



“ANGRY BLACK  
BITCH  
SISTER NIGGER”

*Sexualized Performances for the Nations*

by Naila Keleta Mae

This research queries the political processes through which black female bodies in contemporary Canada are sexualized in everyday life in ways that uphold, disrupt, and transgress the various nations with whom we are in conversation. Within the purview of this paper then, "nation" refers not only to state-legislated geographical borders, but also to the dominating discourses within colluding and competing black nationalisms. My work is theoretically underpinned by black feminisms, black performances, and black literary studies, and is methodologically based in autoethnographic research, which explores a particular life in order to better understand a way of life (Reed-Danahay 1997; Ellis 1999; McClaurin 2001; Holt 2003). As such, this paper analyzes my published and recorded performance poem "this is my rant" to contemplate how black women in Canada manage our sexualized performances in black nationalisms from Canada, Jamaica, and the United States. Broader political implications at stake in this research include a deepened examination of the ways in which similarly sexualized bodies mobilize, disrupt, and subvert nation space in Canada and beyond.

### **this is my rant**

just last night i was reasoning limeing with a bredren writer poet friend discussing how toxic north america is and how imperative it is that we bounce. nothing like financial privilege. continually bombarded by propaganda machines. numb. the natural result of excessive north american conditioning. numb i am. close to being immune too.

politics slip so easily. chant down babylon one minute. surf the net to price my future SUV the next.

complete with tan leather interior and brown tinted windows. not black. that's far too ghetto. and what's the alternative? actually live the politics i spew in social circles? damn all that revolution of self-talk makes me nauseous.

conveniently conscious sister. looking for a conveniently conscious significant other so we can sit back, relax and listen to the 8-track. let's talk about the sign of the times. unwind over a bottle of good south african red wine. make love 'til the sun sets again. revolutionize the world sprawled out on plush leather couches after a delicious five course meal.

i feel so inadequate.

lonely

i am

lonely

with no one to invest all my love energy into. it sucks you hear me? it sucks.

i don't even know if i have the energy to talk politics discuss world issues, drop names, show how well read (red) i am, be deep as i navigate my way into a whole other crew. you know, the conscious conscious really conscious black crew. you know, the crew of readers thinkers that chant down babylon with proper colonial english sophistication? the crew that differentiates between black people and niggers?

shit

then call me

call me that nigga who's tired of trying to fit. that nigga raised in so much white it seeps out of her pores when she least expects it. i'm that canadian trying to be jamaican, african-faking nigger. hardcore exterior chick. the one who wants her clit licked on the regular 'bout to go by a vibrator type a nigga.

that creative type writer singer that sister who doesn't fit.

that platinum blond wig owning, sweet essential oi

lectual debates" and the need for "black political change," the performance poem reverts to the valuation of black female bodies as prime reproductive commodities (Keleta Mae, 2009). The declarations of "this is my rant" are emphatic, "my womb is the fucking change" and black women are, "birthing the next generation with no support or voice." In those words I move through three sexualized performances: the language of "my womb" signals the asexualized stock performance of sister; "fucking," the hypersexualized performance of angry; and "birthing," the heterosexualized performance of black.

Informatively, in that specific moment of multivocality and simultaneity of discourse, I perceived that there was no room for the desexualized performance of bitch or the sexualized performance of less-than-human that nigger space connotes. Is it reasonable to infer then that angry, black, and sister are the most accessible or readable performance sites for black women who want to discuss the future of black nationalisms? If so, to what extent does "this is my rant" collude with the same authoritative structures of black nationalisms that it seeks to topple through its choices around which sexualized performances to invoke at pivotal moments in the text?

My frustrations with the multiple performances necessary to converse with black nationalisms are readily apparent in "this is my rant"—"i don't even know if i have the energy to talk politics, discuss world issues, drop names, show how well read [red] i am, be 'deep' as i navigate my way into a whole other crew. you know the conscious conscious really conscious black crew." Curiously, this foreclosure of discussion (not having "the energy" for civic engagement) has embedded within it a triple entendre, a multivocality that I had not consciously considered in its composition. The double entendre I sought to reference with "read [red]" was "red" as in a Jamaican Rastafarian word for being high from marijuana. However, in Jamaican reggae music culture, "red" has another very specific sexualized meaning. "The redness of the labia denotes a healthy, strong vagina, and by extension, a healthy, strong, aggressive woman whose submission or subjugation is symbolized by the forceful, painful removal and negation of the healthy red of the labia. Hence, Spragga Benz's [dancehall artist] exhortation to 'dig out di red'" (Hope, 49).

I grew up hearing that Spragga Benz song and so many other explicit, violent dancehall reggae lyrics. I grew up with hip hop and dancehall, both cultures finding expression, invoking sexualizations, and articulating black nationalisms in the basements, high schools, gymnasiums, and backyards that housed the parties of my youth in Toronto. "Ram it and jack it and rev out the hole," Spragga Benz would sing. As teenagers my girlfriends and I would sometimes stop dancing on the dance floor in utter protest to a song we found particularly offensive. Maybe because we listened to Queen Latifah and thought black nationalism meant Ladies First. We folded our arms. Refused to whine (a way of dancing to reggae music). We performed disinterest. No teenage boy was good enough.

*As teenagers my girlfriends and I would sometimes stop dancing on the dance floor in utter protest to a song we found particularly offensive.*

But some nights, between the dancehall and hip hop lyrics of the most popular songs, there wasn't much music left to dance to—and we wanted to dance. We picked our battles. When we danced with the teenage boys, we whined our bodies harder—nothing soft in our developing black female frames. "Rev out the hole? Whose hole?" was our silent counter refrain, "You couldn't if you tried."

suicide  
hovers on the breath  
in the realms of thought  
of all the so-called  
strong/ black womyn/ warriors  
i know

Death is on the breath, below the surface of the bravado of "this is my rant" and the endless strength so often attributed to those who inhabit black female bodies. The reference to suicide is an effort to underscore the urgency of black females' calls for equality and social justice within the black nationalisms that deeply inform many of our lives. The aforementioned excerpt of "this is my rant" is an explicit articulation that, whatever the sexualized performance ascribed to black female bodies by audiences and performers, the stakes are exceedingly high. Desires to communicate are great. Frustrations at the perceptions of the limitations of language and space are palpable.

And so, the questions that continue to haunt this research include: Which dominating sexualized performances of black female bodies are made invisible in "this is my rant"? Which other dominating streams of thought in black nationalisms does "this is my rant" mobilize, trouble, and transgress? And, of course, what's next?



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#### NOTE

<sup>1</sup> An expanded version of this text was first published in a magazine in 2002 under my then name, Naila Belvett. In the years following, I revised, performed, titled, and recorded it as "this is my rant." In June 2009, I released it as a song on my album *bloom*; readers can download the song at [www.nailakeletamae.com](http://www.nailakeletamae.com). All further quotations are taken from the 2009 version.

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## BIO

**Naila Keleta Mae** IS AN ACCOMPLISHED INTERDISCIPLINARY ARTIST, EDUCATOR, AND SCHOLAR WHO HAS WORKED IN BRAZIL, CANADA, FRANCE, PORTUGAL, SOUTH AFRICA, AND THE US. SHE IS ON FACULTY AT GODDARD COLLEGE, IS A PH.D CANDIDATE AT YORK UNIVERSITY, AND IS A JOSEPH-ARMAND BOMBARDIER CANADA GRADUATE SCHOLAR. HER ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN THIS ISSUE OF *ALT. THEATRE* FEATURES THE SONG "THIS IS MY RANT" FROM HER THIRD ALBUM, *BLOOM* (2009), AVAILABLE FOR FREE AT [WWW.NAILAKELETAMAE.COM](http://WWW.NAILAKELETAMAE.COM)