

Queens of *Consciousness & Sex-Radicalism* in Hip-Hop: On Erykah Badu & The Notorious K.I.M.

by

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Abstract

This article is a study of sex, politics and *lyrical* literature across what could be called “Hip-Hop & Hip-Hop Soul.” It champions the concept “sexual consciousness” against popular and academic assumptions that construe “sexuality” and “consciousness” to be antithetical--in the tradition of “the mind/body split” of the white bourgeois West. An alternative, radical articulation of consciousness with an alternative, radical politics of gender and sexuality is located in the musical writings of two contemporary “iconic” figures: Lil’ Kim of “Hip-Hop” and Erykah Badu of “Neo-Soul.” Underscoring continuities between these *author*-figures, one of whom is coded as an icon of “sexuality (without consciousness),” conventionally, and the other as an icon of “consciousness (without sexuality),” I show how Black popular music is a space where radical sexual identities and epistemic politics are innovated out of vibrant African/Diasporic traditions.

The reputed “Father of African Cinema,” Ousmane Sembène is perhaps ironically famous for what we can call his *sexual consciousness*, a consciousness of the politics of sex or gender and sexuality, in his radical productions of Black independent film. For example, *Mooladé* (2004) is about resistance to female “circumcision” or “genital excision.” *Guelwaar* (1992) treats the theme of prostitution in Dakar, portraying sex workers as survivors of oppression and the colonized elite as “beggars” or prostitutes to neo-colonial “aid.” *Xala* or *The Curse* (1974) is a parody of the Black pseudo-bourgeoisie middle-class in which the father of “flag independence” is characterized as impotent in matters of both sex and political economy. Thus, Toni Cade Bambara once stated, mocking male chauvinism: “*If a sister had written half the works of Ousmane Sembene, there’d be back-and-forth debates raging about reverse sexism: how come the heroics are always done by women?*” (Bambara in Tate 36). Analogously, sisters have worked a critical “sexual consciousness” beyond the alleged “high art” of cinema in and for Black popular culture, particularly in the art and culture of Hip-Hop.

Lyrically lauded by the likes of Toni Morrison and bell hooks, Lil’ Kim is most famous or infamous for this sort of consciousness, which is oxymoronic under status-quo schools of thought. The world of music constantly pits “sexuality” against “consciousness” in its commentary, especially when Black music is the subject at hand; internationally, it divides music with “positive,” “progressive” or “political” content from “sex-driven” music which is, supposedly, “sensational,” “scandalous” and “slack.” This line of thinking goes well beyond contemporary critics and consumers. For over five hundred years, the Western world of ideas has itself opposed sexuality and consciousness, rigidly, laying the foundation for an entire culture to interpret “eroticism” as a threat to “intelligence,” “bodies” as menaces to “minds” and “sensuality” as an enemy to “rationality” or rationalism. The European oppression of most of the world’s peoples, African people most of all, it continues to use this bi-polar world-view to advance a racist empire that is every bit as much sexist, class-elitist and homophobic as it is racist or white-supremacist. Consequently, social and music criticism claiming to be “positive” “progressive” and “political” might want to separate itself from this Western tradition of thought, lest its “positive,” “progressive” “politics” be no less identified with white racist imperialism, sexism, elitism and homophobia. A radical sexual politics is in order, and such a politics of consciousness is brilliantly showcased in and beyond *The Notorious K.I.M., a paradigm-shifter and “lyrical force to be reckoned with” according to Hip-Hop Immortals: The Remix* (Malone n.p.).

A Senegalese Hip-Hop enthusiast himself, Sembène has produced other films which resonate well with a practice of rap resounding elsewhere. *Ceddo* (1976) returns his spectators to “the matriarchal era” as Africans struggle against invasion and conquest by Islam: Princess Dior avenges her father’s death by killing the Imam aiming to usurp the throne. Cool, calm and collected, she shoots him in the genitals. The title character of *Faat Kine* (2000) is a more modern, middle-aged woman who achieves economic independence and, hence, a freedom from a host of sexist sexual constraints. A single mother of means, she and her girlfriends enjoy sexuality to the max, even affectionately referring to each other as “*salope*,” which can be translated as “bitch” (or “slut”), as they turn the tables on male privilege in general. These royal themes of sex, power, matriarchy promoted by “Ousmane-the-Axe” are totally in sync with Lil’ Kim’s “Big Momma/Queen Bitch” aesthetics of rhyme; and this provides a perfect introduction to a productive comparison of her and other “Hip-Hop Queens” in the African Diaspora, most notably Erykah Badu of “Hip-Hop Soul.”

Hip-Hop Queens: Baduizm à la The Notorious K.I.M.

Both Badu and Lil’ Kim emerge as break-out Black female artists from the mid-to-late 1990’s, authoring musical-cultural trends that simply did not exist prior to their respective solo debuts, *Hard Core* (1996) and *Baduizm* (1997). If many might oppose one’s material “violence” with the other’s “spiritual vibe,” Badu’s second studio album would be *Mama’s Gun* (2000). Her lyrical gun is shot there with outright sexual bravado, to boot. Finally, Badu’s willfully “gangsta” vibe on *Worldwide Underground* (2003) seals the deal. The Brooklynite K.I.M. and “Southern Girl” Badu are in many ways more than compatible. The same cannot actually be said of other artists who systematically seek to imitate Lil’ Kim, stylistically, and superficially, such as Foxy Brown, Trina, Eve, Remy Martin and Jackie-O as well as some older artists who have made themselves over anew, erotically, such as Da Brat and Missy “Misdemeanor” Elliot. Further, besides nearly every other female rapper in her wake, even middle-class Black radio “shock-jock” Wendy Williams can be said to continue this imitative trend, ironically, in her ghost-written or co-authored book, *Wendy’s Got the Heat* (2004). “Lil’ Kim,” a musical icon of “sexuality,” and “Erykah Badu,” a musical icon of “consciousness,” can be shown to have much in common lyrically, despite the preconceived images of the critical establishment. When *sexual consciousness* is entertained, *both* easily emerge as queens of consciousness *and* sex-radicalism, *both*, via Hip-Hop.

In hindsight, Badu's image was first cast nationwide in the context of her first single, a Bluesy "bohemian" number which inspired countless comparisons to Billie Holiday. With *The Color Purple* (1985) supplying a cinematic motif for the music video, "On & On" would begin spiritually: "*Peace and Blessings manifest with every lesson learned/If your knowledge were your wealth, then it will be well earned.*" Later, Black Muslims merge with Kemet when Badu reprises "On & On" in concert for *Live* (1997). "Reprise" explicates her song-text meticulously, after enormous success, breaking it down bit by cosmological bit:

Y'all know what a cypher is? ["Yeah!"] It's all kinds of ciphers. But a cypher can be represented by a circle, which consists of how many degrees? ["360!"] What? 360 degrees. And my cipher keeps moving like a rolling stone. So in my song when I say that, my cipher represents myself or the atoms in my body and the rolling stone represents the Earth. The atoms in the body rotate at the same rate on the same axis that the Earth rotates, giving us a direct connection with the place we call Earth; therefore, we can call ourselves Earth. Okay? On my hand I wear an ankh. This is an ankh. An ankh is an ancient Kemetiic symbol. The word Kemet is the original name for Egypt.

Going on with her exegesis, her talk takes an erotic turn; and this makes all the sense in the mind of Badu:

...This symbol can be found on the walls of the Hieroglyphics, in Kemet. And this symbol represents Life. Alright? This portion represents the womb. Sistas, put your hands on your wombs. This portion represents the male principle, with the birth canal. Bruthas, put your hands on your male principles! [Roars] And this portion represents the fallopian tubes. 120/120/120: 360 degrees of Life and Completion. You and Me. Life. In all I do, I try to represent Life. Give birth to different things: Melodies, Music, Prayers. Babies...

The physics and metaphysics of reproduction, the pleasure of life-giving organs and organisms are affirmed as creative (not "crude") activity and processes. They are not puritanically veiled or avoided. The oneness signified by Badu's ankh, a huge physical presence on stage at her early shows, recalls the oneness or communion of Lil' Kim's Hip-Hop anthems with Biggie Smalls: The Notorious B.I.G. and K.I.M. also ask their Black audiences on Junior M.A.F.I.A.'s "Get Money" (*Conspiracy*, 1995) to grab their "privates," their "principles," to "represent" as a collective unit, a classic call-and-response chorus. Sex is simply part of "Life" for *Baduizm*, too.

The *Live* version of “On & On” confirms this fact in another fashion. Badu spits a rhyme at the end of this rendition. She’s not just some “Neo-Soul songstress.” She’s a dope MC: “*I thank it’s time to take tha jam deep into da hype/Hardcore cold-hypin tha mic/I just so happen to be Tough with a capital ‘T’/Cain’t no weak ass, trick MC keep up rough with me.*” Badu has always said she *is* Hip-Hop, to the bone. Here, she disses “weak ass, trick MC’s” and shouts out “hard-core.” This should shock those who think “sexuality” and “consciousness” are diametrically opposite in nature, by definition. Yet, for non-believers, she takes it further: “*Yeah, I’m dope on a rope/They wanna play tug-o-war/Jealousy appears/between both your ears/Cuz I been doin this shit for years/Never goin out wack/I’m a female mack/So saps, git back/while my dollars stack.*” These lines leave her “mackin’” with a “head-wrap,” literally, “gettin’ money” and rapping in a style that allows for no dichotomous separation of her from Lil’ Kim, whose song “Crush on You” supplies the music sampled in the background. The verse seems to require this interpolation-reference, or *vice versa*.

These matters might have been clarified by “Tyrone” at the end of Badu’s *Live* or, maybe, at the onset of “Searching” when Badu announces that this is “grown folks music.” What put the “-izm” in *Baduizm* after all? The artist’s own “organic,” ghetto-driven definition said it is “*what you smoke, it gets you high*” (McIver 91). Of course, it also refers to what “gets you off.” *Baduizm* relates to orgasm as much as anything (i.e., knowledge and spirituality). Her aesthetic erotica gets more sexually explicit on “Booty,” the seventh track on *Mama’s Gun*. Like “Next Lifetime” on *Baduizm* as well as *Live*, “Booty” has a huge a problem with monogamy. It makes it strictly circumstantial, rather than “moral,” rejecting its conventional constrictions: “*I don’t want him, cuz a what he done to you/You don’t need him/cuz he ain’t ready/See, I don’t want him if he ain’t made no arrangement wit you/And you don’t need him, cuz da boy ain’t ready.*” This bawdy attack on pretentious postures becomes more pointed still. Badu continues to snap: “*You got a Ph.D, Magna Cum Laude/But ya nigga love me wit a GED.*” This recasting of one-on-one relationships as an optional, reciprocal *arrangement*, not an unquestionable ideal, is hardly the stuff of bourgeois family values, gender, heterosexuality or “consciousness.” Yet Badu’s “-izm” is present on *Mama’s Gun* as a matter of *principle*.

Mama Gun’s was an incredibly reflective sophomore release. “On & On” was reprised yet again in the form of “... & On,” where Badu playfully checked herself for pretensions found in many who deem themselves “part of the solution,” concerning Black oppression, not “part of the problem,” as it were: “*On & on & on & on/Wake tha fuck up cuz it’s been too long/Say, wait a minute, Queen, whut’s yur name?/I be that gypsy flippin life game, from tha right brain.*” She puts a brake on one brand of “consciousness” with the chorus: “*What good do your words do/if they don’t understand you/Don’t go talking that shit/Badu, Badu.*”

A “conscious” elitism is mocked as Badu pokes fun at her own name, shrewdly. The “Badu, Badu” scat becomes synonymous with “non-sense,” or “shit-talkin” that the masses can’t understand. The scat is no longer the cosmic tongue of Jazz. It is suddenly, tactically, the “scatology” of excrement. Jazz was itself vernacular or “street” speech for “fuck,” and it is on “... & On” that we hear Badu get repeatedly profane perhaps for the first time since *Live’s* “Tyrone.” She wakes us “tha fuck up” and hips us to certain “hip” hypocrisies of “consciousness” on *Mama’s Gun*, scoffing at puritanically self-important postures with pleasure.

Badu mixes sexuality and self-critique and adds a *gangsta* to the “-izm” on *Mama’s Gun* as well as *Worldwide Underground*. Sex and guns are far more associated with a Lil’ Kim (“Head of La Bella Mafia”) than a Badu in the minds of most music critics and consumers of Black popular culture. For those who consider themselves among the “conscious,” typically, even apostles of “consciousness,” this association is quite revolting. Even though Black people are warred upon and in need of freedom, by any means, according to the heroic Black consciousness of Malcolm X, these critics are loathe to be “positive” about guns aimed in any direction, under any circumstances. This evident contradiction is not championed by Badu. She unpacks her second studio title with lethal precision:

Most of the time, you don’t even know your Mama have a gun -- and when she pulls it out, and shows it to you, it’s something serious... When she pulls it out, she’s going to use it; she’s not gonna pull it out just to wave it... Mama has more sense than that. What this means is that with everything that goes on in our society -- children are dying, parents are killing themselves, people’s spirits are just broken -- then how about putting this in your holster. Stick this on your lap when you drive. Put this in the seat while you drive. Put this in the small of your back. That’s why it’s called Mama’s Gun... I urge folk to use my music and my words as they will, as they should, as they see fit (McIver 2002, 204-5).

No less than Lil’ Kim, therefore, Badu refuses any reading of society that sees guns as simply “masculine” or “male.” As a result, the booklet of liner notes for *Mama’s Gun* begins with a poem of sorts. It is more like a pledge. This pledge is not one of allegiance to “America,” or patriotism, but a poetic pledge. “The Warrior’s Reminder” is printed, significantly, in the shape of a moon; a crescent placed inside a circle formed by a tambourine:

i am awake/my mind is free/i am creative/i love myself/my willpower is strong/i am brave/i practice patience...i want to grow/i know i will/i take on responsibility/i hide myself from no one/I’m on my path/warriors walk alone/i won’t let my focus change/taking out the demons in my range...that’ s mama’s gun.

Her plush *Worldwide Underground* project would focus on “freaky” instrumentation, thanks to her new production team for this third studio album: “Freakquency.” Even so, Badu’s vocals run with dead prez on “The Grind,” quite militantly; and she packs her maternal-lyrical pistol again on “Danger (Other Side of the Game, Part 2),” which blares: “*Got a box a money/that I keep unda my bed/But we don’t spend it though/Might need it fo mo Ye-Yo/We keep this money/just in case we need to make a run/Gotta keep a clip in Mama’s gun/A run.*” Any ambiguities about her gun being literal or metaphorical are apparently erased. The whole song is about living life “in the zone,” the very dangerous zone that the drug trade represents--with a raw adrenaline rush, while Badu continues to shout out “sophisticated gangsterism” and “pimpism” on *Worldwide Underground*’s “Woo.” Interestingly enough, publishing credits on her previous albums had always read “Divine Pimp Pub,” another reality which legions of listeners must have overlooked, another reality which connects her to rather than separates her from the songbook of Lil’ Kim.

Sex Radical Royals/Royal Sex Radicals: Queens of Consciousness

Indeed, quite like The Notorious K.I.M. or “Big Momma/Queen Bitch” content-wise with respect to sexuality, “gangsterism,” gun talk, drugs, female “pimpsterism,” and mic postures, Badu and her “-izm” moved further into what Ifi Amadiume (1989, 1997) calls “matriarchy,” African matriarchy--via Kemet, Yorubaland and Dahomey--when she staged an appearance with dead prez on New York City’s WBLS as a part of “The Wendy Williams Experience.” A portion of this interview was poorly transcribed in *Honey* magazine (October 2003), or its “Wendy’s World” column which was for a time a regular feature. Mocking rumors about her sex life involving Andre 3000 from Outkast, Common and M-1 from dpz, Badu surprises and upstages DJ Williams in a bit of guerilla theater on the radio. She tells her that she is actually involved with all three: “*I have three boyfriends now... It’s a new philosophy. We’re trying to bring it to the United States...an African tradition from the Bambula tribe.*” To belong, Black men have to go through “Badu Boot Camp” and, if they stay the course, they must obey “42 Laws of Baduality.” A “shock-jock” in shock and disbelief, Williams asks Badu when was the last time someone “ran up in her.” Badu replies: “*Ran up in me? We don’t use those types of terms.*” Indeed, as Williams poses questions about marriage, putting Black children in white schools and mindless sex, Badu scorns them all as an “American way of thinking.” Though Williams claims we are “Americans,” by virtue of being in “America,” Badu insists (very Malcolm X-like): “*Well, maybe you are. But we not. I’m not. We aren’t.*” It’s “an African mentality” that Badu aggressively upholds.

Asked about masturbation, she embraces “mind sex” as an alternative: “Well, I don’t have to [masturbate]. Cuz I have a certain kind of mind sex that I use now. I don’t have to do any physical kinds of things. I can just feel good all day, all the time. Actually, I’m coming now.” “Mind Sex” is a track off dead prez’s debut album, *Let’s Get Free* (2000); and both members were in the studio to support Badu’s “polyandry” (i.e., multiple partners or “polygamy” for women). Bambula men say what they are trained to say, it is said. They “betta not” have sex of any kind with anyone other than Badu, while Badu can have sex with anyone she likes. Of the revolutionary duo, stic.man answers a question about having kids: “I got a million children in Africa that I’m gon free.” M-1 confirms:

We jus support tha Sistas. It’s all love to tha Real Black Girls. We also gon be out here, you know, making sure that we holdin it down for tha souljaz and tha warriors out here. So that when it’s time for us to really be able to hold some real true Sistas down, we gon be able to do it correctly.

Andre 3000 is described by Badu as a mere keeper of sperm. Then, she informs a dazed and confused Williams: “This is getting boring.” This gossipy “American” mentality is boring. Badu closes this broadcast experience with the same words that began it, for her: “Peace and love, everybody. Peace and love. Incense, candles [finger-snaps]” (Williams 109). The transcript of this exchange published in *Honey* bore a sour subtitle: “Erykah Badu Takes Mind Games to a Cosmic Level.” It is the body politics of Baduism that disturb certain status-quo mentalities, inasmuch as they disturb, unsettle and negate certain notions of “consciousness” in the absence of a concept of *sexual consciousness* which may be more readily thought with regard to Lil’ Kim.

Williams was obviously thrown off by this unexpected show of raunch. It would have been different story altogether had this whole display come from Lil’ Kim. From her, raunch is expected (and, wrongly, little else). From Erykah Badu, audiences expect “consciousness,” or what passes for “consciousness” in a society that confuses middle-class “respectability” and puritanical hypocrisy for so-called “consciousness.” This would be an *anti-sexual* “consciousness” which conceals, when possible, its own “guilty pleasures” in confined and concealed, privatized spaces. From these spaces, Black and other promoters of puritanism can emerge to denounce those who are bold enough to renounce or disregard white bourgeois “morality,” to expose it even as immoral itself. It must take such boldness of vision to see Erykah Badu’s brilliant sexuality, and to recognize and endorse Lil’ Kim’s carnal, conscious intelligence. Unfortunately, however, this is not the kind of “queen” that “Wendy Williams” is.

European imperialism is well-known for depicting African rulers as “ruthless” and “despotic,” while enshrining their own monarchies as “divinely” ordained if not “democratic.” These concepts of monarchy and democracy are culturally specific, extremely repressive and, indeed, racist, elitist and sexist. For colonial slavery and neo-slavery alike, Western monarchy would create “African” “kings” and “chiefs” in the image of European despots or tyrants, as a way of maximizing and justifying white racist rule over non-white populations in and out of Africa. Crucially, anti-imperialist historians and scholar-activists such as Cheikh Anta Diop (1959) and Walter Rodney (1972) have exposed this mis-representation of African politics, unearthing far more populist or people-oriented sets of institutions than previously recognized after the onslaught of Europe. Oba T’Shaka would even argue for a “royal democracy” in *Return to the African Mother Principle of Male and Female Equality* (1995). Also unearthed are institutions of matriarchy and “mother-right” erased by the West’s invention of “kings” and “chiefs” in Africa for self-serving agendas. This history and “herstory” are epitomized in all the work of Ifi Amadiume, especially in *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion, & Culture* (1997). She refers to Africa as “that continent of matriarchy,” writing against class rule and continued Europeanization: “Hinterland Africa proper which had such structures which favored the rule of goddesses, matriarchy, queens, etc., is indeed still present with us” (Amadiume 1989, xvii).

In the African Diaspora, among the masses in particular, Black rhetorics of royalty trump “democracy,” and slavery repeatedly. This royalism does not fit the profile of class elitism; nor is it uniformly patrilineal or patriarchal as is royalty in Europe. One Lil’ Kim statement made in a conscientiously anti-homophobic context (for an interview with *Next Magazine: The Hippest Guide to Gay New York*) is quite typical: “At the end of the day we’re all queens and kings anyway, so why not celebrate it?” (Davis 13). Despite the English language terminology, the original repressive logic of monarchism--proper--this is literally subverted as queens come before kings in her lyrical (“Big Momma/Queen Bitch”) matriarchy, or “mother-right.” Her majesty is a matter of politics operating at the level of the grassroots. It is not a matter of inheritance. Unlike the relatively rare queendom in Europe, this queendom would not rule over a patriarchy of kings or princes as some sort of substitute-kingdom, succeeding on an incidental, individual basis until the next male heir is superimposed. Many African queendoms have boasted a radical sexual politics instead, no less so abroad under empire in the West. In the symbolics of Hip-Hop, accordingly, this queen is a queen because she runs things in the interests of other queens anointed in and by the masses: Lil’ Kim insists that she is “Queen of all queens” on *The Notorious K.I.M.’s “I’m Human”* (2000) because she represents for her sex like no one else in a wickedly male-dominated world. The blue-blood, patrilineal and patriarchal, Western individualist conception of royalty folds rhetorically in the face of such Black popular expression.

As for the “Queen of Neo-Soul,” Badu confronts a particular set of problems the more and more erotic her artistic performance gets. There is no “King of Neo-Soul,” revealingly. He isn’t dead. “He” simply never was. There is no such conception. The royal Badu would return to her brief radio stint in “The Learning Curve,” a feature in *Vibe* magazine scripted and photographed with a classroom motif. The article’s “Lesson #1” quotes her, comically: “*I start rumors about myself, like, I got some breast implants, or I got a wig snatched off my head in public. Getting in the news helps move units. Maybe next I’ll tell people that I eat rocks or something. You have to keep them wondering.*” Her humorous, polyandrous WBLS appearance was still a hot topic of discussion: “*I went up there with the idea of saying things to be entertaining and fun...But people took what I said seriously*” (Green 96). The role of a queen with many husbands, lovers or sexual partners, none of whom will ever be “king” (or “king” of *her*, specifically), was entertaining for Badu but not for this audience of “Neo-Soul” consumers.

XXL Presents Hip-Hop Soul would pick up where *Vibe* left off, but it darts back in a sensationalist direction. This feature is entitled “Let’s Get Serious.” It asks if Badu is “a heaven-sent angel of righteousness or some sort of voodoo sex goddess” (Thompson 51). As usual, “righteousness” is opposed to sexuality in a visibly racialized fashion; there is “heaven” for “angels” (or puritans) and a “voodoo” slur for all others. Then, there is the table of contents which is where the narrative of sexism begins: “*Ask yourself: ‘Who is Erykah Badu?’ No, really. Who is Erykah Badu? Is she the Mother Nature of neo-soul or a sex goddess who feasts on the hearts of MCs?*” (9). MC’s are male, by definition, for them; and females eat at their hearts like “savages.” It is not her “intellect,” art or music that attracts these questions. It is her “personal” life. Badu says it’s just a “big misconception,” before continuing on: “*It’s cute, though: I’m a pimp...And I’m not telling my secret of how I turn these men out, because other women will do it. So I’m going to just let it be. Good work, Andre, keep on ‘spreading.’ Common, you know how I feel. Remember what I told you*” (51). She both acknowledges her like for “hundred-dollar billers” (52), or hustlers, and having “brought consciousness in” as a “trend” (51). This is stated with something like regret, since that trendy notion of consciousness is clearly limited and flawed: “*Nothing has changed about me...But I don’t know if people know that...*” (52).

In “Let’s Get Serious,” superficialities of “consciousness” were cut up even further with the benefit of hindsight: “*I think in 1997 when I came out, certain people were looking for a savior in the music industry, a savior for their spirits. So when I decided to do what I felt, to naturally change how I look, I figured out people weren’t actually looking for a savior, they were looking for someone who **looked** like one*” (**Emphasis hers**, 51). This is key.

Visually, Badu is presented in a series of photographs in which she sports a hat as well as hair of varying lengths. "The Learning Curve" was also accompanied by a segment called "Hair Wars: *Vibe* Takes a Look at Badu's Most Famous Dos and Don'ts." This segment is pretty mindless, and typically so. Still, it makes Badu's point about how "saviors" are identified by appearance, not substance; how "certain" people want the look of "consciousness," the "trend" of it, rather than what would be the substance of "consciousness" itself; and how completely unconscious the "conscious" are about their routine notions of consciousness, musical and non-musical.

This would certainly explain why The Notorious K.I.M. could not be seen as a savior by this society, especially outside Hip-Hop, and among "Hip-Hop Soul" elites--notwithstanding "Marc Jacobs featuring Lil' Kim as Joan of Arc," a stunning ten-page (pre-imprisonment) high-fashion layout published in *Flaunt* magazine (in September 2005). Hers is not the "look" of "consciousness" or pseudo-consciousness typically promoted by bourgeois and pseudo-bourgeois spectators of popular culture. Her look or their preconceptions about it blinds these critics to the substance of consciousness for which she spits and stands as a lyricist no matter how radical this consciousness might be because her material is so conscious and relentless in its assault on their sexually conservative commitment to the elitist repression of the white bourgeois West.

She had addressed this class subject in the premiere issue of *Honey* with Tanya Pendleton. The interview's title is, provocatively, "When and Where I Enter: The Lil' Kim Story." Under an equally provocative section title, "Mary, Erykah, Lauryn, Janet, Faith, (Not) Charlie," Lil' Kim speaks with patience, diplomacy and persistence:

I think I want to work with Lauryn. She does what she does and that's her; I do what I do and that's me. I love her music... You know every woman needs that; the world needs that... That song "Doo Wop (That Thing)" is cool, because she's putting us onto these men. "Women, you betta watch out." That's not so much of a different record than what I talk about. She can sing--If I could sing like her, I'd be selling four or five million records. What's the difference in Lil' Kim singing "Queen Bitch" or Foxy with "Ill Na Na"? It's the same thing. We're just more street with ours... I don't see why people always downgrade us. We just approach things different (Pendleton 58).

The R&B-oriented artists for whom these MCs provide a constant, puritanical contrast are pinpointed for a common political cause, even if these more commercially acceptable artists might object to her analytical identification--out of fear, shame, etc. Although sex is frequently said to be a "quick" and "shallow" road to riches, according to countless, "conscious" commentaries on Hip-Hop and R&B, it is important to note that singing actually sells more than rapping about anything among Black female artists in particular.

The music of Lil' Kim is by no means more "commercial" than the music of the singers she names, who have "sold" and, arguably, "sold out" more than "conscious" criticism could possibly, legitimately allow. The anti-sex line hurled at her (and others) signifies a hypocritical falsity. And utterly exposed again is this notion of "consciousness" that is simply about the politics of race, sex and class, politics which are systematically hostile to her sexual consciousness and its massive, revolutionary promise.

Conclusion

"I'm a queen, and I can't say I've run across a full-blown king"

-- *The Notorious K.I.M.*

Of all those discussed by Irene d'Almeida in *Francophone African Women Writers: Destroying the Emptiness of Silence* (1994), Werewere Liking may be most radically relevant for a discussion of this royal sex-radicalism, thanks to her *It Shall Be of Jasper and Coral (Journal of a Misovire): A Song-Novel* (1983/2000). A "misovire," combining Greek and Latin as a new coinage, she could be defined as a "man-hater," since a misogynist is a "woman-hater." A "misanthrope" is conventionally defined as "a hater of [society] or mankind." Yet this is not how Liking defines "misovire" herself. For her, she is "a woman who can't find an admirable man" (d'Almeida in Liking xix). The "fiery dream inside" the body (4) of her "misovire" is about humanity, and a divinity connected to "a desire for life, a desire for art, the art of desire" (46). Liking champions and commits herself to the "fight" to "taste true pleasure again" (90-91), a divine pleasure and art that is officially incompatible with gender and all established "-ism's." This text is for a time when, as she states, "I am no longer a misovire and there are no more misogynists" (112).

Whether "misovires" specifically or not, "Hip-Hop Queens" come to mind, again, as these cultural and political connections across writing, visual arts and music are extraordinarily profound: Werewere Liking appears in a caravan of poets traveling from Gorée Island in Senegal to Timbuktu, Mali, for example, in *Tara: Search for the Word* (2000), a film by Fatoumata Kandé-Senghor, who is also filming a documentary on rap (*Radikal Spirit*) in Senegal with Waru Studios--even as it is Hip-Hop enthusiast Ousmane Sembène who is hailed as an original architect of an anti-elitist African cinema of liberation along with Haile Gerima of Ethiopia and Med Hondo of Mauritania. A trinity of sorts, Hondo, Gerima and "Ousmane-the-Axe" are hailed as the founders of Black radical filmmaking, on the continent, in very much the same vein that DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaataa and Grandmaster Flash are hailed the founders of Hip-Hop revolution in the Americas.

Sembène's sexual politics are well-established. In "Reading the Signs, Empowering the Eye," Toni Cade Bambara writes of Gerima's sexual radicalism on celluloid or in classics such as *Bush Mama* (1976), an urban political drama set in Watts, California (Bambara 89-138). Hondo is most well-known for his warrior-queen epic, *Sarraounia* (1986), a FESPACO award-winning production that speaks marvelously to many of the stances of musical matriarchs like Lil' Kim and Erykah Badu.

An elder intellectual critic in Black Studies, Sylvia Wynter quotes Nas's *I Am* (1999) for her "Un-Settling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom" (2000). She also argues passionately for a new "order of consciousness" in "Africa, the West and the Analogy of Culture," a powerful article from June Givanni's *Symbolic Narratives/African Cinema: Audiences, Theory and the Moving Image* (2000). She would note that more than any other concept in European philosophy, it is the concept of "consciousness" that has defied adequate definition in the West, Europe and North America. She would also pinpoint its mind/body split, its basic, artificial opposition of "rationality" and "sexuality" (or "sensuality"), as a central part of the problem. Nevertheless, this is the notion of "consciousness" upheld by intellectuals and critics, all over the world now over the past five hundred-plus years; and this is why "consciousness" calls to be completely rethought--in radical resistance to oppressions and repressions of all kinds. A contradiction in terms for the dominant society, the concept of *sexual consciousness* can go a long way in this direction toward the subversion of "Western Man" and the creation of "a new humanity," or "a new society," which is neither racist nor sexist nor bourgeois or class elitist nor homophobic, etc. Amiri Baraka once wrote, in "Ieroy" (1969): "when I die, the consciousness I carry I will to black people. May they pick me apart and take the useful parts, the sweet meat of my feelings. And leave the bitter bullshit rotten white parts alone" (Baraka 1991 223). So what part of this hegemonic order of "consciousness" must we most definitely leave alone? Musically and otherwise, our *sexual consciousness* should reprise or revolutionize consciousness in general and "Black consciousness" in particular in the face of a historically anti-Black, anti-African system of power--and pleasure--as well as "knowledge."

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