Figure 1. Renée Cox, *Yo Mama's Pieta* (1994). Archival ink jet print on cotton rag, 4 × 4 in.

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Beyoncé's Soft Power: Poetics and Politics of an Afro-Diasporic Aesthetics

Ellen McLarney

The modern world follows the belly. Gestational language has been key to describing the world-making and world-breaking capacities of racial slavery. . . . The theft, regulation and destruction of black women's sexual and reproductive capacities would also define the afterlife of slavery.
—Saidiya Hartman, "Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors"

The *Yo Mama* Series is a dispassionate representation of women claiming their womanhood and power in the world of art and commerce, white male dominance, and gender. . . . There was a major problem with the art world in terms of female artists naturally expressing themselves through the procreation of life.
—Renée Cox, Artist's Statement

On 1 February 2017, four days after President Donald Trump signed his controversial executive order "Protecting the Nation

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from Foreign Terrorist Entry into the United States," Beyoncé released a set of pictures showing her nearly naked body pregnant with twins, swimming in water, enwreathed in flowers, radiating halos. Newsfeeds juxtaposed the images incongruously alongside pictures of Trump's snarling face and images of the protests erupting across the nation. In the midst of the mayhem was the serene, beatific visage of a woman with child seemingly speaking another language via a lyrical visual poetics. Through carefully choreographed semiotics, Beyoncé channeled her own symbolic capital against the Trump media machine, rising above the biased ugliness legislated by the executive order. Through collaborations with artists from the African Muslim diaspora (one from Somalia, one of the "banned" nations) and from Latin America, Beyoncé did combat with the racial politics and immigration policies of the Trump presidency. This multimedia, multisensory project brought together Warsan Shire, a British poet born in Kenya to Somali parents; Awol Erizku, an Ethiopian-born American artist raised in the Bronx; Daniela Vesco, a Costa Rican photographer; and Beyoncé, "a fierce nymph of Texas"[1] ("my daddy Alabama, momma Louisiana / You mix that negro with that Creole, make a Texas bama"[2]) descended from the Acadian anti-British militant Joseph Broussard dit Beausoleil.[3] Beyoncé's family name Beyincé (Buyince, Boyance) itself sounds like an adaptation from the Arabic Bou Younes, or "father of Jonah," a figure emblematic not only of the perils of immigrations and water passages but also of living in the belly of the beast.

Taken as a collective, these artists pose formidable challenges to racist media representations in the Breitbart age. The symbolic tropes cultivated in Beyoncé's pregnancy announcement intervened in debates inflamed by the 2016 election: about black lives and black bodies; the political power of the female voice and body; the contested terrains of motherhood and reproduction; the citizenship status of immigrants, refugees, and the undocumented; and the place of the Muslim and Latinx diasporas in American politics and culture. The images were curated at a specific moment—in the immediate aftermath of the Women's March on Washington, during the uproar over the "Muslim ban," on the first day of Black

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History Month, and in anticipation of the Grammys—channeling a "soft power"[4] exercised by Beyoncé to "trump hate" but without mentioning Trump's name. Beyoncé bent the neoliberal tools of social media and marketing strategies to her message, creating one of Instagram's most-liked images of all time, breaking records with over 8 million likes in twenty-four hours and reaching her 119 million followers—nearly twice the number of voters for Hillary Clinton in the 2016 election (65,853,516).

The coinciding of Beyoncé's pregnancy announcement and Trump's executive order was uncanny and probably unanticipated. Nonetheless, the images articulate a vision rooted in political and aesthetic collaborations long cultivated in Beyoncé's work through commitments to #BlackLivesMatter in her visual album *Lemonade* (2016) and Black Panther references in the Super Bowl's "Formation" performance, her eleventh-hour "pantsuit nation" campaigning for Hillary Clinton (while newly pregnant with twins), and her controversial samplings of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk "We Should All Be Feminists" on her track "***Flawless." The photographs, portraits, and accompanying poetry published on her website intervene in critical debates about the representation of black lives and black bodies, black motherhood and the black family, black suffering and black beauty. This essay looks specifically at the celebration of black motherhood in the wake of #BlackLivesMatter, the persecution—and martyrdom—of black children, and the suffering of the mothers that helped spearhead the movement. Beyoncé takes their mourning, transforming it into a ritualistic glorification of black motherhood, black life, and black bodies.

The announcement draws on two of the most powerful tools of the Black Arts Movement—photography and poetry—as Beyoncé positioned herself in the "field of representation" of black life as "a site of ongoing struggle."[5] Photography is central to "any theoretical discussion of the relationship of black life to the visual and to art making," writes bell hooks. "Access and mass appeal have historically made photography a powerful location for the construction of an oppositional black aesthetic. . . . There [i]s a constant struggle on the part of black folks to create a counter-hegemonic world of images that would stand as visual resistance,

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challenging racist images."[6] Beyoncé helped curate a black aesthetics ("the spiritual sister of the Black Power concept"), drawing on "symbolism, mythology, critique, and iconology . . . concerned with the relationship between art and politics" and "a radical reordering of the western cultural aesthetic."[7] She draws on the writing and cultural production of artists, poets, and authors from the Afro-Muslim (and the Latinx) diaspora, connecting "Black activists, writers, and artists" with the "the broader Muslim Third World." "In this way, the Muslim International acts as a permeable contact zone, sharing territories of struggle with the larger Afro-diasporic imagination, in which ideas about community, resistance, and belonging can be engaged."[8] Yet Beyoncé is no Amiri Baraka; his fierce masculinity and Black Power embrace of violence (and sometimes masculinist misogyny) contrast sharply with her hyper-feminized, and hypercommercialized, soft power.

The fully curated set of portraits by Erizku and Vesco, a series of "snapshots" of family life, and Shire's full poem "I Have Three Hearts" were released on Beyoncé's website simultaneous with the Instagram announcement. Drawing on diverse materials, I analyze the aesthetics of transnational flows of symbols, signs, and images—exchanges, adaptations, borrowings, samplings, and appropriations—that serve as both the media *and* the message of the announcement. I do so as a feminist scholar of the Muslim diaspora focusing on the intertwined power of popular cultural production and political consciousness. The images and poetry explore the migratory patterns (and violence) of trajectories of religious symbolism: the Madonna in her voyage to the Americas via European conquest; the journey of Yoruban orishas from West Africa to the Caribbean via the slave trade; the movement of the "black Venus" Saartjie Baartman from South Africa to London and Paris. All these were reconciled in one transcendent, transracial figure encompassing black and white lineages, African and American, immigrant and native—contradictions the images embrace, embody, and reconcile. Genealogical forums fixate on, and bicker over, whether Beyoncé is black or white and where her commitments lie, trying to impose fixed racial categories on her. But she proposes "the transgressive figure of the transracial subject as one

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who knowingly and fluidly crosses borders . . . because crossing borders is central to disrupting race." She cannot "undo the logic of race, which took centuries to build and continues to evolve, simply through raciolinguistic performances," but she works toward "a collective process of social transformation" by speaking to the public through her massive following.[9]

Erizku's and Vesco's portraits inject the black experience into the universals claimed by European art, doing so through an aesthetics that both references and critiques European visual culture. They probe transnational motifs of universal motherhood through charged images of the "black Venus," Black Madonna, Virgin of Guadalupe, Yoruba orishas Ochún and Yemoja, and Nefertiti. Visualizing transracial icons and bodies, they challenge the image of a white god in the popular imagination. In so doing, they unravel the historical fallacy of white nationalism as a form of (religious) purity and (self-)righteous moral superiority, symbolized by the drop of blood at the center of the Ku Klux Klan cross. This idea of a religious and racial *limpieza de sangre* (blood purity), developed during the Reconquista of Christian Spain, culminated in the expulsion of both Jews and Muslims, a politics chillingly echoed in the Trump era.

Integral to this collaborative project is its collective vision articulated from different cultural, religious, and ethnic positions but executed under the sign of Beyoncé's powerful visual presence and voice that seem to embrace and subsume everything in their purview. The images aim at both transcendence and immanence as the artistic, poetic, and cultural referents transcend the local, the national, the ethnic, and the religious. The artists' individual contributions speak to their intersectional subject positions within imperial metropolises, psychically divided between metropole and postcolony via migration patterns. Their collaborative work speaks to the interlocking trajectories of these different artists; their different positions both inside and outside empire; their cultural production in the heart of empire; their varying geopolitical relations to those empires' brutal histories; and their unequal relations to capital. Beyoncé's performative politics raises questions about the appropriations and exploitations of the neoliberal celebrity

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machine; its consumption of immigrant (creative) labor; its exoticization of other cultures; and its aestheticization of pain and suffering. Critiques like these have been leveled against Beyoncé—in imagery culled, purportedly without permission, from scenes of Hurricane Katrina's destruction in her "Formation" video. "Can black people appropriate one another?" asks Shantrelle Lewis about "Formation." "Yes, we can—especially . . . when you take the cultural productions of a marginalized community and present them as your own. Especially when you capitalize off of their deaths. This is not giving people voice. It is stealing."[10] Unsurprisingly, Shire, Erizku, and Vesco remained largely invisible in the media attention, raising ethical questions about the erasure of their cultural labor in the process of borrowing, sampling, and appropriating.[11]

In *Lemonade,* Beyoncé uses Shire's poetry to articulate the anguish of betrayal in an almost ritualistic commemoration of black lives and black culture, shadowed by loss and suffering yet glimmering with beauty, power, strength, and feeling. *Lemonade* draws on the conceptual and artistic framework of Warsan Shire's album of audio poetry *warsan versus melancholy (the seven stages of being lonely),* structured as a poetic progression through "the seven stages of grief."[12] *warsan versus melancholy* provided nearly the entire script for *Lemonade,* with Beyoncé's voice reciting Shire's poetry, putting Shire's audio to video, effectively visualizing the poetics. Shire's album ends with the redemptive power of art to heal through a supplication for mercy in the face of trauma.[13] In the closing poem "(the prayer)," she recites: "ya Allah, if it will keep my heart soft, break my heart every day." The prayer echoes the epigraph opening Shire's chapbook *Teaching My Mother to Give Birth* (2011)—a verse from Audre Lorde's poem "Call"—where the mother is the object of supplication: "Mother, loosen my tongue or adorn me with a lighter burden."[14] Shire wrote "I Have Three Hearts" specifically for Beyoncé's pregnancy, weaving together their creative labors in the heart of racial capitalism.

Using her pop-star power, Beyoncé wielded her significant cultural capital to stage black diasporic art on the global platform of social media. Though she uses her body as the site of "converging political and social vectors that mark the flesh as a prime com-

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modity of exchange,"[15] she reclaims that body as a site of creative (re)production, situating her body in a genealogy of representations of black women's bodies, the black family, and the black mother. bell hooks fiercely criticized *Lemonade*'s commodification of black women's bodies, calling it "the business of capitalist money making at its best." Yet hooks simultaneously connects *Lemonade*'s artistic genealogy to the work of Carrie Mae Weems and Julie Dash, observing that its "visual landscape" constructs "a powerfully symbolic black female sisterhood that resists invisibility, that refuses to be silent . . . it shifts the gaze of white mainstream culture. It challenges us all to look anew, to radically revision how we see the black female body."[16] Though racial capitalism continually exploits the creative and reproductive powers of the female body (black, brown, or white), their powers cannot be reduced to or exhausted by this exploitation, writes Saidiya Hartman: "This care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation."[17]

Black Lives, the Black Madonna, and the Pietà

In generating a mythopoetic narrative around her pregnant body, Beyoncé deploys the soft power of cultural production, motherhood, and her business sense against the hard power of state violence against black (and brown, immigrant, and Muslim) lives. The photographs and the poetry home in on the politics of representation black motherhood,[18] an intervention conceptually allied with the work of art historian Deborah Willis, who has devoted her career to critiquing and reconceiving the history of photographic representation of black lives, black bodies, black womanhood, and the black family.[19] Beyoncé's earlier work draws on images of motherhood, most powerfully in references to visual artist Renée Cox's *Yo Mama's Pieta* (1996) in her visual album *Beyoncé* (2013). Recording and filming in the aftermath of Trayvon Martin's killing, she compared his death to Emmett Till's on her website. *Yo Mama's Pieta* (fig. 1) depicts Cox herself as the grieving Madonna, a living black woman holding a black youth in her arms in stark contrast to Michelangelo's *Pietà* carved in cold, white marble. Ref-

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erenced in Beyoncé's "Mine" music video released in December 2013 (fig. 2), Cox's image assumed new significance—and intensified pathos—as a reference to the harrowing events that catalyzed #BlackLivesMatter. Though Beyoncé marched to protest Trayvon Martin's murder that July, critics appeared confounded by the imagery, missing the reference to Cox's "Yo Mama" series. The *Pietà* evokes the suffering of mothers of martyred sons senselessly killed by state violence—suffering she returns and pays tribute to in *Lemonade*. The "Resurrection" chapter in *Lemonade* features living portraits of mothers holding photographs of their sons in a *Pietà*-like gesture: Sybrina Fulton holding Trayvon Martin; Lezley McSpadden, Michael Brown (fig. 3); and Gwen Carr, Eric Garner. "Resurrection" revolves around the power of visual representation, specifically photography, opening with black girls assembling for a collective portrait. A woman's voice asks: "How are we supposed to lead our children to the future? What do we do? How do we lead them?" Following a trail of discarded photographs, the camera stops on Beyoncé's image reflected in a mirror while she looks at a photograph. She recites lines from Warsan Shire's "for women who are difficult to love (the affirmation)":

you are terrifying
and strange and beautiful
something not everyone knows how to love.[20]

The camera compels us to visually follow that photographic trail toward pathos, identification, and empathy, but also sorrow over crimes against humanity.

Released on social media, Beyoncé's pregnancy portraits intervene in a sphere of representation where the visual depiction of repeated instances of violence against black citizens has provoked uproar and moral indignation, continuing a legacy of representation with roots in lynching photographs.[21] In the context of #BlackLivesMatter, Beyoncé's Black Madonna is the twin of the *Pietà*, but with the redemptive hope and promise of the mother with child. Cox formulated her *Pietà* only after her earlier *Yo Mama* self-portraits depicting her pregnancy, just as Beyoncé only turned

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Figure 2. Beyoncé's "Mine" music video (2013) with imagery from Cox's *Pieta*

to the *Pietà* after giving birth to her own child, acknowledging a deep and abiding pathos and identification with a mother's pain at losing her child. In "Black Women and Motherhood," Patricia Hill Collins observes that "so much sanctification surrounds Black motherhood that 'the idea that mothers should live lives of sacrifice has come to be seen as the norm.'"[22] "Glorifying the strong Black mother" has been a way to replace negative white images of black mothers with positive ones. She discusses a series of controlling images like the matriarch, mammy, and welfare mother, but Collins also recognizes that black motherhood can be a "catalyst for social activism" and "foundation for black women's activism." "By placing family, children, education, and community at the center of our political activism," she writes, "African-American women draw on Afrocentric conceptualizations of mothering, family, community, and empowerment."[23]

In the multimedia staging of her pregnancy, Beyoncé curates a romanticized portrait of the black family juxtaposed against the anguish of *Lemonade,* its bitterness and anger, its portrait of a fractured relationship, and its sense of betrayal (what hooks calls its "hurt" and "trauma").[24] The visual parallels suggest that the pregnancy is the fruition of reconciliation, the resurrection of the relationship, a kind of miraculous rebirth. The

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Figure 3. Lezley McSpadden holding Michael Brown's photograph in *Lemonade* (2016)

announcement includes a slew of snapshots of the Carter nuclear family challenging dominant media depictions of the black family. Following two portraits of Beyoncé as the "Black Madonna" and the "Virgin of Guadalupe" on her website are a set of photos charting her relationship with Jay-Z from their earliest "Crazy in Love" days, through their engagement, marriage, honeymoon, pregnancy, the birth of Blue, vacations, holidays, and birthday parties. Though highly aestheticized and even glorified, they are snapshots of family life imbued with nostalgia, yearning, and affect.

Historically, "vernacular" photography has been critical to challenging dominant representations of black lives and black families, an institution under siege in the US since slavery. As Tina Campt observes:

> Photography plays a critical role in articulating black people's complex relationship to cultural identity and national belonging. . . . The photographic image has played a dual role in rendering the history of African diasporic communities, because of its ability to document and simultaneously pathologize the history, culture, and struggles of these communities. Photography also provides a means of challenging negative stereotypes and assumptions about black people in ways that create a counterimage of who they are, as well as who they might be or become. Indeed, it is the equally powerful positive and negative impact of photography that has made it such an important vehicle of social and cultural formation.[25]

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Ava DuVernay's film *13th* (US, 2016) ends with a montage of family snapshots of black families, bringing her harrowing narrative to a close with a glimmer of redemptive hope. The film itself is a visual document of America's pathological treatment of African diasporic communities: Jim Crow, the Ku Klux Klan, lynchings, and the prison industrial complex. The joy depicted in the family photographs provides a seemingly impossible antidote to the horror story DuVernay has told, depathologizing the pathologization of black families. Beyoncé's intervention speaks to this cultural context and this cultural moment. Her pictures directly answer bell hooks's call to "move beyond the pain" of black suffering and victimization, to emphasize intersectionality, and "to be truly free" by creating "lives of sustained optimal well-being and joy," balancing the bitterness with sweetness.[26]

Black Venus: Obverse and Reverse

The commissioned portraits and poetry around the coming heirs, Rumi and Sir Carter, had the aura of a Queen Bey court, a politics rivaling the gilt era of Trump Towers. Their neoliberal ethos and Christian imagery, and even their overtones of royalty, drew on an identifiably American political lexicon even as they implicitly challenged the racism (against Muslims, Mexicans, Cubans, and African Americans)—and sexism—of Trump's legislative prerogatives. Beyoncé constructed a carefully choreographed harmony between vernacular snapshots documenting her personal narrative, pregnant body, and family history and an aestheticized glorification of black motherhood through the Madonna, Venus, and Yemoja imagery. She deploys a mythopoetics toward an ecstatic, sensory celebration of black motherhood and its (pro)creative potential.

The accompanying announcement was prosaic, almost ordinary. "We would like to share our love and happiness. We have been blessed . . . thank you for your well wishes," etc., signed by "The Carters." (Stars: they're just like us!) But beneath these words, Beyoncé swims underwater swathed in translucent saffron and red

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scarves floating serenely around her body, almost like billowing blood or an umbilical cord. She testifies to what lies beneath, like a visual subconscious that epitomizes the experience of pregnancy. Below this image by Vesco is Shire's poem, written specifically for Beyoncé's pregnancy:

mother is a cocoon where
cells spark, limbs form, mother
swells and stretches to protect her
child, mother has one foot in this world
and one foot in the next
mother black venus.

In the intersectional nexus of the Shire/Vesco/Beyoncé collaboration, multiple overlapping religio-cultural referents symbolize sacred motherhood: Vesco's photograph evokes the Yoruba orisha Ochún, a water deity of fertility whose color is yellow, while the poetic reference "mother has one foot in this world / and one foot in the next" alludes to a hadith (saying of the Prophet Muhammad) that "paradise [*janna*] is at the feet of your mother."[27] Collins refers to this as the "so much sanctification" surrounding motherhood—the flip side of "motherhood as a truly burdensome condition that stifles [women's] creativity, exploits their labor, and makes them partners in their own oppression."[28] This sanctification also responds to negative racist white/colonial images of both black and Muslim womanhood, becoming a counteractive move of protest. It is a moment of redemption after the horror of the slave trade, alluded to by the West African migrations of the Yoruban orishas and the "black Venus" imagery. Here is a woman who owns her own body; the profit from her labor is hers; and she clearly controls her own (pro)creativity and its representation—even if the body-as-commodity epitomizes a neoliberal economy of exchange.

The imagery's nexus of sanctification/denigration is what performance artist and black feminist Lorraine O'Grady calls two sides of the same coin. In her famous essay on Édouard Manet's painting *Olympia* (1863), she writes: "The female body in the West

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is not a unitary sign. Rather, like a coin, it has an obverse and a reverse: on the one side, it is white; on the other, not-white or, prototypically, black. The two bodies cannot be separate, nor can one body be understood in isolation from the other in the West's metaphoric construction of 'woman.'"[29] Western media representations similarly construct the "Muslimwoman"[30] as the antithesis of the American woman, a trope that emerged in tandem with the conquest of Muslim lands, minds, and bodies in the "war on terror."[31] In this new era of imperial expansion, Muslim women have again been flattened into oppressed objects of male desire represented visually through the material object of the veil. These media images trace their genealogy to the politics and aesthetics of earlier empires' colonial orientalism.[32] Muslim women have attained a new salience as the obverse of the liberated Western woman in overdetermined signifiers that proliferate in media representations. Shire's complex and nuanced poetry—focusing on desire, bodies, womanhood, death, family, and motherhood—complicates these facile dichotomies through the textures of her own poetic voice.

Awol Erizku's portraits of Beyoncé reference Manet's *Olympia*, but now with a black woman at its center. Instead of the black slave bringing the white odalisque flowers, it is Blue, Beyoncé's daughter, handing her a single flower like an olive branch. In style and composition, the image references the black photographer James VanDerZee's *Reclining Nude Woman Draped with Cloth*, which reinterprets classic motifs of colonial orientalism. VanDerZee's photograph comments on the racism of colonial image making, observes its obsession with sexualizing racial subjugation, and challenges this history through a breathing humanization of black women's bodies. Erizku's 2015 show "New Flower / Images of the Reclining Venus" revisited this approach, depicting young, partly clothed black women reclining against backgrounds that look like bedrooms, photographic reinterpretations of classical odalisques and reclining nudes such as Manet's *Olympia*, Giorgione's *Sleeping Venus* (ca. 1510), and Titian's *Pardo Venus* (1551).

The images' voyeuristic sexuality skirts the line between exploitation and critique, using the sexuality of black girls to market the images, through clear reference to the dominant imagery of

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colonial orientalism. Erizku acknowledges—and challenges—the racialized figure of the "oriental" odalisque, a supine figure inviting penetration, domination, and liberation by "enlightened" European masters. Now the artist is Muslim and African. In Beyoncé's portraits, the odalisque governs the creative execution of her portrait, retaining control over the process of not only representation but also reproduction, consumption, *and profit from* the product. Beyoncé and Erizku critically overturn representations of the odalisque as slave and concubine locked in a racialized hierarchy of exploitative sexuality. Instead, she governs and controls her own sexuality and fertility as much as her (pro)creative capacity. The images have mythic as well as historic overtones: they also speak to current political struggles over reproductive self-determination (the defunding of Planned Parenthood, overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, limiting insurance coverage of maternity care and contraception). The images are recycled but rewritten for new political contexts that continue to carry the burden of historical symbolism even as that symbolism is joyously subverted.

In the series of photographs curated on her website, Beyoncé emerges out of the water as a mother goddess like the *Birth of Venus*, giving new life to the image but via a transracial aesthetic alluding to multiple origins. She fills the "representational chasm"[33] of Africans in American popular culture with Shire's stark lyricism, Erizku's flowers and color, Vesco's Venuses and orishas, and a rich tapestry of mytho-poetic symbolism that Beyoncé performs, and refracts, with her body. Shire's "mother black venus" verse refers to a long, charged legacy of racist images of black women's bodies: interconnecting, mutually reinforcing matrices of poetic, visual, ethnographic, and colonial representation.[34]

Isaac Teale's poem "The Sable Venus" (1765) compares Botticelli's Venus to the "black Venus": "Both just alike, except the white, / No difference, no—none at night."[35] A 1789 engraving by Thomas Stothard, "The Voyage of the Sable Venus," illustrates the poem with the Venus arising out of a half shell as in Botticelli's painting. In the historical context of the Middle Passage—and the rapes that occurred in slave ships' hulls—the poem and Stothard's engraving take on grotesque overtones. Deborah Willis's photo-

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graphic history of the black female body begins with Stothard's image, eloquently illustrating how an ethnographic aesthetic created and re-created racialized hierarchies. Artists have reworked these racist modes of visual representation, as in Margaret Burroughs's 1960 print "Voyage of the Sable Venus" and Robin Coste Lewis's 2015 poetry collection *The Voyage of the Sable Venus*. Willis herself ends on an unmitigatedly positive, even euphoric, note with a visual rumination on "perception of beauty" that prominently features pregnant bodies. Daniela Vesco's portraits of Beyoncé as Botticelli's Venus, along with Shire's poetry, reclaim these visual and poetic histories of the "black Venus." Their transcendent motifs of universal motherhood transform racist images with transracial figures that disrupt racial boundaries.

Similarly, Shire's "black venus" references the exploitative, pseudoscientific, circus-like ethnographic display of the "Hottentot Venus" Saartjie Baartman in early nineteenth-century England and France, stoking rumors Beyoncé would star in a film about her.[36] Films, histories, fiction, art, poetry, and criticism have focused on Baartman, such as Deborah Willis's edited volume *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her "Hottentot,"* devoted to the project of her critical recuperation. The book is titled after Renée Cox and Lyle Ashton Harris's photograph *Venus Hottentot 2000*, an image of Cox with metallic breast and buttock appendages strapped to her body, which graces the cover.[37] Harris remarks that he was "reclaiming the image of the Hottentot Venus [as] a way of exploring my own psychic identification with the image at the level of spectacle. I am playing with what it means to be an African diasporic artist producing and selling work that is by and large narcissistically mired in the debasement and objectification of blackness."[38]

Black Madonna: *La Virgen de ida y vuelta*

Erizku's portraits of Beyoncé as the Madonna demonstrate an intimate familiarity with art history and black feminist visual theory. A graduate of Cooper Union and Yale's MFA program in Visual Arts, Erizku reinterprets celebrated works from European art history, as do Jamaican-American photographer Renée Cox

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and Nigerian-American painter Kehinde Wiley, who similarly reconfigure classic European works by putting black figures at their center.[39] Erizku made his name in a 2012 New York show with the photograph *Girl with a Bamboo Earring*, a hip-hop version of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*. (Erizku's image now adorns the cover of Su'ad Abdul Khabeer's *Muslim Cool: Race, Religion, and Hip Hop in the United States*). His 2014 show "The Only Way Is Up" took ordinary objects and made them into art, gesturing to Marcel Duchamp. The show included a mixtape sampling the visual artist Kerry James Marshall lecturing about the relationship between "high art" and "low art" over Beyoncé's "Drunk in Love": "in the places where we come to understand what beauty represents . . . and when you are not represented there—that is a problem." This was the thesis of the show, as critic Antwaun Sargent observes: "to make blackness as universal of a reference as whiteness."[40]

Erizku reinterprets (adapts? samples? mixes? radically reimagines? miscegenates? translates?) European pieces like Jan Brueghel the Elder's *Madonna in Floral Wreath* (1616) and Peter Paul Rubens's *Madonna in Floral Wreath* (1620), destabilizing—and critiquing—the whiteness of the European artistic tradition and of the Christian tradition. As an artist in the West, though, he is also a contemporary scion of that tradition and its struggles over aesthetic and racial representation. Below Shire's verse "mother black venus" is Beyoncé as the Madonna, draped in a sheer green veil, enwreathed in flowers. The vivid colors celebrate and illuminate the black body, with the celestial color blue in the background. The nearly ecstatic riot of colors suggests the bodily pleasures and heightened senses of pregnancy, even if glossing its travails (in Collins's sense). Erizku intervenes in the history of Christianity as a white religion, Jesus as a white god, and Mary as a white virgin flanked in a blue veil. The celestial blue of Erizku's background is suddenly evocative of blue blackness rather than European Virgins. The Madonna photographs simultaneously evoke visual representations of Christian iconography in African American photographers' "renderings of the black mother,"[41] as in James Latimer Allen's 1930s photograph *Madonna and Child* (fig. 4).[42] Taken in

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Figure 4. James Latimer Allen, *Madonna and Child*. Photographs and Prints Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, New York Public Library

a mirror, Ming Smith-Murray's portrait of herself breastfeeding draws on this tradition. The viewer becomes the mirror, seeing her as she sees herself. Willis calls this Smith-Murray's "Madonna self-portrait [that] underscores the experience of motherhood and career. The photograph in which she is both subject and photographer, mother and artist, echoes the duality of her life and her desire to produce work within the constraints of motherhood."[43] Similarly, Renée Cox's *Yo Mama* self-portraits of herself as a naked Madonna holding her squirming child are striking for their embodied life and vivid black-and-white aesthetics. They are living, breathing portraits of black mothers as so much sanctification embodied, celebrating a "black feminist aesthetic" that articulates "a black liberation discourse on the black body as beautiful."[44]

The photos following the *Madonna in Floral Wreath* portraits personalize the images via grainy home videos of Beyoncé holding Blue as a newborn, becoming a kind of live Madonna through the vernacular of personal photographs and home videos (fig. 5). The series zooms in from the macrocosmic icon into the intensely personal and intimate, bringing the sacred down to earth, with silhouette photographs of Beyoncé pregnant with Blue at four, five, six, seven, eight, and nine months that look like X-rays or ultrasounds. Family snapshots trace the genealogy of Beyoncé's family

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through a sequence of photographs—of her grandmother with her mother, her mother with her, her with Blue, and Blue with a pregnant Beyoncé. In the midst of these pictures is a stanza from Shire's poem:

venus falls in love
flowers grow wherever
love touches her, this
is how she is reborn
girl turning into woman
woman turning into mother
mother turning into venus[45]

The older pictures are in black and white, like snapshots from the past or stills from an old film reel, contrasting in kind and tone with the gorgeousness of the almost fauve-colored orisha and flo-

Figure 5. One of the Carter family "snapshots" with Blue

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ral Madonna pictures, aesthetic references to both her African and creole origins (French, Acadian, Caribbean).

The images move conceptually inward even further with the next photograph by Vesco recalling the first in the series: Beyoncé in water swathed in red and yellow scarves, but now upside down, legs in fetal position. The colors and imagery evoke the opening sequences of *Lemonade*'s "Hold Up," where Beyoncé swims in an underwater dreamworld hovering over her own bed, alluding to the orishas Yemoja and her sister Ochún of Yoruba-based Afro-Atlantic religious cultures (figs. 6 and 8). The scene ends with Beyoncé bursting out of the door of the house, waters flooding outward in an emblem of birth. The scene evokes catharsis through rioting imagery, as she smashes car windows, fire hydrants, surveillance cameras, piñatas, and even the camera filming her with a baseball bat. Ochún represents vengeance and "the struggles of life" as well as love, sexuality, and fertility. The imagery suggests personal and political retribution—and self-determination—through cleansing violence and creative labor.

Figure 6. Beyoncé underwater as Yemoja. Photograph by Daniela Vesco

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Yemoja is associated with "women, motherhood, family, and the arts . . . representations of black women as mothers that move throughout the Afro-Atlantic world," "fierce foremothers" that perform important "spiritual and cultural work." She is a "Divine Mother" and a "Water Goddess" that has been aestheticized throughout the diaspora, "a mother-force flowing infinitely in Africana art and literature."[46] The yellow scarves, like the yellow dress worn in *Lemonade,* signify Yemoja's sister Ochún, syncretized with the Cuban Virgen de la Caridad (picked up on Beyoncé's trip to Cuba in 2013?). Ochún is seen as *mulata*, as dismantling binary oppositions, as "(n)either white (n)or black, (n)either African (n)or Spaniard." She is not a single truth, writes Miguel de la Torre, her meaning "always depends on Her relationship to what She is not . . . (N)Either La Virgen (n)or Ochún can purge the Other from its domain, for each contains the Other within Herself." The virgin/ Ochún figures "inhabit a sacred area where borders are fluid and opposites are subverted . . . with time, [these different] faith traditions began to share quite similar sacred spaces."[47] The juxtaposition between the Santería/Virgin figures in Beyoncé's pregnancy announcement—which references the Madonna and the Venus as both black and white and evokes European and Afro-Atlantic cultural traditions, aesthetics, and religions—subverts these oppositions. These dichotomies collapse, reconciling any "clash" of civilizations by bringing the "opposing" figures together in the same sacred space. This is what Ochún epitomizes—an African deity "whitened" by her exile in the Americas, transported via the torturous routes of the slave trade, assimilating to help guide and protect her followers in their journeys overseas. In de la Torre's discussion of the overlapping iconography of the Virgen de la Caridad and Ochún, he talks about how "Glory lives in *el exilio,* with humiliated and abandoned people. From exile God begins a new history. This is not the first time She has been manifested as a wandering symbol of Her people. As Ochún, She journeyed from Africa when Her African children were forced by slave traders to go to Cuba. . . . Because of Ochún's love for Her children."[48] The Ochún section from *Lemonade* ("Denial," from the track "Hold On") begins with words from Warsan Shire's "for women who are difficult to love."

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That Shire herself is a poet singing of a different era of forced displacements—of immigrations and deportations—stands like a sign over the track's opening, albeit with reference to a different, but analogous, set of exiles. The religious syncretism of the imagery, the superimposed layers of sacred references, speaks to the art as a space where "borders are fluid and opposites are subverted" and where different "faith traditions begin to share quite similar sacred spaces."

Following the Ochún image of Beyoncé suspended in water upside down (with umbilical-cord-like scarves) are two black-and-white photographs of Beyoncé as the Black Madonna (fig. 7). She is again framed by an aureole, but this time in black and white, enwreathed in flora of red roses and white orchids, and crowned with a garland of flowers and spiky rays of light emanating from her head. Here, Vesco connects the dots between the Yemoja/Ochún image and the Virgin of Guadalupe first syncretized during the slave trade, earning her the nickname "la Virgen de ida y vuelta," the Virgin of coming and going.[49] The Virgin of Guadalupe also played an earlier role in the Reconquista of Spain as the black Madonna while the Catholics drove the Muslims out of Spain, forced those who remained to convert to Christianity, and

Figure 7. Beyoncé as the "Black Madonna," the Virgin of Guadalupe. Photograph by Daniela Vesco

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expelled first the Jews in 1492 and later the Muslims in 1609. During the same period in Spain, racialized understandings of blood purity (*limpieza de sangre*) emerged in connection with religion, with Christians understood as "pure blood" and Jewish converts labeled "pigs" (*marranos*) and Muslims "moriscos" (Moorish). To evoke the Black Madonna in the midst of a crusade to keep Muslims out of the US is to reference these earlier campaigns against Muslims and Jews. The ethnic and religious cleansing is eerily evocative of current politics—and media images and stories about deportations echo these earlier expulsions.

Historically, the Virgin of Guadalupe has been critical to contestations over race and religion. In *Visualizing Guadalupe: From Black Madonna to Queen of the Americas*, Jeanette Favrot Peterson writes about "the resurgence in the early modern period of the Judeo-Christian dialectic between white and black and signifiers of positive and negative values. White, allied with light, was synonymous with purity and spiritual insight. . . . Black was the absence of light, it evoked evil, and above all, it came to be associated with the infidel." Depicting the Mother of God as dark skinned "contest[ed] a dyadic value system. Not strictly oppositional, her blackness was considered sacred . . . destabiliz[ing] a social hierarchy that positioned whiteness at the apex." Interpretations of the Virgin in the Americas produced "more positive" visualities for "interpreting the material conditions of darkness."[50] Vesco and Beyoncé help produce new visualities disrupting racial hierarchies and upending "white control of black images."[51] Using new technologies of representation, they promote heightened emotional reactions and visceral responses like earlier artists did via Black Madonna imagery in the Americas. As Peterson observes, "newly introduced technologies of representation innately possessed a seductive power" in the sixteenth and seventeenth century, provoking intensified reception. "Indigenous artists unarguably had extraordinary mimetic skill and brandished their versatility in a display of a great range of styles . . . result[ing] in a plurality of visual codes that converged and competed with one another . . . hybrid modes of production breed[ing] polyvalent modes of being received."[52] These multiple portraits evoke plural visual codes and hybrid modes of production, using new technologies to heighten public reception.

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Beyoncé evokes her own family trajectory, her own narrative, her own genealogy—and also the power of rebirth and reinvention, if not just survival. Diasporic aesthetics impart an additional level of signification as a commentary on current dislocations and displacements, migrations retracing earlier trajectories, bearing scars of earlier histories. The visual, aesthetic, and poetic testimonies of Erizku, Shire, and Vesco speak to the sharing of sacred space within so-called secular regimes. Through a hybrid coexistence between traditions and cultures, they evoke a utopian vision of racial and religious pluralism against formidable odds and current realities.

Warsan Shire: Poetics and Politics

Like black women, Muslim women have been intensively subjected to a regime of visuality in Western (North Atlantic/colonial) media production, partly through hysterical media frenzy around the politics of veiling in relation to Muslim women's bodies and sexuality.[53] As the Pakistani writer Rafia Zakaria observes: "The migrant and the Muslim woman may be the most marginal figures of our divided and suspicious present, their realities dulled into the monochrome of submission and desperation, to elicit pity or polemic. In Warsan Shire's poetry they speak for themselves, its vivid literary exploration of their inner lives adding the depth and complexity that grants them a full and realised humanity."[54] We do not see this full and realized humanity of Muslim women in Western media representations, despite the proliferation of neo-orientalist images.

Despite attention to *Lemonade* and "I Have Three Hearts," Warsan Shire has remained somewhat a cipher, refusing to capitalize on the publicity. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the American public has mainly ignored her, her contributions, and her words. Yet Shire's receding from public view (even with increased attention to her work) speaks as a powerful absence-presence commenting on the politics of representation. Even if she was integral to its production, she is almost left out of the spectacle—reproducing the structural inequalities of the pop culture media machine. Both Shire's own story as well as her poetry speak directly to the issues raised by

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the Muslim ban, of living in the North Atlantic as an African Muslim, of the colonial histories of slavery that frame earlier migrations from Africa, and of a new era of forced displacements and uneasy migrations to new worlds sometimes less forgiving than the old. "I Have Three Hearts" is more celebratory and optimistic than Shire's other poems that speak about war, rape, deportation, child abuse, betrayal, and melancholy. She also writes about topics like FGM (female genital mutilation) and honor killings that seem to serve as definitive marks of difference of African and Muslim diasporas in the North Atlantic world, especially in the media. She personalizes, rather than sensationalizes, these bicultural or "transracial" confrontations in which different systems of objective, systemic oppression confront each other within individual subjective experiences.

Shire was born in Kenya to Somali parents and migrated to the UK at the age of one. She published her first poetry collection *Teaching My Mother to Give Birth* in 2011; *warsan versus melancholy (the seven stages of being lonely)*—the creative framework for *Lemonade*—in 2012; and *Her Blue Body* in 2015, the fruit of her tenure as Young Poet Laureate of London. In 2013, she won Brunel University's inaugural prize for African poetry. In receiving the prize, she commented that she had never been to Somalia, but she is Somali. "The poems for me," she said, "are a way of creating a connection to a country I've never been to. I don't know how it feels to belong, or to be home."[55] In *Warsan Shire: Une voix poétique feminine de la diaspora somalienne*, William Souny calls Shire a "paradigm of a vernacular cosmopolitanism" claiming "the right to difference in equality." This right stems from

> la situation contemporaine du sujet minoritaire, postcolonial ou migratoire, qui se forme et se transforme dans les interstices d'une dynamique globale où s'entrecroisent une pluralité d'expériences, langages et représentations, dans un rapport d'hybridation complexe d'identités. Warsan Shire s'inscrit dans ce contexte. Les conditions d'émergence et d'expression de sa parole poétique composent une cartographie polymorphe et transnationale.
>
> (the contemporary situation of a minority, postcolonial, or migratory subject, who forms and transforms herself within the interstices of

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a global dynamic where a plurality of experiences, languages, and representations intersect in a relationship of complex hybridization of identities. Warsan Shire inscribes herself in this context. The conditions of the emergence and expression of her poetic voice compose a polymorphous and transnational cartography.)[56]

Shire's poetry, particularly in *Teaching My Mother to Give Birth*, straddles worlds (between the UK, Somalia, and Kenya) through the narratives of family members, news traveling back and forth, stories passed down through generations, changes effected through migration, but also bodily changes like sickness, love, falling out of love, beautification, aging, death, puberty, mourning, and trauma. The poems emerge out of the convergence of worlds, through alienations and adaptations, written in two languages, English code-mixed with Somali words and poetics.[57]

Teaching My Mother to Give Birth refers to a Somali proverb, as Shire explains: "I'm the eldest in my family, my mother literally learnt how to mother, how to sacrifice, how to grow up, how to be alone, through me. I began writing the book when I was 19 years old. She was also 19 when she gave birth to me."[58] The collection's poems chart family histories, stories about relatives and friends, the aunt who she was named for, grandparents on both sides, her parents' wedding, how they met, when they separated. A palpable physicality infuses the poems through vivid descriptions of intense desire, betrayal, jealousy, a wedding night, taking a lover. But they also describe the difficulty of living as an immigrant, trying to assimilate, and moving between intersecting cultural landscapes. Two poems, both extended meditations on cultural and geographical dislocation, are at the center of the collection: "Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)" and "Ugly." "Ugly" reflects on differing cultural and racial notions of beauty, but also on the physical, emotional, and psychical scars of forced dislocation. The refugee is a reminder of war and loss, worn intimately on the body.

Your daughter is ugly.
She knows loss intimately,
carries whole cities in her belly.

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As a child, relatives wouldn't hold her.
She was splintered wood and sea water.
She reminded them of the war.[59]

"Ugly" describes how the mother taught the girl Somali ways of beautification, braiding hair into a rope, perfuming it with frankincense, gargling rosewater, calling the daughter "macaanto," which means "honey"—"*macaanto girls like you shouldn't smell / of lonely or empty*" (31). The poem talks about the girl's body as carrying the scars of the world:

and tell her that men will not love her
if she is covered in continents,
if her teeth are small colonies,
if her stomach is an island
if her thighs are borders? . . .
Your daughter's face is a small riot,
her hands are a civil war,
a refugee camp behind each ear
a body littered with ugly things. (32)

"Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)" contains one of Shire's most famous lines used as a "rallying cry" against the Muslim ban: "No one leaves home unless home is the mouth of a shark."[60] Written in 2009, the poem mentions two of the countries, Libya and Yemen, later targeted by the executive order: "They ask me *how did you get here*? Can't you see it on my body?" The poem goes on to predict—and recall—some of the most terrible images of the refugee crisis: "I hope the journey meant more than miles because all of my children are in the water. I thought the sea was safer than the land. . . . Look at all these borders, foaming at the mouth with bodies broken and desperate. . . . I spent days and nights in the stomach of the truck; I did not come out the same." The collection speaks to the terrible and transformative experience of becoming a different person in the process of dislocation, made analogous here to the experience of childbirth as passage into another world. She goes on to reflect, in searing terms, on the pain of racism, exclusion, marginaliza-

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tion: "My beauty is not beauty here. My body is burning with the shame of not belonging, my body is longing."

Earlier transnational, multicultural feminist collaborations inform and shadow this work. Shire's collection of poetry *Her Blue Body* directly references Alice Walker's poem "We Have a Beautiful Mother":

Her green lap
Immense
Her brown embrace
Eternal
Her blue body
Everything.[61]

Walker's (and Beyoncé's) ecstatic embrace of universal motherhood is qualified with universal suffering, as in Shire's poem "what they did yesterday afternoon," which recounts her aunt's house being set on fire. So she prays:

dear god
i come from two countries
one is thirsty
the other is on fire
both need water.

later that night
i held an atlas in my lap
ran my fingers across the whole world
and whispered
where does it hurt?

it answered
everywhere
everywhere
everywhere.[62]

This sits uneasily next to the pop cultural appropriation of the poetry, with *Lemonade* speaking of the vortex of suffering over a husband's infidelity. In a 2013 interview, Shire says:

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> I'm from Somalia where there has been a war going on for my entire life. I grew up with a lot of horror in the backdrop—a lot of terrible things that have happened to people who are really close to me, and to my country, and to my parents; so it's in the home and it's even in you, it's on your skin and it's in your memories and your childhood. And my relatives and my friends and my mother's friends have experienced things that you can't imagine, and they've put on this jacket of resiliency and a dark humor.[63]

Shire's next work, *warsan versus melancholy*, is about a bad breakup, but the implications, already profound and sad, are of other leave-takings, separations, loneliness, and an inability to stay. "The unbearable weight of staying" is a seeming play on, and inversion of, Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, testifying to the untenable predicament of the refugee in contrast to the existential lightness of being European. The collection is about loss on multiple levels. *Lemonade* excerpts segments from nearly every poem from *warsan versus melancholy* in addition to two other poems from *Her Blue Body*, "nail technician as palm reader" and "grief has its blue hands in her hair." As Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan ask in their famous essay on Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar's *Warrior Marks*: Is Beyoncé "co-opt[ing] and commodify[ing] multiculturalism" without acknowledging the geopolitical and cultural asymmetries and the "differences between subjects of less powerful and more powerful states?"[64] It may be cultural appropriation—even plagiarism, as she was accused of in the "Formation" video, using documentary footage of New Orleans after Katrina despite being denied permission by the filmmakers. Few seemed to recognize or acknowledge Shire's contribution to *Lemonade*, or that "I Have Three Hearts" was Shire's, not Beyoncé's. Though Shire is credited, the jumbling of the poems' order and their mixing with other, unidentified voices disrupts her authorial voice. (Is this the "legalized thefts . . . through which racism has been constituted and practiced"?)[65] Shire remained eerily uncredited in public citations and accolades (as in the initial announcement of the Peabody Award to *Lemonade*), seemingly disappearing into relative silence.

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The transnational trajectories connect these artists via different subject positions, unequal relationships to power, differing modes of cultural production, and different priorities. Have their respective experiences of infidelity created affinity and connection, as Beyoncé's collaboration seems to suggest? Their collaborative art highlights the hypocrisies of bans on migratory flows, even as the US continues to exploit immigrant labor, brainpower, and cultural capital, and to invade foreign lands. Did Beyoncé reproduce those unequal relations of (cultural-artistic) labor, commit the "ultimate violence" of appropriation—"romanticized identification with cultural others"[66]—and perpetuate a soft power complicit with the politics of American empire? In their critique of Walker, Grewal and Kaplan refer to "a map of ethnic and racial diaspora superimposed upon a map of a unified and universal female body. This complex mapping of modern subjects conflates an African diaspora with a Western cultural feminism construction of woman to argue for a return to the mother country, to the body of the mother, to the source of female identity."[67]

Beyoncé's appropriations have inspired resentments. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie critiqued the Western media's privileging of Beyoncé's samplings over her own literary production, leading her to declare: "Her type of feminism is not mine." Although Adichie distanced herself from Beyoncé, she still commended her for "taking a stand on political and social issues" and "portraying a woman who is in charge of her own destiny, who does her own thing, and she has girl power."[68] In a public talk, she defended Beyoncé's right to "own her sexuality" and simultaneously to "identify as feminist."[69] The most damning critique of Beyoncé must be Morgan Parker's poetry collection *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé* (2017), which revolves around Beyoncé's flawless perfection ("a gloss will snowfall on your lips" / "I see my perfect breath") as a betrayal of her sex and her race. In "White Beyoncé," Parker plays on the "***Flawless" lyrics:

She's un-revolutionarily flawless . . .

She woke up like a million bucks
slipped into lacy panties it's always sunny . . .

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She performs and the coverage is breezy:
What rosy cheeks what milky vacancy

Her daughter learns about beauty
Discovers nothing surprising[70]

Or similarly, another poem in the same collection says:

I want to be flawed
all the way to bed. Wake up, flawless.
Subjected, flawless. Swallowed my tongue . . .
I made my bed so I have sex in it. (61)

Parker rails against Beyoncé's packaged aesthetics, demanding an accounting of the ugliness of American racism: "This is for all the grown women out there / Whose countries hate them and their brothers . . ." (76).[71]

Black Arts, Redux

Beyoncé draws deeply on the motifs of black motherhood and family as refuge from white racial oppression, sites for inculcating politically conscious subjectivities and collectivities, as do Deborah Willis, Patricia Hill Collins, Renée Cox, bell hooks, and Saidiya Hartman.[72] She cultivates a politics of intersectionality, critiquing multiple modes of state violence and oppression. Drawing on the creative labor of Erizku, Shire, and Vesco, she speaks to transnational flows of images, of borrowing, appropriating, sampling, recycling, reinventing, and reinterpreting—and ultimately refusing, challenging, protesting—even if those modalities are absorbed by the system that generates them. A British Somali Muslim woman writing about motherhood, a pregnant body suggesting the black Madonna, an Ethiopian American Muslim reconfiguring the white Euro-Christian imaginary, and a Costa Rican channeling Yoruban water orishas—all stand as a powerful counternarrative to the script of the Trump administration about African Americans, Mexicans, refugees, immigrants, and women. The carefully curated imagery was not just a circus of social media

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performativity but an intervention into the politics of US race relations. But the appropriation and sampling of their voices and artistic contributions for the glory of the Beyoncé brand raise ethical questions, especially in the light of the current realities of dislocated and undocumented populations worldwide.

In the 1960s, the Black Arts Movement "became a space in which Black radicalism, Islam, and the politics of the Muslim Third World had a powerful impact on the lyrical imaginations, sonic landscapes, and political visions."[73] Different branches of black activism at that time had lasting impact on legislation in the US, not just the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1964, but also the Immigration and Nationality (Hart-Celler) Act introduced into Congress the following year. The Hart-Celler Act had profound effects on the demographics of US society, abolishing immigration quotas based on national origin, race, and ethnicity, overturning restrictions on immigration from Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America, and making safe haven for refugees an immigration priority. When Lyndon Johnson signed the bill into law before the Statue of Liberty, he criticized the racism of the national origins quota system: "This system has been un-American in the highest sense . . . it will never again shadow the gate to the American Nation with the twin barriers of prejudice and privilege. Our beautiful America was built by a nation of strangers. . . . The land flourished because it was fed from so many sources—because it was nourished by so many cultures and traditions and peoples."[74]

"History," a *New York Times* article observed of Beyoncé, "is her stage."[75] During the first moments of the Trump presidency, Beyoncé helped create what bell hooks calls "a counter-hegemonic world of images that would stand as visual resistance, challenging racist images."[76] The photographs and poetry confronted another set of images that went viral in the days after the executive order was signed: Trump talking about Frederick Douglass on the first day of Black History Month; Ivanka Trump impervious to suffering at a gala in a silver gown; and Melania Trump eating diamond necklaces like spaghetti on the cover of *Vanity Fair México*. Confronting that SAMO, that "same ol' shit," was a delirious proliferation of images of migratory flows across continents, cultures, religious traditions, and aesthetic signifiers, all in a riot of color.[77]

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This signifier of the black mother is no mammy, no sexual oddity, no "bizarre deity," but a mother love goddess floating in the ether of social media, a "crazy in love" dreamworld that we cannot shake from our collective consciousness—and conscience.

Notes

1. Morgan Parker, *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé* (Portland, OR: Tin House, 2017), 12.

2. Beyoncé, "Formation," *Lemonade* (Parkwood Entertainment and Columbia Records, 2016).

3. John Mack Faragher, *A Great and Noble Scheme: The Tragic Story of the Expulsion of the French Acadians from Their American Homeland* (New York: W. W. Norton 2006), 306–10, 396–402.

4. Joseph S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2004).

5. "As we reclaim our literature, poetry has been the major voice of poor, working class, and Colored women." Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (New York: Ten Speed, 1984), 116; bell hooks, "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, ed. Deborah Willis (New York: New Press, 1996), 45–46.

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9. H. Samy Alim, "Who's Afraid of the Transracial Subject? Raciolinguistics and the Political Project of Transracialization,"

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in *Raciolinguistics: How Language Shapes Our Ideas about Race*, ed. H. Samy Alim, John R. Rickford, and Arnetha F. Ball (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 36–37.

10. Shantrelle Lewis, "'Formation' Exploits New Orleans' Trauma," *Slate*, 10 February 2016, slate.com/human-interest/2016/02/beyonces-formation-exploits-new-orleans-trauma.html.

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13. In an interview, Shire talks about workshops she teaches on the "art of healing through narrative" and "using poetry to heal trauma." "I wanted to share with people how I had found healing, through creating . . . the cathartic ritual of letting go and using memory and confession as a form of creation." Kameelah Janan Rasheed, "To Be Vulnerable and Fearless: An Interview with Writer Warsan Shire," *Well&Often Reader* (November 2012), wellandoftenpress.com/reader/to-be-vulnerable-and-fearless-an-interview-with-writer-warsan-shire/.

14. Warsan Shire, *Teaching My Mother How to Give Birth* (London: Flipped Eye, 2011).

15. Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 75.

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17. Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," *Souls* 18, no. 1 (2016): 171.

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Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty (New York: Vintage, 1997); Stephen Pimpare, *Ghettos, Tramps, and Welfare Queens: Down and Out on the Silver Screen* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

19. Willis, *Picturing Us*; Michael H. Cottman and Deborah Willis, *The Family of Black America* (New York: Crown, 1996); Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Deborah Willis, *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2009).

20. Warsan Shire, "for women who are difficult to love (the affirmation)," in *warsan versus melancholy (the seven stages of being lonely)*, 14 February 2012, warsanshire.bandcamp.com.

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22. Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 116–18.

23. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 129.

24. hooks, "Moving beyond Pain."

25. Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 5.

26. hooks, "Moving beyond Pain."

27. *Sunan Nasa'i* 3104, vol. 1, book 25, hadith 3106. The Arabic word for "paradise" (*janna*) also means "garden," which Erizku's floral images evoke.

28. Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, 118.

29. Lorraine O'Grady, "Olympia's Maid: Reclaiming Black Female Subjectivity," in *New Feminist Criticism: Art, Identity, Action*, ed. Joanna Frueh, Cassandra L. Langer, and Arlene Raven (New York: HarperCollins, 1994), 152.

30. miriam cooke, "Deploying the Muslimwoman," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 24, no. 1 (2008): 91–119. Cooke connects the

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concept of "Muslimwoman" to Joan Martin's "blackwoman" from Joan M. Martin, *More Than Chains and Toil: A Christian Work Ethic of Enslaved Women* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2000).

31. Sadia Abbas, *At Freedom's Limit: Islam and the Postcolonial Predicament* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014), 41–71.

32. Marnia Lazreg, *The Eloquence of Silence: Algerian Women in Question* (New York: Routledge, 1994); Leila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1993).

33. Taiye Selasi, "A Portrait of the Artist as a Young African Immigrant," *New York Times*, 8 May 2017.

34. "Black Venus" alludes to another history of literary/poetic representation—the occulted story of Jeanne Duval, Charles Baudelaire's Haitian mistress, reimagined in Angela Carter's short story "Black Venus" and James McManus's novel *Black Venus*. Baudelaire's poem "Sed non satiata" in *Fleurs du mal* describes Duval as a "bizarre deity, brown like the night" and a "pitiless demon." Édouard Manet's *Lady with a Fan* (1862) depicts Duval, a painting reinterpreted by Lorraine O'Grady in her diptychs juxtaposing images of Baudelaire and Duval, and by Carrie Mae Weems in her photograph *Portrait of a Woman Fallen from Grace and into the Hands of Evil* (1987). In a testament to the circulatory flows and migrations of these images, Weems's photograph graces the cover of Morgan Parker's 2017 poetry collection *There Are More Beautiful Things Than Beyoncé*.

35. Bryant Edwards, *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (London: John Stockdale, 1801), 34–35.

36. Rebecca Hawkes, "Beyoncé Isn't Making a Saartjie Baartman Film after All, Says a Representative for the Singer," *Telegraph*, 1 February 2016, www.telegraph.co.uk/film/movie-news/beyonce-saartjie-baartman-movie/. Beyoncé references "Sarah Baartman hips" in the song "Black Effect" from the Carters' *Everything Is Love* (Parkwood Entertainment, Sony Music, and Roc Nation, 2018).

37. Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*; Deborah Willis, ed., *Black Venus 2010: They Called Her "Hottentot"* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2010); T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting,

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Black Venus: Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999).

38. Alan Read, ed., *The Fact of Blackness: Frantz Fanon and Visual Representation* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1996), 150.

39. Wiley's oeuvre is replete with black Christ figures, and Erizku's photography clearly emulates his work. See Eugenie Tsai, ed., *Kehinde Wiley: A New Republic* (New York: Brooklyn Museum, 2015), 17, 41, 80.

40. Antwaun Sargent, "Artist Awol Erizku on Creating a New Way to Look at Race in Art," *Complex*, 7 August 2014, www.complex.com/style/2014/08/awol-erizku-the-only-way-is-up.

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42. The image is from *Opportunity* magazine in December 1941 and is also referred to as "Brown Madonna."

43. Willis and Williams, *The Black Female Body*, 150.

44. Janell Hobson, "The 'Batty' Politic: Toward an Aesthetic of the Black Female Body," *Hypatia* 18, no. 4 (2003): 87–105. See also Janell Hobson, *Venus in the Dark: Blackness and Beauty in Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

45. Warsan Shire, "I Have Three Hearts," *Beyonce.com*, 1 February 2017.

46. Solimar Otero and Toyin Falola, eds., *Yemoja: Gender, Sexuality, and Creativity in the Latina/o and Afro-Atlantic Diasporas* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2013), xix, xxiv. Also see Elizabeth Pérez, "'Nobody's Mammy': Yemayá as Fierce Foremother in Afro-Cuban Religions," in Otero and Falola, *Yemoja.*

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49. Jeanette Favrot Peterson, *Visualizing Guadalupe: From Black Madonna to Queen of the Americas* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), 6.

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51. hooks, "Photography and Black Life," 46–47.

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57. Souny, *Warsan Shire*, 34–47.

58. Indigo Williams, "Ask a Poet: Warsan Shire," *Indigowilliamspoetry* (blog), 30 July 2013.

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60. Warsan Shire, "Conversations about Home (at the Deportation Centre)," in *Teaching My Mother*, 24. Marta Bausells and Maeve Shearlaw, "Poets Speak Out for Refugees: 'No One Leaves Home, unless Home Is the Mouth of a Shark,'" *Guardian*, 16 September 2015, www.theguardian.com/books/2015/sep/16/poets-speak-out-for-refugees-; Lily Kuo, "This Poem Is Now the Rallying Call for Refugees: 'No One Leaves Home unless Home Is the Mouth of a Shark,'" *Quartz Africa*, 30 January 2017, qz.com/africa/897871/warsan-shires-poem-captures-the-reality-of-life-for-refugees-no-one-leaves-home-unless-home-is-the-mouth-of-a-shark/.

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Ellen McLarney is associate professor of Arabic literature and culture at Duke University. Her research focuses on Islamic popular culture and Islamic politics in the Middle East and the Muslim diaspora. Her book *Soft Force: Women in Egypt's Islamic Awakening* (2015) analyzes Muslim women's intellectual production on subjects like motherhood, family, work, and women's rights and liberation. She was a Humanities Fellow in religious studies at Stanford and a Hurford Family Fellow at the National Humanities Center. In 2018, she was a Fulbright Scholar in Argentina.

Figure 8. Beyoncé underwater as Yemoja. Photograph by Daniela Vesco

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