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The Exoticisation of Motherhood: The Body Politics of Pregnant Femininity through the Lens of Celebrity Motherhood

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ABSTRACT

At a time when parenthood seems to have become almost mandatory regardless of sexual orientation, and children serve as fashionable props on Instagram profiles and in lifestyle magazines, this article examines the way in which pregnant femininity and maternity is engulfed by neoliberal discourses of aestheticisation and disciplining of the body. It offers a cultural discourse analysis of the body politics of pregnant femininity through the lens of exoticised celebrity motherhood. In order to understand present day celebrity pregnancies, it draws upon the new 'cult of motherhood' and revolves around Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles as case studies in exoticised celebrity motherhood, through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding both women's pregnancies. It sees them as being part of a larger narrative that racializes and exoticises shapely (non-white) bodies, while disciplining both women – yet to varying degrees- within the contemporary Anglo-European norms of beauty. Given the educational and pedagogical role of celebrities and their construction of a 'public-private self' (Marshall 2010), global celebrity figures Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles-Carter are seen offering a 'grammar of conduct' (Skeggs and Wood, 2011) around which the moral, and the maternal, self is being articulated and gauged.

Keywords: celebrity, motherhood, pregnancy, exoticisation

WHY THE FUSS ABOUT PREGNANT FEMINITY?

The human body in Western modernity has been enveloped in rationality, being disciplined for work and labour while concurrently operating as the paramount symbol for the subject to demonstrate their self-control and worth. This way, bodily conduct is normalised through the internalisation of a set of social controls while people construct and project a sacred, deep self by means of their bodies (Sassatelli, 2010). Advertising, fashion and commercial culture stresses the firm and toned-up body, as the professionals, practices and spaces of keep-fit culture proliferate – gyms, fitness centres, and health clubs offer expert advice, dietary regimes, personal trainers, and specialised classes that cater to individual needs. This is coupled by a mushrooming of specialised, women's, men's, lifestyle, gossip magazines and websites which offer tons of 'how to' tips on routines, fashion and comportment while performing physical exercise.

The aestheticisation of the body has been extensively and invariably discussed. For some it is a part of an all-encompassing consumer culture, where people attend to their image in an instrumental way, for social acceptability and sense of self-worth is reflected on how a person looks (Featherstone, 2010). Therefore, the modification and enhancement (cosmetic or not) of the body through a number of regimes and technologies is justified by the need to construct a beautiful appearance, and by extension a beautiful self. Other discourses take a more sympathetic view of individualisation – arguing that the self becomes a reflexive and secular project which works around a refined project of body presentation (Giddens, 1991). Within this fitness culture, wider cultural values - the ideals of the fit, toned and slender body, coded as both a conspicuous sign of personal worth and the result of individual choice - are being inscribed and mediated across the globe (Sassatelli, 2010).

The pregnant body has not escaped the professionalisation and proliferation of fitness routines, now imbued with a sense of suave luxury – wellness spas offering aerial yoga classes to pregnant women have a different ring to them and divert attention from the 'macho' world of the 'gymnasium' where big, bulky men were pumping iron. Starting from celebrity pregnancies and by now enveloping almost all pregnancies, pregnant femininity is 'framed' (to use Goffman) within a 'stay fit, stay active' context. Goffman uses the notion of frame to indicate those

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principles of organisation that govern events and activities, and our subjective involvement in them (1974: 10-11). Frames provide a 'context for understanding' and for making 'reference' to what is relevant and appropriate – in this case, pregnant femininity, and motherhood at large, is understood within a 'fitness' frame which values the fit, slender, tight female body over any other.

An emerging body of feminist scholarship discusses how broader political and socio-economic shifts interact with cultural constructions of femininity and motherhood (Ennis, 2014; Hanson 2004; Littler, 2013; Plant, 2010; Ross 2016; Tyler, 2011; Wilson and Chivers Yochim 2015). It is such kind of scholarship that intrigued and encouraged me to join the discussion around celebrity motherhood and femininity, especially the one that revolves around the highly debated femininity of Beyonce Knowles-Carter and Kim Kardashian. Coming from an audience studies perspective, where subject positioning and the construction of meaning amongst readers is of primary importance, I do not pretend to preclude how socially constructed audiences make sense of celebrity pregnant embodiment, and, essentially, motherhood. Rather, what I want to do here is to offer a cultural discourse analysis of the body politics of pregnant femininity through the lens of exoticised celebrity motherhood.

In order to understand present day celebrity pregnancies, I will draw upon the new 'cult of motherhood', as this is contextualized within the 'new domesticity', 'mommy culture' and postfeminism. I will use Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles as case studies in (racialised, exoticised) celebrity motherhood, through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding both women's pregnancies. My decision to focus on them stems from the way both women are part of 'transnational celebritihood' – being instantly recognisable and stirring publicity waves wherever they go, and in that sense they constitute a 'common conceptual currency' across space and cultures. For example, even though American, they both resonate in Greece, whether as pop icons[1], or by 'making news': following the release of Beyonce's and Jay-Z's video clip 'Apeshit' in June 2018, shot in the Louvre and featuring the Venus de Milo among other sculptures, the mayor of Milos invited Beyonce to the island as part of a newly launched municipal campaign to bring Venus 'back home'[2]. As far as Kim Kardashian is concerned, she was widely reported when, at seven months pregnant, she visited Mykonos and Santorini with sisters Kourtney and Khloe, the rest of the clan and a TV crew of 50 in August 2013[3].

In fact, both women exhibit what Jones and Weber describe as 'transmediated continuity' (2015) when they explore the relationship between the media and maternal embodiment. Indeed, Kim and Beyonce exemplify such continuity pre-, through and post- pregnancy, in the sense that stories about them have flowed and intensified across diverse media platforms such as the internet, tabloids, cultural critics, fans, anonymous commentators, social media, or retail merchandising[4], though one performs it differently than the other. For example, in Kim's case, her body and the scandal surrounding it – whether in the form of the private sex tapes she did with rapper Ray J in 2003, or in the speculation surrounding her cosmetic procedures[5]- help constitute intermedial continuity. Kim's reality celebrity – her currency as a reality star- secures the attention capital that makes her relevant for the convergence of neoliberalism and postfeminism; within it, good citizens deploy self-management strategies that turn the self into a viable commodity and reinforce self-display as a measure of personal value for women (Jones and Weber, 2015: 25).

I am also interested in them because I see them as being part of a larger narrative that racialises and exoticises shapely (non- white) bodies, while disciplining both women – yet to varying degrees- within the contemporary Anglo-European norms of beauty[6]. Whether it is about Beyonce's 'infamous'[7], 'bombshell'[8] curves, or about how

[1] Beyonce's 2009 concert in Athens sold out and was a huge success; various seasons of *Keeping up with the Kardashians* have been steadily on offer on mainstream terrestrial and cable TV in Greece.

[2] GTP, 28 June 2018, Greek Mayor Invites Superstar Beyonce to Milos, https://news.gtp.gr/2018/06/28/greek-mayor-invites-superstar-beyonce-milos/

[3] Hollywood Greek Reporter, 28 April 2013, The Kardashians Take Over Mykonos, https://hollywood.greekreporter.com/2013/04/28/the-kardashians-take-over-mykonos/

[4] Here, for example, I'm referring to the Kardashian's Dash retail stores, brought to a halt in 2018 (Inc. com, April 25, 2018, https://www.inc.com/gene-marks/kim-kardashian-made-a-big-mistake-by-closing-her-dash-stores.html) and to Beyonce retail (https://shop.beyonce.com/).

[5] As shown in recent media speculation about Kardashian plastic surgery. Harper's Bazaar, Nov. 13, 2018 https://www.harpersbazaar.com.au/beauty/kardashian-surgery-17663; Mirror, Aug. 18, 2018, https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashians-plastic-surgery-timeline-10292368

[6] Further below, I will discuss the way in which Kim Kardashian, although white, performs and comes across as non-white.

[7] The Sun, 11 Aug. 2016, Sun, Sea and Bey: Beyoncé works her infamous curves as she enjoys a boat trip in Italy with Jay Z and Blue Ivy, https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/1602640/beyonce-works-her-infamous-curves-as-she-enjoys-a-boat-trip-in-italy-with-jay-z-and-blue-ivy/

[8] Daily Mail, 30 May 2013, Too bootylicious? http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2333226/Beyonce-row-H-M-discovering-wanted-downsize-curves-swimwear-campaign.html

Kim Kardashian 'flaunts'[9] her 'hourglass'[10] ones, the truth is that both women have been part of the same normalising discourse of whiteness that has constructed an identity for Jennifer Lopez and Salma Hayek through their bodies (their booties, more likely)[11]. In equal measure, Beyonce and Kim Kardashian can be seen to (re)form the beauty ideal, marketing their 'shapely' posteriors (Angharad and Molina, 2010), and illustrating in the process the implicit antinomy (between exoneration and vilification of curves) embedded in pregnant embodiment.

In this respect, both women demonstrate 'unruliness' – for in some way they both step outside the boundaries of what is perceived as 'good' womanhood, whether through their shapely figures or through their exuding sensuality. And although the unruly woman is perceived to be increasingly under threat in the Trump era, unruly women surround us in our every day lives, becoming yet more powerful when in celebrity form, where they come across more layered and are fraught with contradictions (Petersen, 2017: xi). While sometimes women are allowed some level of unruliness, when it comes to women of colour[12], the rules of 'acceptable' unruliness become more difficult to bent and these women can easily be seen as 'troubling', 'angry' and 'out of control'. Yet given how celebrities are our most binding and visible embodiments of ideology at work, outlining the way we regulate representations of anything - race, femininity, pregnancy – it is interesting to explore how unruly celebrities simultaneously transgress and fortify dominant norms. Whether the case is Kim Kardashian who refuses to hide her heavily pregnant belly, Beyonce's conflation of sexiness and maternity, Serena Williams' s muscular 'like a man's', yet curvy 'like a woman's', body, or Nicki Minaj's sensual trespass into the male-dominated sphere of rap, unruly women of all kinds of shape, form, age and colour create feelings of abject (Petersen, 2017: xv-xvii). Following the notion that the celebrity mom profile is the conduit for the culture of 'new momism' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004; Moir 2015), I'm also interested in teasing out the tensions that exist when the celebrity motherhood of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce disrupt the neoliberal postfeminist maternal body.

MOTHERHOOD, THE NEOLIBERAL BODY PROJECT AND PREGNANT EMBODIMENTS

Sharon Hays' seminal notion of 'intensive mothering', coined in 1996, has been instrumental in shaping our understanding of the amplifying cultural demands posed on mothers in order to channel extraordinary amounts of time, resources and labour, both physical and emotional, into their children (Hays, 1996). In most Western societies supported by neoliberal ideologies, mothering takes place on top of other, professional or equally challenging, responsibilities (Ross, 2016: 126). This tendency has been further exacerbated across the global North amidst rampant neoliberalism (seen for example in the waning of government or community support for mothers and childcare), increasingly leading mothers to recode and rationalise everyday family life, to the extent that they internalise the idea that it is *their* responsibility to realize the impossible (Wilson and Chivers Yochim, 2015). Yet, contemporary motherhood sits uncomfortably at the intersection of conflicting cultural changes and ideologies brought about by the postfeminist and neoliberal turns. Indeed, while the beneficiaries of post-feminist sensibilities have been raised to be independent, assertive and to exercise personal choice, once they become mothers, they realise that postfeminist neoliberal mothering coexists with unchanged, old-fashioned values regarding family management and responsibilities (placing primary responsibility for childcare and domestic life on mothers) (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 36).

In that respect, in their struggle to 'have it all', present-day moms find themselves, in 'double entanglement' (McRobbie, 2008). In this paradoxical context, women's agency is celebrated, yet concurrently being contained within an unattainable ideal of motherhood, which Douglas and Michaels, (2004) name as 'new momism' and explain as follows. They view a chasm between the honey-hued, as they call them, ideals of perfect motherhood in the mass media and the reality of mothers' everyday lives, within which mothers are conditioned to an 'onslaught of beatific imagery, romantic fantasies, self-righteous sermons, psychological warnings, terrifying movies about losing their children, even more terrifying news stories about abducted and abused children, and totally unrealistic advice about how to be the most perfect and revered mom in the neighborhood, maybe even in the whole country' (: 2). At the same time mothers have difficulty escaping the standards of perfection set and reinforced by the media,

[9] The Mirror, 1 April 2017, Kim Kardashian flaunts curves in tight shorts, http://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-flaunts-curves-tight-10137134

[10] The Sun, 26 April 2017, Rear We Go Again: Kim Kardashian back to her best as she slips into another bikini and reveals her hourglass curves https://www.thesun.co.uk/tvandshowbiz/3421669/kim-kardashian-shows-off-her-hourglass-curves-in-barely-there-bikini-during-all-girls-holiday-with-her-sister-kourtney-to-mexico/

[11] The normalisation of whiteness also includes hair (Angharad and Molina 2010), as illustrated in various reports about Beyonce's 'sleek' long hair (Vibe, 11 Feb 2013, Get The Look: Beyoncé's Sleek Hair From the Grammys, https://www.vibe.com/2013/02/get-the-look-beyonces-hair-from-the-grammys), or in 'how to get Kim Kardashian's sleek hair' tutorials, (People, 2 May 2017, How to Get Kim Kardashian's Super-Straight, Shiny Hair, https://people.com/style/kim-kardashian-straight-shiny-hair-how-to/)

[12] Although Caucasian, Kim Kardashian plays the race card successfully as will be explained further below.

they are worn down by an all-encompassing culture that suggests that however much you do for and love your kids, it is never enough. The spread of such ideal motherhood has been further facilitated and accentuated from the early noughties onwards by growing media representations that pitched selfless 'moms' against 'welfare mothers' (Douglas and Michaels, 2004).

Whether within a more conservative frame, like Sarah Palin's 'mama grizzly'[13], or a more liberal one, like Michelle Obama's assumption of the 'Mom-in-Chief' moniker[14], motherhood is revered, idealised and branded – even flaunted- across a variety of platforms. In *Postfeminist Celebrity and Motherhood: Brand Mom*, Jorie Lagerway (2017) discusses contemporary popular culture's obsession with moms, as it constructs an iconic, heroic, and supposedly universal, mother figure, fulfilled by the intense affective labour of motherhood while also being intertwined with capitalist brand culture.

Hence, motherhood becomes a potent mechanism of identity construction within everyday life, and Moir (2015) is among those cultural critics who discuss it as a potential lucrative endeavour for celebrities who want to reinvent themselves. She mentions a number of (predominantly white) celebrities whose lifestyle brands and children's apparel are legitimized by the stars' status, expertise and identity as mothers. Whether it is about The Honest Company, Jessica Alba's[15] 'wellness brand'[16] of biodegradable diapers and other baby merchandise, which 'errs on the side of caution' because they believe 'you shouldn't have to choose between what works and what's good for you'; Tori Spelling's baby clothing line (recently under fire for stealing another company's designs[17]); or Gwen Stefani's more alternative clothes line 'at budget prices' for Target[18], maternity provides an easily identifiable state with which celebrities can mould common experiences with audiences, regardless of their rank in the star system. In what is seen as a highly chaotic consumer environment, motherhood affords celebrities the development of a brand identity (Moir, 2015: 51).

This self-sacrificing mom is seen as 'a hallmark of postfeminist culture and has become an integral part of how we understand adult women in popular media' (Lagerway, 2017: 2) today. Lagerway uses TIME's controversial 2012 cover[19], featuring a young, slender, blonde, conventionally beautiful mother and her 3-year old son while breastfeeding, to press upon us the normative ideal of white, beautiful, middle class motherhood post -2000. In the age of the 'new momism', maternity becomes fashionable and competitive – not merely in the sense that (almost) every woman 'needs' to become a mother, but also in terms of performance, i.e. how women 'do' motherhood.

Such a revival of the 1950s revival of 'the cult of domesticity' – a 'new domesticity'- for millennial women who rediscover the crafts of a 'new femininity' has not gone unnoticed. Whether in the form of the 'queen of food porn/domestic goddess' Nigela Lawson (Hollows, 2003), or in a number of high-profile women who gave up their careers in order to become stay-at-home moms[20], domestic femininity experiences a strong comeback amongst millennial women[21], while also refueling the so-called 'mommy wars'[22]. This, voluntary, change in lifestyle as a way-out of the work-life dilemma is known as 'downshifting' (Parkins 2009) – a narrative that tries to bridge feminism with 'traditional' femininity [as] 'it tries to imagine a solution to the problem of inhabiting contemporary femininities (Hollows, 2006: 111).

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[13] CBS News, The Most Memorable Political Quotes of 2010, Sarah Palin Introduces America to Mama Grizzles, https://www.cbsnews.com/pictures/the-most-memorable-political-quotes-of-2010/2/

[14] Hayden 2016; MSNBC, Michelle Obama, 'mom-in-chief'; Sep. 8, 2012, https://www.msnbc.com/up-with-chris-hayes/watch/michelle-obama-mom-in-chief-44111939741

[15] Alba downplays and elides any connotations of ethnicity.

[16] The Honest Company, Inc. https://www.honest.com/about-us/who-we-are

[17] INQUISITR, 23 October 2017, Tori Spelling's 'Baby By Tori' Comes Under Fire, Spelling Accused Of Ripping Off Another Designer, https://www.inquisitr.com/4570991/tori-spelling-baby-by-tori-designer-baby-clothes/

[18] Rolling Stone, 18 July 2011, 'Gwen Stefani Designs Kids Clothes For Target', https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-news/gwen-stefani-designs-kids-clothes-for-target-247103/

[19] TIME,10 May 2012, Behind the Cover: Are you Mom Enough? http://time.com/3450144/behind-the-cover-are-you-mom-enough/

[20] Various examples circulate in the literature: Brenda Barnes, ex Pepsi Cola North America President (Genz 2009); Leslie Morgan Steiner, former Washington Post Magazine General Manager, before she became a global celebrity consultant on inspirational parenting and work-life balancing (Parkins 2009).

[21] Truth be told, for many women, domesticity is not equated with housewifery, as many of them work from home and are breadwinners (Forbes, 9 Febr. 2018, More Millenial Women Are Becoming Stay at Home Moms – Here's Why). Attitudes about stay-at-home women vary across regions and countries, with childrearing increasing levels of part-time work among mothers, rather than fathers, in most countries. Countries with relatively high proportions preferring families with stay-at-home women are developing countries in South Asia and the Middle East. In contrast, in Europe, preference for families with stay-at-home moms is low. In between come developing and developed countries such as Brazil, China, Russia and the United States, where about one-quarter of men and women prefer families with stay-at-home moms (Yale Global Online, 25 Jan. 2018, Despite Growing Gender Equality, More Women Stay at Home Than Men, https://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/despite-growing-gender-equality-more-women-stay-home-men

[22] 'Mommy wars' refer to the ongoing debate between stay-at-home and working mothers, which have been in circulation since the 1980s, yet have attained further resonance since the turn of the 21st century, prompted by popular media texts such as Leslie Morgan Steiner's *Mommy Wars: Stay-at-Home and Career Moms Face Off on Their Choices, Their Lives, Their Families* (2006), Marie Claire's 'Modern Mothers- Who's Doing it Best?' (2007), or Daily Mirror's 'Young, highly educated and proud to be a housewife', 5 Sept. 2017.

However, from a postfeminist perspective, the figure of the housewife/mother is no longer seen as an emblem of female oppression but, rather, as someone who renegotiates and resignifies her domestic/feminist position (Genz, 2009). Indeed, instead of staying within the exclusionary logic of either/or, where women are forced to choose between independence or subordination to the domestic/maternal subject position, Genz argues for the inclusionary logic of both/and, which leaves room for the ambiguities and intricacies inherent in a postfeminist position. This way, she asserts, postfeminism makes room for the 'altered stage of gendered conflicts and transformations, a diversification of feminist issues that women face in a postfeminist age' (2009: 53). Such tensions are no better illustrated than in the flourishing genre of 'momlit' –featuring novels such as Allison Pearson's 'I Don't Know How She Does it' (2003), which sold over a million copies in the UK alone[23], Fiona Neil's 'The Secret Life of a Slummy Mummy' (2007), or Christina Hopkinson's 'The Pile of Stuff at the Bottom of the Stairs' (2011). Overall, momlit foregrounds the struggle between the home and the workplace modern women are faced with, in the much sought-after effort to strike the right work/life balance. Quite often, the solution to the feminist/feminine conundrum lies in the heroine's part-time employment, affording her the best of both worlds – a life 'in balance', where she can, in effect, 'choose' to 'have it all' (Genz, 2009: 59). In fact, 'momlit's increasing popularity has led to the pervasiveness of phrases such as 'having it all' and 'yummy mommy' to the extent they have become common tropes associated with contemporary motherhood and strengthened by the cultural politics of neoliberal consumer capitalism (Moir, 2015: 53).

In addition to the arguments about how mothers are unfairly positioned to absorb the damage from neoliberal policies (Ross, 2016; Wilson and Chivers Yochim, 2017), various scholars discuss the new meanings the body has taken on, on as a result of the neoliberal turn (Dworkin and Wachs, 2009; Gershon, 2011; Jette, 2009). What this means is that as neoliberal consumption and politics have become more pronounced over the past thirty years, the body has been rendered the target of purposeful action in its own right – a locus for self-entrepreneurship and self-care. As a result, the body is the place where self-reflexive management, personal agency and good neoliberal citizenship is enacted. We experience our bodies as prized commodities, and the way we manage them is a marker of 'healthy' neoliberal subjectivity (or not). Furthermore, within neoliberalism, the body has become central for self-identity, all the more because well-being is portrayed as a personal responsibility (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 46). Practices of 'body making' – cosmetic surgery, working out, weight regulation, fitness culture, personal trainers – are intertwined with gender identity in the sense that the way to reconcile femininity and the body is through 'feminine' body management practices. Thus, women's bodies are mobilized via neoliberal sensibilities as a premier symbol of the good postfeminist neoliberal citizenship (48).

The pressure on motherhood for an ideal fit body is growing both from within (through a process of self-governance whereby subjects internalize the normalising practices, techniques, mentalities and rationalities that govern the maternal body) and from without (through celebrity media, publicity reports on celebrity pregnancies). The body – even more so, the pregnant body – becomes a 'manageable asset', to be regulated and kept under control. Failing to do so is viewed as a signifier of 'deficient' neoliberal citizenship, selfhood and motherhood (Tyler, 2011). At the same time, overweight moms (and moms-to-be) find out that they also lack sexual agency as well as maternal status, for, increasingly, mothers have to negotiate standards of feminine performance and maternal subjectivity.

CELEBRITY MOMS

Within the new culture of 'momism', celebrity pregnancies become the 'new centerfold' – I'm not necessarily using the term with sexual connotations, though without excluding them – as the world watches with vigilance their celebrity bumps grow, monitoring them from afar, and expecting them to go back to the 'right' size soon after they give birth. Celebrities, in fact, become the cultural intermediaries that manage and help shape discursive constructions of contemporary motherhood, while delimiting the frame of 'respectable' maternity - more often than not associated with slender, disciplined, toned, (usually) white, female bodies rather than more 'unruly', 'loud' and shapely (quite often, though not exclusively, non-white) figures. These unruly women compete against a more pervasive and palatable form of femininity – the lifestyle branded motherhood of icons such as Reese Witherspoon, Blake Lovely, or Gwyneth Paltrow, women with 'adorable pregnancies', who have embraced the 'new domesticity', never wear or do the wrong thing, and are straight and white (Petersen, 2017: xviii).

This heightened interest in celebrity motherhood is hardly surprising, given the fascination that has engulfed Western pregnant embodiment since the 18th century. Hardly a thing of today, the 'bump watch' has been part of

[23] The Guardian, 6 April 2011, 'Mum lit: a chore thing', 'The chick lit fans have all grown up, got married and started reading 'mum lit'' reports Zoe Williams (https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/apr/06/mum-lit-christina-hopkinson-books). Vogue's Anne Wintour described Neil's book as 'a literary phenomenon to rival Bridget Jones', while publishers reported that mum-lit had become a publishing "sensation" as fans of chick-lit were having families (The Telegrapgh, 4 June 2007, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1553542/Slummy-Mummy-is-the-toast-of-US-Vogue.html)

a sophisticated array of social intervention and control mechanisms that mark the precipitation of medical intervention and monitoring of the pregnant body and sexuality, ever since midwives gradually surrendered authority of maternity to man-midwives/obstetricians (Hanson, 2004). So, although we may have come a long way since expecting mothers were required to stay at home, hiding their 'embarrassment' as a visible manifestation of sexuality,[24] women's waistlines continue to fascinate and attract unwarranted attention, turning what is a private affair to public spectacle[25]. Lagerway (2017) argues the most highly valued, visible and celebrated images and performances of pregnancy and motherhood at the time are those which are most brandable; celebrities, she says, 'cultivate branded identities to navigate the contradictory demands of postfeminism, a neoliberal emphasis on individualism and entrepreneurialism, and the professional or semi-professional requirements of their media' (3). As the new celebrity moms come to define and romanticize 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler 2011), the maternal body becomes the symbol and the 'management tool' for both the ideal fit body and 'perfect' motherhood (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015, 49). Drawing on Foucaldian notions of governmentality – as the organized techniques, mentalities and rationalities of a government to produce citizens best suited to fulfil the government's policies – Hallstein O'Brien suggests that

> '[…] neoliberal subjects are disciplined to view themselves as selves to be managed and, as such, self-regulate themselves to adhere to neoliberal rationalities. [….] Among other things, this means that neoliberal subjects view themselves as having "improvable assets" that they reflexively manage' (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015: 45)

To elaborate, body shape stands as a marker of good health and –more significantly - of morally good maternal citizenship, and popular media love to praise slender-pregnant, bikini-ready celebrity bodies while they loathe those celebrity moms who could not discipline themselves enough. This way, the maternal body becomes a field on which broader anxieties about ideal femininity are played out, rationalised and negotiated.

The now mandatory postpartum body work is a corollary of the above trends, putting increasingly more pressure upon everyday women to look like their pre-pregnancy selves. "You look nothing like you've just given birth' becomes an often-heard accolade, yet still represents something unrealistic for an abundance of women. All the more reason why it is so important when celebrity moms take a stance and talk openly about the 'post baby' 'body real politik'. In this spirit, Jennifer Garner, in the 'Ellen Show', pushed back against expectations about the body and pregnancy when she admitted having 'a baby bump' not because she was pregnant again, but because she'd had three children already – [my bump is here to stay and everybody should get used to it][26].

Other celebrity moms become vocal about the postpartum pressure exerted on women to get 'bikini-ready', or 'runaway ready' in an attempt to exonerate baby bumps and normalize bodies of 'real women' instead. Hilaria Baldwin[27] and Katherine Heiglis[28] are among those high-profile moms who came out, showing and talking about their post-pregnancy bodies in an attempt to 'normalize the post-partum body', criticising the relentless body shaming of maternal subjectivities. Having said this, it's worth thinking about the degree to which celebrities capitalise on a public performance of feminist speech acts when being outspoken about post-partum body politics.

WHEN DID WE START AESTHETICISING CELEBRITY MOTHERHOOD?

Pregnancy has been reconfigured into an aesthetic 'project of the self', in which maternity is the quintessential expression of neoliberal femininity - informed by the notion of 'pregnant beauty' (Tyler, 2011). Tyler traces the representational shift in the visual configuration of the pregnant body in the early nineties – a time when popular culture started to be inundated by images of pregnant women in pop videos, on the catwalk, in soap operas, in advertising, on cinema screens.

Above all, however, it was the front cover of *Vanity Fair* in August 1991, captured by the lens of Annie Leibovitz and featuring a naked and heavily pregnant Demi Moore that broke the taboo around the representation of pregnancy. This celebrity photo shoot changed expected motherhood from a private affair into a sexy, embodied and public performance, and launched an endless array of 'bump chic' generations of women. For them, pregnancy

[24] It is interesting how, in Spanish, being pregnant is still an embarrassment – 'el embarazo'.
[25] Jezebel, 2 Nov. 2011, A Brief History of the Bump Watch, https://jezebel.com/a-brief-history-of-the-bump-watch-5754158; and among many others, see for example Perez Hilton's Baby Bump Watch, at https://perezhilton.com/category/baby-bump-watch/ with news about the latest pregnancies among the glitterati.
[26] Parents. Com (undated) Jennifer Garner Confirms Baby Bump, https://www.parents.com/pregnancy/everything-pregnancy/jennifer-garner-confirms-she-has-a-baby-bump-but-its-not-what-you/
[27] People, 21 May 2018, Hilaria Baldwin Hopes to 'Normalize the Postpartum Figure' by Showing Off Body 1 Day After Baby No. 4 https://people.com/parents/hilaria-baldwin-body-after-baby-fourth-child-selfie/
[28] People, 16 Celeb Moms on Loving Their Post-Baby Bodies, 12 July 2018, https://people.com/parents/anne-hathaway-blake-lively-celeb-moms-talk-body-image/#katherine-heigl

was no longer an embarrassment or an abject physical state - rather, a chance to have a differently sexy and fashionable figure. Let us consider how different this level of visibility and glamorisation of pregnancy is, compared to a time – in the USA of the 1950s- when media portrayals of pregnancy and maternity were scarce and even the use of the word 'pregnant' was prohibited, despite the dominance of the 'cult of domesticity' where the housewife/mother ruled[29].

Tyler discusses how light in this photograph is used to denote whiteness, making Moore look like she is glowing from within. Wearing nothing else but her diamond earrings and a large diamond ring, Moore stands for wealth, success, class and stardom. Despite the visual reference to 15th century representations of Madonnas – which normally were devoid of sexual desire, nevertheless- Moore's pregnant embodiment exudes something sacred, maternal and deeply erotic (2001), which also accounts for the turmoil created in the US as to how to classify it. Indeed, given the invisibility of pregnant bodies in popular media until then, the publication of Moore's photograph took US newsagents by surprise, for they didn't know how to 'read' it; therefore, in several cases it was placed on the top shelf, next to pornography. The cover created the most heated controversy in *Vanity Fair*'s history – surrounded by ninety-five television spots, sixty-four radio shows, 1,500 newspaper articles and a dozen cartoons and causing a number of newsagent chains to refuse to carry the issue, as 'unsuitable' for 'family stores'. Still, it became the best-selling single issue in the magazine's history, while the front cover photograph made the headlines on news bulletins around the globe (Tyler, 2001: 75). The 1991 *Vanity Fair* cover paved the way for numerous pregnant celebrities to follow suit, for ever changing our perceptions of the mediation of pregnant femininity. As a result, young expecting mothers for some time now sport 'skintight' sartorial choices, exposing the belly instead of hiding it underneath large and loose habits. Such 'cool' pregnant subjectivity comes at a price, though, for expecting moms experience today intense self-surveillance and self-regulation.

However, now that being pregnant is no longer considered an obstacle for great sex, it shouldn't escape us that only specific types of embodied pregnancy are considered beautiful and sexually attractive – white, tight, slender, youthful bodies with social capital and aspiration. This implies two things in my view: 1. That those pregnant bodies (black, Latino, low-class, non-slender) which do not conform to normative pregnant beauty, are not seen in the same light of respectability and sexiness; 2. The normative ideal of pregnant beauty, the slender body, obscures the relentless work required to achieve it, especially after giving birth. Celebrity websites and the popular press and magazines endlessly scrutinise post-pregnancy celebrity bodies, offering expert advice as to how quickly to make this goal possible, from the various 'mommy makeovers' – literally 'technologies of the self' – readily available, such as tummy tucks, breast lifts, breast augmentations, early elective C –sections, to dietary and fitness routines. This renders the pregnant body a 'disciplinary' figure, which is, in itself, '[…] symptomatic of a deeply entrenched 'disciplinary neoliberalism' in which the most intimate bodily experiences have become thoroughly capitalized' (Tyler, 2011: 28).

Having argued above how pregnant femininity is seen to represent a particular, neoliberal amalgam of postfeminist maternity and womanhood, I will now focus on the (sexual) politics of the (exoticised) pregnant body, by focusing on Beyonce and Kim Kardashian.

BEING PREGNANT IN THE AGE OF POSTFEMINISM: KIM KARDASHIAN...

Much of Kim Kardashian's fame relates to her 'sizeable assets' – her chest and posterior – heating up public discussions around her pregnancies. Although we've come a long way since popular media encouraged (white middle class) women to gain weight in order to look attractive -because 'skinny girls are not glamour girls'[30] –, the neoliberal construction of the slender-pregnant body has engulfed her pregnancies in intense media scrutiny and celebrity gossip, leading *Vogue* to ponder why American media were so mean to her[31]. During her first pregnancy, in 2013, Kim Kardashian was twice tagged as a 'whale' as a result of the weight she had gained. In the first example, Kim features on the cover of British popular press magazine *You* in juxtaposition to Kate Middleton; the main caption reads 'Battle of the bumps', followed by a smaller one: 'Kate the Waif' vs 'Kim the Whale'. Hallstein-O'Brien (2015) discusses how the British media constructed Middleton as the 'good' princess against the 'bad' neoliberal reality TV star. In so doing, the media discourse framed the way pregnant women should manage themselves and their bodies while preparing for motherhood. At the same time, they were making the case that good body management is a prerequisite for and symbol of good future mothering (Hallstein-O'Brien, 2015: 52).

[29] Television history was made in the US on 19 January 1953, when Lucy Ricardo, played by a pregnant Lucy Ball, gave birth in front of the television audience, attracting an audience of 44 million viewers (compared to a mere 29 million viewers who watched Dwight D. Eisenhower's televised presidential inauguration the following day) (Bor, 2013).

[30] Jezebel, 29 Nov. 2011, "The Good Ol' Days, When You Weren't Fat Enough', http://jezebel.com/5863117/vintage-ads-encourage-women-to-gain-weight

[31] Vogue, 1 June 2015, 'Why Was America So Mean to Pregnant Kim Kardashian?' http://www.vogue.com/article/kim-kardashian-pregnant-media-hate

Public vile against Kardashian reached new heights with a meme that went viral, comparing Kim Kardashian, in black and white, to Shamu the killer whale, and asking 'who wore it best?'[32] . By pitting one woman against the other, the media set off a popularity contest as to whose pregnancy was the best[33].

Once pregnant again in 2015, the media became obsessed comparing Kim's two pregnancy styles,[34] making sure they reported how she engorged on junk food and had a rough time controlling her ravenous appetite[35].

Although still curvy today, Kim 'has worked hard on her post-baby body' and has streamlined herself following a high intensity, interval training workout, accompanied by a diet designed 'to burn fat and increase her strength and endurance while keeping her curves sexy' [36]. Through such bodily 'containment', Kim has turned an 'excessive' body into one 'in control', in order to become a post-partum 'disciplinary figure' herself (Tyler, 2011). Concurrently, media and expert speculation about the procedures she has undergone to forge and secure her (in)famous hourly shape continue unabatedly[37] – with most discussion revolving around her large posterior, thought to have been 'enhanced' by means of a 'Brazilian butt lift'[38].

Apart from being a neoliberal 'project of the self' – to be capitalised upon through her Instagram and Snapchat accounts, to the extent that she may 'break the internet' several times over-,[39] her uplifted derriere has both racialised her and preserved racial (and class) differences. Although the larger rear has been historically associated with women of colour, and continues to be fetishised today, it was initially introduced into mainstream popular culture through the body of Jennifer Lopez. In fact, a lot has been said in the popular media about Jennifer Lopez's 'booty', thus gendering and racialising Lopez as being outside the boundaries of whiteness and middle-class respectability (Molina Guzman, 2010; Molina Guzmán and Valdivia, 2004). For example, for some Hispanic cultural critics the fact that Lopez has embraced her booty as a marketable commodity of desirable beauty[40] points to her ethnic pride while challenging white cultural dominance (Negrón-Muntaner, 2002; Ovalle, 2011). Her big backside upsets white hegemonic constructions of beauty and good taste because it is seen as proof of the dark excess of Latino and African diaspora cultures – while at the same time offers one of the largest Latino populations in the US rare visibility. Furthermore, as Lopez quite often moves ambiguously between whiteness and Latinidad, references to the big (non-white) booty work to preserve rather than challenge racial differences, and although she has lost weight over the years, her posterior continues to be fetishised and circulated as a remarkable 'Latina butt' (Hallstein-O'Brien, 2015: 72). In this respect, Lopez encapsulates 'racial mobility' as she oscillates 'between the normalcy of whiteness and the exoticism of black' (Ovalle, 2011: 7). Drawing on her Armenian descent to authenticate herself, Kardashian's fuller figure is ascribed a similar racial ambiguity, as she moves between the poles of blackness and whiteness. Thus, her

> '[…] curvaceous body is […] not just publicly sexualised but publicly raced, most emphatically by Kardashian herself, as she strategically embodies both the trope of the heavily regulated 'white' body and the trope of the curvaceous, exoticised, non-white (implicitly black) body. (Sastre, 2014: 129)

Public and media attention (and fixation) to Kardashian's butt, cannot obscure the point that despite the various attempts to discipline it (via cellulite treatment, diet pill endorsements, her emphasis on fitness), her fleshy, bacchanalian posterior is far removed from the normative white one, and thus places her within a history of the exoticised 'othered' body. However, far from the colonial white gaze that surrounded Sarah Baartman, the original 'Hottentot Venus' (Barrera, 2002; Netto, 2005), Kardashian's butt becomes a marker of her uniqueness *as well as*

[32] We Know Memes, 1 March 2013, http://weknowmemes.com/2013/03/kim-kardashian-vs-a-killer-whale-who-wore-it-better/

[33] See for example the cover of US Weekly (12 June 2013), where the headline read: "Kate vs. Kim: Due the Same Day! It's a royal vs. reality show down — the nurseries, the baby clothes, their bump style, and baby weight battles. Inside the exciting last month.", or the two women's pregnancy styles on E-online http://www.eonline.com/photos/8366/kim-kardashian-s-kate-middleton-s-pregnancy-styles/279778

[34] Racked, 12 Nov. 2015, An Obsessive Comparison of Kim Kardashian's Pregnancy Styles https://www.racked.com/2015/11/12/9703198/kim-kardashian-pregnancy-style

[35] Daily Mail, 24 Nov. 2015, 'You're a closet eater!' , https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-3331423/Kris-Jenner-scolds-pregnant-Kim-Kardashian-eating-sugary-food-KUWTK-preview-clip.html

[36] Your Tango, 3 Aug. 2018, How Did Kim Kardashian Lose Weight? https://www.yourtango.com/2018315822/how-did-kim-kardashian-lose-weight

[37] Mirror, 18 Aug. 2018, 'Kim Kardashian's plastic surgery timeline in full as star exposes her 'injected bum' in tiny bikini', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashians-plastic-surgery-timeline-10292368

[38] The procedure involves moving fat from the stomach and thighs to the buttock, ensuring a thin waist and a protruding derriere (Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483)

[39] In Paper Magazine's Winter 2014 issue (November 12), Kim Kardashian showed off her famous asset on two covers; clad in a sequin dress with a glass of champagne resting on her bum in the first one, and donning black gloves and a pearl necklace, buttocks bare, in the second. The idea was 'to break the internet'. A year later, in time for Halloween 2015, a Kim Kardashian 'PAPER' Mag Halloween Costume, was, half-jokingly, promoted by Bustle (24 Spt. 2015, https://www.bustle.com/articles/112648-a-kim-kardashian-paper-mag-halloween-costume-that-will-win-every-contest).

[40] Rolling Stone, 14 April 2014, http://www.rollingstone.com/music/videos/jennifer-lopez-twerks-hard-in-booty-teaser-20140614

an object of fascination, bringing her (yet more) visibility and financial success. In an attempt to refute criticism and authenticate her body, Kardashian claims her 'right to the booty' on account of her Armenian heritage - thus framing herself as non-white, *despite* the fact that she is Caucasian and, as a result, white. Because of this, she has been vilified by black women for encroaching on their territory (the big posterior) and robbing them of one of the few assets they may have. In the end, she creates ambivalence around her identity, manipulating her heritage into a performance of 'otherness', and becomes wealthier along the way (Sastre, 2014). The public illustration of the authenticity of the Kardashian posterior through the use of X-rays in 2011 (following the hype about whether or not she's had a butt implant), and the disavowal she's had anything artificial in it[41], resonates the publicity surrounding Jeniffer Lopez's unprecedented behind in 1997-1998 – 'Todo es mio' [it's all mine] - in Latin and English speaking media in the US (Beltra, 2002).

Kim's body – pregnant or post-partum- attracts public attention, either through the work of the 'selfie queen' herself and the countless photos of her lower part in various phases of undress, through comments posted by fans and anti-fans, commentary in the popular media and by expert opinion, or through paparazzi lens, and thus perpetuates a labour of visibility within 'transmediated continuity' (Jones and Weber, 2015). As a reality celebrity mother, she fuses narcissism, sexualisation, sexuality, pathology and demonisation in the context of a multiplatform mediascape. Her declarations against body shame and self love[42], find expression in a neoliberal, postfeminist culture that demands sexualized visibility as a sign of one's market appeal (24-25). However, Kim's bodily display may be in conflict with how she is being perceived as a mother, at a time when the narratives of downshifting/work-life balance discussed earlier have gained momentum. The mother's idealised place within the domesticity further problematises her public representation (Kaplan 1992), especially when a celebrity mom like her is being seen as overly sexual, marketed and commodified. Caught up in the 'body positivity' vs 'bikini-ready' antinomy, Kim Kardashian illustrates the tensions embedded in postfeminist motherhood. For, despite the 'racial ambiguity' (Sastre 2014) her derriere may afford her, Kim's bodily image may have more to share with Britney Spears' post-partum 'female grotesque' (Nash, 2005/2006).

... AND BEYONCE KNOWLES

Although for some black feminists, post-feminism has nothing to do with black women, since the postfeminist subject is predominantly white (Hill Collins, 2005), Beyonce Knowles Carter can be considered as a 'rich' text, combining a number of intersecting discourses – black femininity, performativity, sexuality, motherhood, entrepreneurialism, *and* postfeminism. Fierce feminist controversies have surrounded her, dubbed 'Beyonce wars' both by the media and academia (Cooper, 2013; Sawyer undated, Chatman, 2015), whether regarding her 2014 MTV VMAs performance in front of a screen emblazoned with the word 'Feminist' in giant letters[43]; acclaimed black feminist bell hooks' labelling her 'a terrorist' for her appearance on TIME's May 2014 front cover at the New School in May 2014[44]; her sampling a part of Nigerian writer's Chimamanda Ngoz Adichie TEDx talk [We Should all be Feminists] in the single 'Flawless' (2013) [45]; or the heated public controversy that erupted when bell hooks issued a biting assessment of Beyonce's 'Lemonade' album in 2016, admonishing it for its reliance on victimhood tropes and subservience to patriarchal and capitalist themes[46].

Whitney Teal, another black feminist critic, writing for personal essay hub xoJane (folded within InStyle in 2017) argued that what Beyonce has achieved for black women, especially for those who have been raised within a Southern Christian culture[47], is extraordinary. In a culture premised on Victorian femininity and modesty,

[41] Though medical experts suggest that the 'Brazilian butt lift' involves a fat recycling within the body, which is undetectable. Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483

[42] Mirror, 5 April 2018, Kim Kardashian strips down to incredibly tiny black thong to show off her 'real bum' - but is 'crushed by fan backlash', https://www.mirror.co.uk/3am/celebrity-news/kim-kardashian-strips-down-incredibly-10297483

[43] Pride Source, 25 Sept. 2014, Annie Lennox On Her Legacy, Why Beyonce Is 'Feminist Lite', http://www.pridesource.com/article.html?article=68228

[44] The New School events, 'bell hooks scholar-in-residence - Are You Still a Slave? Liberating the Black Female Body', 6 May 2016, https://events.newschool.edu/event/bell_hooks_scholar-in-residence_-_are_you_still_a_slave_liberating_the_black_female_body. The panel involved a public dialogue between bell hooks, Marci Blackman, Shola Lynch and Janet Mock. Included in TIME's list of the 100 most influential people, Beyonce posed in a white bra and panties, lips parted, gaze sultry. Where Mock saw in this an artist with ultimate control of her public persona, hooks responded that Beyonce was complicit in her own exploitation, and that a part of her was anti-feminist, 'a terrorist', when it came to the impact on young girls.

[45] Quartz Africa, 9 Oct. 2016, 'Chimamanda Adichie says Beyonce's kind of feminism isn't her kind of feminism' https://qz.com/804863/chimamanda-adichie-says-beyonces-kind-of-feminism-isnt-her-kind-of-feminism/

[46] bell hooks institute, 9 May 2016, 'Moving Beyond Pain' http://www.bellhooksinstitute.com/blog/2016/5/9/moving-beyond-pain

[47] The history of the church in the black community of the American South is connected to the growth of the 'Black Church' and the spread of various Protestant denominations (mainly Methodist, Baptist) within African Americans during slavery and mainly through the 19th century. The church in the American South was instrumental in the rise of black literacy but it was surrounded by tension between North

Beyonce has disposed the historical narrative of the hypersexual/temptress black woman and challenged norms of propriety and cultural and religious righteousness (Teal, 2013 in Sawyer - undated). The daughter of married middle-class parents, a 'can-do' girl, she comes from a socio-economic position that allows her to become an ideal postfeminist subject – independent, successful, self-inventing, entrepreneurial- argues Dayna Chatman (2015), In fact, through her work on Beyonce´'s performances of black femininity, Chatman interrogates how '… her body and personal narrative reinforce normative conceptions of marriage, motherhood, and femininity […] indoctrinating women ideologically into what I refer to as a post-feminist gender regime' (2015: 928).

Furthermore, from a postfeminist point of view, Beyonce has decidedly broken away from playing the perfect, good black girl, and through her music and performance presents 'feminism as a lived experience'. '[…] We don't have to shrink to make others more comfortable with our fierceness. […] We can suck dick in the backseats of chauffeured cars, because, why not? We can brag about our asses because they're amazing and any person would be lucky to have "all that ass up in your face."', says Teal when discussing Beyonce's role in Black women's sexual liberation and wholeness (in Sawyer- undated). In Beyonce's case, it is her *embodied performance* -either as an artist or as an expecting mother- that causes (a feminist) unease with the (postfeminist) sensibility of empowerment and agency through sexuality.

Contrary to prevailing discourses about the 'typical' black family, where the father is absent, and the mother is unwed, poor and welfare-dependent, Beyonce is the real-life personification of 'having it all' momlit discussed earlier – by first becoming successful in her career, marrying, and *then* having a child, Beyonce´ has achieved 'it all' and has thus avoided the 'black girl curse' (where black middle class professional women have difficulties finding 'Mr Right' because of their expectations, Chatman, 2015). In that respect, Beyonce seems to straddle confidently the work/life balance dictated by the 'new femininity' and is looked upon for inspiration in the fields of 'womanhood, motherhood, sexiness, self-worth and self-acceptance' (Caron, 2018).

Beyonce becomes the neoliberal subject per se, in control of her 'project of the self' (Tyler, 2011), as evidenced in the way she manages her private life and negotiates her public/private self. From explicit references to husband's Jay-Z infidelity in Lemonade, to both her pregnancy announcements, she exemplifies how a celebrity can effectively manage the inevitable commodification of her own image and life, in the sense that instead of fighting with the media for her privacy, Beyonce foregrounds her private life in her work under controlled circumstances. Her first baby announcement at the 2011 VMA Awards was well monitored: wearing an orange Lanvin caftan – one out of near-70 gowns she considered – Beyonce merely performed a small belly rub in front of the cameras. 'I put a lot of thought into how I wanted to unveil it. It was important to me that I was able to do it myself" she revealed at Harper's Bazaar48, showing this was a carefully orchestrated manoeuvre. 'I didn't want a crazy picture or gossip story to break the news,' she continued "so I decided to say nothing and proudly show my baby bump […].". Fully immersed in the neoliberal pregnant governmentality that permeates contemporary 'mommy culture' (Hallstein O'Brien, 2015; Tyler, 2011), she offered plenty of advice about her post-partum regime of exercise and diet at a 2012 interview in People magazine, which declared her 'The World's Most Beautiful Woman'. The magazine commented how the artist was 'back to her pre-pregnancy weight and gearing up for her first post-baby concerts, […]', framing her as a role model for other women to follow when 'doing motherhood', particularly so when she wanted to 'show women that when you become a mother, it doesn't mean you put everything away. You can be a mother and a seductress to your husband.' [49] Through this foregrounding of sexual agency, Beyonce is seen to '… [walk] a thin line between challenging attempts to regulate her body and offering up her body as commodity fetish. The former is a feminist project, while the latter is a post-feminist one' (Chatman, 2015: 937).

It's interesting to see how the popular media have canonised - even sanctified – Beyonce's pregnant body especially when carrying her twins. When she appeared in the 2017 Grammys, outfitted in a Peter Dundas glittering gold chain-mail dress draping her belly, a thick band of gold rings around her neck and a sunburst-like halo and body chain by the House of Malakai, almost full term, she was seen as a cross-over between a bacchanalian Mother Nature and a Madonna[50]. While heavier when carrying the twins than other celebrity mums-to-be, she has been constantly praised for her beauty, womanhood and sensuality in a way that other (white) celebrity mothers have not[51]. Removed from any comparison with Sarah Baartman's (black) Hottentot Venus, or a (white) 'welfare mom',

and South: black people in the South did not welcome the interventions from the North, black or white, mainly because most Northern blacks (like whites) saw Southern black worship as hopelessly "heathen." As urban, middle-class membership in the Southern church developed at the end of the 19th century, black women worked to address urban ills, rural arrest and racial violence, established reading groups, wrote for religious periodicals, and promoted traditional ideals of Victorian womanhood and respectability (Maffly-Kipp, 2001).

[48] Harper' Bazaar 11 Oct. 2011, Beyoncé's Baby Love, https://www.harpersbazaar.com/celebrity/latest/news/a825/beyonces-baby-love-interview-1111/

[49] People, 25 April 2012, Motherhood Makes Beyoncé Feel 'More Beautiful Than Ever', https://people.com/celebrity/beyonce-knowles-is-people-magazine-worlds-most-beautiful/

[50] Refinery29, 13 Feb 2017, This Is Where You've Seen Beyoncé's Divine Grammys Performance Before https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2017/02/140654/beyonce-grammys-inspiration-religious-symbols-meaning

[51] The vitriolic publicity Britney Spears found herself engulfed in during her darker and heavier period (including the weight gain during her second pregnancy in 2005) is a case in point. Alluding to notions of 'white trash' (Nash 2006), Britney was vilified by the media between

and being a 'crossover text' (Beltrán, 2002: 74)[52], Beyonce easily encapsulates the figure of the 'yummy mommy' (Littler, 2013) (typically white in pop culture encarnations, Douglas and Michaels 2000). As a working mom, she has become a brand and a style icon, - Lagerwey's (2016) brand Mom incarnate-, through her Ivy Park collection for Topshop[53].

Her second pregnancy announcement was hailed like an artistic event, and literally broke the internet: 'We would like to share our love and happiness. We have been blessed two times over. We are incredibly grateful that our family will be growing by two, and we thank you for your well wishes. - The Carters'54 announced Queen Bee on her Instagram account, releasing a self portrait that became the most-liked Instagram post ever55 (until that day). The portrait - taken by Awol Erizku, a conceptual artist well connected with the pop-music industry, who likes to distill notions of black beauty within canonical and contemporary works in Western art - pictures her heavily pregnant, seated in front of a colourful wreath, on a bed of ivy, wearing a bra and a veil, reminiscent of a Renaissance Madonna. Reports suggest[56] that this photo was chosen, much like a curator or a magazine editor - by the artist herself after trying a variety of others in her personal account for her pregnancy announcement.

Although not as muscular as other black bodies – look for example at the visceral comments surrounding Serena Williams' body over the years (Petersen, 2017: 8-11) – Beyonce's curves and physical strength point to trenchant assumptions about black women's bodies and the 'unruliness' surrounding them. Her body eschews traditional trappings of (white) femininity, where leaner – 'drier'- body aesthetics have been ushered in. Beyonce's body - like Kim's – goes through different phases of containment and (self)-policing, yet always remains fuller than the 'stick-thin' Anglo-Saxon (gold) standard of female emdodiment. In fact, rather than being 'skinny-toned', following the body aesthetics initially paved by Jane Fonda in the eighties, both women encapsulate the curvier, fuller-yet-toned, female body.

Beyonce illustrates the individualised feminism of the 21st century: everything, motherhood above all, is a choice. In this, she becomes yet another example of a woman who 'has it all' – a successful career, a good marriage, despite its ups and downs, self-worth, personal wealth, and now a happy family, and she confesses how she needs to joggle everything (career and family, public and private life), 'like every other woman'[57]. In so doing, however, not only is she normalising discourses of heterosexual marriage and maternity, but of downshifting as well. Through this performance of motherhood, enabled within the 'celebrity confessional' (Jermyn, 2008; Littler, 2013; Redmond, 2011), Beyonce's 'ordinariness' is maintained and solidified, allowing identification with female audiences. In addition, resonating present day culture of body-positivity and acceptance, in a September 2018 Vogue interview, she utterly humanised the post-partum body by exonerating the 'mommy pouch', which she admitted she now has, and publicly denouncing social pressure to immediately resume the pre-pregnancy body[58].

CONCLUSION

At a time when parenthood seems to have become almost mandatory regardless of sexual orientation, and children serve as fashionable props on Instagram profiles and in lifestyle magazines, this article has examined the way in which pregnant femininity and maternity is engulfed by discourses of aestheticisation and disciplining of the body. As the regime of fitness culture becomes mainstream and carrying the burden of being 'bikini-ready', celebrity mothers personify a responsibility -and respectability- narrative which expects women to self-control and self-regulate. Within such 'disciplinary neoliberalism' (Tyler, 2011), and given the educational and pedagogical role of celebrities and their construction of a 'public-private self' (Marshall, 2010), global celebrity figures Kim Kardashian and Beyonce Knowles-Carter offer a 'grammar of conduct' (Skeggs and Wood, 2011) around which the moral, and the maternal, self is being articulated and gauged.

Furthermore, this article has teased out the tensions that exist once the celebrity motherhood of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce disrupts the neoliberal postfeminist maternal body. Both women/mothers have been discussed as pertaining to an exoticising narrative as a result of their curvy bodies and as to how each one negotiates

2007-2011 only to be revered anew when a few years later she bounced back, leaner, stronger and with a killer six-pack (Body, Height, Weight, 29 Oct. 2016, Britney Spears to present the weight changes, https://bodyheightweight.com/britney-spears-weight-loss/)

[52] Crossover is defined as the process of becoming popular with a new audience, especially to denote how non-white stars succeed in becoming popular with white audiences (Beltrán 2002: 74).

[53] https://www.elle.com/fashion/a35286/beyonce-elle-cover-photos/

[54] Instagram, 1 Feb. 2017, https://www.instagram.com/p/BP-rXUGBPJa/?utm_source=ig_embed

[55] Vogue, 2 Feb. 2017 https://www.vogue.com/article/beyonce-pregnancy-twins-announcement-most-liked-instagram

[56] The Atlantic, 2 Feb. 2017, Beyoncé's High-Art Pregnancy Photo https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2017/02/beyonce-twins-pregnancy-announcement-image-art-awol-erizku/515400/

[57] Still, let us not forget that in, class terms, Beyoncé, like other rich women, hires staff, who remain 'invisible', to help her with her domestic routine.

[58] Vogue, 6 August 2018, Beyoncé in Her Own Words: Her Life, Her Body, Her Heritage, https://www.vogue.com/article/beyonce-september-issue-2018

her distance from dominant Anglo-European norms of beauty and acceptance. Through such unruliness (Petersen, 2017), both of them work to upset and, in tandem, to corroborate the model of 'new domesticity'. By availing themselves to public consumption, they fall prey to the waxing and waning of public adoration as evidenced in Kim's performance of pregnancy, as well as the buzz surrounding Beyonce's motherhood and corporeality.

Through a discursive analysis of the publicity surrounding the pregnancies of Kim Kardashian and Beyonce, this article has suggested that both women are characterised by 'transmediated continuity' (Jones and Weber, 2015) in the sense that they are being immersed in and surrounded by neoliberal discourses of self-management while pregnant and post-partum, across an array of media platforms and texts. Both Kim Kardashian and Beyonce produce and put forward gendered and race subjectivities, either through Kim's 'racial ambiguity' or Beyonce's 'crossover' text. In this way, they both show heterosexual women and non-binary persons how to do womanhood, amidst heated controversies surrounding their femininity, feminism, motherhood and entrepreneurialism, all of which accommodate the tensions and conflicts that women face in a postfeminist era.

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