

# *Barbadian Aesthetics: Towards a Conceptualization*

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THE MAJOR OBJECTIVE of this article is to provide some insights into the conceptualization of Barbadian aesthetics through an analysis of what might be termed “folk” and “popular” subversive works. To this end, it outlines some connections between a number of important but apparently disparate artists and art forms. The argument is based on Kamau Brathwaite’s hypothesis of an underground literary and artistic tradition which links selected writers and art forms within Barbados. Central to Brathwaite’s hypothesis is the connection he would seem to make between folk culture and popular culture. Indeed, he rejects more traditional, closed concepts of the category commonly called “Literature.” He is much more intent on conceiving of a cultural tradition which emphasizes creativity, a connection with “roots,” and a grounding in “Nation Language.” While some critics of Barbadian literature regard writers like Brathwaite and George Lamming as the last of a dying cadre of writers, this article tests that assumption by comparing Brathwaite with other younger Barbadian writers.

“Micro-states” are forced to compete vigorously for place, space and voice. In the Caribbean, slavery and conquest have served to fix small states as appendages of larger “mother countries.” In these states, the stifling of “local” voices, especially at the level of political self-determination, has given rise to subversive cultural expressions which seek to regain some control of discourse within and outside of the nation. It is therefore at the level of culture that most Caribbean “micro-states” have consolidated a sense of identity. At the present global juncture these states are no less hemmed in by larger power blocks; for example, the recent squeezing of Caribbean banana producing states between the US and Europe reflects the ongoing challenges posed to the region. In his 1995 lecture on “Western Education and the Caribbean Intellectual,”

Lamming identified satellite television as representing "the encirclement of re-colonization." Echoes of this lecture appear in the published text *Coming Coming Coming Home* (22). Many states are now faced with the challenge of negotiating their own sense of cultural identity in the midst of an onslaught by trans-national agencies which have positioned culture as the site of conquest. The need to define national cultural space is even more imperative for small emerging states of the region.

Recent postmodernist approaches to the analysis of culture question the rationality of conceptualising well-defined national cultures. Stuart Hall's 1999 lecture on "Identity and the Nation State," given to mark the University of the West Indies' 50th anniversary, posed many striking questions. Can we talk of the Nation as an exclusive category, especially in light of recent social, political, cultural, and intellectual developments? Much recent theory, which is characterized by a predominantly "first world" scepticism, has formulated and perpetuated neat paradigms and theoretical categories which sideline the intrinsic study of small nation states. Although the term "Commonwealth" has become outmoded, the controlling politics it represented have been repackaged in the guise of "postcoloniality" and the "Black Atlantic."

With the advent of globalization at the end of the twentieth century, such notions as hybridity, liminality, fluidity, non-fixity and "betweenity" have understandably diffused perceptibly older concepts of closed/fixed national boundaries. The nation state (like the author before it) is therefore rendered as dead. But it is precisely because of globalization that the immediate future sustainability of smaller national cultures rests on the extent of *their* identification of who they are as a people. To my mind the spectre of globalization necessitates a different approach to engaging literature and culture in small emerging states. Whereas alliances and the forging of wider communities are driving principles of globalization, there is also a counter imperative: that of better defining the Nation. In this article I will concentrate on the counter imperative in order to address the question of a Barbadian aesthetic. The need to do so is compelling, for although Barbadian writers and artists have attracted a great deal of critical attention, there has been little attempt to discuss these writers in the context of

a national project or tradition; rather, most of this criticism has been in the context of postcoloniality, or anticoloniality, or cross-cultural studies. As Brathwaite has lamented in his Sir Winston Scott Memorial lecture (which subsequently appeared as *Barababan Poems*), there is “an absence of Bajan critical discussion, the absence of a Bajan critical dimension” (23).

Worldwide there are difficulties in conceptualizing national literatures in small emerging countries, in large part because prevailing (postcolonial, poststructuralist) methodological approaches and imperatives tend to focus on artists across cultures, rather than on consolidating and legitimising what can be called national discourses. Whereas “macro-states” have long established a sense of their own national literature and culture, many smaller countries like Barbados have not thoroughly considered the existence of theirs. In order to place Barbadian literature in its local context, and thus work toward the establishment of a well-defined Barbadian aesthetic which places “Literature” at its core, this essay traces the inter-connection of the “scribal” tradition with oral and music oriented/based traditions.

Some misleading mis-readings of Barbados have been offered in George Pinckard’s 1908 *Notes on the West Indies* and Richard Ligon’s 1657 *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* and other historiographic sources. More recently, there have appeared commendable studies of individual Barbadian artists, for example, Sandra Pouchet Paquet’s *The Novels of George Lamming* and Gordon Rohlehr’s *Pathfinder: Black Awakening in The Arrivants of Edward Kamau Brathwaite*. There has been little attempt, however, to validate connections between native Barbadian artists and aesthetic components within the nation. It is imperative, I feel, to identify links between Brathwaite and the most recent core of writers, performers and chanters. The foundation on which it is possible to talk of a unifying Barbadian artistic connection might very well have some basis in what Brathwaite has repeatedly referred to as “an underground connection”; recently, Brathwaite explored this issue in his address in honour of his seventieth birthday, at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill. I therefore want to use this notion of “an underground Barbados” to discuss how it is possible to begin to conceptualize an artistic tradition, a Barbadian aesthetics.

In Brathwaite's estimation, Barbadian culture has deceived observers over the centuries. Many people have thought of Barbados as "Little England," and as Bimshire, another of the British Shires. Brathwaite has countered this by suggesting that Black culture in Barbados which is predominantly African has over the centuries existed submerged or "underground." The submergence of African culture in Barbados has not signalled its extinction; rather, this has been a necessary condition of its survival. Such African Barbadian retentions in the tuk band, folk song, calypso, food, and in the dialect or nation language, signify the persistence of African traditions in Barbadian culture (see Alleyne, Alsopp, Roberts).

In Brathwaite's scheme of racial and cultural contestation, the "indestructible [black] self" survives institutionalized slavery. Nation language is the most potent component of this submerged, black Barbadian culture. Given the centrality of language as a cultural marker in Brathwaite's theorizing, it is imperative to begin to conceptualize Barbadian culture by engaging with the Nation language artists. Before I discuss these writers, however, I feel it is necessary to come to terms with issues which relate to the conceptualization of Literature and culture.

### I. On what Terms? Folk/Popular Culture

The rationale for these initial observations concerning concepts such as "popular culture" and "folk culture" is that Barbadian aesthetics cannot be understood if it is hemmed in by inflexible modes of discourse. A clear understanding of Barbadian aesthetics necessitates an understanding of how a variety of artists might indeed be considered to breach these and other categories.

John Fiske is correct when he asserts that, "popular culture is not consumption, it is culture — the active process of generating and circulating meanings and pleasures within a social system: culture, however industrialized, can never be adequately described in terms of the buying and selling of commodities" (23). But his categorization of popular culture in relation to folk culture must be called into question, especially within the context of Barbadian aesthetics. Fiske says point blank that popular culture is not folk culture. He sees folk culture as the product of a stable traditional social order in which social differences are not at work, a society

therefore characterized by social consensus rather than social conflict. According to this view, which is based on a somewhat static view of history, culture, and the signifying process, folk culture might be a fossilized set of practices. The reality is that the past is never stable, static, or fixed. As people come to terms with their present and future selves they also reassess and re-image their past, their folk culture. A phenomenon like the indigenous percussive band called the tuk band, for example, is both folk and popular, because it simultaneously embodies the symbolism of the past, while harnessing the potential of the present and future (see Best). It is an agency with subversive potentialities. When unearthed and understood, "folk culture" can become the most potent weapon for transforming embattled "outpost-colonial" (my term) societies like those in the Caribbean and elsewhere.

"Popular culture" as a concept is excessively contradictory. On the one hand it is industrialized and commercially bound. According to Fiske, It subsists of "commodities produced and distributed by a profit-motivated industry" (23). But culture is also the outpourings of "the people," whose concerns are not always the concerns of industry. When Brathwaite speaks of the underground tradition (as he did, for example, at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill, in June 2000, during a week of celebrations in his honour), he is asking that we conceive of a link between folk and popular phenomena. He urges a new kind of criticism which discusses the interconnectivity of poets like himself and music-based, cutting-edge artists like Gabby, Red Plastic Bag, Rameses Brown, and others. His understanding of culture, then, is at odds with that of many other critics; for example, he would object to any reading of "the popular" that would limit it to contexts where, in the words of Tony Bennett et al., "the market economy has penetrated most forms of cultural production and consumption" (15).

In the text *Culture, Media, Language*, Janet Batsleer explains that there have been four major conceptualizations of popular culture: as the material of the working class; as the product of a culture industry; as myth; as an ideological apparatus of the state (257). Following Brathwaite's method, I am predominantly (though not exclusively) concerned with the first conceptualization, which privileges the material of the working class, the folk.

## II. The Field

Barbados is a complex collective. For centuries it has been regarded as politically conservative; for example, its own statue of Lord Nelson was erected before that of the British, and in Barbados' own Trafalgar Square. I want to propose that there are at least two Barbadoses: the mythic Barbados, and the undiscovered/under-discoursed Barbados. It is the second of these Barbadoses that I want to explore through an examination of its folk and popular culture. The mythic Barbados has existed and been perpetuated by planter, selected historiographic texts, travelogues, diaries, letters, pastoral poems and other fictions. In the age of institutionalized tourism, this mythic Barbados has been perpetuated in travel brochures; the Barbados Tourism Authority, for examples, has described an island "out in the turquoise sea . . . somewhere beyond your imagination." When I say "mythic Barbados" I am referring to the strategies and constructions which have stereotyped Barbados as a homogeneous entity, Protestant, prim and proper, transparent, not given to indigenous expression.

The relatively sparse academic writings on the contemporary creative arts of Barbados have tended to promote the perception of a tame, disjointed artistic community. But Barbadian culture is diverse, complex, yet systemically interconnected. Many observers have been blinded to the viability and vibrancy of local arts as a result of the operation of what Louis Althusser refers to as ideological state apparatuses, which in Barbados have consistently discouraged the interrogation and legitimisation of African Barbadian culture. Such a self-examination and conceptualization can be achieved, I suggest, by engaging with and analysing selected folk and popular creative arts.

## III. Reading Popular Subversive Strands

After having decried the mis-reading and non-reading of Barbadian culture, I want to demonstrate that there is an active and subversive link between selected popular Barbadian artists. Academic literature beyond the region has devoted some attention to Barbados' indigenous writers, including Kamau Brathwaite, George Lamming, and Austin Clarke. But in Carole Boyce Davies' important work *Out of the Kumbia*, which focuses on the contribution of

Caribbean women in the arts, no more than a few sentences are devoted to Daphne Joseph Hackett. In Judy Stone's text *Theatre*, Barbadian playwrights and troupes are almost negligible. Other writers who merit more than the minimal attention they have received include A.N Forde, Frank Collymore, Bruce St. John, Timothy Callender, Anthony Kellman, John Wickham, Winston Farrell, Mike Richards (Adisa Andwele), and Jonathan Small; at best, their work has appeared in such anthologies as Kellman's *Crossing Water*, Brown's *Caribbean Poetry Now*, Brown's *Caribbean New Wave*, or Brown's *Oxford Book of Caribbean Short Stories*. In recent studies of Caribbean music by the likes of Peter Manuel, Deanna Robinson, and Roger Wallis, Barbados is mentioned on account of its having a pressing plant and local distribution outlet for major record companies outside of the region. The international *All Music Guide* edited by Erlewine et al. refers to one of Barbados' greatest singing/composing legends, Gabby, as a Trinidadian singer, and misrepresents Red Plastic Bag, Barbados' most clever writer of traditional calypso, as Red Plastic Bay (1163). Addressing the subject of popular theatre in the Caribbean at the 1993 "Pressures of the Text" conference at the University of Birmingham, Al Creighton referred to the "Tame" theatre practiced in Barbados. Although he does not repeat this assessment in the published version of his paper, he does gesture toward it ("The Satanic Rehearsals" 42). Some people might agree with this reading of dramatic productions like "Man Talk," "Laugh It Off," "Bajan Bus Stop," "Talk Tent," "Off Snakes and Grasshoppers," "King Ja Ja," and "A Hero's Welcome." But Creighton's conclusion is based on a comparison with other Caribbean and non-Caribbean theatres, and shows no concern really with examining the particular context which is Barbados. Like so many externally produced critiques of "micro-states," Creighton's fails to reveal the particularities of a National aesthetic, because it neglects to undertake the closer analysis of local forms

In order to detect the revolutionary in a particular society, one must first have a sense of what the norm is within that society. Barbadian theatre, and much of the creative arts, are indeed potently subversive, even as they are also (and at the same time) negotiated and tame. The comic masking of political statement in such local

annual productions as “Laff It Off,” “Bajan Bus Stop,” “Pam-palam,” and “Talk Tent” begs to be examined as camouflaged subversion. If one examines the ways in which laughter violates a number of discursive proprieties of Barbadian society, then it becomes more evident that the tendency towards comic/satiric theatre marks a distinctive act of subversion by producers, directors and actors. Barbadian theatre is more prone to operate through subversive subtlety, rather than through overt confrontation. Many of the above productions therefore rely on satire, irony, caricatures and humour for their effective working.

Some commentaries on Barbadian writing continue to lament the absence of continuity within the tradition of Lamming and Brathwaite. It is therefore implied that there are no more Lamming or Brathwaites on the horizon. To a large degree this is true. But also, it is important to interrogate the viewpoints from which such statements are emanating. It should be said that the social, political, cultural and literary climate which gave birth to Lamming and Brathwaite was a specific moment in Barbadian and Caribbean history. Those writers were born of a movement which was Caribbean-wide, facilitated by literary migrations to metropolises and by the interests of large publishing houses in certain types of exotic writings. There were also fledgling literary magazines like *Bim*. Much of the curiosity of that era is now gone. To lament the absence of new writers like Lamming or Brathwaite is therefore to misunderstand the dynamics of Caribbean society. In fact, Brathwaite has been a noticeable influence on many writers who have come to national attention since the 1990s.

Now I want to demonstrate how a number of disparate creative entities are connected within a corpus of Barbadian works that have struggled for legitimacy. By making this connection, I will begin to indicate the possibility of mapping a Barbadian aesthetics, one which links traditional earlier popular folk forms to more recent hardcore styles. Between the early 20th century and the present a number of subversive creative arts phenomena have surfaced in Barbados; and each of these is related in some way to a later, more subversive artistic manifestation. These subversive practices continue to resignify or resurface in varying forms and media. In order to theorize the existence of a popular counter-discursive expression in



Barbados, it is necessary to locate some of these expressions, see how they are related, and appreciate how they violate discursive proprieties of Barbadian society.

A people's language, speech patterns, varieties, intonations, and lexicon are perhaps their most important and self-defining attributes. It is no surprise therefore that current academic debates in the realm of literature, culture, philosophy and sociology have positioned language at the centre of analysis. When one considers the creative uses to which Barbadian nation language has been put, the names of selected creative artists readily come to mind. Edward Cordle, writing at the turn of the twentieth century with his formulaic and structured Barbadian dialogues between Lizzy and Joe, is one example. In his late nineteenth-century verse built on rhyming couplets, the creole was not projected as a medium of "serious" expression. His use of Barbadian dialect created the backdrop for the portrayal of humorous encounters between the stereotypical protagonists, who are middle-aged, working-class Barbadians. Readers are drawn to the two protagonists on account of their fixed, formulaic representativeness. Their language is stolid, exaggerated at times to comic effect. On account of this, the characters usurp the place of importance from the wider social issues which impacted a repressive social setup in Barbados. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Barbados still retained many of the social structures imposed by slavery. The Lizzy and Joe sequences do not reflect the repressive realities of late nineteenth-century Barbados. The anthology *Overhead*, published in 1903, includes many of Cordle's pieces. In the poem "Hard Times With Lizzie — Foe is Very Ill," the attempt to capture the Barbadian hyper corrective "s" at verb endings, results in an almost laughable caricature of the characters and belittles their supposed plight:

Dese common class Barbadians en got nuh gratitude,  
 Dey haunts yuh place, dey wears yuh clothes and eats up all yuh food  
 But wait till trouble holes yuh, yuh nebah sees a sole,  
 An dem dat wuz de hottest is shore fuh tuhn more cole.

(22, lines 21-24)

This work is an important contribution to dramatic poetry. It is only much later in the twentieth century, however, that

experimentation with Barbadian speech varieties reveals a more complex functioning of the nation language.

Bruce St. John is one such later writer. His collection of poetry *Bumbatuk* begs to be interpreted for its nation language, its tonal inflections, and its use of the rhythms of tuk, the native Barbadian rhythmic and intonational style created by the percussive band. In the essay "Towards a Poetics of Barbadian Dialect Writing in Verse," included in *Bumbatuk*, St. John begins to formulate a context for the perception of a tuk, indigenous aesthetic. His nation language poetry is much more confident than Cordle's. Whereas Cordle used the non-standard variety largely to convey humour, St. John uses the nation language for a variety of purposes. In "Letter to England," for example, he uses it for dramatic effect:

Girl chile darling yuh ole muddah hey  
 Praisin de Lord fuh 'e blessings an 'e mercies . . .  
 Uh get de five pounds an' de Christmas card  
 God bless yuh. (60, lines 1-4)

In "Academic-Epidemic," St. John uses nation language to satirize the foibles of intellectualism. He creates the Barbadian soundscape in a way that other writers like Frank Collymore and A.N. Forde have only hinted at in poems like "Hymn to the Sea" and "Canes" respectively.

Timothy Callender fits into this category as well. In his prose, Bajan intonations construct bridges of sound which serve as vivid sound blocks for his strongly stated story lines. The story "Christmas Plans" follows the reintegration of Saga Boy into the community after he is released from prison. It ends with his return to communal ritual and a stated indifference to institutional control:

"Yes man. I agree with that too," Saga say. And they get up to go leaving Silus and Mildred there. And 'pon the step they look at one another and laugh and nod they head.

"And Saga say, Well what we waiting for? Let we go and fire a grog nuh!" (50)

Like Cordle and St. John, Callender constructs his works around a number of recurring characters and iconographies. Callender's appeal to a Barbadian sensibility rested on his description of local pastimes in "traditional" Barbadian villages like St Judes and St

Elizabeth. Whereas Cordle's use of the dialect called attention to the act of painfully constructing the local language, Callender's nation language fuels the plot and punctuates its dramatic turns. His major themes, like St. John's, are social change, cultural transformations, and personal/communal conflict. Unlike St. John, Callender preferred prose to poetry, but they shared a keen awareness of how Barbadian society struggles to define its difference in a rapidly changing post-independence context.

Anthony Kellman is presently also experimenting with the use of St. John's pioneering *tuk* phrasing, through a complex structure based on advanced methods of poetic scanning. His recorded cassettes of the 1990s, *Surf Poems* and *Surf Poems 2*, promise to give fuller expression to his page-based experiments. By producing audio recordings of his poetry he joins Brathwaite, whose Argo recordings supported his philosophical thinking on Orality. Throughout the 1990s Farrell has produced "African Lion on the Loose" and "Earth Spirit"; and Adisa has produced "Conscious" and "Doing it Saf." The "calypso poets" continue to release large amounts of song-poems each year, most of them timed to coincide with the annual, national Crop Over festival.

Jeanette Layne-Clark's ambivalent attitude to nation language belies her acute sensitivity to the nuances of the Barbadian intonation, lexicon, and syntax. She does not sit squarely with Brathwaite's deification of the nation language, but ironically, she possesses as keen a perception of it as he. She has produced creative writing for radio dramas, as well as serials like the 1970s "Okras in the Stew" and "Partners in Profit." She has also written dramatic monologues, or sketches which have formed part of the popular stage dramatic production called "Pampalam." Some of these dramatic monologues have been recorded for commercial distribution, as on the cassette *Something in de Stew*. The highly expressive drama of Cordle has an echo in Layne-Clark's work. Like Cordle, Layne-Clark has tended to write about stock characters, such as Lottie and Mabel, neighbours whose foibles and struggles propel the action in her serial "Okras in de Stew." Layne-Clark is also like Cordle in relying upon humour as a major device. But Layne-Clark's use of the nation language is much more wide-ranging, perhaps because she is writing almost a hundred years

later than Cordle. By the time she began to write, the role of language in defining identity and culture had become a critical issue.

Layne-Clark's work is thematically concerned with class tensions, anticipatory socialization (or denial of one's social class), social justice, and nation building. These issues are explored in poems like "Roots to Riches," "I Want nuh Dam Chile Money," and "At De Bus Stop," all found on her cassette "Something in de Stew." Her dramatic poem "Shades of Spades" examines the complex issues bound up in the question of identity in a highly colour conscious Barbadian society:

You ever stop to study how many shades Buhbadians got?  
Ranging from black to backra starting with like de pot  
Um is nuff shades fuh truth faith mussy whole fifteen in all  
tek it from me I count them so I know this thing tall.

This dramatic poem goes on to outline the perceived correlation between skin colour and social class. In the performance poem the humorous exterior of the verse is undercut by a biting indictment of social prejudices which continue to inflict the Barbadian psyche.

Barbados' leading composer of calypso is Gabby, who has explored issues of identity, colour, and race in such popular compositions as "Black Man Wake Up," "Mulatto," "Culture" and "Miss Barbados." In the 2000 production/recording of "Black Man Wake Up," Gabby sings:

De white man in this country have no shame  
Inviting de black man down to Sandy Lane  
To play tennis and golf with he  
You should see Whitey at de tee  
Pretending to be who he cannot be. . . .

Both Gabby and Layne-Clark employ the nation language with ease and feeling; both have a penchant for biting satire and rancorous, venomous statement. Layne-Clark, however, does not become as submersed in her message as Gabby does. The outspoken Gabby has always foregrounded issues which relate to colonization and African-Barbadian culture. Layne-Clark, in contrast, is content to present the issues and hint at the need for action, as in "Consumerism," an episode of "Okras in de Stew" that deals with class

exploitation. Gabby makes it overly clear what action is necessary, and indeed presents himself as willing to lead the charge in re-dressing a number of social ills, like drug trafficking, in the work "Rambo, Gabby is Rambo." In this song he warns, "I gon pull and pull and pull until they don't have testicles at all. . . ." He has indeed taken the politics espoused by Brathwaite's verse to a further extreme. His relationship with the Guyanese dreadlocked international star Eddy Grant has resulted in lyrics accompanied by an angry, aggressive technology-driven style which came to the fore in Barbados in the early 1990s. Brathwaite's preoccupation with the drum in his own poetry is mirrored by the strongly stated drums which also drive Gabby's music. Indeed, a number of Gabby's songs from the 1990s, including "Jouvert Morning," "Sweeter Than You," and "In de Savannah," allude lyrically to the significance of the drum.

Since the mid-1980s, a number of younger, un-critiqued, performance-based artists have demonstrated great skill and astuteness in their ability to engage issues of Barbadian society and project Barbadian aesthetics through language. These artists might not fit squarely within what Brathwaite calls, in his 1980 interview with Yolande Cantu, the "literary-literary tradition." These newer artists practise within the related genres of Bajan dub, rhythm poetry, calypso and post-calypso. They might still fall under the broad category of Orature. I see them as integral to the formulation of Barbadian aesthetics. But even before I examine the contribution of this younger generation to a Barbadian aesthetics, it is important to consider the contribution of Brathwaite to this movement, and to show how other younger performers might be linked to his work.

By the late 1990s, the Barbadian establishment began to lay partial claim to Kamau Brathwaite as a vital cultural creative icon. It became noticeable that commentators and many traditionalists, in an attempt to dismiss younger artists/performers, invoked Brathwaite's poetry as a benchmark for all other writers. But many of these commentators seemed unaware of the vital connection between Brathwaite and many of the younger artists whose hardcore styles they dreaded. It is not accurate in the first place to

position Brathwaite squarely within a “literary” tradition. His work has been much more rooted in the politics of a disruptive popular folk culture tradition than many seem to recognize. Brathwaite fits squarely within a wider popular culture discourse precisely because his position has been one of oppositionality to what was “proper” in the 1960s and 1970s, when works like *The Arrivants*, *Mother Poem*, and *Sun Poem* were produced. For a very long time the literati and the critical establishment abroad and at home were not prepared to accept his method, or equipped to understand his experiments. So radical has been his work that it caused a rupture within the then-stable literary philosophical establishment in the Caribbean. It created what is still the most passionate confrontation in the history of Anglophone Caribbean literature, the Brathwaite vs. Walcott aesthetic divide.

#### IV. Brathwaite and younger writers

Let me go on to show there is an underground connection between Brathwaite and the more youthful dub/dancehall and rhythm based poets. When it is understood how Brathwaite’s work influenced and preceded many of the performance poets of the Caribbean, then my arguments for a Barbadian aesthetic which links Kamau Brathwaite to “I” Farrell, to Adisa, and to Lil’ Rick become more plausible. What we call “dub poetry” (not to be confused with “dub chanting”), that is, works by practitioners like Mikey Smith, clearly has its roots in the development of reggae in the 1960s and 1970s. But few analyses have considered Brathwaite as forerunner to 1970s and 1980s dub poetry bards like Smith and Oku Onuora. Indeed, the term “dub poetry” has its contested origin in the late 1970s, some time after Brathwaite’s influence had been sown.

When one begins to acknowledge that by the late 1960s performance pieces like Brathwaite’s “Negus,” “Wings of A Dove,” “The Dust,” and “Rites” were already produced on vinyl by Decca Argo, then I think we begin to contemplate not only the influence of the Jamaican oral and music tradition on Brathwaite, but more significantly, the immense influence he would have on the radical poets of the dub poetry tradition: Smith, Onuora, Zephaniah, Mutabaruka, and others. When in the late 1970s and early 1980s these

major dub poets began to influence the performance tradition in Barbados, they themselves had already been influenced by Brathwaite. This is how national art forms and cultures interact and develop.

My critical point here goes back to the site of interplay and interactivity between Brathwaite and writers like “I” Farrell, Adisa, and the natural progression into the dub genre through Fatman, Jesse James, Kidsite, Lil’ Rick, Peter Ram, and others who came to the fore in the 1990s. Farrell and Adisa have acknowledged a direct influence by Brathwaite; others have not. Some seem unaware of the hidden connection. Farrell’s “Tribute,” from the 1996 collection of the same name, which pays homage to the Barbadian tuk band, resonates with the kind of quiet celebratory ritual of Brathwaite’s “Ogun” or even his “The Making of the Drum.” An even more remarkable “sampling” of Brathwaite’s method occurs in stanza three of Farrell’s “Tribute” (which should be compared to the “Prelude” in section one of *The Arrivants*):

With a skip  
hop/skip  
with a dip  
down low/  
in a wangalo  
with a hip  
hop/high  
with a low  
low tongue  
with a low  
down whisper. . . .  
(6, lines 18-28)

Adisa’s poem “Come Back Now” deals in a more direct way with the legacy of Africa, but while doing so it also in a number of ways reveals the debt owed to Brathwaite:

. . . I in Kamau  
poetry  
fuh it is I  
that hide muhself  
from muhself  
an, now  
uh come back now. . . .  
(10, lines 93-99)

Like Brathwaite's, Gabby's, and Farrell's work, Adisa's poetry also reveals a fascination with the drum as a primary symbol of liberation. In the poem "Apartheid War" the persona chants:

uh could hear  
de drum-beat  
beating beatin beatin  
knocking back apartheid war. . . . (71)

Adisa's ongoing preoccupation with African history and the impact of that history on the present, evident on his most recent cassette, "Doing it Saf" (2000), mirrors Brathwaite's preoccupation with historical dialectics in such works, for example, as *The Arrivals*, *Mother Poem*, and *X/Self*.

I want to go further by proposing that the younger generation of Barbadian artists are in some cases now even more attuned to the nuances of the Barbadian nation language and culture than is Brathwaite's poetry. And I speak here not only of words on the page, but of the texts in total, that is, the works in performance and in their performance domains. The Barbadian nation language in its many formations and intonations has been projected with unprecedented unabashed forthrightness and potency in such 1980s-1990s works as Farrell's "Busman," "Minibus Hustle," and "Black Lion On The Loose"; Adisa's "Concrete Jungle," "Ah Come Back Now," and "Conscious Again"; Kidsite's "Can't Find Hall"; Ram's "Quicksand"; and Lil' Rick's "The Youths." Each of these works has in one way or another proved disruptive to notions of good taste. Each has been subversive. But each has, like Brathwaite's work, also undergone a process of contestation and appropriation, and has in time been embraced by agencies of society's mainstream, whether it be at annual performances during the National Independence Festival of the Creative Arts (NIFCA), Frank Collymore Hall Galas, or the Crop Over Festival. This is the process whereby popular culture forms, when disseminated, subvert, negotiate and return to be tentatively accepted as "creative arts." This dynamic might be traced chronologically through such Adisa poems as "Apartheid War," "Conscious Again," and "Low Blow."

This kind of intertextual play between Brathwaite and other Barbadian writers is not a tenuous connection; rather, it is a major



tradition which must be identified when mapping out Barbadian aesthetics. These Barbadian writers share a number of common thematic interests and recurring stylistic traits. They are all in some way concerned with discourses of history, nationalism, contested regionalism, imperialism, and identity. Their chosen tongue negotiates the intersections between standard English and varieties of nation language.

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