TRACING PERSPECTIVES ON POSTFEMINISM THROUGH THE FILMS OF QUENTIN

TARANTINO

Image: *Ben Kothe / BuzzFeed News; Everett Collection*

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Introduction

The cinematic oeuvre of Quentin Tarantino can be appreciated on different levels. His films are filled with expletives and extremes, an accumulation of 'sex, drugs, and rock and roll'. At the same time, Tarantino is known to be a cinephile who makes use of intertextual approaches and metafictional references (Roche 17). It may seem paradoxical that this deep understanding and appreciation for film and cultural history are expressed in films that appear so superficial, yet it is precisely this combination that lends Tarantino's work to complex political and academic readings, in the context of race, class, and gender. The latter – gender – is the focus point of this thesis. Critics have called Tarantino's works both feminist (Billson; Garcia; Sylvester) and misogynist (Scott; Bastow; Chacko), and various scholars have explored the extent to which Tarantino's films – and by extension, Tarantino himself – can be considered feminist.

In a quantitative approach towards understanding the portrayal of women in Tarantino's work, Anna Purna Kambhampaty and Elijah Wolfson have, for example, calculated the imbalance of lines spoken by female characters (Kambhampaty & Wolfson). They found that women only speak 35.99% of lines across all films, and that Tarantino's films generally feature a majority-male cast. They acknowledge, however, that this quantitative discrepancy does not make Tarantino's work necessarily anti-feminist. The power of film lies in its nonverbal storytelling, and this is especially important to recognize in order to understand the power of the female characters across Tarantino's oeuvre. In *Inglourious Bastards* (2009), female characters – most notably Shosanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent) and Bridget von Hammersmark (Diane Kruger) - speak 20% of the lines, but their actions result in the deaths of the Nazi government – including Adolf Hitler – indicating the end of World War II (Kambhampaty & Wolfson). In *Jackie Brown* (1997) women speak 30% of the lines in the script, but protagonist Jackie outsmarts every other character on screen through her actions (Kambhampaty & Wolfson). Tarantino was recently confronted with the quantitative discrepancy in lines spoken

by women in relation to his most recent work *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). A reporter asked him why Margot Robbie – who played the role of Sharon Tate – was not given more lines, to which Tarantino simply replied: "Well, I just reject your hypotheses" (Ellison). His comment implies that his work cannot be declared anti-feminist or subversive solely on the basis of how many lines female characters speak. Unveiling the feminist meanings within his work thus requires a more complex approach.

In this thesis, I explore the connection between Tarantino's films and feminist film scholarship, focusing specifically on theories relating to postfeminism. I will not attempt to argue whether Tarantino can or should be considered a feminist. Maxime Cervulle problematizes this very question and argues that it negates the opportunity to discuss the numerous academic perspectives on postfeminism that have developed between the lines of a progressive-subversive dichotomy (Cervulle 40). Rather, I explore to what extent the portrayal of women in Tarantino's work reflect contemporary theories on postfeminism. To what extent is the portrayal of women in each film a sign of the times?

Before I explain what theories on postfeminism I intend to discuss, it is important to understand the context in which the term postfeminism originated. Central to this thesis is the attempt to grasp the history of the many interpretations of postfeminism and their relation to feminism and media. Media, including film, is inextricably linked to postfeminism, to the extent that Rosalind Gill declares that "arguments about postfeminism are debates about nothing less than transformations in feminisms and transformations in media culture – and their mutual relationship" (*Sensibility* 147).

In the 1960s and 1970s, at the height of second-wave feminism, feminist scholars concentrated on the research, critique and intervention of media. Women were confronted more than ever before with "representations of womanhood and gender relations in news and magazines, on radio and TV, in film and on billboards" (Gill *Gender* 17). Nonetheless, feminist

scholars were able to distinguish a stable standard for women as portrayed in the media, which they could subsequently critique (Gill *Gender* 18). Early approaches to feminist film interpretations critiqued the objectification of women in cinema, and followed the idea of gaze theory – as famously introduced by Laura Mulvey in her essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975). Feminist scholarship identified Hollywood as misogynistic, portraying stereotypical versions of women in films made by mainly male directors. Feminist activism of the second wave focused on combatting the misogynistic treatment of women in both the domestic and public sphere, arguing that the "personal is political" – an expression coined by feminist activist Carol Hanish. Major accomplishments of the feminist movements of this era include gaining legal reproductive freedom, educational equality, and property rights (Grady).

By the 1980s and 1990s, the landscape had changed significantly – both in media and politics. Women were no longer absent from the production of film. Moreover, the media no longer offered a singular template for the aspiration of womanhood. Producers and consumers of media output had become familiar with feminist critiques of the earlier decades. Signifiers of gender were more plural and fragmented, borrowing codes from different genres (Gill *Gender* 19). While gaze theory remained influential, as women were still significantly objectified, most feminist scholars now deemed it inadequate, as it did not acknowledge the active role of women in film – both on screen and in production. Feminist activism became equally complicated. Second-wave feminism was condemned for its false sense of universality and its adherence to a dominantly white, young, and middle-class perspective, while ignoring the differences in experiences and histories of non-white women (Gill *Gender* 32). Feminists were therefore renegotiating their aims, attempting to find common ground among themselves. In an attempt to create this common ground Toril Moi introduced the term postfeminism, in which the "post" prefix was meant to signal a new way of thinking (Kavka 29).

Since then, postfeminism has become both the most important and the most contested term in feminist scholarship (Gill *Sensibility* 147). Through a review of existing literature, this thesis examines the history of the various – and often contradictory – theories on postfeminism, from the 1990s until the present day. The films made by Quentin Tarantino in each of these decades then serve as case studies, as I discuss how the contemporary perspectives on postfeminism interpret these texts. In order to be comprehensive and consistent, I only discuss the films that are both written and directed by Quentin Tarantino: *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), *Pulp Fiction* (1994), *Jackie Brown* (1997), *Kill Bill Vol. I* (2003) and *Kill Bill Vol. II* (2004), *Death Proof* (2007), *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), *Django Unchained* (2012), *The Hateful Eight* (2015), and *Once Upon in Time in Hollywood* (2019).

Each chapter focuses on a different decade; the 1990s, 2000s, and 2010s, respectively. In the 1990s, as discussed in Chapter 1, different interpretations of the "post" in postfeminism resulted in three dominant perspectives on postfeminism. In these interpretations the prefix signaled either backlash, historical shift, or epistemological change. While these perspectives seemingly align with the Tarantino films made in this decade, I problematize their insufficiency in covering contradictions and nuances. In the 2000s, as discussed in Chapter 2, Rosalind Gill introduces the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility. This idea is able to encompass plural and contradictory views on postfeminism. Moreover, Gill highlights trends in the postfeminist media landscape of the 2000s that establish contemporary standards of femininity. These trends are pervasive in all the Tarantino films – *Kill Bill*, *Death Proof,* and *Inglourious Basterds* – made in this decade. Most importantly, I discuss how the makeover/revenge narrative is reiterated in each of these films in order to convey the postfeminist trends laid out by Gill. In the 2010s, as discussed in Chapter 3, the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility is combined with a focus on intersectionality. In relation to the films made by Tarantino in this era I discuss the intersection of postfeminism and race – in *Django Unchained* (2012) – postfeminism and age

– in *The Hateful Eight* (2015) – and postfeminism in relation to victimization and masculinity
– in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019).

I am not the first to attempt to uncover the complex history of postfeminism in relation to film. Other scholars have similarly traced different theories of postfeminism and their relation to various films, collected in works such as *Postfeminism and Contemporary Hollywood* (Gwynne & Muller), *The Postfeminist Biopic* (Polaschek) and *Interrogating Postfeminism* (Tasker & Negra). However, these works focus on postfeminist theories from either a singular era or a singular perspective. Moreover, none have linked the many theories on postfeminism to the cinematic work of a single director. I argue that tracing the history of postfeminism through the work of one filmmaker allows us to gain a better understanding of the gradual changes in postfeminism over time and its various cultural expressions. The films by Tarantino lend themselves very well to this construction, as he is known to "steal from every single movie ever made" (Debruge). This comment refers to his intertextual approach to filmmaking. His films borrow elements from various genres – Kung Fu, Spaghetti Westerns, and Blaxploitation, to name a few – making his films diverse, complex, and compelling (Roche 18). Moreover, Tarantino is known to be invested in the history of both film and culture. As David Roche states: "Tarantino is very much aware that he is not working alone and that he is not working in an artistic vacuum: his films are resolutely inscribed within film genres and film history" (16). It is these characteristics that have made Adilifu Nama refer to Tarantino's films as "cinematic Rorschach tests" (93) that invite audiences to analyze the work in various ways. It is this trait that allows me to use Tarantino's work to gain a better understanding of the complex postfeminist media landscape of the past decades.

1. **Contradictory Conclusions: Perspectives on Postfeminism in the 1990s**

The meaning of postfeminism has been contested since its first conception. The term was first used by Toril Moi, as part of her pursuit to deconstruct the existing binary between radical and liberal feminism (Kavka 29). During the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, a general academic distinction was made between liberal, radical, and socialist feminism (Gill *Gender* 31). Liberal feminists wanted gender inequality to be fought through legislation and initiatives to help women "catch up" on their numerous deprivations (Gill *Gender* 31). Radical feminists, on the other hand, saw men and women as fundamentally different, and women as "systematically controlled and dominated by men" (Gill *Gender* 31). It is these conflicting views that Toril Moi attempted to bring together in the new concept of postfeminism. Instead of bridging those gaps, however, different interpretations of the "post" in postfeminism formed three main distinguishable perspectives in the 1980s and 1990s; postfeminism as a backlash; postfeminism as an historical shift; and postfeminism as an epistemological or political response to "difference" (Gill *Sensibility* 148).

Those who interpret postfeminism as backlash focus mainly on the anti-feminist connotations of the concept. In this interpretation, the "post" prefix is considered a false declaration of the successful achievement of equality, and should therefore be condemned. In her famous work *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women* (1991) Susan Faludi claims that "the media declared that feminism was the flavor of the seventies and that "post-feminism" was the new story-complete with a younger generation who supposedly reviled the women's movement" (14). In other words, this perspective asserts that postfeminism (often written as post-feminism) considers feminism to be over, an idea that is misconstrued in order to lash back at the previous successes of feminist activism.

Those who interpreted postfeminism as an historical shift interpreted "post" as a demarcation of a new era in feminism. In this new era, the objectives of second-wave feminism

were not considered to be achieved, but changed. Scholars in this perspective – such as Hollows, Mosely, and Read – assert that second-wave feminist goals were set outside of the realm of popular culture and the experiences of ordinary women, and that postfeminism "requires updating feminist analysis to incorporate the entire ambit of women's concerns, rather than a narrow version defined by feminists" (Polaschek 31). The feminist landscape had thus changed to the extent that a new era was heralded. It is therefore that the scholars in this perspective often use the terms postfeminism and third-wave feminism interchangeably.

Those who interpreted postfeminism as an epistemological response to difference, interpret the "post" prefix along the same lines as is done in postmodernism and postcolonialism. Postfeminism signals neither a backlash nor a new era, but "the conceptual shift within feminism from debates around equality to a focus on debates around difference" (Brooks 4). This strand focuses on introducing new interpretations in order to tackle the misconceived universality of second-wave feminism and its ignorance of the experiences of non-white, working class, and queer women.

These different strands all attempt to capture the complex position of women and feminism in the 1990s. As the daughters of second-wave feminists became adults, they were able to pursue paths inaccessible to their mothers: joining the workforce, enjoying higher education, and assuming more independence. Gaps in education between men and women decreased significantly – to the point where women outnumbered men in obtaining university diplomas in 1992 – the median age of marriage jumped up, and women were able to build their career and enter previously male-dominated sectors (Yarrow 10). Furthermore, the cultural Girl Power movement was thriving in music, art, websites, and magazines. At the same time, however, the 1990s was the era of the "bitchification" of women, a term coined by Allison Yarrow in her book *The 90s Bitch*. The portrayal of women as bitches circulated in popular media, continuously suggesting that women were "sluts, whores, trash, prudes, sycophants,

idiots, frauds, emasculators, nutcrackers, dykes, and succubi" (Yarrow 16). The contradictory experience of women was widespread. While Sally Ride traveled to space, Toni Morrison won a Pulitzer Price, and Madonna rose to fame (Yarrow 11), at the same time Anita Hill was made out to be a liar, and Monica Lewinsky became the scapegoat for Bill Clinton's sexual misconduct (Yarrow 16).

It is in this era that a young filmmaker named Quentin Tarantino (1963) started his career as a writer and director, debuting his first feature film in 1992, and releasing two more films before the end of the decade: *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, respectively. In the first section of this chapter, I focus on the "postfeminism as backlash perspective' and its application to a reading of *Reservoir Dogs*. In the following section, *Pulp Fiction* is analyzed through the eyes of the 'postfeminism as historical shift' perspective. Finally, I discuss how *Jackie Brown* relates to the 'postfeminism as response to difference' strand of thought. In each of these sections, I problematize the limitations of these perspectives in capturing the contradictions of postfeminism.

1.1 Backlash in *Reservoir Dogs*

At the start of the decade, *Time* magazine announced that the fight for women's equality had been "largely won" (Faludi 1). It is this – false – declaration of success that stands at the center of the 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective. The scholars in this perspective assert that the term postfeminism signaled the end of feminism, and was moreover used to push back against the accomplishments of second-wave feminists. The process of this backlash is three-fold. First, the declaration that feminism was over was voiced by various – male – contenders. Faludi points at the example of former President Ronald Reagan, who has said that "women have "so much" and that therefore "the White House no longer needs to appoint them to higher office"" (Faludi 1). The successes of the second-wave feminist movements were framed not as a step in the right

direction, but as the arrival at the finish line. Secondly, the accomplishments of feminism were taken as the source of problems instead of progress. If gender equality had been achieved, then why were women still unhappy? The argument was that women are "enslaved by their own liberation" (Faludi 2), which caused depression and burn-outs. Single women suffered from a "man shortage" and were unhappy in their liberated positions (Faludi 7). Faludi presents the example of "Reagan spokeswoman Faith Whittlesey [who] declared feminism a "straitjacket" for women" (Faludi 4). These developments then, finally, permitted backlash against feminism. The defeat of the Equal Rights Amendment, significantly influenced by the anti-ERA activism of Phyllis Schlafly, is an example of such backlash in politics. In the media, this backlash was exercised through the process of "bitchification" – as coined by Allison Yarrow (2018). Because of the production time of films, "Hollywood joined the backlash a few years later than the media" but was nonetheless able to capture all the backlash trends of the time (Faludi 125). Backlash periods have historically resulted in efforts to "hush the female voice in American films" and the 1990s were no different (Faludi 127).

It is in this context that Quentin Tarantino debuted with his film *Reservoir Dogs* (1992). The film follows a gang of criminals – Mr. White (Harvey Keitel), Mr. Orange (Tim Roth), Mr. Blonde (Michael Madsen), Mr. Pink (Steve Buscemi), Mr. Blue (Edward Bunker), and Mr. Brown (Tarantino himself) – in the aftermath of a jewelry heist gone wrong, and their search for the suspected informant in their midst. As his later films would prove, this movie contained all the classic Tarantino staples: intricate dialogue, a banger soundtrack, and ample profanity. What the film glaringly lacked, however, was female characters. In *Reservoir Dogs,* the female voice is thus neglected.

The men central to the plot are presented as hypermasculine: they are stereotypical male aggressors, who whip out their guns at the sign of trouble, and are hesitant to show any kind of weakness. As a group, they are linked by their code names and suits, creating a "unified sense

of manhood" (Pratt 28). The film has therefore been summarized as a "tense macho drama" (Dawson 22). These men live in an exaggerated men's world, in which women are only present as passive and sexualized topics of conversation. Allison Yarrow explains that as part of the bitchification phenomenon, men and women were educated and portrayed differently in regards to sexuality. Male sexuality was celebrated and boys were encouraged to pursue (heterosexual) sex (Yarrow 57). Female sexuality, in contrast, was "blamed and shamed" (Yarrow 47). Women were caught in the "goldilocks conundrum": they were either prudish or promiscuous, with no in-between (Yarrow 68). If they performed sexual acts, moreover, the goal was to pleasure their male partners, not themselves (Yarrow 66). In the media, male and female sexuality were thus approached significantly differently.

In *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), a primary example of this double standard and the process of bitchification appears when we see a flashback of Mr. White and Mr. Orange preparing for their upcoming heist. We see them sitting in a car in front of the diamond store, as they discuss the roles that each of the men are meant to take on during the heist:

> **Mr. White:** Mr. Blonde and Mr. Blue?
>
> **Mr. Orange:** Crowd control. They handle customers and employees in the display area.
>
> **Mr. White:** That girl's ass?
>
> **Mr. Orange:** Sitting right here on my dick (1:23:04).

The comment is followed by laughter. It establishes the women in the film as sexual objects made for male pleasure. Women serve as both comic and sexual relief and are secondary to the plot, which they remain throughout the film. A similar instance occurs when Eddie tells an anecdote about Elois, a black woman who avenges her abusive husband as she "glues his dick to his belly" (1:19:18). The impact of her action is diminished to a joke, as the men conclude:

> **Mr. White:** Was he all pissed off?

Mr. Pink: How would you feel if you had to do a handstand every time you took a piss (1:19:31).

This example once again confirms the status of women in the film as laughing stock. These examples of bitchification and neglect of women as serious characters accumulate to confirm the idea of postfeminist media as focused on backlash.

The most common critique on the 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective is its lack of nuance. Taking the postfeminist media landscape as entirely based on backlash ignores the remaining influence of feminism, female authorship, and "the extent to which feminist themes and concerns have entered into the popular lexicon" (Polaschek 24). Instead, Angela McRobbie finds that what is needed is "a more developed conceptual schema to account for the simultaneous feminization of popular media with the accumulation of ambivalent, fearful response" (258). She therefore develops the idea of 'double-entanglement', an idea that acknowledges both the backlash occurring in the postfeminist "cultural space" (McRobbie 257) and the continuous strides made through feminist activism.

Furthermore, in ignoring the prevalence of feminist themes in the popular lexicon, the 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective ignores the possibility of ironic use of such themes. In *Reservoir Dogs* (1992), there are some examples that can be read as backlash, but imply a need for a more elaborate interpretation.

The film famously opens with a scene of the gang having breakfast at a diner, discussing the meaning of the song "Like a Virgin" by Madonna. They debate the message of the song, discussing how it revolves around "some cooze" who finally gets some "serious dick action", concluding that "the pain is reminding a fuck machine what it was like to be a virgin" (00:01:27). In order to understand different interpretations of this scene we have to understand the meaning of the song "Like a Virgin" in a feminist context. When the song was released in 1984, it was lauded by third-wave feminists for its reclamation of sexuality and its message of

empowerment (Mansour 295). The use of the song in *Reservoir Dogs* can be read in contradictory ways. On the one hand, the objectification of Madonna by the men can be taken as a defilation of the song's meaning for feminists, a prime example of backlash. On the other hand, it may be an insertion of irony. The men may laugh all they want at the song, but even their laughs cannot dismiss the accomplishments of the feminist movement. In order to make this ironic and progressive reading stronger, however, we must look at the role of "shot woman", later in the film.

"Shot woman" is one of only two women credited in the film. The story of *Reservoir Dogs* is told in a non-linear fashion, which allows for "shot woman" to appear late in the film. It is in the second half, as a flashback, that we see her interaction with Mr. White and Mr. Orange. As they make their escape from the scene of the robbery, they stop a car. As Mr. Orange opens the door of the car, he is shot by the woman inside, before he returns to shoot her. "Shot woman" is thus credited passively, while her action of shooting Mr. Orange drives an essential part of the plot. This fact can be interpreted in two different ways. Again, it may be read as a dismissal of women. The late reveal of this information can be a way of either building the tension or framing it an afterthought. By crediting her passively instead of actively, her contributions to the plot are purposely ignored. This interpretation aligns with Susan Faludi's demonstrations of postfeminist backlash. However, continuing the progressive and ironic reading of the opening scene allows for a different conclusion. Yes, "shot woman" is ignored by the film, both on and off-screen, but in the end, there is no denying her influence, or the influence of women in general. The protagonists fail to rob Karina's Diamond Story – implied by name to have a female owner. Their men's world is no longer sustainable. While they can wave away the role of women, women will eventually catch up to them. Feminism is not yet dead.

1.2 Reading Historical Shifts in *Pulp Fiction*

Rather than declaring the death of feminism, the 'postfeminism as historical shift' perspective defines postfeminism as marking the start of a new era in feminism – often treated as interchangeable with third-wave feminism. Scholars in this perspective typically argue that popular culture had moved beyond the goals and concerns set out by second-wave feminism (Polaschek 30). In particular, this version of postfeminism critiques the singular ideals promoted by second-wave feminism, and attempts to reconcile "the feminist, who is outside popular culture, and the ordinary woman, who unthinkingly consumes that culture" (Polaschek 31).

Mimi Schippers and Erin Grayson Sapp assert that the divide between second-wave and third-wave feminism is based mainly on concurring definitions of femininity and the ramifications of performed femininity (28). Second-wave feminists condemn limitations put on expressions of femininity. Mary Daly, conceptualizes power as a "patriarchal prison" which forces women to embody femininity (Schippers & Sapp 29). Essential in the development of third-wave perspectives on femininity was the work of Judith Butler. She conceptualized gender not as a normative construction but as discursive, relational, and performative (Butler). In a postfeminist culture, therefore, women have at least some power to perform femininity according to their individual choice, and to their advantage. In order to illustrate the effect of this historical shift on the interpretation of female film characters, Schippers and Sapp present both a second-wave and a third-wave reading of the character of Fabienne (Maria de Medeiros) in *Pulp Fiction*. I present this reading and extend it to a similar reading of the character of Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman).

It is not until the second hour of the film that we are introduced to Butch and Fabienne. Schippers and Sapp point out that they are both hyperbolic versions of their respective genders: Butch embodying hypermasculinity through his role as an aggressive boxer, and Fabienne as

his hyperfeminine girlfriend (33). Their hyper gendered personas make them easily legible as such, which makes them suitable to such a side-by-side analysis (Schippers & Sapp 33).

We see Butch and Fabienne interacting in the privacy of their hotel room, where they meet after Butch's fight – where he killed his opponent. Over the course of the evening and following morning, the couple spends the night in this hotel room. From a second-wave perspective, Schippers and Sapp argue, Fabienne is read as a "woman embodying her own subjugation and powerless to control her own destiny" (36). Her feminine character serves to constantly reinforce her inferiority to Butch's masculine power. She is completely reliant on Butch's decision to betray Marcellus Wallace and skip town. Moreover, she presents herself as sexually available, and is scarcely clothed in most of her scenes. She confesses to Butch that she looks at herself in the mirror and contemplates her looks when Butch is gone. When she fails to please Butch, as she forgets to bring his watch, she is immediately called out for being stupid. Butch gets angry – in attempt to reassert his control of the situation – because he "specifically reminded [her] not to forget the fucking watch" (1:25:37). In summary, she is presented as vain and silly, traits that make it so that Butch can control and desire her. The film thus sustains the 'patriarchal prison'.

From a third-wave perspective Fabienne's femininity has different meanings. Butch and Fabienne still adhere to "hegemonic models of femininity and masculinity" (Schippers & Sapp 39), though Fabienne is able to consciously manipulate Butch through her deployment of femininity. While she has hyperfeminine traits and presents herself as sexually available, she does so for her own enjoyment, as she asks Butch to "give [her] oral pleasure" (1:19:43). When Butch gets mad at her for forgetting the watch, furthermore, she presents herself as submissive – instead of yelling back – in order to deescalate the situation. She uses her femininity not because she is powerless, but because it allows her to serve her own interests and gain power. Schippers and Sapp conclude that while the film upholds normative expectations of gender

performance, Fabienne does offer counter-hegemonic meanings for the application of such performance (39).

Similar analyses can be applied to the other most notable female character in *Pulp Fiction* (1992) – Mia Wallace (Uma Thurman). Her character and interaction with Vincent Vega (John Travolta) to some extent parallels that of Fabienne and her interaction with Butch. Rather than hyperfeminine, however, Mia Wallace presents more subtle gender traits, making her harder but also interesting to read. The plot of Mia's appearance revolves around her night out with Vincent Vega – as requested by her husband Marcellus Wallace – and her near-death experience that occurs when she mistakes Vincent's heroine for cocaine.

In a second-wave reading of her character, the focus lies on her dependence on the men around her. She is a 'trophy wife' of Marcellus Wallace, and is dependent on his decisions, including the decision that Vincent Vega has to keep her company while Marcellus is away. She is handed over from the control and power of one man to another, enforcing her subordinate position. Furthermore, as she mistakes Vincent's heroine for cocaine and overdoses, she turns into a 'damsel in distress', completely depending on Vincent and his drug dealer Lance (Eric Stoltz) to save her. Additionally, her femininity and sexuality make her the topic of conversation. Mia is introduced in the opening scene of the film, through the discussion of Vincent (John Travolta) and Jules Winnfield (Samuel L. Jackson) in relation to the rumor that someone had given her a foot massage and that this man was later thrown from a balcony by her husband Marcellus Wallace as punishment. Mia is hereby presented as a sexual object that the men around her are allowed or not allowed to use – as determined not by herself, but by her husband. A second-wave reading of Mia would thus conclude that she, and the film, presents her as trapped in the 'patriarchal prison', similar to Fabienne.

In a third-wave reading of Mia, it is acknowledged that the men around Mia try to boss her around, although the focus would lie on the way she counters this power structure. On her

'date' with Vincent, she is the one who controls the situation. She is the one to open the door, she dictates where they go, what they eat, and whether or not Vince should come in for another drink. She does make the near-fatal mistake with drugs, but after she is revived, she regains control of the situation, telling Vincent not to tell Marcellus about it.

Mia presents herself not as hyperfeminine, but performs both masculine and feminine gender traits. On her night out with Vincent, she wears a suit. This masculine look mirrors that of Vincent, and helps to establish her as equal to him rather than subordinate. Mia furthermore rejects the hyperfeminine traits in the women around her. In the bathroom, we see other women fix their make-up, while she snorts cocaine and yells out: "I said goddamn" (00:42:58). She is still aware of her looks, as she looks in the mirror before she leaves, but not obsessed to the extent of the women around her. She presents a balance of feminine and masculine traits, further exemplified by the dancing scene in the restaurant. She insists that she and Vincent take part in a dancing competition. She twists her subordinate position towards her husband Marcellus, as she reasserts her control over Vincent:

> **Mia**: I wanna dance.
>
> **Vincent**: No, no, no no, no, no, no, no.
>
> **Mia**: No, no, no, no, no, no, no. I do believe Marcellus, my husband, your boss, told you to take me out and do whatever I wanted, Now, I want to dance. I want to win. I want that trophy.
>
> **Vincent**: All right.
>
> **Mia**: So, dance good (00:47:06).

Once they enter the dancefloor, she takes the lead. While she moves around elegantly, she does not allow for Vincent to touch her, and she remains in control of her femininity. As they dance, they dance as equals. A third-wave reading of Mia Wallace would therefore conclude that *Pulp*

Fiction does not only offer counter-hegemonic imagery through normative portrayals, but additionally provides counter-hegemonic meanings through mixed gender performance.

Although the exercise of looking at cultural texts through the lens of different eras in feminist thought is valuable, the general idea of 'postfeminism as historical shift' is problematized by Misha Kavka, in her essay "What is the "Post" in Postfeminism" (2002). If there is a distinct historical break, she asks, then when is it? She offers various options – the 1982 publication of *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* by Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith; Madonna's 1991 "Blonde Ambition" tour; and the 1993 publication of *The Lesbian and Gay Studies Reader* by Henry Abelove, Michèle Aina Barale, and David M. Halperin – but concludes that none could be designated as the sole starting point of postfeminism (Kavka 30). She warns that the distinct temporal marking of postfeminism allows young women to distance themselves from their feminist predecessors. While the young women of this era benefitted significantly from the successes of second-wave feminists – as outlined in the introduction of this chapter – there was a significant divide between second-wave feminists and the new generation. This divide is exemplified in the popular phrase "I'm not a feminist, but…" (Kavka 32). The danger of seeing postfeminism as a historical shift thus lies in the dismissal of the continuous evolution of feminist thought. While it is an interesting exercise to look at the changes in feminist concerns and goals, and to apply different interpretations to a single text, it has to be understood that these two interpretations exist in a continuum, where the latter could not have existed without the former.

1.3 *Jackie Brown* in response to difference

While the 'postfeminism as backlash' and 'postfeminism as historical shift' perspectives were most dominant in 1990s postfeminist scholarship, the 'postfeminism as epistemological break'

perspective is highly influential. In this interpretation of postfeminism, the "post" suffix does not represent backlash or a new era, but the focus on the intersection of postfeminism and postmodernism. This interpretation is itself a theoretical break within feminist scholarship, as postfeminism becomes an "analytic perspective, rather than a description of the nature of any particular cultural product" (Gill *Sensibility* 250). The aim of postfeminism is that "it seeks to deconstruct the binaries of masculine and feminine, destabilizing the notions of gender and sexual differentiation, and works to deconstruct dominant narratives and theories of gender" (Polaschek 32). Both Rosalind Gill and Ann Brooks point out that this perspective on postfeminism originated from critiques of second-wave feminism presented by black, working-class, and queer feminists (Gill *Gender* 32). Postfeminism intersects not only with postmodernism, but also with poststructuralism and post-colonialism (Brooks 4). In relation to *Jackie Brown* (1997), this section focuses mainly on the influence of black feminism on the 'postfeminism as epistemological break' perspective. The various critiques from black feminists had tremendous effect on postfeminism. They opened up discussion to the differences between women in race, ethnicity, class, age, and ability. This could not be done by simply 'adding in' women of color to existing feminist frameworks but was one of the driving forces to propel entirely new frameworks of postfeminism.

First and foremost, black feminist critique focused on pointing out the false universalism claimed by second-wave feminism. In 1984, bell hooks published a damning critique of one of the second wave's most canonical text: Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*. In her critique, hooks asserts that the alleged universal plights of second wave feminists was rather the plight of bored housewives, the college educated, upper middle-class, married white women. (qtd. in Gill *Gender* 32).

Second-wave feminism was further criticized for ignoring the different historical experiences of white and black women. The idea of the nuclear family was central to this

critique. As Hazel Carby states: "We do not wish to deny that the family can be a source of oppression for us, but we also wish to examine how the black family has functioned as a prime source of resistance to oppression" (qtd. in Gill *Gender* 32). Similarly, critics pointed out the exclusion of the experience of black women in campaigns for sexual and reproductive rights (Gill *Gender* 32). The reluctance of white second-wave feminists to reflect upon their privilege obstructed the discussion of racism within and outside the larger feminist movement (Gill 2006 33).

In film scholarship, bell hooks describes the neglected agency of black people both in their on-screen portrayals and their off-screen role as viewers. For the majority of cinematic history, black people on screen only existed in the form of stereotypes and "white representations of blackness" (hooks 117). Nonetheless, black viewers were able to experience pleasure and power from the critical viewing of those portrayals (hooks 117). hooks emphasizes, however, that the experience of the black male spectator differs significantly from the black female spectator (hooks 118). As Laura Mulvey had explained in her work on the gaze in relation to white women (Mulvey), black male filmmakers presented black women through a male gaze that objectified them. In mainstream cinema, moreover, black women were either entirely absent or their "bodies and being were there to serve – to enhance and maintain white womanhood as object of the phallocentric gaze" (hooks 119).

Important in the history of black cinema is the introduction of the blaxploitation genre in the 1970s. Originally, the term blaxploitation describes films made to make money from black film audiences (Lawrence 18). Despite these intentions, films within the genre – often produced by black filmmakers – were able to depict the experience of black people in more detail than before (Lawrence 20). These films were among the first to feature strong black leads, both male and female and "both socially and politically conscious" (Lawrence 18). These black characters moved beyond stereotypes, and moved beyond the monolithic roles of "police

detectives, vigilantes, and pimps, among others" (Lawrence 18). *Coffy* (Hill, 1973) and *Cleopatra Jones* (Starrett, 1973) were the first blaxploitation films to feature female leads, played by Pam Grier and Tamara Dobson respectively, who equaled to their male co-stars in terms of toughness (Lawrence 18). From the start, these films conveyed progressive ideas about femininity and sexuality – as discussed in relation to *Pulp Fiction*. Whereas the sexual objectification of white women is generally disapproved in feminist scholarship, the sexual depiction of black women in blaxploitation films was an empowering alternative to the historical neglect of their sexuality on screen (Lawrence 20). That does not mean, however, that their hypersexual presentation goes entirely uncriticized.

With *Jackie Brown* (1997) – his last film of the decade –Tarantino wanted to pay homage to the 1970s blaxploitation genre. His casting of Pam Grier as the protagonist of the film is no coincidence. Grier was a well-known blaxploitation star, playing lead roles in *Coffy* and *Foxy Brown* (1974), amongst others. In *Jackie Brown,* Pam Grier plays a middle-aged flight attendant working for a Mexican airline. In order to earn extra money, she smuggles a gun dealer's money (played by Samuel L. Jackson) from Mexico to the U.S. When she is caught by the FBI, she gets tangled in a complex scheme, in which she manages to outsmart all the men around her and get away with the money and her freedom. As a working-class woman of color with a criminal record, Jackie represents the women that were ignored by white second-wave feminism. Moreover, the scene where she enters jail (00:33:44) emphasizes that she is not alone, as she is sharing her cell with women who are similarly black and working class. Jackie is aware of her situation, as well as the prejudice of others against her because of it. The FBI agents that encourage her to become an informant play on her social status, telling her:

> **Dargus**: If you refuse to cooperate, continue to cop a shit attitude like you're doing now
> we will give you to Customs and they will take you to court, and with your prior, the
> judge will give you two years. Now, you'll probably only end up serving a year and

some change, but if I was a 44-year-old black woman, desperately clinging on to this one shitty, little job that I was fortunate enough to get, I don't think that I'd think I had a year to throw away. So let's start again now, shall we? Who in Mexico gave you this money, and who in America were you bringing it to?

Jackie: I'm not saying another goddamn word (00:32:05).

She manages to employ her status to her advantage as she outsmarts both the FBI and gun dealer Ordell, relying on their underestimation of her. Her defeat of these white – and black – male authority figures is symbolic of black people overcoming perpetuated racism, a trope commonly featured in blaxploitation films (Lawrence 19). Notably, she is able to do so without the use of excessive violence, a trope usually associated with the blaxploitation genre.

In addition to paying homage, Tarantino presents a reinvention of the female blaxploitation lead that is valuable to the 'postfeminism as an epistemological break' perspective. As a strong, black, working-class woman, Jackie counters the hegemony of white, middle class, young women in mainstream postfeminist media. This contributes to the postfeminist discussion that seeks to deconstruct dominant narratives.

Jackie is never overtly sexualized. Throughout the film she is well dressed and groomed, without ever showing much skin or otherwise exhibiting hyperfeminine traits (Platz 537). She is neither hyper-masculinized, but instead is presented as a balanced and strong female heroine. Her femininity is never placed in competition with her masculine traits. The portrayal of Jackie's character has led bell hooks to comment:

I think that it is one of the more meaningful images, resisting images of a black female that has come out of contemporary film and it is important that that resisting image begins with *Coffy*, it doesn't begin in the Quentin Tarantino imagination. He has the capacity and ability, through love I think, through love of the image itself, through love of the character, to take that image of the strong and powerful woman, and bring it into

a new generation, a new time. In a sense, he erases the earlier pornography of *Coffy*

(*BaadAsssss Cinema* 00:48:53).

The same cannot be said of the other notable female character in the film, namely Melanie

Ralston (Bridget Fonda). She is in many ways presented as the opposite of Jackie, being a

young, white, hyper-sexualized woman. She is mostly subordinate to the men around her,

although she is at times successful in the manipulation of the men around her using her

femininity and sexuality. Nonetheless, she is ultimately punished for her attempts of gaining

control, as Louis (Robert De Niro) kills Melanie following an altercation where Louis perceives

Melanie as nagging.

Jackie Brown presents a successful emulation and addition to the blaxploitation genre

and the intersection of black feminism and postfeminism. Nonetheless, Tarantino's portrayal of

Melanie remains problematic. The blaxploitation genre, furthermore, is not without criticism.

The blaxploitation label is still used to as a descriptor today. Lawrence points out, however,

that the term is "reductionistic because it fails to assign individual films to their respective

genres. Before this can be fully addressed, it is necessary to discuss exploitation in pictures in

general" (Lawrence 20). Increased attention to this issue is not only constructive in creating a

better understanding of black cinema, but additionally helps to deconstruct falsely universal

second-wave feminist claims, allowing "the meaning and significance of feminist ideas [to]

become the focus of critical reflection" (Polaschek 37).

2. Making Sense of It All: Trends in the 2000s Postfeminist Media Landscape

Debates around the definition and implications of postfeminism continued into the new millennium. The division between the interpretations of postfeminism as either backlash, historical shift, or epistemological change remained. Instead of diving further into these strands of postfeminism, however, this chapter focuses on the idea of 'postfeminism as a sensibility' as introduced by Rosalind Gill (*Sensibility* 148). This idea is essentially built on the theories developed in the previous decade – most closely linked to the idea of double-entanglement as introduced by Angela McRobbie. The sensibility perspective takes postfeminist media culture as a critical object rather than an analytic perspective. When postfeminism is understood as a sensibility it allows us to discard a reliance on "a static notion of one single authentic feminism as a comparison point" and focus instead on distinctions in "contemporary articulations of gender in the media" (Gill *Sensibility* 148). The contradictions that divided postfeminist scholars before, are now encompassed and acknowledged in this new perspective. Gill argues that the "entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas" is what makes "contemporary media culture distinctively postfeminist" (*Sensibility* 161). It allows us to seek out how "feminist ideas are simultaneously incorporated, revised, depoliticized, and attacked" in media discourse (Gill *Sensibility* 161). It also allows for the acknowledgement and analysis of ironic references to feminist ideas (Gill *Sensibility* 159). This perspective thus builds on Toril Moi's original definition of postfeminism as working towards a deconstruction of binary views on feminism.

While the fluidity of the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility may be confusing, Gill acknowledges several trends – "relatively stable features" (Gill *Sensibility* 149) – that are pervasive within postfeminist media discourse in the 2000s. Central is the obsession with the female body (Gill *Sensibility* 149). The postfeminist media defines femininity as a bodily property and the possession of a "sexy body" as a "source of identity" (Gill *Sensibility* 149). The female body is, however, declared both powerful and unruly. From this ambiguous notion

follows the trend of discipline and (self-)surveillance, the demand for women to keep their bodies well-groomed and in shape. Gill states that a "sleek, toned, controlled figure is normatively essential for portraying success" (*Sensibility* 150). Important to note is the additional media focus on messages of "individualism, choice, and empowerment" (*Sensibility* 153) that frame a woman's strife towards perfection as a very personal and individual process. This focus on individualism moreover extents to political issues. Lois McNay warns that the "reprivatization" of political issues is reversing strides made by the second-wave feminists that framed the personal as political (McNay 106). In summary, postfeminist media thus expresses a need for women to tame their unruly bodies in order to gain power – and to do so through individual empowerment.

Additional to postfeminist media trends regarding the female body are trends linked to sexuality – although Gill emphasizes that these topics themselves are closely linked (*Sensibility* 150). Gill points at the sexualization of culture, the "extraordinary proliferation of discourses about sex and sexuality across all media forms" (*Sensibility* 150). In these discourses, the sexual difference between men and women is continuously reasserted. As explained in chapter 1 – in the context of bitchification – attitudes towards male and female sexuality were already skewed in the 1990s. In the 2000s, this discrepancy continued. Gill explains that as part of this dynamic "discourses of sexual difference also serve to (re-)eroticize power relations between men and women" (*Sensibility* 159). Men continue to be encouraged to seek sexual pleasure, with little regard of consequences. Attitudes towards female sexuality become even more complex. Women remain locked in the "goldilocks conundrum", being labeled either sluts or prudes. What makes female sexuality more complex in the 2000s, is the shift from women as desirable sexual objects to desiring sexual subjects. Gill explains that instead of mute objects of the male gaze, women are increasingly acknowledged to be "desiring sexual subjects" (*Sensibility* 151). While gaining agency over their sexuality, women are nonetheless expected to be forever "up

for it" when it comes to sex – that is, available and willing to please men whenever they want them to (*Sensibility* 151). Gill therefore warns that this trend may represent an internalization of the male gaze rather than sexual empowerment (*Sensibility* 152).

The 2000s postfeminist ideals of beauty and sexuality are popularly conveyed through the makeover narrative. The narrative is abundant in chicklit films of the 1990s and 2000s, including *The Princess Diaries* (Marshall, 2001)*, The Devil Wears Prada* (Frankel, 2006)*,* and *The House Bunny* (Wolf, 2008). The abundance of this narrative has led Joanne Hollows to declare the "makeover takeover" (qtd. in Gill *Sensibility* 156). The logic of the makeover narrative is founded on the idea that the self and body are divided, and that this division can be rectified through both self-surveillance and external help (Gwynne 68). Through the process of the makeover, women are thus able to adhere to postfeminist standards of feminine desirability. This narrative process consists of three distinct steps. First, women are required to believe that they – their lives, clothing, work, sex, looks, and homes – are lacking or flawed. This message is dominant not only in film, but similarly present in "magazines, talk shows, and other media content" (Gill *Postfeminist Sensibility* 156). These media outlets then offer various methods that allow women to improve themselves. It follows that the adherence to postfeminist standards of desirability is presented as empowering – the key to success. In film this is played out in the repetitive constructs of "the make-under, the makeover, and the final revelation/affirmation" that allows female protagonists to "achieve social mobility, popularity, and the 'prize' of (a new or rekindled) heterosexual romance" (Gwynne 61).

The makeover paradigm as dominant in chicklit films is essentially linked to the (rape) revenge narratives present in action and drama films. Revenge narratives, particularly rape revenge narratives, have become a common staple in cinema, with films such as *I Spit on Your Grave* (Zarchi, 1978), *Ms. 45* (Ferrara, 1981), and *Extremities* (Young, 1986) (Coulthard 162). These narratives revolve around female protagonists that have suffered from wrongdoing, often

in the shape of physical and/or sexual violence. At the start of the story, they therefore feel flawed or lacking – similar to the starting point of the makeover narrative. They want to improve their situation through the exercise of revenge against their perpetrators. They are able to do so through the use of violence. In this case the violence used is thus constructive instead of disruptive and condoned by society. Important to note is that the wrongdoing suffered allows the protagonist to become the "ethical center of the universe" (Coulthard 164). The revenge plot is thus framed in an individual and personal context, similar to the process of the makeover. Only when revenge is achieved, the protagonist can become a whole woman again. The makeover and revenge paradigms thus both essentially follow narratives of retribution.

The feminist meanings of revenge narratives are heavily debated. On the one hand, these narratives are lauded for their empowerment of women. The use of violence in revenge narratives allows women to move beyond their victimhood (Coulthard 154). On the other hand, they are criticized for establishing the need for justification of female violence. Traditionally, violence is established as masculine, and female use of violence in the context of revenge may thus reassert the idea that women are innately gentle, and will only perform these 'manly' acts of violence in response to wrongdoing (Davis 15).

All the above-mentioned trends and processes are present in the Quentin Tarantino films released in this decade: *Kill Bill Vol. I* (2003) and *Vol. II* (2004), *Death Proof* (2007), and *Inglourious Basterds* (2009). In contrast to most of his work from the previous decade, all of these films feature female protagonists and/or prominent female characters within an ensemble cast. The films in this decade are diverse in genre, featuring elements of action, drama, Kung Fu, and horror. In each of the following sections, I therefore discuss the context of these genres and their relation to the postfeminist trends and processes of the 2000s as part of the sensibility perspective. The first section of this chapter explores the narrative of (rape) revenge and the influence of the Kung Fu genre in reading Beatrix Kiddo, the protagonist of the *Kill Bill*

franchise and her enemies. Next, I explore the trope of revenge further in *Death Proof* (2007), relating it to established scholarship on the "Final Girl" in the slasher genre. Finally, I discuss the alternative take on history presented in *Inglourious Basterds* (2009), focusing specifically on the revenge plot of Shosanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent).

2.1 Individual Revenge in *Kill Bill Vol. 1 & 2*

Violent and individual revenge is central to the plot of *Kill Bill Vol. I & Vol. II* – which I henceforth discuss as a single narrative. *Kill Bill* tells the story of Beatrix "The Bride" Kiddo (Uma Thurman), an assassin on a path of revenge against the people who almost killed her and her daughter, most notably Bill. When she finds out her daughter is still alive, her main objective becomes reuniting with her. As a trained assassin, Beatrix is willing to kill whoever stands in her way. She ultimately succeeds in her revenge and the film ends with her reunion with her daughter. Lisa Coulthard places *Kill Bill* in a contemporary tradition of action and martial arts films featuring violent women, including *Lara Croft: Tomb Raider* (West, 2001), *Charlie's Angels* (McG, 2000), and *Mr. and Mrs. Smith* (Liman, 2005).

The contradictory feminist interpretations of revenge narratives as discussed in the introduction of this chapter can certainly be applied to *Kill Bill*. The image of Beatrix as a skilled and victorious fighter can be read as empowering and impressive, as she is able to fight off numerous skilled opponents. It should be noted, however, that even though Bill is the main target of Beatrix's revenge, most of the screen time is dedicated to her fights against other women. In these fights – against Vernita Green (Vivica A. Fox), O-ren Ishii (Lucy Liu), and Elle Driver (Daryl Hannah) – Beatrix and her opponents are presented as equals. Although Beatrix is always victorious, they go head to head in terms of skill (Coulthard 159).

When Beatrix fights male opponents, however, she is generally placed in an inferior starting position. Coulthard points out that there are only three instances in the film in which

Beatrix is presented as passive, and all three are the result of violence inflicted by male opponents (Coulthard 160). Budd (Michael Madsen) almost succeeds in killing her, and Bill first shoots her in the church and is later able to immediately disarm her at the start of their final confrontation – both emotionally and physically. The most notable example of her inferiority to men occurs in relation to her fight with Buck (Michael Bowen), the hospital employee.

This secondary storyline presents a rape revenge story in itself, as it is revealed that Buck repeatedly raped Beatrix while she was in a coma. Her coma places her in a physically inferior position, and she is only able to overpower and kill Buck after she wakes up. Beatrix's decision to actually kill him is only solidified – and justified – after she recalls his sexual abuse of her. She exercises her revenge by saying: "Your name is Buck, right? And you came here to fuck, right?" (*Kill Bill Vol. 1,* 00:31:30), after which she smashes his head between a door. Thus, while Beatrix is able to come out victorious in all of her fights, her starting position is significantly complicated in her fights against male opponents.

Beatrix's coma does not only set up the secondary rape revenge narrative. It can additionally be read as a nod to the postfeminist media's standards for the female body. As explained by Gill, postfeminist media is obsessed with the female body, and a "sleek, toned, controlled figure is normatively essential for portraying success" (*Sensibility* 150). Throughout the film, Beatrix displays great control over her body through her martial arts skills. However, the control over her body is taken to an incredible extreme as she wakes up from her coma and is able to regain control over her body in a short amount of time. Gill explains that women are generally expected to maintain their physical shape through heavy self-surveillance and discipline, while making it look 'fun' and easy (*Sensibility* 155). This ambiguity is reflected in the scene where Beatrix regains control of her body after her coma. While she uses all her self-control and strength to make herself recover, she tells herself that it is as simple as "wiggl[ing] your big toe" (*Kill Bill Vol. 1,* 00:34:26). This scene can thus be read as a nod to the impossible

speed and stamina through which women are demanded to control their bodies in postfeminist media discourse.

In order to better understand Beatrix's character, it is worth to discuss the portrayal of Beatrix and her enemies in relation to the genre that *Kill Bill* is inspired by: Kung Fu. The Kung Fu genre is generally conservative in its representation of violent women, and Wendy Arons has been able to uncover general patterns (Arons 27). Chinese culture knows a longstanding tradition of female martial artistry. In Kung Fu film, the woman warrior is thus a well-established phenomenon. The use of violence in the Kung Fu genre should be viewed not as pure aggression, but as a choreographed performance like the performance of dancers in musicals (Arons 30). Still, the use of violence is generally seen as a masculine trait. Female warriors are presented either as hyperfeminine or hypermasculine. They are either admired – in hyperfeminine cases – or dismissed – in hypermasculine cases – by their male colleagues.

When violent women appear as villains in the Kung Fu genre "their gender often marks them as more evil than their male accomplices" (Arons 31). This certainly applies to *Kill Bill*, and the character of Elle Driver, Beatrix's female nemesis. While Bill is presented as the main villain, Elle is presented as more evil. She is sent by Bill to do the dirty work of actually killing Beatrix. Where Bill ultimately shows compassion for Beatrix, Elle truly hates her. This is made clear when Elle expresses regret for not having killed Beatrix herself, as she and Budd are under the impression that he succeeded in this feat:

Budd: So, which "R" you filled with?

Elle: What?

Budd: They say the number one killer of old people is retirement. People got a job to do, they tend to live a little longer so they can do it. I've always figured warriors and their enemies share the same relationship. So now you ain't gonna have to face your enemy on the battlefield no more, which "R" are you filled with, Relief or Regret?

Elle: A little bit of both.

Bud: Bullshit. I'm sure you do feel a little bit of both. But I know damn well you feel one more than you feel the other. The question was which one?

Elle: Regret (*Kill Bill Vol. 2,* 01:07:37).

Furthermore, the deception by which Elle then proceeds to kill Budd – using a Black Mamba snake hidden in a briefcase – is especially malicious. Elle certainly takes pleasure in killing. A similar instance occurs when she kills Pai Mei, the martial arts instructor. She is able to catch him off-guard as she poisons his food, which leads to his death. Her malicious tactics make Elle's portrayal thus significantly more evil than other – male – opponents of Beatrix.

In the Kung-Fu genre, the character of the mother warrior has a special place. Instead of linking violence to sexuality, violence is placed "in the realm of a quasimaternal instinct" (Arons 46). This maternal instinct is certainly present in Beatrix. The presumed loss of her child sets the plot of the film in motion, and the discovery that her child is still alive drives the conclusion. Her use of violence is presented as a means to an end. As she is reunited with her daughter in a melodramatic conclusion of the film, Beatrix abandons her past. The addition of this maternal element to the revenge narrative makes a feminist interpretation more complex. Maxime Cervulle, for example, argues that Beatrix embodies a postfeminist hybrid of feminine and masculine qualities through the "hyperfeminine stylization of her body, combined with typically masculine coded psychology and interests, all influenced by traditionally feminine social values and ambitions" (Cervulle 37).[1] Cervulle concludes, however, that Beatrix's maternity ultimately diminishes the power of her revenge against her male enemies – "the operators of male hegemony" (37).[2] Amanda Davis similarly acknowledges that Beatrix

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[1] "Une stylisation hyperféminine des corps, accompagnée d'une psychologie et d'affects typiquement codés comme masculins, le tout saupoudré de valeurs et ambitions sociales traditionnellement féminines" (Cervulle 37).

[2] "En d'autres termes, la violence de Kiddo, et son potentiel de vengeance contre les agents du sexisme, est canalisée via la maternité et, ainsi, rendue impuissante à menacer véritablement les opérateurs de l'hégémonie masculine" (Cervulle 37).

"effectively defies and conforms to our society's definition of femininity" (20). She concludes that it is this "complex nature that makes Beatrix the prototype for modern society's ideal super-mom" (20). It is thus difficult, if not impossible, to conclude whether Beatrix's use of violence and maternal instinct make her progressive or subversive in a feminist context. Yet, it is precisely this complex situation that the 'postfeminism as a sensibility' perspective allows us to capture.

2.2 Collective Revenge in *Death Proof*

The revenge narrative is featured in various film genres, including horror. Tarantino's second film of the decade, *Death Proof*, borrows various elements of the slasher subgenre of horror. In *Death Proof*, we follow two different groups of women, and their encounters with serial killer Stuntman Mike (Kurt Russell). The first group, consisting of Arlene (Vanessa Ferlito), Jungle Julia (Syney Tamiia Poitier), and Shanna (Jordan Ladd), does not survive their encounter with the serial killer and are all killed in a head-on collision with his "death proof" car. The second group of women, consisting of Zoë Bell (Zoë Bell), Kim (Tracie Thoms), and Abernathy (Rosario Dawson), outsmart Stuntman Mike during their encounter, and succeed in killing him instead of being killed.

The differences in the outcomes of these two storylines and the characteristics of the women in them relate to established scholarship on the role of gender and revenge in the slasher genre. In her highly influential analysis *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* (1992), Carol Clover outlines a gendered perpetrator-victim dynamic that was popularized in the slasher genre since the release of *Psycho* (Hitchcock, 1960). In an interview with Nick James, Quentin Tarantino has referred to this work as the primary source of inspiration for the characters in *Death Proof* (qtd. in Cervulle 44). I therefore present my analysis of the characters in *Death Proof* following the theory of Clover, pointing out the relevant parallels and diversions from the original theory

and their relation to postfeminist media trends of the 2000s. Once again, it is the perspective of postfeminism as a sensibility that allows for the analysis of nuance and ambiguity.

First, Clover argues that the killer is generally presented as a heavily masculinized psychopath (24). Stuntman Mike, the main villain of the film, certainly fits this description. He represents the literal embodiment of the male gaze. As a white, male aggressor, he is the patriarchy incarnate. The film introduces him through his gaze, and his objectification of the female protagonists is established through various point-of-view shots throughout the film (Platz 534). At the beginning of the second act of the story, as we are introduced to the second group of women, Stuntman Mike photographs the women, which "transforms them into passive objects at his disposal" (Platz 534). His pursuit of these women invokes the generally carefree attitude that is promoted in men seeking (hetero)sexual pleasure, as described by Gill in relation to the reassertion of sexual difference in the postfeminist media of the 2000s (*Sensibility* 158).

Notably, Mike kills one woman – Pam (Rose McGowan) – by having her drive along in his car, in a seat that is a "crash box", a spot used in stunt scenes "where they put the camera" (00:44:17). By mangling and killing Pam in the usual spot of the camera, the film not only alludes to Stuntman Mike's objectification of women, but to the larger objectification of women as pervasive throughout the history of Hollywood. The male gaze is therefore reaffirmed as the true villain of the film.

Following her description of the slasher villain, Clover explains the general characteristics of his first victims. These are usually hyperfeminine women "who seek or engage in unauthorized sex" (Clover 33). Their sexuality is what costs them their lives, as "sexual transgressors are scheduled for early destruction" (Clover 33). The group of women central to the first act of the film - Arlene (Vanessa Ferlito), Jungle Julia (Syney Tamiia Poitier), and Shanna (Jordan Ladd) – are all highly feminized and sexualized characters. Their professions, for example, rely heavily on appearances and they express stereotypical "feminine

tastes and conversations" (Platz 532). While none are shown performing sexual acts, they are implied to be the sexual transgressors that Clover describes. The most notable example of this occurs when Arlene is made to perform a lap dance due to a game set up by Julia on her radio show. When Stuntman Mike dares her to perform the lap dance, Arlene refuses at first, but ultimately makes the decision to perform anyway, and appears to take pleasure in the act.

Arlene's behavior in this scene also makes sense in relation to Gill's description of the shift of women from sexual objects to sexual subjects. While the women are heavily sexualized, they are active players in their sexual portrayal. Gill warns, however, that the sexual agency gained by women is limited, as they are still expected to be readily willing and available to fulfill the sexual desire of men (*Sensibility* 151). As mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, this may signal an internalization of the male gaze rather than sexual agency. Arlene's lap dance scene fits this description. Her initial hesitance but ultimate performance reflects Arlene's admission to and possible internalization of societal expectations of her sexuality.

The editing of the storyline of Arlene, Julia, and Shanna furthermore reduces them to body parts rather than women. This relates to the sexualization of female victims as described by Clover (35), as well as the postfeminist media obsession with the female body as described by Gill (*Sensibility* 149). The opening sequence, for example, focuses on Arlene as she walks around the house in her underwear. The camera focuses on her feet, and slowly pans up to the rest of her body. The women's faces are not introduced until almost three minutes into the film (Platz 534). Clover notes that the murder of female victims is generally filmed at close range, while male deaths often happen offscreen (35). This adds to the voyeuristic and sexual portrayal of female victims. Jenny Platz similarly argues that this trio of women is further reduced to sexual objects when they are killed. The body parts that were previously sexualized, Julia's legs and Arlene's face, are specifically destroyed in the collision that kills them (535). In both life and death, the female protagonists of the first act are thus heavily sexualized.

Clover's most notable addition to film scholarship is the introduction of the "Final Girl" character trope (35). In slasher films, the Final Girl is able to survive and at times kill the psychopathic villain. Clover characterizes the Final Girl as boyish, competent in mechanical matters, and sexually reluctant (40). The female protagonists of the second act possess these masculine traits and interests. Zoe Bell (Zoe Bell) and Kim (Tracie Thoms) are both stuntwomen, and extensively discuss their love for cars. It is their masculinity that allows them to survive their encounter with Stuntman Mike, as they outsmart his driving skills, and overpower him. Clover points out that the psychopathic killer and the "Final Girl" generally performs a switch in gender traits when the killer is defeated. This is certainly the case for Stuntman Mike, who shifts from tough to an emotional wreck after he is overtaken by the second group of women. In this moment, women's masculinity stands in sharp contrast with the femininity of Stuntman Mike.

The heavily gendered treatment of the characters in the slasher genre, and the gender shift of the psychopath killer and the "Final Girl" complicates the interpretation of *Death Proof* as a female revenge narrative. Claire Henry argues that the ability of the second group of women to avenge the deaths of the first group of women sets up a collective-driven revenge narrative – in contrast to the individual revenge central in *Kill Bill*. Henry points out that "*Death Proof* depicts female solidarity and friendship as key to responding to sexual violence" (147). In this regard, Claire Henry places the film in the same tradition as *Thelma & Louise* (Scott, 1991), *Baise-Moi* (Despentes & Trinh Thi, 2000), and *Monster* (Jenkins, 2003) (Henry 144). This reading promotes a message of sisterhood that stands in contrast to the focus on individualism in postfeminist media as described by Gill (*Sensibility* 153). If these two groups of women are taken as a collective, their fight and victory over Stuntman Mike can be read as a collective victory of women over the male gaze.

Maxime Cervulle questions the connection between the two groups of the women in *Death Proof.* Cervulle points out that the second group of women is not aware of the deaths of the first group of women. The film may imply a relation, but it is not necessarily there. Cervulle strengthens this argument by calling out the abandonment of Lee (Mary Elizabeth Winstead) in the second act of the film. Lee is left behind with the owner of the car that Kim, Zoe, and Abernathy want to take for a spin (46). It is heavily implied, but never confirmed, that Lee can provide sexual pleasure to the owner in the absence of his car. The women even tell the owner that Lee is a porn star. The most sexualized woman in the group is therefore actively abandoned by the more masculine women. This abandonment disrupts the argument that *Death Proof* presents a collective revenge narrative. Although it may imply that women should abandon postfeminist feminine standards of the body and mind, the alternative of become masculinized is not satisfactory either. Finally, Cervulle's argument against the collectivity of the women in *Death Proof* is enforced by Clover's original theory. Central to Clover's argument in *Men, Women, and Chain Saws* is the fact that the masculinity of the "Final Girl" serves male audiences, as it allows young men to identify with the protagonist. The role of the "Final Girl" – in the case of *Death Proof* fulfilled by Zoë, Kim, and Abernathy – may thus not be to empower female viewers, but relate to (young) male audiences.

2.3 Historical Revenge in *Inglourious Basterds*

While the basic facts of World War II history are indisputable, the medium of film provides an opportunity to present an alternative imagination. In *Inglourious Basterds,* Tarantino presents a revenge fantasy where the end of World War II is brought about by the actions of its protagonists. In one storyline, the film follows the gang of "basterds" who devise a plot that is focused on "one thing, and one thing only: Killing Nazis" (00:22:03) and taking down the Nazi leadership in order to end World War II. In another connected storyline we follow Bridget von

Hammersmark (Diane Kruger), a German actress who works as a spy for the British, in her own effort to fight the Nazi regime. To different extents, these storylines are each reiterations of a revenge narrative. The most important revenge storyline, however, is that of Shosanna Dreyfus (Mélanie Laurent). The murder of her family by the order of Colonel Hans Landa (Christoph Waltz) is played out in the opening scene of the film, which Joe Kraus declares "one of the most memorably sadistic scenes in recent cinema" (441). This event propels Shosanna's storyline as one of personal revenge. Her storyline becomes more complex as her revenge turns into a larger plot against the leadership of the Nazis.

While Shosanna's story starts out at a personal level her story shifts from strictly personal to political, as she plans and succeeds in killing the entire Nazi leadership by setting fire to her cinema. The political element of her storyline counters the trend towards individualization as described by Gill (*Sensibility* 150). Gill explains that the idea of "personal choice" and individualization is pervasive in the postfeminist media landscape. This personal approach has been extended to experiences of domestic violence, racism, and homophobia, "turning the personal-as-political on its head" (Gill 153). In *Inglourious Basterds*, the personal experience of Shosanna as a Jew is certainly made political in the context of Nazi occupied France.

The political and historical setting of Shosanna's revenge is emphasized by her last name: Dreyfus. This name is a reference to Alfred Dreyfus, a French Jew who was falsely accused and convicted of being a spy for the Germans in 1898. His trial – which became known as the Dreyfus affair – became an important argument against anti-Semitism in the French military. Shosanna's last name therefore implies that "the heroines act is directed at anti-Semitism in general, not just in Nazi Germany and Occupied France" (Roche 45). This makes Shosanna's story of revenge politically significant.

Despite the film's references to historical figures and events, Adilifu Nama argues that *Inglourious Basterds* "is more than ahistorical; it presents something more akin to an alternative world that exists in a parallel universe" (94). The misspellings in the film's title exemplify this "alternative-world sensibility" (Nama 94). Nama does argue that the science fiction elements of the film allow it to "[indulge] in the metaphoric rhetoric and imagery to examine some current ethical dilemma by means of social or political allegory" (95). Nama goes on to read *Inglourious Basterds* as a critique of the structural racial violence in the United States today. While this reading is convincing and interesting, I want to focus on reading *Inglourious Basterds* as critiquing the persistence of the male gaze in postfeminist media.

In order to strengthen this argument, I want to discuss the metatextual elements of the film in relation to postfeminism. The setting of Shosanna's ultimate revenge, her cinema, is highly significant in this regard. As argued by Jenny Platz:

> Cinema is at the center of the plot: it is where Operation Kino will take place to kill Hitler; it is Shosanna's livelihood and security; it provides the platform for the power of propaganda through the film *Nation's Pride;* allows Bridget von Hammersmark to function as a double agent for the Allies; it is at the center of tension during the card game in the French bar, the material of film itself functions as an explosive device for Shosanna; and finally, it serves as a pre-Third Reich history of German cinema that Goebbels recognizes as a potentially dangerous force (538).

Where *Death Proof* presents Stuntman Mike as the embodiment of the male gaze, *Inglourious Basterds* presents Shosanna as overcoming this gaze. During the climax of the film, as Shosanna burns down her cinema in order to trap and kill the Nazi officials inside, her face is displayed on the screen. She disrupts the screening of *Nation's Pride* and forces the audience to watch and listen to what she has to say, thereby manipulating the gaze of the camera (Platz 538). Her face fills the screen as she says: "I have a message for Germany. That you are all going to die.

And I want you to look deep into the face of the Jew that is going to do it. Marcel, burn it down"
(02:23:20). In this instance, Shosanna is interrupting the film for both the Nazi audience
watching *Nation's Pride* and the audience watching *Inglourious Basterds* (Guthrie 350).
Caroline Guthrie reads this interruption as an emphasis of the "role of collaboration and
passivity in the shaping of the past" (359). I want to extend this argument, taking into account
the historical passivity of women in film. As the audiences – both the Nazi officers and
ourselves – are forced to look and listen to Shosanna, they are subjected to her female gaze.
The interruption and vengeance of Shosanna thus works on both an historical and a meta level.

Just before the climax of the film we see Shosanna prepare herself for the showdown in
the projection room. Her preparation can be interpreted as an alternative take on the makeover
narrative. In postfeminist media of the 2000s, women are shamed and told how to improve their
lives and most importantly their bodies. In this scene, we see Shosanna putting on her dress,
her hat, and smearing lip stick across her cheeks as war paint (Platz 538). The climax of her
revenge narrative is thereby paralleled by a physical transformation – a makeover. The red make
up revokes the image of Shosanna in the opening scene, as she flees across the hills covered in
blood. This time, however, she is the one in control, and her physical appearance reflects this.

Shosanna's physical appearance in combination with her ethnic identity forms an
especially empowering image. As a blonde, blue-eyed Jew, Shosanna possesses a counter-
hegemonic identity that is not identified by the Nazi regime. Their ignorance of this possibility
allows Shosanna to go unnoticed as a hidden Jew (Kraus 438). She powerfully claims this
identity, and makes sure that the Nazi's are aware of it, during the climactic scene in the cinema.
Her final words are: "My name is Shosanna Dreyfus and this is the face of Jewish vengeance"
(02:24:20). While her revenge narrative then comes to completion, she dies in the process. Joe
Kraus points out how Shosanna's faith – like her last name – stands in connection to her Jewish
identity, as the ghostly image of her face on screen and the rising flames behind her connects

her death "to the otherwise unreferenced horrors of the concentration camps" (448). This dark ending is not without purpose. It can be linked to the argument of the metafictional confrontation of the audience, as Kraus asserts that: "Her film may end in triumph, but it demands a reaction; it is anything but escapist" (440). The audience of *Inglourious Basterds* is thus forced to rethink the history of anti-Semitism as well as the history of women in cinema.

In the context of the postfeminist media discourse of the 2000s, the meaning of Shosanna's appearance is more ambiguous. While it is empowering that she occupies a counter-hegemonic identity, she perfectly fits the description of a postfeminist ideal – white, young, and in shape. This unilateral idea of beauty is often critiqued as anti-feminist (163). This critique becomes more evident when extended to the other female characters discussed in this chapter. In both *Kill Bill* and *Death Proof*, the protagonists are all presented as young, straight, pretty, white or light-skinned, toned, and able-bodied. In the case of *Kill Bill*, the borrowing of elements from the Kung Fu genre raises the question as to why a Western, white, blonde woman plays the protagonist. Thus, while the Tarantino films of the 2000s feature strong protagonists that are able to successfully exercise revenge – either individually, collectively, or historically – the portrayals of these protagonists adhere to restrictive postfeminist ideals of femininity as a bodily property.

3.   A New Momentum: Intersectional Approaches to Postfeminism in the 2010s

By the 2010s the postfeminist cultural landscape had become more complex than ever. To a certain extent, feminism was "having a moment" (Gill *10 Years On* 611). Activism brought feminism back to the mainstream forefront, fighting against racism, injustice, and sexual violence. Because of the attention called to feminist activism, this decade is increasingly defined as marking the start of fourth-wave feminism. The start of this wave is generally set around 2008, when feminist blogs started gaining ground on social media (Grady). Other examples of feminist activism in the 2010s include the SlutWalks that started in 2011, Emma Sulkowicz's *Mattre*ss *Performance* in 2014 and 2015, and most famously the #MeToo movement starting in 2017 (Grady). This particular wave of feminism is defined by increased diversity, intersectionality, and activism (Munro). This peak in feminist activism is countered by equally heated misogynist developments. The election of Donald Trump as the President of the United States – and his "grab 'm by the pussy" scandal (Gill *10 Years On*), violence against women in the name of the "incel" movement (Godin), and the possible revision of abortion rights in the US (Glenza) form the tip of the iceberg in this regard. The feminist activist landscape is thus more complicated than ever, and this complexity is reflected in the postfeminist media.

Before discussing the trends in the 2010s postfeminist media, however, I must acknowledge the situation of Quentin Tarantino within the #MeToo debate. Tarantino is closely linked to Harvey Weinstein, the man whose accusation and conviction fueled the #MeToo movement. Most of the films discussed in this and earlier chapters were released by Weinstein's company. Furthermore, Uma Thurman – who played both Mia Wallace (*Pulp Fiction*, 1994), and Beatrix Kiddo (*Kill Bill Vol. 1 & 2,* 2003 & 2004*)* – has become vocal about her own experience of Weinstein's predatory behavior, as well as Tarantino's reluctance to denounce Weinstein after she told him about it (Dowd). As noted in the introduction, it is not the aim of

this thesis to determine whether Tarantino is a feminist or not. As in the previous chapters, this chapter discusses the characters within Tarantino's work, not his own character. In this case, however, I cannot ignore the complex context in which these films are made. I will thus discuss the #Metoo context in relation to Tarantino's most recent film – *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019).

Both feminist activism and scholarship of this era can be defined by an increased focus on intersectionality, which interrogates the idea that postfeminism is "white and middle class by default" (Tasker and Negra 3). In an intersectional approach, the postfeminist media landscape is analyzed through the perspectives of non-white, queer, old, and working-class (Gill *10 Years On* 614). In this chapter I highlight various intersectional approaches and their influence on the analysis of postfeminism.

The first section of this chapter focuses on the intersection of feminism and race. As mentioned in the section on *Jackie Brown* (1997), the experience of black women has been neglected in mainstream feminist scholarship. In this section, I revisit this debate. In order to highlight the different experience of black and white women on screen, I analyze different interpretations of the characterization of Broomhilda von Shaft (Kerry Washington) in *Django Unchained* (2012) as a 'damsel in distress'.

In the second section of this chapter I dive into the intersection of postfeminism and ageism. As articulated in the previous chapters, the postfeminist media of the 1990s and 2000s portrayed a feminine ideal of youth and girl power. The critiques of this ideal and the implications for women who did not fit this mold in terms of age are explored in this section, and connected to the character of Daisy Domergue (Jennifer Jason Leigh) in *The Hateful Eight* (2015). I furthermore enter into the discussion around the victimization of women on screen, a debate that I will link to both Daisy Domergue in *The Hateful Eight*, and Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie) in *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

The final section of this chapter arrives at Quentin Tarantino's most recent work – *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* (2019). In this section, I discuss the portrayal of Sharon Tate (Margot Robbie) and the consequences of her counter-factual storyline in relation to victimhood. Moreover, I use this section to discuss the intersection of postfeminism and portrayals of femininity/masculinity in male characters – in this case Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt). While analyses of postfeminism have been primarily focused on the treatment of women on screen, research into the portrayal of men has gained ground in the recent years and needs to be discussed.

3.1 Postfeminism and Race in *Django Unchained*

In *Django Unchained,* Tarantino continues to reimagine factual history. The film tells the story of Django, a freed slave who with the help of Doctor Schultz (Christoph Waltz) attempts to free his wife from the slaveholder Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio). Guthrie argues that: "The film consistently challenges the narratives of the historical imaginary in which slavery is simply an unfortunate chapter of American history by insisting on its horrific practices, and foregrounding its protagonist's righteous rage, rather than a more palatable performance of victimhood" (354). The position of Broomhilda (Kerry Washington) as a victim of slavery is especially interesting to discuss in the context of both racism and postfeminism, and is thus the focus point of this section.

In chapter 1, I have discussed the role of *Jackie Brown* within the blaxploitation genre and the larger discussion of the epistemological intersection of postfeminism and race. In this chapter, I continue this discussion in the context of postfeminism as a sensibility and its intersection with race. While women of color are increasingly visible in popular culture, Jess Butler emphasizes that postfeminism "strictly regulates and polices the forms their participation may take" (Butler 50). In this section, I explore how the placement of black women in

traditionally white tropes challenges the stereotypical depiction of black women. In particular, I focus on the portrayal of Broomhilda von Shaft (Kerry Washington) in *Django Unchained* (2012) as a 'damsel in distress'.

The trope of the damsel in distress has been around for decades, and is present in films such as *Tarzan* (1959), *Superman* (1978). Throughout the many reiterations of this trope however, the 'damsel' in question has always been white. In the context of white feminism, the 'damsel in distress' trope has become overused and heavily criticized. The idea of a 'damsel' – derived from the French "demoiselle", meaning "young lady" – in need of a man to save her is oppositional to messages of female empowerment and independence. Celeste Doaks, however, argues for a different interpretation of the trope in the case of Broomhilda's in *Django Unchained* (2012). She points out that as a black 'damsel in distress', the character is actually innovative instead of overplayed (Doaks 111).

In order to understand why the portrayal of a black woman as a 'damsel in distress', we must understand the majority of black female imagery in present in postfeminist media. Throughout cinematic history, black women have been stereotyped through imagery of "the mammy, the jezebel, the sapphire, the matriarch, the welfare queen, and the crack-addicted mother in popular culture and social policy" (Springer *Divas* 254). In her work on the portrayal of African American women in postfeminist popular culture, Kimberly Springer explains three of these images: The Mammy, the Jezebel, and the Sapphire (Springer *Waiting* 174). The Mammy describes the stereotypical depiction of black women as "passive and subservient" (Springer *Waiting* 174). She is generally constructed as "rotund, asexual, sometimes cantankerous, but often perennially happy servant" (Springer *Waiting* 174). This image has been around since the era of slavery and still "haunts African American women today" (Springer *Waiting* 174). The Jezebel provides a "diametrically opposed" image in comparison to the Mammy (Springer *Waiting* 175). In this imagery, black women are "present to serve the

sexual needs of white slave owner" (Springer *Waiting* 175). The Sapphire inhabits a space between the Mammy and the Jezebel. The Sapphire presents black women "as evil, treacherous, bitchy, stubborn, and hateful" (Springer *Waiting* 175). She is related to the modern stereotype of the Diva. In the postfeminist media culture, the diva – especially the black diva – is considered "unreasonable, unpredictable, and likely unhinged" (Springer *Diva* 257). Springer emphasizes that even today, the eradication of these images has not succeeded (Springer *Diva* 267).

It is the history of these stereotypical depictions that makes the image of the black 'damsel in distress' so refreshing. Doaks acknowledges that this portrayal does not negate the damage of pre-existing stereotypes, but the image on Broomhilda as a vulnerable black woman provides an historically neglected element of humanization (Doaks 111). While vulnerability is held as a weakness in the eyes of white feminists, it is "a courageous space for the Black Female character to inhabit" (Doaks 111). A prime example of Broomhilda's distressed position occurs when she faints after she is reunited with her husband Django. Doaks points out that many white female characters have fainted in the history of cinema – Fay Wray in *King Kong* (Cooper & Schoedsack, 1933) Laura Hope Crews in *Gone with the Wind* (Fleming, Cukor, and Wood, 1939), and Marilyn Monroe in *Niagara* (Hathaway, 1953) – yet black female characters have rarely suffered from a temporary loss of consciousness (Doaks 117). Fainting requires and signifies vulnerability and delicacy. Nonetheless, the action reinforces a subordination in women, in this case in relation to Django (Jamie Fox).

In spite of Broomhilda's subordinate position to Django, they treat each other as equals in regards to sexuality. After they are reunited, they share a bath together. In this scene both characters are undressed, yet no sexual intercourse takes place on screen. As their bodies as submerged, their genitalia disappear, which allows for the scene to become sensual rather than sexual (Doaks 116). As they gaze at each other, they reject the stereotypical white male gaze.

Nama compares the strong relationship of Django and Broomhilda to that of Sixo and his Thirty-Mile Woman in Toni Morrison's *Beloved* (116). This echoes the "Oppositional Gaze", as theorized by bell hooks (1999), that allows black audiences to gain agency in cinema.

Broomhilda's characterization as a damsel is innovative, but not entirely unproblematic. As noted, the trope is heavily criticized in mainstream feminist scholarship. While Broomhilda is able to gain some agency, she remains subordinate not only to her husband Django, but most of all Calvin Candie (Leonardo DiCaprio), the slave plantation owner. As a slave, Broomhilda suffers harsh physical punishments for her attempts to run away. She is "tortured by branding, whipping, and being stripped of her clothes" (Nama 116). We are introduced to Broomhilda through the memory of Django, yet the first time she appears in person, she has just been brutally tortured by being put in a box. The explicit way in which Tarantino includes the violence against slaves in *Django Unchained* has been widely debated. On the one hand, the visceral images provide a break from the "lopsided representation of American slavery as mere discomfort" in American cinema (Nama 116). Tarantino himself has commented that: "We all intellectually 'know' the brutality and inhumanity of slavery, but after you do the research it's no longer intellectual any more, no longer just historical record – you feel it in your bones. It makes you angry, and want to do something … I'm here to tell you, that however bad things get in the movie, a lot worse shit actually happened." (Pulver). On the other hand, the heavy beatings endured by Broomhilda in *Django Unchained* – and similarly Patsey (Lupita Nyong'o) in *Twelve Years a Slave* (McQueen, 2013) – serve as a metaphor for the "fetishized black body" (Nama 116). The postfeminist meaning of Broomhilda's depiction thus remains ambiguous.

A similarly ambiguous interpretation can be applied to Broomhilda's ability to speak German. Her former mistress taught her the language, in order to have someone to talk to in her native tongue. The rarity of this skill is remarked upon by Dr. King Schultz (Christoph Waltz), as he says to Django: "Let me get this straight, your slave wife speaks German, and her name

is Broomhilda von Shaft?" (00:26:21). This skill positions Broomhilda as intellectually superior to both Django and Calvin Candie. This helps her gain agency. Yet the skill has problematic connotations, as it revokes the idea of the exceptional or "magical Negro" (Doaks 117). Nama explains that the idea of the exceptional black person is a double-edged sword (Nama 119). On the one hand, it can be read in line with W.E.B. Du Bois' idea of the "talented tenth", to refer to the fraction of black persons that would be influential in improving the conditions of black people in America (Nama 119). The other side of the argument, however, is that the idea of an exceptional black person negates the value of the black community as a whole. This logic has been used as a supportive argument for scientific racism – e.g. the eugenics movement (Nama 120). In film, the "magical Negro" has become a stereotypical supportive character to white protagonists (Doaks 117).

In *Django Unchained*, both Django and Broomhilda are presented as exceptional. Broomhilda is positioned as exceptional through her bilingual skills, and Django's exceptional position is pointed out by Calvin Candie:

> Where I part company from many of my phrenologist colleagues is, I believe this is a level above bright, above talented, above loyal that a nigger can aspire to. Say one nigger that just pops up in ten thousand. The exceptional nigger. But I do believe that, given time exceptional niggers like Bright Boy [Django] here become if not frequent more frequent. Bright Boy, you are that one in ten thousand. (01:13:55)

Nama declares that overall, *Django Unchained* "is an interventionist film that attempts to confront the purposeful discontinuity surrounding the history of the portrayal of racial oppression in American cinema" (119). In relation to the character of Broomhilda, and her position at the intersection of postfeminism and race, *Django Unchained* (2012) presents an innovative yet ambiguous portrayal of the black 'damsel in distress'. Thus, while Tarantino is

not able to entirely refrain from stereotypical depictions, the film certainly presents interesting ground for critical reflection of black stereotypes.

3.2 Postfeminism and Age in *The Hateful Eight*

As explained in the previous chapters, the postfeminist media landscape of the 1990s and 2000s revolved around images of women as youthful and girly. The idea of aging has long been framed as a 'trauma' in Hollywood (Kaplan 172). Since the early twentieth century, youthfulness has shaped the film industry (Whelehan 79). The 'older' woman – I use these quotations because the Hollywood definition of old is heavily skewed – has generally been neglected and misrepresented. E. Ann Kaplan asserts that "it is in the interest of patriarchal culture to keep alive the myth that, after menopause, women have no particular function and therefore can be passed over for young women who still depend on men" (190). Older women therefore suffered the stereotypical depictions of the "nag, hag, or poor old thing and family martyr" (Markson & Taylor 157).

Before discussing *The Hateful Eight*'s portrayal of Daisy Domergue as an 'older' woman, we must understand the dynamics that underlie the stereotypical portrayals of older women in postfeminist media. The misrepresentation of the aging or older woman relates to the 'postfeminism as backlash' dynamic and the critique on the temporal marking of the waves of feminism as argued by Misha Kavka (2002) – as explained in Chapter 1. The structure of feminism as 'waves' comes with the risk of neglecting the continuity in feminist strives towards gender equality. As noted by Astrid Henry: "the [term] 'third wave' has frequently been employed as a kind of shorthand for a generational difference among feminist, one based on chronological age" (3). Henry furthermore asserts that our thinking of feminism as 'generations' evokes a mother-daughter relationship between second-wave and third-wave feminists (Henry 3). As explained in relation to the 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective,

postfeminist media heavily criticized the second-wave feminists. This dynamic instigated a sense of divide between second-wave and third-wave feminists, a divide that is signified in the Hollywood characterizations of the "unruly girl" and the "unrepentant mother", as explained Kathleen Rowe Karlyn. In more general terms, it is the backlash against second-wave feminists that fueled the dismissal of older women in postfeminist media.

In the recent decade, as discussions about the intersection of agism and sexism have gained ground, there has been a turn in postfeminist media portrayals of older women. Imelda emphasizes that "the persistence of stars such as Meryl Streep, Glenn Close, and Goldie Hawn offers a positive image of the older woman that allows a female audience to sometimes read against the grain of the narrative thrust" (Whelehan 94). The portrayal of Daisy Domergue, however, does not add to this progressive trend.

The character of Daisy Domergue is said to be 38 years old (*Hatefulpedia*) and is played by the then 53-year-old Jennifer Jason Leigh. In the film, Daisy is a criminal caught by John Ruth, who wants to deliver her to the hangman of Red Rock and get his bounty. Throughout the film, Daisy is presented as rude, belligerent, and annoying. This portrayal cannot be blamed entirely on her position as a criminal. Tarantino has featured various assassins, criminals, and other 'bad gals' in his films, but all were portrayed much more sophisticated and stylized – e.g. Beatrix Kiddo (Uma Thurman) in *Kill Bill*. Daisy is instead villainized, especially through her physical appearance. She looks battered, grotesque, and is stripped entirely of her sexuality. These characteristics revoke the depiction of older women in cinema as "old hags" (Markson & Taylor 157). Daisy's captor, John Ruth, who is noticeably older than Daisy, is instead portrayed as respectable and superior to Daisy. Daisy is only valued for the bounty on her head, which she herself acknowledges as she tries to buy her life, offering the bounties of her fellow gang members in return. Daisy is only able to gain agency by outsmarting John Ruth with the

help of her gang of – male – criminals. Nonetheless, this success does not redeem her, as she is ultimately lynched.

What is most disturbing about Daisy's portrayal is her treatment as a literal punching bag throughout the film. Whenever she speaks up, John Ruth replies by punching, kicking, and pushing her. By the end of the film – prior to her death – she has a blue eye, is missing teeth, and is covered in John Ruth's blood. Even when Daisy outsmarts John and tells him; "When you get to hell John, tell 'm Daisy sent you" (1:44:15), she is immediately slapped in the face in response. Even in her death, she is violated as her killers – Sheriff Chris Mannix (Walton Goggins) and Major Marquis Warren (Samuel L. Jackson) – opt out of shooting her in favor of lynching, saying: "I say shooting is too good for her. John Ruth could have shot her anywhere, anytime along the way. John Ruth was the hangman, and when the hangman catches you, you gone die by no bullet" (2:37:40). Their collective killing of Daisy is presented as the act that allows the two men to overcome their differences, to form what Joshua Gooch describes as "a community of brutal men founded on the murder of a woman" (Gooch 17). In the final shot of the film, we view the men through the eyes of a hung Daisy. The audience is thereby made complicit in the violent murder of Daisy (Gooch 19).

On-screen violence against women is not uncommon. The maltreatment of women has a long history in genres of action, drama, and horror. In this regard, filmmaker Alfred Hitchcock has become (in)famous for saying: "I always believe in following the advice of the playwright Sardou: "Torture the women!" The trouble today is that we don't torture women enough" (qtd. in Bacon 125). In postfeminist media, misogynist violence is both critically condemned and commercially exploited (Bacon 126). The danger of these portrayals lies in the real-life desensitization to and normalization of such violence (Malamuth & Check 1981).

The Hateful Eight is the only Tarantino film to include an explicit discussion of gender and violence. This discussion occurs in relation to the fact that Daisy is a female criminal, and

is soon to be hanged as punishment for her crimes. During this scene, Chris asks Oswaldo: "Considering all the things I've done for money, I ain't one to judge. But don't you feel just the least little bad about hanging a woman?" to which Oswaldo replies: "Until they invent a trigger that women can't pull, if you're a hangman, you're going to hang women" (01:17:50). Note that Daisy herself is not at all included in this discussion, apart from a side comment made by Chris – "So Domergue, I suppose this blizzard counts as a stroke of luck as far as you're concerned" (01:17:25). The discussion of her position as a woman is thus rendered useless through their disrespectful treatment of her. As argued by Joshua Gooch: "Even if the film means to place this misogyny under critical pressure, Domergue's treatment makes it a fundamentally misogynist film" (Gooch 17).

3.3 Postfeminism, Victimhood, and Masculinity in *Once Upon A Time In Hollywood*

Finally, we arrive at the most recent work in Tarantino's oeuvre: *Once Upon A Time in Hollywood* – henceforth abbreviated as *OUATIH*. The film tells an alternative historical imagination of the murder of actress Sharon Tate by members of the Manson Family cult. It is this change in history in relation to debates about violence against women on screen that I want to discuss first. Next, I discuss the portrayals of Rick Dalton (Leonardo DiCaprio) and Cliff Booth (Brad Pitt) in relation to the intersection of postfeminism and masculinity.

It is not the first time that Tarantino uses his films to change factual history, however, this is the first time he specifically *un*does a notable event. In reality, the murder of Sharon Tate – who was eight months pregnant at the time – and her house guests was received with shock (Holson). The gruesome level of violence inflicted in the case caused significant uproar. It is therefore interesting – especially following the hyperviolence inflicted upon the female character in Tarantino's previous film – that Tarantino undoes this violent act. In doing so, Tarantino presents a world in which Sharon Tate's memory is not diminished to her status as a

murder victim. In this respect, Caroline Guthrie has argued that "counterfactual depictions of the past provide a dialectical means of engaging the volatility of the present moment's relation to history" (340). In an age in which the position of women as victims of (sexual) violence is heavily debated as part of the #MeToo movement, this counterfactual storyline thus becomes especially meaningful.

While meaningful, Sharon Tate does not stand at the center of the film's narrative. Instead it is the duo of has-been actor Rick Dalton and his stuntman Cliff Booth that acts as the protagonist. At first glance, both Rick and Cliff appear as hyper-masculine figures through their names, jobs, and demeanors. They are an actor and a stuntman, famous from playing in hypermasculine Westerns. Their characters, and their masculinity, is actually more nuanced than that, and deserves more attention.

In the past, scholarship studied men only in relation to problematic masculinity and the male gaze (Gill *Gender* 34). Since the 1990s, however, cultural studies of masculinities have diversified. The idea of "hegemonic masculinity" – the idea that recognizes a plurality of masculinities - is one of the most important notions in masculinity studies (Gill *Gender* 34). Included in this idea is the acknowledgment that not all masculinities are considered equal, and some are more powerful or dominant than others. The field of media studies has been significantly influenced by masculinity studies, and Rosalind Gill explains the focus of masculinity media studies as threefold. First, attention has been called to the traditionally "narrow range of representations of masculinity in the media" (Gill *Gender* 36). Second, scholarship has recognized a trend towards the eroticization and idealization of male bodies – in line with Gill's earlier findings on the general sexualization of culture (Gill *Sensibility* 150). Finally, within the recent postfeminist media landscape, new forms of masculinity have been constructed, including the "New Lad". The New Lad stands at the center of lad flicks, a hybrid of "buddy movies, romantic comedies, and chick flicks" (Gill & Hansen-Miller 1). The

narrative of these films is generally a coming-of-age story, where masculinity is a central object. The protagonist is usually characterized as "fallible, damaged, and distinctly unheroic" (Gill & Hansen-Miller 2) Through comic absurdity, and a reliance on irony and knowingness, these characters find their way to male adulthood. Lad flicks generally represent ambiguous messages, as explained by Gill & Hansen-Miller:

> In a sense, then, lad flicks offer a compelling 'invitation' to men to 'put aside childish things' and join the adult heterosexual world. But the films are, it seems to us, ambivalent about this. Whilst the narrative resolutions might suggest one kind of reading (as above), this would appear reductive given the gleeful celebration of laddish pursuits depicted throughout the films. These activities include a whole array of 'juvenile' behaviors, but primarily center on the enjoyment/use of women for sexual pleasure. (Gill & Hansen-Miller 12)

Central to the lad flick genre, moreover, is the depiction of strong homosocial relationships between heterosexual males. The relationship of Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth certainly qualifies as a strong homosocial bond. Throughout the film, their friendship, especially Cliff's support for Rick, is constantly affirmed. What sets these men apart from the typical New Lad is the glaring fact that they are not boys transitioning into adulthood, but rather men coming-of-older-age. In his analysis of *Heat* (1995), Vincent M. Gaine runs into a similar issue, and therefore coins these older male characters the "new frontiersmen" (174). Like the New Lad, this type of man forges "a masculine identity as a simultaneous ironic incorporation and disavowal of feminism and performs his own 'post-feminist' backlash through exaggeration of their masculinity" (174). Gaine, concludes, that, while *Heat* ultimately declares this hypermasculinity as unsustainable, the film offers no real understanding of these implications nor a viable solution (178).

The "new frontiersmen" of *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood* to a large extent follow the trajectory explained by Gaine. Both Rick and Cliff are heavily masculinized through their work as stuntmen in Westerns. The cowboy character is generally understood as hypermasculine. However, while Rick Dalton is known for his portrayals of these hypermasculine characters, and tries to emulate this hypermasculinity in his real life, he is continuously confronted with his own insecurities. Throughout the film, Rick suffers multiple emotional breakdowns as he is trying to come to terms with his fading career and social status. Instead of adding depth and meaning to the film, these emotional moments are presented with a layer of irony. They become a place of comic relief. The characterization of Rick as an emotional man therefore loses meaning.

The character of Cliff appears similarly hypermasculine. He is a stuntman and in good physical shape. He takes his physical skills to an absurd level when he daydreams about defeating the famous martial arts fighter Bruce Lee. He dreams of this scenario while he is working on Rick's roof, wearing no shirt. In this scene, the film displays a heavy layer of knowingness, as it sexualizes not only the character of Cliff Booth, but moreover plays into the fame of actor Brad Pitt and his status as a sex symbol (Carroll). While Cliff appears to be hypermasculine, he does have a softer side to him. He has a very caring character, which is shown through his treatment and support for both Rick and for his dog. He also rejects the sexual advances of Pussycat (Margaret Qualley), because he suspects she is underage. This is, however, not presented an act of respect, but rather as an act of self-protection, as he says: "What I'm too old to do, is going to jail for poontang" (01:26:20). This implies that it is not the act of sex itself that he has an issue with, but the legal consequences of such an act.

I want to relate this scene to a larger problematization of the depiction of both Rick and Cliff as hypermasculine in the context of the #MeToo era. It is at the least questionable that Tarantino chooses to make a film focusing on two hypermasculine protagonists while the

activism in this era focuses attention to the treatment of women. This would have been the perfect time for Tarantino to play with the social debate in the portrayal of a strong female protagonist. Instead, he does not actively engage in the conversation – apart from the restoration of Sharon Tate's image, although the erasure of her murder can in itself be read as an omission of the debate around female victimhood. Cliff's concern with the legal consequences of engaging in sexual acts with Pussycat, rather than a concern with her wellbeing, becomes even more problematic in this context. It is as if Tarantino sends a message that being accused of sexual assault is more worrying than making sure women consent to sexual activity. It is, moreover, speculated that Cliff killed his ex-wife – a fact that is played off as a joke by the film. Tarantino thus misses – or actively neglects – multiple opportunities to discuss the victimhood of women and the role of male aggressors in the #MeToo era.

Similar to the lad flicks of the 1990s and 2000s, *OUATIH* presents an ambiguous message of masculinity. It is this hypermasculinity – and hyperviolence – that saves the protagonists' lives. As they are attacked by the Manson cult members, they are able to fight them off and kill them. Cliff does so with the help of his fighting skills and his dog. Rick employs a flamethrower to kill the last standing female intruder. While the film restores a level of agency to Sharon Tate by not killing her, the message that Cliff and Rick are able to do what she could not – that is, fighting off the intruders – is ambiguous at best. Overall, the film appears to largely adhere to narratives set out by new lads and new frontiersmen, which is especially questionable in the context of the #MeToo movement.

Conclusion

The history of postfeminist scholarship is both messy and confusing. While the term was originally meant to form a bridge between radical and liberal feminist thought, the reconciliation of feminist goals and meanings turned out to be a difficult process. Additionally, the complex postfeminist media landscape, where signifiers of gender became increasingly plural and fragmented, provided the added challenge of acknowledging both feminist and anti-feminist articulations.

In the 1990s, different interpretations of the "post" in postfeminism resulted in three contradictory conclusions about the state of the postfeminist media landscape. In these interpretations postfeminism signaled either backlash, historical shift, or epistemological change. I conclude that, however contradictory, these perspectives all present accurate interpretations of characteristics of postfeminist media. What they fail to do, is to acknowledge that these interpretations each describe different sides of the same coin. The postfeminist media is both feminist and anti-feminist, both a new era and a continuity, and should also include the renegotiation of feminist values according to the voices of previously neglected women.

In the case of *Reservoir Dogs*, the 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective allows us to identify anti-feminist sentiments present in the film. The male protagonists in the film are hypermasculine and objectify women by treating them as comic and sexual relief. I place these sentiments in relation to the larger process of bitchification. As I point out, however, women covertly drive the plot of the film. The 'postfeminism as backlash' perspective is unable to acknowledge the possible ironic use of anti-feminist sentiments.

In *Pulp Fiction*, the characters of Fabienne and Mia Wallace lend themselves to interpretations according to both second-wave and third-wave feminist thought. These readings demonstrate a shift in the interpretation of femininity, from femininity as imposed – locking women in a 'patriarchal prison' – to femininity as performed – for personal gain. The danger

of seeing postfeminism as a historical shift, however, lies in the dismissal of the continuous evolution of feminist thought.

Through *Jackie Brown,* Tarantino presents a successful emulation and addition to the blaxploitation genre and the intersection of black feminism and postfeminism. In this regard, the character of Jackie adds to the 'postfeminism as epistemological change' perspective that attempts to break down a white hegemonic view on feminism. Yet, the film carries heavy anti-feminist sentiments towards other female characters. In summary, the perspectives on postfeminism as originated in the 1990s are helpful in analyzing the postfeminist meanings present in *Reservoir Dogs*, *Pulp Fiction*, and *Jackie Brown*, yet none are able to capture all the nuances and contradictions that characterize Quentin Tarantino's films.

In the 2000s, Rosalind Gill attempts to capture the contradictory feminist and anti-feminist sentiments in the postfeminist media landscape by defining postfeminism as a sensibility. This way, postfeminism can be analyzed focusing on distinctions in "contemporary articulations of gender in the media" (Gill *Sensibility* 148). Gill outlines these contemporary articulations in the form of trends relating to the postfeminist media standards of the female body and sexuality, including the general sexualization of culture, the focus on individualism, and the obsession with the female body. It is explained that these ideals are commonly enforced through narratives of makeover and revenge. All the Tarantino films made in this era feature female protagonists who each in their own way relate to the trends and dynamics laid out by Gill.

The story of Beatrix's individual revenge is central in *Kill Bill*. What is notable is that her revenge against women is portrayed different than her revenge against men. Whereas Beatrix and her female enemies are presented as equals, Beatrix is presented as inferior to her male enemies. An analysis of elements borrowed from the genre of Kung Fu underlines the gendered characteristics of the main characters in the film. It is also debated whether Beatrix'

role as a mother can be considered empowering. Ultimately, the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility allows for the acknowledgement of the complex position of Beatrix in relation to feminism.

In *Death Proof*, Tarantino is inspired by existing literature on gendered revenge dynamics in slasher films. In *Men, Women, and Chainsaws* Carol Clover famously introduced the character trope of the "Final Girl", as well as general characterizations of the villains and victims of the slasher genre. Stuntman Mike fits the description of the psychopathic killer out to wreak havoc with his "death proof" car. His treatment of his female victims makes him a personification of the cinematic male gaze. The protagonists of the first act of the film largely fit the description of the "sexual transgressors" that meet their death at the hand of the psychopathic killer – Stuntman Mike (Clover 33). They moreover reflect an internalization of the male gaze, as warned for by Gill (*Sensibility* 152). The Final Girls of the film – Zoe, Abernathy, and Kim – are able to kill Stuntman Mike in their own encounter. However, their masculine personality traits, and their abandonment of their friend Lee, make it questionable to what extent their characters are meant to empower a female audience.

In *Inglourious Basterds*, Tarantino presents an alternative imagination of the end of World War II. The personal and political revenge narrative of Shosanna is central to the plot. By combining references to historical figures and events with metafictional and fantastical elements, Tarantino triggers the audience to think about their own imagination of historical events and the historically persistent male gaze. The character of Shosanna presents an image of a strong Jewish women, who avenges not only the murder of her own family, but anti-Semitism in general. Her looks, and the looks of the other protagonists discussed in this chapter, can nonetheless be interrogated for their adherence to a postfeminist, white, young, able-bodied ideal of the female body.

In the 2010s, the idea of postfeminism as a sensibility is combined with intersectional approaches. This approach becomes popular in both activism and scholarship, and helps to bring feminism back to the foreground of public discussion. I explore a variety of intersectional approaches in relation to *Django Unchained*, *The Hateful Eight*, and *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*.

In my analysis of *Django Unchained*, I point out that the depiction of Broomhilda as a 'damsel in distress' provides a refreshing alternative to the stereotypical depictions of black women that are historically ubiquitous in film. I highlight that the 'damsel in distress' image is generally regarded as subversive by white women, but provides much needed humanization to a black female character. Broomhilda's ability to speak German is ambiguous, as it can be read as revoking the harmful stereotype of the "magical Negro" (Doaks 117). Thus, while the film is critical of black female stereotypes, it is not entirely able to refrain from them.

In *The Hateful Eight*, Tarantino presents a rather backwards portrayal of older women through the character of Daisy Domergue. Throughout the film, she is treated as a literal punching bag, with little opportunity to gain control over her situation. In comparison to other female characters in Tarantino's oeuvre, she is heavily villainized and disrespected. While the film includes a discussion of the morality of violence against women, Daisy herself does not have a voice in this conversation. The violent treatment of her character does not contribute to the promotion of progressive imagery of older women in Hollywood.

The final film discussed in this thesis, *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood,* contains similarly questionable imagery. Tarantino rewrites the history of Sharon Tate's murder by undoing the violent act. He thereby restores the image of Sharon Tate as an actress rather than a murder victim, but the erasure of her murder can also be read as an evasion of the engagement in the #MeToo debates. The hypermasculine characters of Rick Dalton and Cliff Booth are the protagonists of the film. While there are attempts to present them as emotional and caring, these

efforts are either undermined by comedy or overshadowed by misogyny. It is disappointing that Tarantino misses – or neglects – the opportunity to engage in the debates of the #MeToo movement.

Due to its limited scope, this thesis fails to do justice to all the intersectional approaches to postfeminism. Rosalind Gill also emphasizes that the intersections of postfeminism and religion, transgender and disability have not yet been theorized (*10 Years On* 615). It is thus up to future scholarship – and future Tarantino films – to address to extend the intersectional approach to postfeminism.

This goal of this thesis was to add to the existing scholarship on the various perspectives on postfeminism and film. The way in which Tarantino's films feature both feminist and anti-feminist meanings – and the way in which his female characters walk the line between progressive and subversive – make his work valuable within the larger discussion of feminism in the postfeminist media landscape. It is, however, necessary that Tarantino continuous to engage with postfeminist discussions in his future work. As argued by Maxime Cervulle, the most meaningful feminist discussions take place in the gray areas within a progressive-subversive dichotomy (Cervulle 40). This thesis ultimately contributes to a better understanding of the characterization of both men and women in postfeminist media of the past, present, and future.

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