist message to the fore (cf. womanism). In this song Beyoncé tries to convince complacent male rapper Jay-Z that they need one another and that their reconciliation can only benefit their future:

(...) [T]rust me you need me

.....  
You need a real woman in your life

That’s a good look

.....  
I’m-a help you build up your account

.....  
Partner let me upgrade ya

.....  
Introduce you to some new things and

.....  
I'll be the help whenever you need me

.....  
Picture your life elevated with me

.....  
(...) [Y]a dynasty [ain't complete] without a chief like me [*sic*] ("Upgrade U Lyrics"  
line 16, 19-20, 23, 41, 43, 53, 106, 113).

Additionally, Beyoncé generalizes her statement by "fixa[ting] on uplift, upgrade, and enlightenment (...) towards broader concerns" (Brooks 197-198) as she focuses on sexual inequality within the black community (e.g. the African-American Civil Rights Movement led by Martin Luther King): "I can do for you what Martin did for the people / Ran by the men, but the women keep the tempo" ("Upgrade U Lyrics" 48-49). Furthermore, as Beyoncé does not only act, but also dresses like and even mimics the lyrics of rapper Jay-Z up to the middle of the music video, she visualizes hip-hop feminism through genderbending ("Upgrade U Music Video").

Her latest album (2013) more fiercely exploits this concept of hip-hop feminism via the songs "Drunk in Love", "Yoncé" and "\*\*\*Flawless". First of all, "[w]ithin [a third-wave] pro-sex framework (...) Beyoncé's [song 'Drunk in Love'] can be understood as [a further] exploration of (...) hip-hop feminism" (Weidhase 130). Although the black and white music video shows shots of Beyoncé's female sexuality, she avoids being objectified by rapper (and

husband) Jay-Z (“Drunk in Love Music Video”). Additionally, Beyoncé raps about her sexual desire:

(...) [G]angster wife

.....

(...) [M]y boy toys

(...) [R]ide it with my surfboard<sup>16</sup> (...)

(...) [O]n that wood<sup>17</sup> (“Drunk in Love Lyrics line 33, 36-38).

Secondly, the music video “Yoncé” shows pornographic shots of the black booty, body and backward gaze within a street setting that connects with black hip-hop culture in order to “disrupt black community norms that silence black female sexuality and encourage shame around [the colored female body and booty]” (Peoples 24, Durham 38, “Yoncé Music Video”). Additionally, the lyrics and the “representatio[n] of the booty [are] accompan[ied by] bass-heavy [hip-hop] ‘booty’ music” (Durham 38): “Drop the bass, man the bass, get lower / (...) / The man ain’t ever seen a booty like this” (“Yoncé Lyrics” 15, 18, Henry et al. 240).

Finally, in the song “\*\*\*Flawless” Beyoncé does not only stress her “control over and ownership of her own work” (Weidhase 128), but also emphasizes her marital independence: “[D]on’t think I’m just his little wife / Don’t get it twisted, get it twisted / This my sh[it] bow down [bitches]” (“\*\*\*Flawless Lyrics” line 11-13). Additionally, the song combines a “Southern-style hip-hop (...) [that] borrows from the rap ‘diss track’ tradition of bravado and dirty-dozen vernacular put-downs” (Hobson “Beyoncé’s Fierce Feminism” 45) with Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s feminist speech that highlight aspects of Beyoncé’s feminism:

We teach girls to shrink themselves

To make themselves smaller

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<sup>16</sup> i.e. the female sex organ (slang) (“Surfboard”)

<sup>17</sup> i.e. erection (slang) (“Wood”)

We say to girls, you can have ambition  
But not too much  
You should aim to be successful but not too successful  
Otherwise you will threaten the man  
Because I am female I am expected to aspire to marriage  
I'm expected to make my life choices always keeping in mind  
That marriage is the most important  
Marriage can be a source of joy and love and mutual support  
But why do we teach girls to aspire to marriage and we don't teach boys the same  
We raise girls to see each other as competitors, not for jobs or accomplishments  
Which I think can be a good thing  
But for the attention of men  
We teach girls that they cannot be sexual beings in the way that boys are  
Feminist: a person who believes in the social[,] political and economic equality of the  
sexes (“\*\*\*Flawless Lyrics” 23-38).

## Conclusion

Throughout history themes relating to women's discrimination on the basis of (the intersectionality of) race, gender and class remain omnipresent. However, each wave or period adds new subthemes or applies innovative ways to address these issues. The same applies for other Afro-American elements such as the call-and-response trope and the black vernacular.

Although Beyoncé already implicitly refers to this black feminist heritage in earlier Destiny's Child or solo recordings, she only publicly discloses her feminist attitude on her latest self-titled album *Beyoncé*. Like previous albums, *Beyoncé* renews the race category as it no longer focuses on race discrimination, but rather breaks the silence around colored women's sexual agency, their black bodies and their inferior position within a sexist Afro-American (hip-hop) culture. However, by openly connecting these three aspects with a black feminist point of view, Beyoncé causes controversy as this notion collides with the prevailing American idea of "the historical (and ongoing) victimization and dehumanization of black women on the grounds of their perceived hypersexuality" (Weidhase 129).

Surprisingly, colored as well as white second-wave feminists critique Beyoncé's new black feminist policy (Weidhase 128). "[T]he generational difference [thus] reveals an unease with the conflation of a [third-wave feminist] sense of empowerment through [black] sexuality and feminist politics" (Weidhase 129). As feminist waves should not be considered as fixed theoretical concepts, but rather as "metaphor[s] (...) [that] denote continuity of movement" (Gilley 188) and change according to the needs of women, second-wave feminists' concern about Beyoncé's approach to feminism is gratuitous.



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## **Bijlage 1: Samenvatting**

Tijdens de negentiende eeuw ontstaat in het victoriaanse Amerika de eerste feministische beweging. Hoewel die de solidariteit en gelijkheid van alle vrouwen pretendeert, zijn Afro-Amerikaanse vrouwen toch in de minderheid. Dat is te wijten aan de slavernij die tot en met de Amerikaanse burgeroorlog (1861-65) de ongelijkheid tussen blank en zwart in stand houdt. Desalniettemin slaagt ex-slaaf Sojourner Truth erin om woordvoerder te worden van die beweging. Zij promoot in haar speeches de gelijkheid van seksen en focust ook op de barre omstandigheden van Afro-Amerikaanse vrouwen. Daarnaast zoeken zwarte vrouwelijke schrijvers zoals Harriet Ann Jacobs en Harriet Wilson een eigen genre om op die manier een stem te geven aan de negentiende-eeuwse Afro-Amerikaanse vrouw. Daarvoor gebruiken zij zowel elementen van de sentimentele roman, die voornamelijk door blanke vrouwen wordt gelezen, als aspecten van de autobiografieën van (mannelijke) slaven. Bovendien komen in slavenliederen bepaalde sentimentele thema's terug die ook aanwezig zijn in de autobiografieën van Jacobs en Wilson.

Hoewel de Black Woman's Era (1890-1910) en de Harlem Renaissance (1918-37) niet tot een van de feministische stromingen behoren, vormen zij toch een belangrijke voedingsbodem voor de toekomstige tweede feministische beweging. Een van de belangrijkste vertegenwoordigers van de Black Woman's Era is Anna Julia Cooper. Zij bekritiseert de Amerikaanse maatschappij die Afro-Amerikaanse vrouwen discrimineert op basis van hun geslacht, klasse en ras. Die driedelige discriminatie binnen de Amerikaanse (blanke of zwarte) gemeenschap keert terug in Zora Neale Hurstons roman *Their Eyes Were Watching God* en de muziek van zowel blues artiest Bessie Smith als jazz zangeres Billie Holiday.

Van de jaren 1960 tot en met 1980 vormt er zich een tweede feministische stroming waarin blanke en zwarte feministische bewegingen afzonderlijk tot stand komen. Dat zwarte feminisme

wordt ook wel 'womanism' genoemd naar de Afro-Amerikaanse feministische theorie van Alice Walker. Zij somt in vier definities op aan welke voorwaarden zwarte vrouwen moeten voldoen om zich 'womanist' te noemen. Naast die theorie, komt de driedelige discriminatie van Afro-Amerikaanse vrouwen op basis van gender, klasse en ras binnen de blanke en zwarte gemeenschap ook naar voren in Walkers roman *The Color Purple*. Bovendien kan de theorie van 'womanism' ook toegepast worden op de zangstukken van Gloria Gaynor en Aretha Franklin.

In de jaren '90 ontstaat een derde feministische tendens die vooral inzoomt op contradicties (in identiteit). Hoewel die beweging lijnrecht ingaat tegen eenduidige theorieën zoals Alice Walkers 'womanism', blijven zwarte feministen van de derde golf het gedachtegoed van hun voorganger(s) verkondigen (wat an sich als contradictie kan beschouwd worden). Daarnaast streeft de derde feministische stroming ernaar om vrouwendiscriminatie en –emancipatie in de praktijk te verkondigen. Vandaar dat zwarte feministen hun geëmancipeerde boodschap bijvoorbeeld doorgeven via muziek. Ook de nummers van Beyoncé en haar voormalige muziekgroep Destiny's Child belichamen kenmerken van de derde feministische stroming. Daarnaast vernieuwen ze ook de klassieke categorieën van gender, klasse en ras opdat die meer zou aansluiten bij de leefwereld van (jonge) zwarte vrouwen.