

Veronika Muchitsch : *Neoliberal Sounds? The Politics of Beyoncé's Voice on "Run The World (Girls)"*

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Neoliberal Sounds? The Politics of Beyoncé's Voice on "Run The World (Girls)"

Veronika Muchitsch

"Boy you know you love it
How we're smart enough to make these millions
Strong enough to bear the children
Then get back to business"
– Beyoncé, "Run The World (Girls)" (2011)

In 2016, Beyoncé is one of the world's most accomplished entertainers – a skillful dancer, a celebrated singer, and a pop star of exceptional magnitude. She is also acknowledged as a highly successful entrepreneur^[1], whose newest product, a sports-fashion line introduced in April 2016, is yet another contribution to the ultimate "product", the brand of *Beyoncé* herself. From early on in her career, Beyoncé's image stressed themes of economic independence, capitalism, and consumerism in lyrics, videos and interviews. Over the span of more than two decades, they have been carefully compounded with selected biographical anecdotes from a childhood determined by profit-oriented parents, an emphasis on individualization and a multi-faceted self. Collectively, these themes have contributed to the image of a larger-than-life star; a perfect exemplification of successful neoliberal entrepreneurship.

In this article, I argue that Beyoncé's image is strongly informed by neoliberal governmentality and its specific gendered manifestation of post-feminism. Further, I suggest

that these ideologies do not only inform Beyoncé's overall image but also become audible in the singer's vocal sounds. My argument is based upon an understanding of vocal sound as a material-semiotic (Haraway 1988)[2] generative process that renders audible specific body politics. Following a phenomenon-oriented form of vocal analysis, I interpret specific relations of Roland Barthes' notions geno-song and pheno-song as sonic markers of neoliberal governmentality. Analyzing Beyoncé's song "Run The World (Girls)" (2011) with a focus on vocal sounds and their relations to other musical aspects as well as to its lyrics, I propose three specific sonic resonances to post-feminist-neoliberal body politics. Following my examination of these politics, I will explore (1) sounds of materiality and obscured technique, (2) empowerment and hyper-femininity as well as (3) flexibility and intensity as such sonic resonances.

Towards a Phenomenon-Oriented Analysis of Voice

As I approach voice as an audible manifestation of distinct body politics, my analysis will be applied through its sound. I will use the notion of vocal sound (*Stimmklang*)[3] to emphasize this focus. For a sound- and body-centric approach to voice, phenomenological approaches[4] prove helpful, as they understand voice as a threshold phenomenon (*Schwellenphänomen*) (Kolesch 2003), which constantly transgresses the dualisms of body and mind, in and out, self and other. Consequently, they problematize the position of an ostensibly disembodied and objective analyzing subject and raise the question of an embodied form of music analysis. Sound- and body-centric methodological approaches are not only valuable for my specific research interest, but also for the general study of pop music as a specifically physical musical practice[5].

To establish a phenomenon-oriented analytic approach, I use Ulrike Sowodniok's proposition of a geno-typical physiology of vocal sound, which is conceptualized as a descriptive form of analysis directed towards the materiality of both singing and hearing bodies (Sowodniok 2013). In order to establish a vocabulary for such an approach, she suggests the incorporation of material[6] sensations of sound perception in its description, which I consider essential to a language for sound- and body-centric forms of analysis.

The phenomenological question of embodied selves represents also a core interest in Roland Barthes' article "Le Grain de la Voix" (1972), in which he adapts Julia Kristeva's semiology of language[7]. Transferring Kristeva's concept to the sphere of music, Barthes' pheno-song represents the communicative sphere of vocal sound – aspects of genre, style and dynamics – and thus refers to the "cultured" voice, which had been the focus of vocal

production and its analysis throughout Western history. In contrast, geno-song is defined as a signifying process that derives from "within language and its materiality" and as inextricably bound to the singing body (Barthes 1979, p. 185). Barthes' notions of geno- and pheno-song facilitate my examination of vocal sound as sonic manifestation of body politics in two distinct ways. First, as post-feminist-neoliberal governmentality exhibits distinct body norms and practices, I suggest that relations of geno- and pheno-song in the analyzed sounds facilitate their identification. Second, the close relation of geno-song to the body's materiality[8] and its manifestation in the sound of language direct the analysis towards the sound of language as a site for specific relations of geno- and pheno-song and their distinct connotations of race, class and gender, which I will examine in detail in future projects.

The following analysis of Beyoncé's "Run The World (Girls)" represents an initial attempt of a phenomenon-oriented form of analysis of vocal sound as a manifestation of body politics. Taking into account its specific attention to post-feminist-neoliberal body politics, my analysis is partial –

I do not raise the claim of neutral analysis – and characterized by a radical specificity of time and space (Haraway 1988)[9]. The analyzed vocal sounds as well as my perception and description are positioned within a hegemonic neoliberal ideology and its body politics during several decades around the turn of the millennium in the so-called Western world.

A Phenomenon-Oriented Analysis: Vocal Sound(s) of "Run The World (Girls)"

"Run The World (Girls)" was released in 2011 as the lead single of Beyoncé's fourth solo record, *4* (2011). It is an up-tempo song characterized by a heavily accentuated rhythm that generates a military effect. After several beats, a recurring chant section, which represents the chorus, starts abruptly. A verse (00:38), a short pre-chorus (01:15), and a repetition of the chorus (01:38) follow. The succession of verse, pre-chorus and chorus-sections is repeated, before the song introduces (03:24) and ultimately ends with a fourth section that is a modification of the chorus-chant. Throughout the song, percussion instruments and Beyoncé's voice are foregrounded and inform the overall sound. With the exception of the song's pre-chorus sections[10] that introduce an explicit harmonic progression and a less foregrounded rhythm, the song exhibits a relatively static harmonic structure.

The lyrics depict a message of female empowerment, which becomes most overt in the repetitive chant "Who run the world? Girls" in the chorus sections. As exemplified in the lyrics I quoted in the epigraph above, the verse sections conflate narratives of female

empowerment with notions of traditional femininity, entrepreneurship and capitalism. As I will elaborate below, this entanglement represents a core-element of neoliberal post-feminism.[11]

Sonically, "Run The World (Girls)" departs from the R&B- and Soul-influenced sounds that had been prevalent throughout Beyoncé's career and on other songs on her fourth solo record. It also anticipates many of the vocal qualities that are increasingly present in the singer's more recent work. Beyoncé's vocal performance here is distinctly versatile and features traditional R&B-vocalization (including vibrato and melisma) as well as chant, rap, and technologically altered vocal sounds such as stutters[12]. After several measures of the song's distinct military rhythm, two distinct vocal sounds introduce the chorus section.[13] A repetitive chant consisting of several female* voices dominates the section, sounding intensely expressive and immediate. Beyoncé's voice can be distinguished from the others, producing the effect of her voice "leading" a group of other "girls". Further, Beyoncé performs a distinct sound of language. Transgressing General American English, it exhibits ways of speaking associated with urban or so-called street Black vernacular, including grammatical specifics, such as "some of *them* men", "make your check come at *they* neck". The distinct sounds correspond with lyrical references to historical and ongoing racism in the US.[14] At the same time, a technologically altered sound consisting of several voices (or tracks) appears. I hear an indecipherable phrase ("oh yeah"?) as ambiguously gendered and non-human and thus as a stark contrast to the expressive and immediate effect. The technologically altered sound ends with the fourth repetition of the initial line "Girls! We run this mother (yeah)" (00:15).

The lyrics are then modified to "Who run the world? Girls. Girls", which are uttered in a call-and-response[15] pattern (00:16). Here, Beyoncé's voice is foregrounded as the one asking the question, which is followed by a joint chant in response ("Girls. Girls") that is low-pitched at first, and then shifts to a higher pitch at the second utterance of "girls". As the lyrics are modified again, first to "Who run this mother? Girls"[16] (00:22) and finally back to "Who run the world? Girls. Girls" (00:30), the vocal sounds gradually shift to a markedly high tonal range. Further, these vocal sounds are supplemented by a high-pitched technologically altered stutter and the re-introduction of the technologically altered sound as well as a high-pitched melismatic melody. Towards the end of this first section, which serves as the song's chorus, it is hardly possible to disentangle the distinct sounds, tracks and voices (00:30-00:38). In contrast to the tension between sounds of chant and technologically altered voices described previously, here, the superposition of voices – rather than their individual sounds – renders the performance distinctly expressive and intense, producing the effect of a sonic densification of multiple female* voices, bodies and selves.

Throughout the song, rap, chant, the melismatic voice and technologically altered sounds are interwoven continuously. Verse 1 begins with relatively low-pitched rap sounds, which sound distinctly rhythmic and almost mechanical (00:37). This is followed by a technologically altered voice on a slightly higher pitch, which exhibits a strong accent and thus sounds ambivalently technological *and* material. The superposition of these sounds points to the question of performances of sex, gender and race in relation to technology in contemporary pop music.[17]

In the pre-chorus section (01:15), Beyoncé shifts to a rather traditional R&B vocalization that features melismatic ornamentation and vibrato and differs strongly from the rap sounds heard previously. She performs a similar succession of different vocal sounds and styles in the second verse (02:01) and pre-chorus sections (02:39). These sections of the song feature various vocal sounds in succession – as opposed to their superposition in the chorus section. As noted above, the superposition creates the effect of a dense collective of female* voices, bodies and selves. Throughout the verse- and pre-chorus sections, Beyoncé's vocal sound changes repeatedly and at times starkly, but it can be identified as distinctly hers at all times. Thus, she sonically performs multiple roles of an increasingly individualistic and flexible self. The effect is emphasized by the song's lyrics, which convey an image of multi-faceted post-feminist femininity that subsumes narratives of traditional femininity and sexuality, motherhood, entrepreneurship, capitalism and power[18].

In the 1990s, post-feminism emerged as a new mode of femininity that entailed narratives of emancipation *and* hyper-femininity, individuality *and* makeover, irony, and consumerism (McRobbie 1994). These narratives have been vividly evident in pop music, and in Beyoncé's image throughout her career. Feminist scholars have recently identified the post-feminist entanglement of feminist, anti-feminist and capitalist narratives as a gendered manifestation of neoliberal governmentality (Gill 2007; McRobbie 2009; Oksala 2011). I will examine these narratives and its resonances in Beyoncé's vocal sound below.

Post-Feminist-Neoliberal Governmentality

Neoliberal governmentality, Michel Foucault argued, represents both an extension and an intensification of modern disciplinary regimes. Foucault's analyses identified neoliberal governmentality as being structured around the shift from external institutionalized modes of disciplining and to individual self-disciplining processes of subjects, which entail two core mechanisms. First, individuals are invoked as entrepreneurs of their own existence. Thus, they are responsible for the "success" of their lives, which requires constant processes of

self-governance and discipline and is measured against the backdrop of a marketized reality. Hence, neoliberal governmentality generates a specific form of subjectivity that is based on narratives of freedom of choice, individualization, and responsibility. Second, the body is revaluated and regarded as a window to "successful" identity. Thus, processes of self-governance and self-discipline become primarily manifest on bodies and culminate in contemporary "neoliberal body cults" and the booms of fitness, organic food and cosmetic surgery industries (Kreisky 2003, online). At the same time, narratives of agency, flexibility and freedom of choice obscure these processes of self-discipline as well as the ideology's rigid norms and exclusions along the lines of race, class, gender and other categories of identity.

Elaborating on the links between neoliberalism and post-feminism, Rosalind Gill concludes that both phenomena are structured by a "current of individualism" that has replaced "notions of the social or political"; they introduce a certain kind of self-regulating and self-reinventing subject, and are both explicitly directed at women*: "To a much greater extent than men, women are required to work on and transform the self, regulate every aspect of their conduct, and present their actions as freely chosen" (Gill 2007, p. 164).[19] Beyoncé's post-feminist self becomes vividly present in the sounds and lyrics of "Run The World (Girls)". As the chant sections feature a female* collective, they suggest a feminist narrative of solidarity. However, most sections of the songs exhibit a succession of sounds and styles of Beyoncé's individual voice. In correspondence with lyrics that stress entrepreneurship, power and a multi-faceted self, the vocal sounds contribute to the performance of an individual, self-regulating and self-reinventing self.

Sounds of Post-Feminist-Neoliberal Body Politics

1. Materiality and Obscured Technique

In order to embody images of "successful subjectivity", neoliberal bodies require constant processes of self-discipline and self-surveillance (Gill 2007, p. 155). At the same time, however, the effort of these processes must not be disclosed but presented as fun and deliberately chosen (Ibid). I interpret the development of Beyoncé's vocal sounds over the course of her career as a specific manifestation of these processes: The continuous perfection of her voice does not result in an increasingly technical sound, which would disclose such processes. Rather, the voice sounds increasingly effortless, thus obscuring processes of training and self-discipline.

At the beginning of Beyoncé's solo career (*Dangerously in Love*, 2003), her extensive use of vibrato and melisma created a technical sound, which sonically discloses childhood and teenage years spent on stage.[20] At first, the surplus of vocal technique was contradicted by its sonic quality, which was at times hollow and shrill in higher registers.[21] Starting with the singer's second solo record (*B'Day*, 2006), a twofold development emerged: the continuous perfection of vocal technique enabled Beyoncé to use melisma and vibrato in increasingly nuanced and subtle ways, while a fuller overall sound emerged. Beyoncé's fourth solo record (*4*) in 2011 marks the sonic culmination of this process of perfection. A prevalence of R&B- and Soul-inspired songs enables Beyoncé's to showcase a voluminous and elastic vocal performance, mastering melodic leaps and melismatic figures in a seemingly effortless manner.

"Run The World (Girls)" departs from earlier rigidly technical vocal performances and incorporates chant, rap and rhythmic stutters to complement her R&B-oriented style of singing, which emphasizes the song's expressive effect. In terms of Barthes' notions of pheno- and geno-song, I suggest that the singer's perfect vocal technique and increasingly expressive sonic qualities characterize Beyoncé's distinctly pheno-typical voice. However, on "Run The World (Girls)", Beyoncé's voice sounds increasingly expressive, intense and material. I suggest that this effect is enabled by the very perfection of technique: Beyoncé's pheno-typical vocal perfection enables her to perform an increasingly expressive and ostensibly effortless vocal sound, which is accompanied by a nuanced performance of technical elements like melisma and vibrato. Thus, the very perfection of technique creates an increasingly geno-typical, or material effect. At the same time, this material effect obscures processes of self-discipline, as the voice sounds increasingly effortless. I argue that this development suggests a specific relation between pheno- and geno-song, which in turn represents a sonic resonance to neoliberal post-feminist hyper-corporeality and undisclosed self-discipline. It is an audible manifestation of post-feminist-neoliberal body politics, which exhibit an "obsessive preoccupation with the [female*] body" (Gill 2007, p. 149) while obscuring processes of self-governance and self-discipline.

2. Empowerment and Hyper-Femininity

Considering the correspondences between sonic qualities and lyrics, Beyoncé's vocal sound on "Run The World (Girls)" is a sonic manifestation of a distinctly post-feminist embodied self. In verse 1 (00:37), Beyoncé raps at a medium to low pitch range over a marching rhythm and a fast tempo, "some of them men think they freak this like we do / but no they don't / make

your check come at they neck / disrespect us no they won't". Here, a low-pitched tonal range represents a stark contrast to the high-pitched chant in the preceding section. Further, the rigidly rhythmic vocal performance emphasizes the lyrical fierceness and contributes to a masculine-coded vocal effect.

In verse 2 (02:01), Beyoncé shifts to a higher pitch range. In the second part of this verse (02:15), she raps "This goes out to all the women getting it in you're on your grind / to other men that respect what I do please accept my shine / Boy you know you love it how we're smart enough to make these millions / strong enough to bear the children", while a downward leap in pitch accompanies the last line "then get back to business" (02:29). In this verse, Beyoncé's vocal performance yet again becomes increasingly versatile and exhibits the succession of high and low tonal ranges as well as the combination of rap and singing in addition to various vocal sounds. As these sounds correspond to the conflation of narratives of female empowerment, motherhood and entrepreneurship in the lyrics, they are a sonic performance of the post-feminist lyrical persona. Here, high-pitched and sung sounds correspond with narratives of motherhood, while the verse's last line "then get back to business" is accompanied by a downward leap in pitch and thus represents a return to the masculine coded sounds described above.

In the pre-chorus section (01:15), however, the lyrics and gendered vocal sounds are interwoven in an increasingly complex way. Beyoncé utters the lines "My persuasion can build a nation / Endless power, the love we can devour / You'll do anything for me". While the verses conveyed narratives of power through characteristically low-pitched rap vocals, here, Beyoncé performs feminine coded vocal sounds, exhibiting a higher tonal range as well as traditional R&B singing. I argue that the conflation of masculine and feminine coded vocal qualities as well as their superposition with narratives of power in the lyrics represents a distinctly post-feminist intertwinement of normative femininity and narratives of entrepreneurship and capitalism. As Rosalind Gill argues, in post-feminism, "[t]he body is presented [...] as women's source of power [...]" (Gill 2007, p. 164). In the same vein, Johanna Oksala argues that female* neoliberal subjects hold the same ostensible freedom as their male* counterparts, while their lives continue to be governed through the normative femininity of their bodies. Thus, normative femininity does not contradict but rather intensifies neoliberal narratives of entrepreneurship: "Feminine appearance has come to be seen as an important instrument by which women can increase their human capital" (Oksala 2011, p. 115). In the pre-chorus section, Beyoncé emphasizes *her* human capital²² through narratives of (em)power(ment) and a distinctly feminine coded vocal sound.

3. Sonic Flexibility and Intensity

As I argued in my description of the song's individual sections above, successively added layers of sound and various vocal qualities contribute to both horizontal and vertical densifications of sounds, which I perceive as impressions of flexibility as well as intensification. Vertical densification of sounds, or sonic intensification, refers to the superposition of different vocal sounds and is particularly present in the chorus sections of the song, creating the effect of a collective of female* voices. In contrast, the verse and pre-chorus sections exhibit successive performances of rap, stutters and R&B vocalization as well as vast variations in pitch, rhythm, and tempo, creating an effect of horizontal densification, or flexibility.

As all of the successive sounds can be attributed to Beyoncé, they contribute to the performance of a distinctly multi-faceted self. Considering the correspondence between vocal sounds and lyrics, the self appears to be distinctly post-feminist, as it unites the roles of hyper-feminine and sexual woman, mother, lover *and* entrepreneur. The multi-faceted post-feminist self is a specific manifestation of neoliberal flexibility. As Eva Kreisky notes, neoliberal subjects and bodies are required to adapt to changing conditions of work and private life and thus be inherently flexible (Kreisky 2003 online). I suggest that Beyoncé's flexible vocal performance can be understood along the same lines. In the markedly capitalist sphere of pop music, the ability to adapt to changing styles enhances Beyoncé's human capital.

A variety of styles as well as vast variations in rhythm and tempo contribute to an effect of sonic intensification throughout the song. In her analysis of contemporary pop music, Robin James identifies a trend of sonic intensification, which becomes manifest in a style of music that "[...] centers rhythm and timbre rather than harmony, [and] is modular rather than teleological" (James 2014, p. 26).^[23] As she argues following Jeffrey Nealon (2007), the sonic developments emerge from a general narrative of intensification that determines neoliberal ideology:

"As neoliberalism re-imagines markets as systems of free competition (not exchange), conquest and assimilation also get upgraded into intensification or investment" (James 2014, p. 44).

In Beyoncé's vocal performance, effects of intensification and flexibility are established by the superposition of various characteristics. Sounds of materiality and obscured technique as well as sounds of empowerment and hyper-femininity are not only sonic resonances to post-feminist ideology, but also contribute to overarching effects of intensification and flexibility.

The effect of intensification is further emphasized by the incorporation of rhythm-centered forms of vocal performance (chant, rap) as well as technologically manipulated stutters. In addition to the individual qualities of various vocal sounds, effects of flexibility and intensification are created through the ensemble of sounds; through their chaotic succession and superposition. While intensity and flexibility represent core narratives in neoliberal governmentality, on "Run The World (Girls)", Beyoncé's markedly diverse and hyper-material vocal sounds are interweaved densely in both horizontal and vertical spheres, thus rendering the performance strikingly flexible and intense.

Conclusion

In this article, I have examined three distinct ways in which Beyoncé's vocal performance on "Run The World (Girls)" resonates with post-feminist-neoliberal governmentality. Considering the song's specific vocal qualities as well as developments over Beyoncé's career, I interpreted Beyoncé's voice as extensively trained and disciplined, and thus pheno-typical. As Beyoncé's voice represents a specific site of the singer's idiosyncratic human capital, it is constantly trained and disciplined and consequently becomes able to obscure these processes through an increasingly expressive vocal sound. Thus, I argue that the perfect pheno-typical control over her voice enables her to perform an intensified materiality, and to obscure the use of vocal technique, which may generate the effect of an increasingly genotypical vocal sound. This development resonates strongly with neoliberal and post-feminist premises of undisclosed self-disciplining processes and a revaluation of (female*) bodies.

Considering the correspondences between vocal sounds and lyrics, I suggested further that feminine-coded sounds do not contradict but emphasize narratives of empowerment as stressed in the song's lyrics. The effect becomes audible most overtly in the pre-chorus sections as well as in verse 2, where neoliberal narratives of entrepreneurship and power are conveyed through high-pitched melismatic vocalization. The vocal effect can thus be linked to the post-feminist reinforcement of normative femininity as a means for enhanced human capital in a neoliberal reality.

Further, I interpreted the multiplicity of vocal styles and sounds as a sonic resonance to multi-faceted post-feminist femininity, which is a specific manifestation of the neoliberal narratives of flexibility and intensification. In Beyoncé's vocal performance, this effect is achieved by the incorporation of chant, rap, and technologically altered vocal sounds as well as vast shifts in rhythm, tempo, style, and pitch. Collectively, the contradictory entanglement

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of Beyoncé's multiple vocal sounds on "Run The World (Girls)" contribute to a vocal performance that I argue is markedly post-feminist as it conflates sounds of normative femininity with masculine coded sounds and sounds of intensified materiality, and thus represents a specific manifestation of neoliberal governmentality.

Endnotes

1 In June 2014, Beyoncé was featured on the cover of the New York Times appendix T Magazine and the subject of its editorial article. Titled "The Woman on Top of the World", the article emphasized Beyoncé's impact beyond the realm of pop music and entertainment and thus added to an emerging trend of acknowledging her entrepreneurial magnitude (Rosen 2014). The trend found its preliminary culmination when in July 2014, Forbes magazine listed the pop star atop of its annual "Celebrity 100" list of "most powerful celebrities".

2 Haraway continues, "Like "poems", which are sites of literary production where language too is an actor independent of intentions and authors, bodies as objects of knowledge are material-semiotic generative nodes. Their boundaries materialize in social interaction" (Haraway 1988, p. 595).

3 Sowodniok (2013) suggests the notion of vocal sound (*Stimmklang*) as an analytical category that demands new methods of analysis. She continues: "[t]herefore, vocal sound leads language and music to new meaning. It moves performance before the written work. At the threshold of body and world, it points to the materiality of sensual touch (Sowodniok 2013, p. 60-61, my translation).

4 Phenomenological approaches to voice can be found in Waldenfels (2003), Kolesch (2003), Sowodniok (2013).

5 Werner Jauk stresses the immediate functional impact of pop music as opposed to structural, inner-musical aspects of composition (Jauk 2009).

6 For the use of materiality as an analytical category in the analysis of voice, see also Bonz (2011) and Jarman-Ivens (2011).

7 Informed by psychoanalysis, Kristeva's semiology conceptualizes subjects as split entities, which are generated by conscious – e.g. social structures – as well as subconscious spheres. While the pheno-text of language represents the conscious in the form of a sign system, Kristeva conceptualizes geno-text as a signifying process within pheno-song, which generates the speaking subject.

8 Jochen Bonz suggests supplementing Barthes' notions with acoustic materiality (*Materialität*) and conventionality (*Konventionalität*) (2011).

9 In "Situated Knowledge", Donna Haraway states in relationship to feminist knowledge production, "The alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology" (Haraway 1988, p.584).

10 The pre-chorus sections start at 01:16 min. and 02:39 min., respectively.

11 As Jody Rosen recognizes, the song is not only a post-feminist anthem, but also a business plan, Beyoncé adheres to (Rosen 2014, Online).

12 Robin James identifies rhythmic stutters as one of the prevailing elements of contemporary electronic-dance-music informed pop music (James 2014, p. 39).

13 What I refer to as chorus, is the recurring chant section starting at min. 00:00, 01:15, and 02:59 of the song.

14 In verse 1 (01:00), she raps: "I think I need a barber / None of these n*ggas can fade me / I'm so good with this / I remind you I'm so hood with this". Notably, the sound is further altered technologically and features a stutter on "n*ggas".

15 Call and response is associated with traditional African American singing practices.

16 In the line, "Who run this mother? Girls", "mother" may be read as short for "motherfucker". Thus, it can be read as referring to both a male* world or a man* who is "run" by the female lyrical subject(s).

17 Robin James (2008) elaborates on the persona of the black 'robo-diva' and the narrative of the cyborg in pop music and discusses politics of sex, gender and race through a technological lense.

18 The entanglement of these themes is specifically dense in Verse 2 (02:01): "It's hot up in here DJ / Don't be scared to run this-run this back / I'm rapping for the girls who taking over the world / Help me raise a glass for the college grads / 41 rolling to let you know what time it is, check / You can't hold me / I work my 9 to 5, better cut my check", and continuing (02:15) "This goes out to all the women getting it in you're on your grind / To other men that respect what I do please accept my shine / Boy you know you love it how we're smart enough to make these millions / strong enough to bear the children / then get back to business"

19 As Gill continues, post-feminism becomes manifest in contemporary media culture through a relatively set of elements: "These include the notion that femininity is a bodily property; the shift from objectification to subjectification; the emphasis upon self-surveillance, monitoring and discipline; a focus upon individualism, choice and empowerment; the dominance of a makeover paradigm; and an emphasis upon consumerism and the commodification of difference. These themes coexist with, and

are structured by, stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to 'race' and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability as well as gender" (Gill 2007, p. 149).

20 From an early age on, Beyoncé performed within the gospel choir of her community, later within several girl groups, and ultimately, Destiny's Child.

21 It is a quality that can be heard on Beyoncé's first hit single *Crazy in Love* (2003).

22 The notion of human capital was coined by economist Gary Becker (1975).

23 James further identifies soars, drops and stutters as prevalent features of contemporary electronic-dance-pop music (James 2014).

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