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Contents

The Caribbean: South of the South

Kamau Brathwaite
Note(s) on Caribbean Cosmology 1

M. Nourbese Philip
Island Liturgy I and III 18

River City Interview
A Conversation with M. Nourbese Philip 22

M.J. Fenwick
Caribbean Women Confront the Canon 35

Aída Cartagena Portalatín
from *Yania Tierra* 44

Nancy Morejón
I Love My Master 47

Mahadai Das
They Came In Ships 49

Afua Cooper
Atabeyra 52

Marion Bethel
"Of Pirates and Junkanoo" 54

Ramabai Espinet
Mama Glo 55

Merle Collins
A Song of Pain 57

Marlène Apollon
Story 60

Aldon L. Nielsen
C.L.R. James:
The Black Critic as Prisoner and Artist 62

Richard Graham
Magic, Aesthetics, and Meaning:
The Migration of the New World Bottle Tree 74

Rosanne Kanhai
Under the Stinging Nettles 96

Wilson Harris
Apprenticeship to the Furies 104

Cross Section

Nathaniel Mackey
Blue in Green:
Black Interiority 116

Omar S. Castañeda
High on the Precipice 126

Hank Lazer
from *Days* 129

Graham W. Foust
Planet hollywood 133
Cat on a hot tin soldier 135

Aldon L. Nielsen
This Is One Way To Begin 136
Sun in corrugated 137
A snake 138
Untitled 139

Claire Harris
WOEMAN WOMB PRISONED 140

Contributors 170

The Caribbean: South of the South

Kamau Brathwaite

Note(s) on Caribbean Cosmology

an edited transcription of an impromptu experience/ response*

(Delivered at "The Caribbean: South of the South" symposium at The University of Memphis, November 20, 1996. Since this KB has produced a considered elaborate version of these thoughts/ideas = **Shape of the Sacred Cosmos of the Caribbean . Af Presence in the NewWorld Plantation & in the Maroon Americas)**

for MJ
who switch off thelectrixity
& light cyandles of colour & sweet verdure
when i come in out of the aether that evening

& Gordon Osing
who speak the nommo of these moonuments

nam

genesis
(origin, generation/history & regeneration out of crisis/catastrophe)

nommo
(name & shape [circle/spiderweb/prism] of the culture, also = Ancestor; its nomen & lumen, its illumination, its self-generating xistence, like the sun; and the ability to be able to speak these things - thru tongue, langue, nation-language [NL]) limbo (art of memory, transportation of the culture under duress)

maroon & asafo
(maintenance of the culture in the new duress & the continuing defence of its nommo)

griot/ananse
(the 'secular' accounting of the ancestral & limbo xperience w/in the language (nommo/NL) style of the culture

atumpan
(drum & more recently pan) (integration vibration - man's voice of god etc - that links the sacred & secular into a cosmology of kinesis that interweaves & does not separate the two; and links also thru dance w/the nommo-griot-ananse arts & constitution of genesis, kinesis & utterance:

nam

vodoun

('general' name [any other of this order cd be chosen] for the central integrating xperience of the culture: in which all the elements of the culture/cosmology: in a space [oumfour is the general rep word used here] or crossroad(s): lwa-spirits-ancestors-the dead-the living-the unborn (bolom) conceived of as future/past (which is what all these elements, xcept the living are) - 'meet' & activate thru the kinetic ?xperience of 'possession' 'Possession' is itself a threshold (lembe) to & thru all these elements wherein/whereby the living (MAN) gains access to the power, xperience, knowledge & WISDOM of all the DNA [=structure (past/present + future functioning=] of the cosmology & because of its immanent & integrated quality, often leads, in Plantation cultures, to other effects of POSSESSION as well

which is why yard, balm, plot (ground/grounn/grounns) & carnival are so closely associated/connected w/oumfour & vodoun

yard

open space behind or 'inside' (courtyard) one's house where Man lives, secular & sacred: the *lwa* are present or are imminent (& immanent, always) at the thresholds or crossroads or 'altars' in the yard - which itself is a crossroad/threshold place and many yards are also oumfour or may be used as oumfours. The yard is also where the anansesem are relayed & where MUSIC (panyard) is invented (the pan) & created (drum, kaiso). The social, political, economic & psychological microcosm of the culture is also found in the yard. Caribbean arts (anansesem, kaiso, the Caribbean novel) begin in the yard

balmyard

is an even closer integration of sacred & secular & also connected w/ other arts of healing & psycho-physical protection (OBI & MYAL) & divination (IFA); it is that part of the oumfour or part of a healer's yard where healing (balm)/physical or

spiritual or spiritual travelling after conversion, confession, initiation or for other spiritual reasons, is done. It is often literally simply a cordoned off & designated

area w/in the 'ordinary' house or yard (esp of course in cultures of scarce resources - which this cosmology is essentially designed to address & which this cosmology essentially reflects)

plot (ground/grounn/grounns)
is where you bury the navel-string after the child's birth so that like the tree at whose root it is, it may grow into Ancestor and speak w/ the vibration of Nommo; is where you bury (or 'plant') the dead so that they may become unborn and therefore part of the future; and where of course they may communicate with the spirits, the duppys (dupe) the ancestors & the lwa (Nature); it is the particular spot on earth (poteau mitan) where the gods may land or 'ground' their Shango electricity; hence the Rastafarian notion of grounnation, out of which comes also the idea of NATION: the place collective community in which you are grounded & yr knowledge of that ground & the WISDOM ensuing or issuing from that. Plot or ground is the place where the slaves were allowed, after the famines of the Am Rev, to plant their first 'native' (ital) food, esp YAM the 'food' & representation of the creator God, Onyame, resulting not only in improved slave nutrition but increasingly active & radical slave PLOTS & revolts > the regime

carnival (konnuCarnival)
while VODOUN is secret, sacred and 'private', carnival is permitted, public & secular oriented tho w/in the cosmology this kind of separation is meaningless or rather can lead to misunderstanding of the culture. Carnival is parallel w/vodoun and in the Ancestor is part of a larger celebration of birth-life-death-renewal; xplosion of space/time or temne in the case of carnival, implosion of it/them in the case of vodoun; the celebration of these things: survival (see also LIMBO), 'crop-

over', cultural & resistance victory - there are many 'names' (NOMMO) of Carnival in the Caribbean/see CFA (1988)

protecting this vodoun/konnu 'complex' is 'once again, the mkissi of protection: asafo, maroon//ifa, obi, myal

and at the very 'soul/heart' of the cosmology, the pervasive immanence of NAM the pervasive innamence of ijsself (mask, man in disguise, man spelled BACKWARDS as in the limbo of the alter/ renaissance; nam = spirit or grit or indestructible kernel of the culture, transformative power of nyame to eat to eat YAM to eat NYAME god to become lwa, to be able to xplode (dyNAMo) after dying, to I AM from its creative negative

nam

As I'm listening to the three presentations, I'm thinking about a number of things. First of all, it's a great compliment to the Caribbean that this is being done at all, but it is also something that is very much overdue

I want to begin with two quotes I heard, one is from the Norton editor who said that 'Caribbean literature is a hot item these days,' and M J Fenwick's comment that 'the pressure of our literature is at last breaking through.'

Which is true, but also, I would caution you, that it is being *let through*. It is not jus (t) breaking through. There's a permission thing going on because Caribbean peoples have always depended upon the metropole; it's part of the structure of the political economy. And in the 50s the English, the English publishers, the English literary establishment, allowed us through, so we had this, so-called, flowering of Caribbean lit erature with George Lamming and V S Naipaul and all the other names you know. And then they lost interest in us, and it was not until, I suppose, these 90s (Walcott's Nobel Prize etc) that the United States started to find us 'a hot item'.

And therefore there is another *allowing in*

But I want you to understand that Caribbean literature has always been here. From the very beginning of our formation, let us say, even before the so-called 'modern' formation of our societies, from the time of the Amerindian peoples, there was a cul ture, there was a literature, there was an *expression*. But these things were invisibilized. The conquering forces did not feel that they could cope with this alterity, this otherness, this difference. Therefore the myth that was purveyed by the conquistadores & colonizers and absorbed by the colonized people, was that we had no culture

But in fact all three people who have spoken today have given us remarkabl (e) examples of the continuation of that original culture or that reformed culture within the Caribbean and its continuation into the present

What I really want to do for you is to give you a kind of cosmology of Caribbean culture. I think that we really can't understand *any* culture seriously until we understand that it has a cosmological design which has names. Today we heard three items of a cosmology which is much larger than that. So as I respond, I want to respond from within the cosmology itself

> What happens at universities is that, of course, you become specialized, you get an interest in a particular item, and you focus your microscope on that item. And many times you use that item as the world itself, as the very cosmos, and therefore you are in danger of misunderstanding the nature, the enormity, the complexity of the culture you are studying, examining, even explaining. . .

There are some **twelve** (more or less, depending on how you make the classification) integrated/integrating (organic) elements or items or ikons (nooms) of/ in Caribbean cosmology and I'm saying that no matter what aspect of the culture you are discussing, is essential that the part should reflect the whole

[[**One**]] of all there is the *nommo* of the culture. A culture must have a *nommo* - which is its way of identifying itself, the word it uses for identity - the identity of its DNA, shall we say. In the Caribbean this nommo is 'seen' very often not as word but as *sound, vibration* - simply because, as Nourbese Philip has been telling us over and over that when Africans were brought into the Caribbean and when the native peoples of the Caribbean were lynched and silenced, there was hardly a word they could use. There was an implosion into silence until the silence began to resonate in the form of resistance *vibration.* So that, in a sense, the *nommo* of the Caribbean is in the shape, in the sound of a gong which resonates, or in the power of the drum. And therefore to say that we have no word, have no Book, have no Bible, have no sense/experience of *genesis,* is a plication of the Colombian conquistadors who came almost exclusively with a scripture of literary word (itself a paradoxical mystification since most conquistadores were themselves 'illiterate' and came from a culture

still very strong in Oral Tradition - but whose *Renaissance cosmology*, you see, was shifting to written text) so that the *nommo* of the Caribbean culture was mis*nominated* by its conquerors and in fact is of a much more *immanent* qual ity than is 'normal' - 'normal', that is, in the present tense of Western values

[[**Two**]] - and this is in no special order, I just wrote them down at the back of an envelope of the room as I was thinking of how I might respond to this presentation and contribute some kind of further context & information - is the *ananse* aspect of the culture. *Ananse* is the spider that comes from Africa, and if you look at that spider, it is self-creating. The spider has the brain in ijs belly and creates ijs own road, the spider creates the road on which it moves through the web. And it is said that spiders were able to come from Africa in the interstices of the slave ships and even by arcing across the middlepassage on their silk bridges

That *ananse* is the symbol of creation and of survival and of song and of story, so that in Caribbean culture(s) there is always a great tradition of people telling stories, people re/membering their past and then knitting it back together. And this is a tradition which survives in what we call *ananse* stories *(ananseseм)* which come strai ght from West Africa

But these, again, have been *deprivileged* (and this is an important blow and aspect of our cosmology) because *ananseseм* were never written into books and have not (at least not yet!) become part of what we now begin to call our 'literary tradition' our 'Caribbean style' - itself of course in dire need of consideration and definition - though Conferences such as yours are no doubt steps in that direction - though even here we'll need more consistency, more unanimous co-operative effort - and therefore we tend to forget that this great oral tradition bears a great burden of the nature and formation of our culture

[[**Three**]] **-** and this is a big one - what is called *santería* or *vodoun* or *pocoma nia (pu/kumina)* - the notion that culture is integrated at a certain level, a level of worship, of celebration, of in-gathering. This is the area of Caribbean plantation culture that has been most fortunately ignored, as far as I'm concerned, because had it been examined in the 1920s or in the 1820s - such is the nature of 'imperial inquiry' - it would have been destroyed long ago its secrets would have been dissected and there would have been no possible reintegration for Caribbean people

But *vodoun* carries within itself all of the cosmological 'qualities' I'm speaking about - the *nommo,* the immanence, the sound of vibration *(atumpan),* the *ananse* storytelling (creation/survival/genesis) (and when we say *genesis* we imply specifically the concept of *spark out of ashes),* and the various other arts, especially of *konn(u)* (spirit/masking) that you see here this afternoon

In *vodoun* (please not *voodoo!* - another aspect of our cosmology's 'problem'!) the individual becomes the *lwa.* God is (re)generated into this servile or 'ordinary', or this apparently servile or 'ordinary' individual [the term 'servile' is used here in its historical sense of **slave**; Caribbean cosmology, as we ?understand it today, deriving from the crisis & catastrophe of the slavePlantation - but with significant mediation of course from the various Ancestors involved], and that is the miracle of it — that this 'ordinary' person who sweeps your streets, who washes your floor at midday, at mid night, can become a god or goddess. That is a miracle and that explains the survival of that so circumstanced person. That person doesn't go mad (though many, I fear did and do), does not have to live on drugs (ditto). Despite the 'abject poverty' of the 'apparent circumstance', that person possesses dignity and humor and honor. And *vodoun* which we have examined in many ways in the academy and elsewhere, still preserves the secret of that integration

[[**Four**]] the arts of healing which are very closely connected with *vodoun* and which become *myal* or *obeah.*: the use of root, herb, interstanding, the 'laying-on of hands', the use of medicine other than the biomedical, other than the Western. This, too, is a pharmacology which has been insulted throughout the years, even by Caribbean people, but which has still persisted. And now once more, as the economic conditions become dire, they begin to resurface, which is a sign, need I say, that *myal &obeah,* like so much of the (total) cosmology of the Caribbean, never really totally disappeared, although by the year 1760 these cultural 'elements' had been made illegal on the plantation along with the *atumpan,* along with *vodoun* along with *konn (u)* along with *ansesem/nommo* in the sense that the speaking of 'African' and the public singing and signing of Africa were prohibited & violently punishable - which is why in today's Caribbean world, and in the contemporary imperialist world of 'popular culture', 'Africa' (esp NewWorld/Plantation Africa) (cf jazz, rhumba, samba, breakdance, rap, reggae, dub, nation-language [NL]) has become identified with 'radical', 'revolt' and 'revolutionary')

[[**Five**]] are the arts of divination, which are very important to people who don't have - better 'are not part of' - Western science, or shall I say, people who are pre-EuroRenaissance, people who are preliterate, whatever you want to call it. People in other words, from a different culture, whose cosmology has a shade and shape different from what you 'know'/ are taught to be - cosmology

Divination concerns what will happen tomorrow, what will happen to my son, how will my examination go? And in the Caribbean there is still the remnant of the Afri can divination culture in the form of the *warri* (or *wari/oware)* board. If you go through the airport at Antigua, you will see people selling *warri* boards. One appears briefly in that flim set in the middle of the Sahara, *The Sheltering Sky* (Be- rtolucci 1990). They have seeds (48 *obi, hasa,* horseknicker) which they place (4 per hole) into the holes *(system)* (12/ two rows of six) of the *warri* board, and when these seeds stop at a certain place, it has a certain meaning In the Caribbean, it's regarded as a game as a game only, but it's part. part of a divination (Ifa) ritual. It's an art, an art of memory which is - again the place the pattern & the paradox - *forgotten* in the Caribbean/Americas (the KongoLuba 'play' warri w/boards of 48 holes!) - but which still is there in the boutiques at th (e) Antigua airport - *awaiting rememory?* - **Roots Beloved Daughters of the Dust** - & is remainder that this art of memory has been part of the culture & is use to marry many other arts today. like calypso*(kaiso),* storytelling *(nansesem),* genealogy *(griot/* family & people histories, praise-songs, *ayinnyam & atran) conte* & recount etc, rap, ring-games w/their choral chants, the dozens etc etc & in various other forms & aspects of NL culture

[[**Six**]] = *carnival..* Its genesis is *konnu* (spirit/mask & hence the form *'jonkonnu'*) a kind of seasonal (Christian Christmas i.e African *harmattan)* 'masquerade' - again insulted into the misName 'John Canoe', which of course issues the wrong kind of vibration/message (mess/age)

All of those images you saw today in Lesley Ferris' remarkable presentation were masks of one form or another, and the origin of those masks is West Africa. And th (e) origin of the West African mask is in a ritual that is played out in West Africa against the coming of the *harmattan.*

Harmattan *(ahanamanta* in Ghana) is this desiccating wind that comes out of the Sahara every year from about October thru December (Christmas)

and continues on into April (Easter), and people have to prepare themselves against it because it's very destructive, though out of it (as w/ 'northern' winters) comes the Yam & Spring

The art of masking and using masks shows what the harmattan does to your soul, which is to desiccate it - and have it spring & green & flower & yamshoot again. The original *konnu* or *carnival* masks were therefore made of straw or dried leaves or anything that scintillated in the wind. Those are the original *konnu*, and they still exist today in Jamaica, in the Bahamas, and in Belize, in New Orleans - and of course now in Brooklyn and Miami - in other words, throughout PlantationAmerica, Brazil being its great & wonderful southern explosion. And these *konnus* 'transpor (t)' the original *carnival*.

Now the connection between *carnival* and the Caribbean is very very precise, and although there are carnivals in Europe and there were (and are) Europeans in the Caribbean, the form and structure of the Caribbean carnival - and its origin - is not in Europe but in West Africa, from that same harmattan tradition I speak about - thoug (h) it is Europe, of course, the master/colonizer, which gives permission for the African carnival because it has elements & seasons - and reasons! - similar to Europe's - as long, that is, as it's not too dread, too 'ugly', too licentious (!), too publicly or pubicly African. And because human beings are involved in what some call 'primate' mood 'primate' pleasure primeval/primavera reasons, the Euro & African konnu/carnival traditions quickly 'mutualized' (interculturation); though (again we have to note this imperial academic tendency) Europe quickly assumed that *carnival* was theirs, which they had gifted to their slaves for their 'benefit' - deliberately confusing cultural permission with cultural origination And this is what I hear too much of here today - the now *academic assumption* that this is so - which of course leaves th (e) Caribbean in the same ole second class imitation, non-originating status that it's been in since Columbus

European *carnival* was hardly ever a streetdance-*tramp*—procession w/ circular stop (s), secular aspect of *vodoun* - which is the first difference. The Euro 'underclasses' were of course also permitted *bacchanal carnivals* - again with features essentially different from the African; but the ?typical Euro 'carnival' was usually a soirée type thing - extension of the ballroom (some say 'ball-game'); something taking place in a room using small often hand-held masks, and its music was not directed towards

kinesis - or - more complex - was not directed towards *non-kinesis* - as African/Caribbean/Plantation *konnuCarnival* is -

[for the notion of kineses & Carnival's non-kineses, see my **Shape**, referred to above. Note also the diff between Shakespeare's notion of the *carnival* (Comus-like masque) in his Plantation play, **The Tempest**, and Aimé Cés aire's alter / native version of **Une Tempete. There is difference also in the DESTINATIONS of the two carnivals: the EuroCarnival's destination, being mainly secular, is towards the secular aspect of Bacchus; the W Af carnivals' destination is to the graveyards - renewal of yam ancestors]**

-- and - partly at least - surely - explains the hard cultural opposition to the emergence *(emergency)* of Caribbean carnivals in Prosperean Europe & North America

The slaves in the Caribbean (& their Plantation descendants) recreated *carnival* to commemorate their crossing of the Atlantic. Now these cross - or rather, *were crossed* - the Atlantic in 18th century sailingships when the trade winds - or rather when the *slave trade winds* were blowing. When the slave or trade winds blow from the coast of West Africa is when the harmattan is also blowing. In fact, the harmattan is the same slave trade wind that crosses the Atlantic with *ananse,* and it cross es the Atlantic with *konnu.* - the continuing integration of the cosmology, okay? When the slaves land in the Caribbean, one of their first rituals is to protect themselves against the wind that brought them, which is the same wind that they know from West Africa, and which is the same wind that creates their original *konnuCarni-val:* a very African and survival 'arrangement'

Now what's interesting about this [[**Seven**]] connected element of Caribbean cos mology - the *jouvert,* - is that *jouvert* originally was the one African *konnu/carnival* form that was permitted by the planters because *carnival* was seen (as I hinted earlier in a more general context) as *canboulay,* as rebellion *(canboulay = cannes brullé (s)* = canefield burning) and therefore *carnival* (especially in this aspect and/or because of this aspect of it) was constantly banned by the authorities. But they *permitted*

- or perhaps could not effectively prevent, control - the *carnival* that took place before light, before dawn, i.e **in the dark** - *jouvert, (jouver, jou'vert, jour ouvert* - th (e) beginning of the day - now taken to mean first or 'African' or Sycoraxian - formerly disreputable or forbidden, even evil & ugly, 'Ole Mas' - carnival

Here were and are the masks (& masques) that re/membered (and re/enacted) the dismembered & disremembered *lwa* African gods African forms that would be allowed to process during only the hours of early darkness. They have been transgressed into this business of the molasses and the mud. Another apparent paradox. On th (e) one hand, Africa appears to be insulted (downgraded, further *denigrated* - though 'denigrate' (de/nigrat e)) surely means to *lose* the **negra** (lose the **power**) not *pile on* - more **PARADOXES OF PLANTATION CULTURE** - the humiliation and squash as it does today) by these negative icons, taken from the very detritus of the Plantation: the insulted insulting themselves. And in *jouvert carnival* there is this important element of self-regard, self-laughter-at, auto-satire. But more (and worse) an element of re-insulting the insulted culture. You were going in to mud, going into molasses, the mud and dirt sticking to the molasses; it appears you are trying to look as mad and as ugly as possible because you feel so; and because you're made to feel so - existentialism - you are re-enacting (propitiating and appropriating the something you are suppose to be - mad, mud, African and ugly

But the very act of doing this - *of being able to do this,* - becomes tremor, count-er-tenor, counter-trauma - productive reinvestment (in the sense of clothing & later *possession)* in the destitution which is now revealed as apparent only - the mud & molasses revealing themselves not as insults or self-insults, but as living, darkly glistenin (g), human ital masks - and look. *subtle but significant in that mud & molasses* - the symbols of vegetation, birth, rebirth, regeneration: grass & straw & green (another *mki issi* from the 'vert' in *jouvert)* & glitter

The ikons of *jouvert* contain therefore and convey significant elements of *genesis* of the original African culture, and in many of the Caribbean countries, *jouvert* Carnival remains very 'pure' - by which I mean located 'nearer'/more 'like' the Ancestor than the more 'modern' and 'syncretized' forms. I mean, if you want to see people making *igbo* and *egungun*

konnu in the Caribbean, go to Montserrat or Bequia or Tobago or Berbice (Guyana) and there you'll still see how in the early Ole Mas dawn, people walk and carry with them these tangible memories of Africa in a way that is quite remarkable - and all the more so because often/seldom they can't even *say* that this is what they doin. By the time daylight comes, it changes into the commercial masks, and you have the kinds of things you see there [indicating certain illus of Car nival from the Conference]. *Jouvert* has remained for a long time a very special sacred 'minority' and 'nonEstablishment' period within the NewWorld African calendar - and I won't like any of you inconsiderable enthusiastes to go rushing off there and mashin us up!

Then [[**eight**]] there are the arts of warfare, which you find among the Maroons and the successfully revolted slaves, and we call the public display form of that *gere (gerreh)* - which is a word no doubt coming from the French *?guerre.* tho I'm pretty sure there's (also) an African word (must be!) connecting here too. . .esp since in its Jamaica context, *gere (gerreh)* ?also refers to a form of wake *(deadyard* custom) which now connects it with *kumina (vodoun)*

Here are the arts and the rituals which imitate - *recreate* - Mandinka, Asante and Yoruba and Kongo warrior groups — all of the African warrior groups are imitated or remembered and recreated and re-enacted often in cruel/sad *reduction* of the original, in these *gere* forms, which are very rare now, but which are part of this cosmology. And when you go to certain parts of - I can only speak about Jamaica and the Maroo (n) towns and areas I know, you see *gere* and in certain of the villages and/or districts in Jamaica where they still speak Yoruba, Kongo, or still some Asante Twi, there you have the *Gere* festival. . . And *gere* costume-bands also appear in konnuCarnival [the term konnu/Carnival being used passim in this event to distinguish it from commercialCarnival]

[[**Nine**]], element of the cosmology = **asafo** (connected w/maroon, *gere* and, in Brazil, *capoeira)* : the culture of the male and female youth groups whose duty it was/?is in West Africa to build houses and defend the villages. Is because of this **asafo** tradition that the bans on *carnival* derive because one of the essences of *carnival* is that it's (certainly was) in a sense, gangs and groups - called *bands* - of people, and they all (used to) come from a specific designation or *yard,* and these groups at one time represented very clearly defined almost tribal identities within Caribbean

plantation society - especially within the growing postEmancipation cities and towns The push for urban emancipation, civil rights, political independence from colonialism, labour & tradeunion moves - and from time to time - tho quite rarely - cultural agitation (Bedward, Garvey, Rodney in Jamaica; the fight for freedom of kaiso and carnival in Trinidad) has centred on asafo, now increasingly - alas - *gangsta* - but all coming from the same restless *kalinda* roots of dispossession and an instinct, at any rate, towards at least some kind of cultural and/or maroon or rastafarian repossession

[[**Ten**]] = the *rites de passage*. of the culture/cosmology. All cultures have this: th (e) marking rituals of birth, the out-dooring, initiation from youth to adulthood, the marriage ceremonies, and the dramatic ceremonies of death. In the Caribbean as in W Africa, these rites are the most expensive outlay we have in terms of emotion and in terms of economy. In panAfrican culture, nine days after birth and nine days after death, the thresholds/transitions **(limbos)** must be acknowledged. And since Death is more painful, demanding of the future/past, a longer more attentive act of memory and vigilance - even though birth and death both involve galactic time/distances. . . but while birth is an 'inward' movement involving anticipation (but not too much!), death is 'outward, complex and hazardous and without it, in fact, there can be no birth - the ritual cosmological observances here are more elaborate than for birth ceremonies: wakes, nine-nights, burials and reburials, the constant feeding of the dead with cosmologically appropriate and correct words, chants, prayers, mediations, libations and other offerings, colours, foods + the multiplication of the forty-day memorials (40, 40+40, 40+40+40, 40+40+40+40 [4 units of 40 & why 4 and why 40?] followed by the multiplication of 40+40+40+40 x 40 - no wonder the cosmology calls for *warri* (computer) boards and *griots* (artists of memory)

As you can imagine, this is a very submerged and for a variety of reasons (some to do with our very sense and pressure/needs of 'modernity') a 'suppressed area'. But I have to make another point now about the cosmology/culture different, for a moment, from its narrative; and that is the what I call the Sycoraxian nature and quality of its submergence. We witness already the action of paradox upon this in limbo/lembe. What I notice with *submerged* - the submerged - elements of CaribbeanPlantation

culture, is that their very submergence begin to become the ground or basis of ne (w) formal/spiritual continuations of that very apparently afflicted culture. We see it perhaps most easily/clearly in the development of black music, nation-language, *vodoun, carnival* and through kinetic expression in the form of dance and athletics. But in this intimate submerged area of death cosmology, a strange thing is happenin (g)

As you know in the Caribbean we are composed of if not a plunity certainly a *plurit ude* of cultures - with the notion of *beauty* thrown in by the *nommo* there also: Amerindian, European, African, 'East' Indian (i.e from India) and Chinese, Yoruba, Kongo, Moslem, Hindu etc and all of these, especially those whose Ancestors came here as slave or indenture, have elaborate ancestral death rituals similar to what I have ideally described for the AfricanCaribbean - indeed, while I still struggle in my family to discern a clear line of four or five generations, my ChineseJamaica friend calmly says that he traces back 500 generations - so you can see the kind of arithmetic his culture has to do - and does!

What I'm saying is that as these cosmologies of death are apparently forgotten and/ or suppressed or apparently neglected, so do they widen out under the ground of our would-be nation, finding common groundwater as it were, communicating with each other like invisible perhaps *with* - who knows! - invisible computers; so that already on the 'surface' of language, of music *(chutney soca,* for example) of carnival, of sensibility - and increasingly now - which is why I say what I say - increasingly now - within the *oumfour,* - the at first unexpected and surprising intervention of 'nonAfrican'*oggouns* - tho this has been something observed since c1850 in the anglophone Caribbean with the settlement of indentured Asians into the region - Indian *lwa,* Indian *pukka* (pukka/pocomania) Chinee (or Coolie) spirit etc etc etc

[[**Eleven**]] element of Caribbean cosmology is *atumpan,*: the art of the drum (music), the voice of the drum (poetry, history, prayer, information), the voice of Odomankoma; meaning(s) here so complex we can't even begin to talk about that now in the time/energy/preparation of/for this forum right now. It's the basis of dance, speech, the sacred/secular theatre of *kinesis,* the very basis of *possession,* the vibration/vibraheart of *nommo.*

In 1740 in the English-speaking Caribbean, and a little later in the Spanish and French Caribbean, the drum was banned because 'they' recognized that there was some connection, the planters said, between rebellion and lion and drum. What they didn't recognize is that there is also a connection between drum and rebellion and culture - and, as I've said over & over again now, they are all cosmo/logically connected So that even though dem ban the drum, they couldn't kill/silence it, since we turn to hum and hannclap and footstamp, voice vibration (an aspect of this as trump was/is always there as kinesis vector in *vodoun*) - and to *pan!* - which was not (then) legally defined and therefore not legally defended as drum - drum being legally defined (so much for the Scriptural Tradition) as (1) African (2) loud (3) dangerous and connected with noise, dance, lewd, loss of productive labour and rebellion and (4) membrane of animal stretched across the wooden space of its support. And so the Sycorax & limbo of the culture again escape the ban and so the culture continues into & thru its various arts - 'artistic expression' in multitude - the experience of the multitude - and I've not even spoken of its [[**Twelve**]] nuclear trigger, **nam** - and so our celebration of Caribbean in this womb & bomb this afternoon

Our concern as writers, literary critics, craftpersons of all solaces, is to relate - i wouldn't say necessarily this (my) cosmology - but to a pattern & sign names of an experience very similar. very similar. for as the song says we come here in the same ship under the same whip wid the same loud lip to countervail it

Kamau New York 10 May 96 now 14 May 96 & still lovin yu