

Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal

Volume 3

Issue 2 *Calypso and the Caribbean Literary
Imagination: A Special Issue*

Article 7

December 2005

Fugues, Fragments and Fissures—A Work in Progress

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Recommended Citation

Philip, Marlene NourbeSe (2005) "Fugues, Fragments and Fissures—A Work in Progress," *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 7.
Available at: <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium/vol3/iss2/7>

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In fact, Americans of African descent might be *the* alienated people in this century. For if America represents for others an emancipation from the past, it means for black Americans an abduction from the past, into first the apocalypse of chattel slavery and then the more subtle horrors of racism, segregation, and “invisibility,” creating the especially acute psychic tensions that we see in Ellison’s novel.

—Robert W. Rudnicki, *Percyscapes*

Two white women travelling through Africa
Chorus: Africa
Find themselves in the hands of a cannibal witch doctor
Chorus: Witch doctor
He cook up one and he eat one raw
She taste so good he wanted more
Chorus: More more more
He wanted more (The Mighty Sparrow, “Congo Man”)

I am about twelve years old, legs lengthening into puberty and I know this calypso is rude—sexually suggestive—but I don’t know how, although the laughter of the adults tell me all I need to know. Is big people business Sparrow singing about—about eating white meat and travelling through Africa. Of course, I know all about Africa: every Saturday we make our way to the local cinema, there to feast on cowboys and Indians and me-Tarzan-you-Jane. But this is my first introduction to Africa through the up-from-the-ground-behind-the-bridge art form of calypso. My first conscious memory, or so I believe for a long time, is of Africa.

Some of the most powerful and enduring tropes of Africa are present: travel; cannibals, witch doctors and sorcery. Through the White woman’s body gender will be the weapon of choice with which to challenge colonialism and racism. The Black man will have his own back through consuming the White woman—literally and sexually. This was payback time in the nation’s and people’s history and the White man’s trophy would be sexually used and bred into extinction through these metaphors of the raw and the cooked which, unknowingly, signalled Levi Strauss’ organizing methodology of the raw and the cooked.

As many calypsos have done, “Congo Man” was functioning as an aide mémoire about Africa. A fragment. Of a whole. A sliver or shard of memory in the psyche which if left would fester and suppurate. “Congo Man” was also functioning, however, as an aid to amnesia, a way of erasing the past and allowing us to forget that which we didn’t know as colonial subjects—that Africa was and is more than cannibalism, witch doctors and sorcery. And in the between of these two states—remembering and forgetting, memory and amnesia lies the fissure.

I am always (re)turning. To the Caribbean. To Trinidad and to Tobago. The latter being my birth as well as spirit home in this part of the world.¹ On this particular visit I am staying in Bacolet, Tobago, on the Atlantic coast. The closest beach, a mere stone's throw away, Minster's Bay is washed by the Atlantic Ocean. If you stand on the beach facing the sea you are (re)turned towards Africa. The beach is seldom used because of the presence of rip tides; this means I often have it to myself. However, being a woman on a beach alone, even in Tobago, conjures up anxieties—how safe is this place? My s/p(l)ace?²

I had always believed “Congo Man” to be my first introduction to Africa. It was not. Some years earlier, when I lived in Tobago, my family was visited by Coptic priests who had come to bless the then and still only Coptic Church in Tobago. These priests were from Ethiopia and they stayed with us. Tall slim, brown men in long black clothes, and long hair that hung down their backs in curls. One of them wished to marry my older sister who would then have been about eight. The proposal was that she would continue to live with us until she came of age, at which time my mother would send her to him. In Ethiopia. In Africa. Unlike the case of “Congo Man” where Africa becomes the over-determined trope, I cannot recall the word Africa being mentioned around the visit of the Coptic priests, although I imagine it must have been. Several times.

Had I fulfilled my dream and become a back up singer, coolly riding the rhythms of the calypso, my role would have been to echo the word “Africa” highlighting it, emphasizing its mystery, its apparent fathomlessness. As witness, recorder, griot, poet and teller of tales my role is similar to the back up singer, echoing the word, but perhaps glossing it in another way.

If there were an earlier memory than this one it would have been Tarzan of Africa. The same Africa, complete with cannibal witch doctor that Sparrow sings about. Like the woman's body in “Congo Man” which becomes the means through which he will challenge racism and colonialism, my sister's body was intended to be the means through which the broken circle would be completed. She would be the bartered bride—one body for a memory. Lost. And found.

Each and every Sunday we ate the white-host body of Christ, so that we could be saved; although not cannibal we drank his blood. In “Congo Man” we would all participate in an entirely different eating—of the white woman's body. In both cases, however, we sought salvation as history pulled and pushed us along the trajectory of freedom. And Sparrow's laugh, “Cyah cyah cyah,” riding over the sweet crooning voices of the back up singers, explained without words what no adult would explain about the eating of humans. And gods.

Fragment

Journal—January 2004

I walk the beach almost every day—as is my custom I collect shells—if I manage not to pick up one then I can walk without picking up any—having picked up that first shell, or pebble, or piece

of smoothed glass, I am then condemned to keep picking them up. This time I am keen to know their species and names—I have left my book on shells in Toronto, so I buy another in a store in Black Rock and begin my quest. For fragments.

I find the fragments of shell more beautiful than the whole ones and today, reading a book on shells of the Caribbean, and again on the beach, am aware of preferring the broken ones and liking the challenge of trying to figure out the identity of the shell from the fragment. Have been able to identify Common Spirula, Decussate Bittersweet, Measle Cowrie and Magnum Cockle to name a few. Not to mention Atlantic Hairy Triton and West Indian Top Shell.

-am aware of how this idea of the fragment mirrors issues here in the Caribbean—we are fragments of a whole but can still be identified as such. Or can we?

-the islands themselves are volcanic and coral fragments.

-the w/holeness exists in the fragment—as the w/whole exists in the fragment of the text.

-found a cowrie shell—lovely the whole back missing but from the front it appears w/whole

-can fragments be an organizing principle for the Caribbean?

-how much of a shell can be lost before it is no longer a shell?

-when does the fragment cease being a part of the w/whole? To become its own w/whole?

Elvira: I had been lying on my bed at the hotel one afternoon and I came awake very suddenly. The radio was playing Eddy Grant. Do you know his song “Neighbour, Neighbour.” (She hums the refrain and he shakes his head.) There was something in the timbre of his voice—

Rohan

So, I’ve got Eddy Grant to thank for this?

Elvira

It was the first time I’d ever felt like that.

Rohan

Like what? Are you having an affair with Eddy Grant?

In *Coups and Calypsos*, Elvira an African Trinidadian woman married to, and separated from Rohan, an Indian Trinidadian, hears a fragment of a calypso, which reverberates within her, stoking a desire to be with an African man. Something in Grant’s voice, not to mention the melody, dislodges a memory of a former wholeness long forgotten. By the play’s end she has embarked on a journey to find herself and ground that discovery in a discarded history and culture.

Fragment

Journal—2002

There are three bands. In a pan yard. In Woodbrook. One of them is small—some youngsters or youth men and a few older men; some dreadlocked and some not; a couple of women. The pans—tenor, guitar and bass licking up the music; congo drums calling, shak shak shekere and

scraper keeping the rhythm—thok thok thok thok—two cylindrical sticks knock knocking together and keeping the beat and just so we right inside the music. There is a fire, an urgency, a calling out, a longing, an acknowledgment of a history—the savagery, the beauty, the absolute will to survive and the unquenchable impulse moving to the rhythm of the music and I seeing me myself and I and I in the young boy beating his heart out on a tenor pan as he laughing to dead into a riff that is the call that the other pans answering and the old man laughing too and shaking the tambourine with a joy on his old, gap-toothed face and I knowing in an instant that this too passing and we surviving, that we not dying, that we here—with sun shining bright bright, sea, sand, and poverty; with anger and with joy—that we be and be here—always moving, never standing still, never static.

A truly subversive thought that, given the aids pandemic that is ravaging the Caribbean and, in particular, Trinidad and Tobago, not to mention Africa. But there is a fragment. Of a w/hole that that pan side captured that evening—and through the fragment I could recognize the w/hole. Of something long forgotten.

My father demonstrates the jazz of memory by remembering everything he did not do and so filling the gaps, the black holes, the lacunae left by his failing, faltering and essentially fragile memory that crumbles at the touch of reality, so that everything you mention, each land mark, each place you pass, he has dreamt of or thought of—just—and so he riffs on absences and gaps, filling them with his own fictions, metamorphosing in to a Lord, knighted by the Queen. Why not? Why the hell not? Like the calypsonian weaving from a fragment a whole, as s/he improvises on the fragments of his/her memory. Our collective fragments of memory. And isn't this what we do—improvise, filling the gaps in our memory with our fictions masquerading as truth dress up as lies playing ole marse with we minds.

Meantime is what I doing in dis here dream dat is not my own—is somebody else dream dis who dreaming me and we because I have memory and memory don't dream, memory is forever, is a melody you don't have to make up, not dream and pretend; and if you have memory how you forgetting because dreaming is only forgetting and what I doing in dis here dream—who dreaming dis dream, who dreaming dis dream ... calypso does remember and pan does remember and rapso and caiso but I does forget and dream and forget to dream or ... as Rudder saying, “Is shake down time” and “just another day in paradise” (“Another Day in Paradise”).

Jean, Dinah, Rosita and Clementina were four prostitutes. They all lived in a calypso by Sparrow, the world's greatest calypso man. Jean Dinah, Rosita and Clementina, their space a corner, a street corner, where they posing and selling what all men wanting—a piece of their space, the space between their legs. Jean Dinah, Rosita and Clementina-

Bet your life is something they selling
And of you catch them broken
You can get it all for nothing

The Yankees gone and Sparrow take over now.
(Sparrow, “Jean and Dinah”)

Once again Sparrow going up in the White man face the face of empire but dis time is de yankee dem he taking on and once again is woman body and woman space he usin to score he points calypso working in the service of memory challenging us to remember those who meant us no good as slaves, peasants, negroes, coloured, Black men and Black women, yet working to erase woman and the reasons why Jean, Dinah, Rosita and Clementina might be forced to sell the space between their legs; forgetting that Sparrow might be taking over but all a we losing in the forgetting. Of woman.

Risking the sin of generalization I suggest that if we re/turn to the idea of how African cultures perform ritual we observe the mask or the costume (the artefact?) that has been created that is then extended into and by performance, the better to call down the ancestors or the spirit through prayer, spoken and unspoken, through utterance, spoken or sung, and once the spirit is called down and caught and the devotee mounted, all things are possible which is where what in the West is called improvisation begins. It is the catching of the spirit through performance that generates “Caiso! Caiso!” Or the applause at the end of a jazz riff. There is memory and recognition. Of something once lost and regained. If only temporarily.

The mask is the given, the static, as is our history, and in the history of raw deals ours is one that brooks little competition. It is the calypsonian, like the reggae artist, the rapso performer, the jazz musician who takes the given into our modern day rituals of performance and through the performance of memory calls down the spirit on us. Often the mask is in fact the amnesia or the forgetting that the calypsonian or reggae artist transforms into memory. Calypso is our call to the ancestors through performing memory and with an incisive economy is also simultaneously newspaper, therapist, priest, confessor, is lament, exhortation, exultation and ululation—a call to arms with “lyrics to make a politician cringe” (Rudder, “Calypso Music”). But that memory is a two-edged sword on the one side of which is amnesia and on the other forgetting. In other words memory carries within it forgetting.³ Just like “Congo Man” carried both memory and forgetting.

Fragment

Journal, 2004

A blue sea—the horizon, white clouds, a blue sky, a butterfly and bird song—so much beauty, so much cruelty, so much, so very very much savagery:

de dream dead long live the dream of be—longinging, trying to weave a network of relationships dead in the blood.

here a cousin, there a cousin, every where a cousin but absent family.

Where you from?

Here.

Where.

Anywhere.

De one on monkey mountain or de one dat say massa day done, or de one massa say done. We is we own boss now. Is dat dream you talkin bout? Or remember how we use to sing how Africans never never never shall be slaves. Except is not Africans we used to be singin bout but Britons—cause we still slaving—dat dream never dead and dat is not we dream.

Lord Yeats (my father) once had dreams, as a boy—dreaming as he cutting grass for cow, horse an goat in a little village name Moriah in Tobago, dreaming as he dancing the cocoa dreaming the dream dreaming him of bigger and better days—a piece a lan a piece a pork, dreaming the dream of an island independent an free who massa day done, not an island where der sprechen deutche and black still serving ... white, where dey resurrecting de plantation and calling it hotel and everybody still free. To dream:

In words—in a language of the people. Language for the people. Language by the people, honed and fashioned through a particular history of empire and savagery. A language also nurtured and cherished ... in the mouths of the calypsonians, Jean and Dinah, Rosita and Clementina, Mama look a boo boo, the cuss buds, the limers, the hos (whores), the jackabats, and the market women. (Philip, “The Absence of Writing” 84)

The fragment is both/and: containing the w/whole while being at the same time a part of the w/whole—it compels us to see both the w/whole and the hole: impulse to memory and impulse to amnesia. The fragment is not static; it contains its opposite and it is that opposite—the impulse to forgetting and erasure that I call the fugue.

In *Percyscapes* Robert Rudnicki explores the dissociative disorder known as the fugue state:⁴ “A fugue state has no pre-determined length, the condition may last hours or months. Thus fugue represents a flight in two senses: an escape from one mode of consciousness to another, and a literal escape from home to a new or unfamiliar place” (9).⁵ In fleeing from the usual, the individual forgets his or her earlier life and adopts a different identity. Trauma is often the precipitating factor and the new personality is not recognizable as having any link with the earlier one. The fugue state can, therefore, be seen as a way of protecting the mind and the psyche from overwhelming trauma and allows the individual to live “normally;” it is a state of amnesia, often associated with wandering, and “can be literal or figurative.”⁶

Chantwell Rudder’s “Madness,” “St Ann’s,” or “Just Another Day in Paradise” represent the fugue state in two senses: in one sense the fugue state is descriptive of the behaviour of an individual; in fact that is its most common usage.⁷ I am suggesting that not only is it descriptive of our society but also of the state itself—our nation state can be described as a fugue state. Indeed, much of what I find incomprehensible in Trinbagonian society becomes comprehensible when I apply concept of the fugue state to it—a state that allows groups and individuals to function as if “normal” but whose behaviour is dissociative. Beginning with the political

shenanigans which manifest as general corruption and contempt for the populace, whatever the party in power, the apparently utter contempt for life in Trinidad and Tobago and the loosening of the bounds that once held families and society: “Whey we goin?” Rudder asks. “St. Ann’s.” (The home for the mentally disturbed) the chorus replies. Many of these behaviours are a direct result of the poisonous legacy of colonialism—but it is a legacy we must confront in order to enter a more integrative state. And one of the ways to confront it is through memory—the memory fragment.

Calypso does remember, but calypso does forget too: calypso as memory or amnesia or both. Many calypsos and calypsonians serve to wake us from our dissociative states—Calypso Rose, David Rudder, Black Stalin, Ella Andal, Singing Sandra, Sparrow to name but a few. One over determined example would be Cro Cro and his 2004 calypso on kidnapping in which he advocated kidnapping the politicians (“Face Reality”). They had him to hang, as the saying goes, but the calypso was a wake up call, forcing the audience to engage with the issues of kidnapping. And to ask questions about how the state was dealing with the issue. Nor, am I only talking of the political calypso, or the calypso of social commentary—Melody’s “Mama Look a Booboo,” for instance, was funny but was also riffing on ideas of our “ugliness” left by our erstwhile masters and still rampant in our collective psyche.

Increasingly, however, calypsos, particularly those that receive the most airplay work to heighten and continue the dissociative, fugal state. They work to keep the people hived off from what it is they will not—cannot—face; from the “normal” which is in fact a disturbed state, particularly if it is a fleeing from what cannot be faced. Many of these calypsos are nothing but a set of instructions, which the audience is expected to follow. Often they are primarily sexual in content but no longer indulging in the clever wordplay and double entendre of earlier calypsos. Carnival culture, which is the primary context of the calypso, has been evacuated of much of its substance. As the carnival bands have become little more than bikinis and beads, so too have the calypsos that are given prominence become little more than empty refrains exhorting the crowds to move left or right, or take something and wave. To fugue.

In this age of the brand and the logo, Trinidad and Tobago’s brand is Carnival. Unfortunately this results in the carnivalization and accompanying sexualization of society. While it is important that carnival arts like calypso have become a part of the school curriculum, what we also have now is teachers taking time off before carnival to prepare and to fete and after carnival to recover.⁸ Students, unsurprisingly, follow suit. The fallout from the increased sexualization is often fatal. Particularly as it relates to the increase in HIV/Aids in Trinidad and Tobago. Sexual tourism is now very much a part of the tourist industry in Tobago and it is commonplace to read news reports of doctors expressing concern about the increase in HIV/Aids testing after Carnival, which speaks to the increase in risky sexual behaviour during the season.

Newspapers are in the business to sell newspapers not necessarily news, and anything that smacks of the extreme, particularly in matters sexual will make the news. But surely,

photographs of Machel Montano a hair's breath away from performing cunnilingus on one of his Powder Puff girls, while being described as a role model for youth passes all understanding. Unless, as I am suggesting, we understand Trinidad and Tobago society to be in a dissociative state. A fugue state. Fleeing from a trauma—an unacknowledged trauma—it simply cannot face.

Neither Trinidad and Tobago nor Caribbean societies in general are unique in having to grapple with the psychic, societal, and material disintegration that are an integral part of the modern capitalist society: the atomisation of society, the breakdown of communities, the dissipation of family ties, the hiving off of generations, the emphasis on youth culture at the expense of the wisdom of the elders. The list is infinite. To which we must add, within the context of a society like Trinidad and Tobago, the legacy of empire, colonialism and its attendant scourges like racism. And to which again we must add the fact that it is a “developing” society, a “third world” country that leads the pack in terms of modern day plagues like HIV/Aids. The matrix of all this is the four hundred year history of slavery, which destroyed so much in African life.

Fragment

Journal—January 2004

I met a doctor yesterday at Bacolet Bay—we talk of life in Tobago. He is a gynaecologist. He talks about the rampant sexuality indulged in by young people in Tobago. Older professional women now are entirely celibate, he says, compared to ten years ago when there was an assumption that having a sexual relationship was an expected part of life. Women in low-end jobs, at hotels for instance, “have to have one man to pay the light bill, another for the phone bill.” Older men prey on young girls. There is a lack of leadership, he says. He is Indian from Guyana where he was a member of the Ratoon group in Guyana in which Indians and Africans worked together to understand each other's cultures. When he grew up, he tells me, all the teachers were Black. If you needed a letter you went to the teacher who was Black. There was a very low literacy rate among Indians, he says, now it's reversed among his Black brothers and sisters. Now they're the ones with low literacy. And, I think to myself, in Port of Spain, Toronto London and L.A. they are shooting each other. All the little Black Boys that Baron sang about. He works on an individual basis, he tells me, trying to encourage young women he meets to get into nursing. In 50 years, he says, the demographics in Tobago will be entirely different as a result of HIV/Aids. He seems a fair man and much of what he says I agree with. He shares with me that he has married outside his group—to a Black woman—which gives him a certain perspective on both sides of the racial divide so to speak.

The waves push us this way and that. I am nervous—wary of the sea and mindful that this is the Atlantic side of the island where you're cautioned to take your passport if you go swimming.

The question in my journal: why has their spirituality appeared so much more resistant than ours? Even on the continent. Why aren't we convinced of the beauty of what we have and who we are?

In *African Genius*, Basil Davidson, in describing how different groups came to terms with their often harsh environments, writes of the “deep wisdom” of Africa that understood that: “religious needs (lay) at heart of social evolution. Social needs, that is, were conceived in religious terms” (9, 50). Religious not in terms of how we think of religion today, but a deep, spiritual understanding of the relationships between ancestors and the land and community that bind us. These connections have been severed, ruptured by our peculiar history into fragments and fugues or fuguing fragments.

Memory/amnesia. A memory triggered when Rudder sings the Our Father, exhorts us to give thanks and we, the chorus, answer and him and do, overriding the amnesia generated by slavery and colonialism.

Fragment

Journal—January 2004

Here there are stairs—either of buildings that once existed but now no longer, or buildings once in the process of being built but now abandoned. In either case they lead nowhere.

Yesterday driving along the Bacolet Road that borders the cemetery—cars line the way—people are dressed in white, lavender, purple or black—but they are drinking and dancing in the street. At a funeral.

The whole society appears to have lost any moral bearing despite the plethora of churches of all denominations. We have aped our erstwhile master—the European—who had nothing to teach us in morals or spirituality

Fragment

Journal—February 2004

In the morning I read CLR James—I laugh a lot. He has quite a way of skewering the English. Then I read Lamming this morning. Ten years ago when I moved back to Tobago I was reading Lamming. Also Mittleholzer—rereading a Morning at the Office—as pertinent today as when it was first written. Then I read Mario Varga Llosa and I come upon a longing for a woman’s voice in all this—James is surprising at times in the nonsense he writes about women but oh for a woman’s sensibility and what do I do as a woman when I look back and all I see is this unending line of men stretching back—James, Lamming Mittleholzer, Dessalines, Toussaint. The only woman who comes to mind is Sylvia Wynter. And Claudia Jones. These men are the planks over the swampy bogs of history—mangrove swamps perhaps?

I envy the women their cool calm collected acceptance of the largesse of their flesh, their sang-froid, their slowness. Yet I am at times irritated by it.

Read The Review yesterday and my god! Not a single woman was mentioned in the entire edition—all the photographs are of men!

Fragment

(Excerpt from letter) February 2004

I think it interesting that at one time the West Indies was known the world over for its cricket teams, which kicked butt, albeit in an entirely male-focused activity, and today we're known for carnival—not kicking butt but showing butt. And there's no coincidence that we are witnessing the currently disastrous performance of the West Indian cricket team.

Having said that, however, as I read and re-read *Beyond the Boundary*, I am overwhelmed by the fact that this activity that defined the Caribbean and shaped how the region was seen is so male. This is a game that we didn't even play as girls or women—how then do I position myself in this activity? As spectator? Beyond the boundary? I want to resist that impulse to find the female equivalent—Sylvia Wynter is one of the most brilliant thinkers, with a formidable intellect and I believe that her failure to garner more attention in the region is because she is female. So too with Claudia Jones. But finding the female equivalent is not the answer; although I must say the other day I was thinking that the Admiral of the Oceans, Columbus, was actually sent by a woman, not a man. It was Queen Isabella, wasn't it, who charged him with the task of finding a way to the east. That's a bit too close to the behind every great man is a woman. No, I see the men of the African Caribbean as continuing the project of patriarchy, much as I value their insights and scholarship. They have answered the master in the language of the master—it's like cricket, isn't it, beating the master at his own game. (And I am reminded of Audre Lorde and the impossibility of using the master's tools to dismantle the master's house.) But that particular game is over and maybe the language doesn't exist yet in which what has yet to be done must be done. Is it the language of Sycorax? After all, Caliban acknowledged that he held the island through and by her. And what is her language?

It is sometimes the language of the calypso—not simply the words but the deeper language—the meta-language. The German scholar Leo Frobenius was of the opinion that in African cultures language did not, as in the West, serve only to communicate ideas, but also brought the imagination to life and enlivened the object world. This for me is the mask coming to life through performance—the mask of history, a false history, being removed and through calypso our memory is animated. Calypso has the potential of bringing us out of that fugue state where we flee the reality of what has been and is still around us. Using the Caribbean demotic, vernacular or nation language, calypsonians have sung our hopes and our dreams, have sent up the stupidities of the colonial masters, and present day politicians; have poked fun at ourselves and bigged us up; reminding us to remember.

In contrast:

Whole cadres of educated elites in the Caribbean are selected for eminence by schooling on the confident premise that they know little or nothing about the societies for which they are responsible. The great merit for which our validating elites are celebrated is their half education. There is so much that they know about

the rest of the world. It is of course the root cause of the signal incapacity of Afro Saxon culture to abandon its obsession with formulas and clichés ... an elite unable to describe its own reality by using concepts and designations that spring out of its own experience. (Lloyd Best)

The inability of Afro Saxon culture to “describe its own reality” is, I’m suggesting expressive of a dissociative state—a fugue state. A state of amnesia.

Fragment

Journal, February 2004

Estate and plantation houses are always seen as romantic places show pieces, with nothing of the history of terror that attaches to them.

There is a BBC report of an earthquake in Iran: the presenter speaks of the people losing their bearings because of loss of family, loss of home—he says they are suffering from post traumatic shock syndrome. And I realize that, indeed, that is what we—this society, our society—suffers from, post-traumatic shock syndrome. That is also perhaps what Africa suffers from.

Body Pond Estate, Antigua

The article appears in the lushly produced *Maco*, a magazine about luxury living in the Caribbean. The article describes a renovation to an old plantation house. As always, a romantic old plantation house. But its name, Body Pond, disturbs me and I fear what further reading confirms, that the estate got its name from a pond where Africans, in an attempt to escape, drowned. Now, the estate, house, garden and pond, owned by a Syrian woman is displayed as a show piece, with but a brief reference to “the island’s only river *legend*” (my emphasis) which takes “its name from the fact that in a desperate bid to flee servitude, plantation slaves had been known to hurl themselves into the water where they met with a tragic death.”

Body Pond. Antigua. Body Pond. The Atlantic. Memory/Amnesia.

Fragment/fugue.

Fragment (Journal)

March 2004

When I am here I live in History—it is all around.

—That time of the day when everything darkens becomes silhouetted, black cut outs—the fringed coconut palm—an image so associated with the tropics—the Caribbean—it comes as a surprise that they are not indigenous but they have made these islands home and metamorphosed into a visual signifier of sorts for the area. Their manner of arrival—nuts borne or carried on the seas to wash up here, there, or anywhere is a metaphor for how we came here as well—to make this place our home un-home.

—Stumps of the coconut trees like so many dismembered arms lacking hands having clawed their way out of the sand, reach out, yearning, reaching reaching ... towards sea, the ocean, the

Atlantic—to Africa. Over there. Past the horizon ...

—And the sea, her hunger sated, spits us up—so much flotsam and jetsam on these hard rocks of indifference passing as island paradises of sun, sea and sex. Where revolutions and dreams in equal measure are born only to die.

—The architecture, if you can call it that, approximates the fort—big square and obzoky, no concession made to the environment that invites openness; houses modelling themselves instead on the closed-in northern type of house—by passing for the most part the gracious graceful elements of the colonial period, to imitate villas of the Mediterranean with red clay roofs, or approximations of the pared down post modern style, or simply, the big white fortress towering above the landscape—a dinosaur on concrete legs. Ugly is the word that comes to mind often in a land so overwhelmingly beautiful.

It is an absolutely beautiful day—on the plantation—clear blue skies, bird song, the huge leaves like sculptures—am struck by how certain plants occupy space.

Am on the plantation and in the great house—literally and it is pleasant being in the great house, but I can never forget myself. We can never forget ourselves.

A bird is on the table, a brown dove walks across the tiled floor head moving in that funny propulsive way that birds do.

An alternate but original meaning of the fugue is a musical composition with polyphonic elements in which “themes are developed contrapuntally” (Rudnicki 7). Usually there is a melody or melodic phrase that is repeated in different keys and at different intervals. In this sense of the word, too, Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean can also be described as fugal societies—polyphonic societies, culturally and racially and ethnically. Societies in which the harsh melodies of loss and exile and be/longing for a re/turn are repeated over and over again in different keys and at different intervals. Societies in which these melodies come from different societies and cultures, some of which, like the African and the Asian carry with them polyphonic and polyrhythmic musical traditions. Fugal societies in two senses of the word—both dissociative and polyphonic. And it is the calypsonian that has the potential to heal the former and allow the polyphonies to grow.

What, if anything, does this have to do with the literary imagination? Calypso and literature both attempt to explain who we are to ourselves and what we’re doing here. Wherever here may be. But the literary imagination is directed to the written and calypso to the oral and performative traditions. They both serve important functions in these post-colonial societies and remain in productive tension with each other as complementary ways to integrate and move a fractured society toward wholeness. ... And just like the names Totoben and Maisie giving themselves when they singing calypso-Exploiter, Roaring Lion, Tiger, Lord Kitchener, Lord Melody. The Mighty Sparrow, Calypso Rose—the names talking about how Totoben and Maisie moving from slave shack to the street, about how Totoben and Maisie through Black Stalin ready to fight for their moving:

I spend so much money to buy this costume
now I ready to jump
you better give me room
I make so much a plan just to play dis marse
now is time to play
give me room to pass
I want to jam down
roll down
shake down
all around town
dis marse is for you and you and you
so move move you blocking up the place
so move
I want to shake my waist
the people want to jam
so get out of the band
I say move (Black Stalin, “Move”)

Notes

¹According to the Haitian Quebecois writer, Max Dorsinville, in his work *Le Pays Natal*, the archetype of return marks the work of writers of the Afrospora—whether it be a metaphorical return in literature or a real return as in writers like Aimé Césaire returning to their homes after an extended sojourn in the metropolis. Return to Africa is also a significant aspect of this archetype.

²In “Dis-Place—the Space Between” I argue that for women the outer space is inflected by the perception of how safe the space between the legs is. (*Genealogy of Resistance* 74-112).

³Bernice Reagon a folklorist and founder of the musical group, Sweet Honey in the Rock, in talking of African culture in the new world, has said that because our societies were so materially impoverished, we had to make our cultures work for us; it had to carry everything. Barnard College, 109th Commencement, New York, N.Y., May 15, 2001.

⁴Fugue from the Latin word meaning flight. The term is also used to describe musical composition that is polyphonic and contrapuntal in style.

⁵Especially, the chapter on “Fugue and the Modern Literary Mind” (Rudnicki 1-35).

⁶Rudnicki, *passim*.

⁷As Philip explains subsequently, “St. Ann’s” is a refrain in the chorus of David Rudder’s “Madness.”

⁸Conversation with a teacher at a high school in Tobago.

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