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I GREW UP with rap music as one of the background noises of my life—visiting my cousins in the north side of Houston and listening to them mix and DJ the family house party, but I wasn't too big a fan. In fact, soul, R&B and 60s rock (though not what we often figure as such because I was in love with the sound of "Blackness"—real and appropriated—that bled through Southern rock and Jimi Hendrix and everything Janis Joplin touched) were a much more visceral soundtrack of my childhood.

But this isn't the story I'm trying to tell. Here is where it picks back up. My parents had been divorced for four or five years and

I was in middle school. The few friends I had managed to collect in elementary school had disappeared as the cliques of fashionable and nerdy started to form. I, of course, had a set that I rolled with—ALBRIGHT HISTORICAL SOCIETY, STAND UP!—but it was a new thing: I was trying on being one of the "gifted and talented" kids instead of a kid who was perpetually in trouble.

My middle school angst was uniquely (to me at least) punctuated by a deep love for a gangster rapper from New York. His name was DMX and he was from a place called Yonkers which I had never heard of in my geography classes but sounded a lot like the

Black ghetto of pain, poverty, and alcoholism that seemed to follow my family regardless of what neighborhood we ran to.

DMX and the portrayal of the violent, emotional, and profane narratives that defined his first two mainstream albums (I didn't know about the mix tape game yet) *It's Dark and Hell Is Hot* (1998) and *Flesh of My Flesh, Blood of My Blood* (1998) gave voice to a darkness that lived repressed under the surface of my chest. I revisit DMX now, after years of struggling with depression, and it all makes sense. I remember back when my mother would ask me what drew me to this dark, imposing man whose album covers featured him drenched in pools of blood

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with his hands clasped together in prayer. And all I could respond was to tell her that I thought his blending of the secular and the religious was something deeper than people were giving him credit for—which I still feel today, even as I grow disenchanted with his behavior off the stage.

But another truth is, that for me—a self-identified Black bisexual feminist—it was exactly the disruption of the cool invulnerable self that rap is so often conflated with and that DMX's early projects explore (the screams and sonic crying that explode from the speakers when you turn the volume up to LISTEN TO MY PAIN DAMMIT level), that made him what he was for me—a space of solace

that simultaneously expressed and invoked my deepest feelings of almost overwhelming anger, sadness, and frustration. It is this access to excessive emotion and "the dark stuff" that keeps me writing in/on rap music. Someone else can write about the racial uplift of the so-called conscious rappers and their return to the West-African griot tradition of community building and activism through storytelling. It is important work and even relevant to the work that I do, but it is just not the story I want to tell. You see, it is this excessive, pornographic display of emotion and bodies and vulnerability that, to me, is at the heart of why we, as feminists, must engage the work of rap music. It gives us a space to talk about

these things, particularly as Black people, particularly those of us who call ourselves women, particularly those of us who identify with a femme gender—because it is that pornographic excess that we are not meant to hold, not meant to wield, and definitely not meant to speak.

The "feminist" location of rap music is, for me, in the representation and ownership of the subject's anger and physicality. Reclaiming these emotions from the work done by racist stereotypes of Black bucks, Jezebels, and Sapphires and into the bodies of youth steeped in (in)visible and (in)articulated racist, classist, sexist, projects meant to mold us into good brown subjects instead

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of unruly angry Black ones. As I see it, the definition of socially conscious rap in the current formations of scholarship on hip-hop is given only to certain kinds of performance politics. These performance politics follow extremely heteronormative lines, still privilege hypermasculine gender presentation, and fit into highly proscribed narratives of what political consciousness is supposed to look like—often leaving out the majority of artists within the musical culture they are attempting to assess. I want to delve into the world of those artists and into those aspects of a musical culture that has supported my voice in the ways that I needed.

This is why I write. This is why I write on rap. This is why I write on rap not as an example of pathologized Black misogyny and homophobia—as if we had the market cornered on these two oppressions—but instead on its liberatory politics of anger. I am not interested in the question of whether the use of the words “bitch” or “ho” make rap music culture (a *whole* culture) regressively misogynistic. Not because I know “they ain’t talking about me,” but because I know where the anger in the use of such terms comes from. I know what it is like to recapitulate that anger in my own speech and embodiment. The politics of anger are something that has

been policed out of all the “good” feminist scholarship these days or at least it seems like all our Black queer feminist rages are turning back on our own Black bodies. And I’m writing about this music that the markets call “gangster rap” because I want to take back the rage, take it and mix it up, and create something just as dark, just as scary, and just as pissed off.