

Against the Backdrop of Colonialism and Slavery: Loss of Personhood, Cultural Enslavement and Quest for Identity in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*

Asika, Ikechukwu Emmanuel

Department of English, Anambra State University, Igbariam, Anambra State, Nigeria

Email: asikaikechukwu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Colonialism has come to be one of the defining historical features of many countries of the world which Africa as well as the Caribbean is inevitably part of. The history of the Caribbean people is the history of rather 'unfortunate' people who were brought together from various parts of the earth especially from Africa during colonialism and slavery and were forced to live together and forge their paths and destinies as one people following the end of colonialism and abolishment of slave trade. This common and unfortunate experience exerted a lot of influences on the Caribbean people and their writers and has come to dictate the tones and themes of their literature for years. Earl Lovelace is a Caribbean writer whose writings reflect the common themes in Caribbean literature which include quest for identity, conditions of exile, injustice of slavery, ancestral enslavement, culture dislocation, loss of self, identity crisis, search for personhood and endless longing for their original root and culture which defines every human being. This study selected one of his novels entitled, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The study examined how the novel, against the backdrop of colonialism and slavery peculiar to the Caribbean people expressed the loss of personhood, cultural dislocation and enslavement and the quest for a new identity as part of the historical realities of the Caribbean people and how the past shares a common link with the present socio-economic and political present of the people.

Keywords: Colonialism, Personhood, Quest for Identity, Cultural Enslavement, Slavery, Rootlessness

Introduction

The history and the making of many parts of the countries of the world is a history rooted in deep and long years of colonialism and slavery. In other words, one cannot trace and fully discuss the historical realities of many nations in isolation of their long, deep and lasting contact with colonialism and its attendant slavery which could range from physical slavery to political, economic, religious, cultural slavery and otherwise. Colonialism has come to be one of the defining historical realities of many countries of the world which Africa and the Caribbean are inevitably part of. It has exerted a lot of influences on these nations. Colonialism lingered for so long that it has become an integral factor in the shaping and making of many countries in Africa and the world at large.

Colonialism is process whereby sovereignty is established over a colony. Colonialism normally refers to the period from the 5th to the 19th centuries when the nations of Europe established colonies in other continents. The reasons for this practice of colonialism or colonization and expansion was readily motivated by one major quest in the minds of the leading European powers, which is to harness and maximize profit for their nations by the means of exploiting other 'unfortunate' countries and also the quest to expand their political tentacles and powers and to spread the colonist ways of life including religious and political beliefs. Colonialism involves a gradually but steady assimilation and deep involvement of one into an imposed culture, identity, outlook, attitude, ideas and perception of life by the colonizers in their bid to achieve and enforce their colonial goals.

The impact and influence of colonialism in many parts of Africa as in other countries that fell under the heavy weight of European exploitation is a subject of serious debate and arguments in the writings of many scholars and critics. The real influence and indelible marks it has on many parts of the world may yet to have been holistically determined and interpreted as many events and issues still crop up in various parts of the world which could be directly or indirectly traced and linked to the colonial experience. Many nations have moved on and have successfully shoved off the ashes of colonialism to lurch themselves into the future and the mainstream of modern development and civilization. Many still bear heavily and suffer greatly too, the impact and scar of colonialism and imperialism. This also extends to many Islands of the Caribbean but does not include America that has long ago moved on and could compete successfully with their former colonial counties. The story of Africa as a continent will never be complete without the shaping influences of the long years of colonialism, oppression and exploitation by the Europeans who first came as gods to salvage Africa from barbarism and

primitivism. Many African countries experience colonialism in various dimensions and colonialism brought about exploitation of human and even cultural resources. As Walter Rodney reports:

Because of the impact of colonialism and cultural imperialism, Europeans and Africans themselves in the colonial period lacked due regard for the unique features of African culture. Those features have a value of their own that cannot be eclipsed by European culture either in the comparable period before 1500 or in the subsequent centuries. They cannot be eclipsed because they are not really comparable phenomenon. (38)

However sincere and truthful Rodney might be in this regard, one cannot blind oneself from the fact that European culture has permeated deeply and have been assimilation into many areas of our Africa culture and ideals. Our political and economic value have suffered greatly too and continues to bear this burden for years. Our concern in this study is not colonialism and slavery as concern with Africa but of the Caribbean, but we recreate Africa to draw a common link of the journey which in reality was the journey that saw millions of Africans to the Caribbean Islands courtesy of the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade and to which we shall now turn to.

The Trans-Atlantic Slavery – The Bridge Between

During the 16th century to 9th century over three centuries in the history, the world witnessed the largest crime against humanity which is the business of the slave trade that robbed Africa million of her able-bodied men, healthy women and in some cases worthy children. At the turn of the 16th century, Christopher Columbus on an expedition discovered America, which was termed the 'New World'. Though America was first discovered by Amerigo Vespucci, it was Columbus voyage that led to the earliest European contact with that part of the world. It was known as the New World, which saw North America and south America added to the number of the continents that made up the 'Old world' – Europe, Asia and Africa. This important discovery opened boundless and unprecedented economic opportunities as at that time which Europeans may today look back at and be proud of but Africa might chose to forget and not remember the horrors and their roles in the development of the new world. Caribbean Island is part of the new world discovered by Columbus. The vast majority of slaves transported to the 'New World' were Africans from the central and Western parts of the continent. The numbers were so old-world immigrants in both North and South America before the late 8th century. The Atlantic slave masters who engaged in the business of slave trade were the Portuguese, the British, the French, the Spanish, the Dutch and the Americans. The exact number of the Africans transported to the new world varies in different accounts from historians. It has long been an object of speculation with estimates ranging from few millions to over one hundred millions of slaves. Europeans as a matter of fact are more comfortable with reduced and minimal figures than any figure pointing to the actual number. Current estimate has it that about 12 million Africans were shipped across the Atlantic although the actual number purchased by the traders is considerably higher. Over 2 million is estimated to have died during the course of shipment on the Atlantic. The reason for the slave business was entirely rooted in exploitation and economic gain as Rodney explains:

Europeans were anxious to acquire gold in Africa because there was pressing need for gold coin within the growing capitalist money economy. Since gold was limited to very small areas of Africa as Europeans were then aware, the principal export was human beings...when Europeans reached America, they recognized its enormous potential in gold and silver and topical produce. But that potential could not be made a reality without adequate labour supplies. The indigenous India population could not withstand new European diseases such as small pox, nor could they bear the organized toil of slave plantations and slave mines, having barely emerged from the hunting stage... Therefore, they turned to the nearest continent, Africa, which incidentally had a population accustomed to settled Agriculture and disciplined labour in many spheres. Those were the objective conditions lying behind the start of the European slave trade....(89)

Thus, the journey of the slaves in the Atlantic was a journey rooted purely on exploitation devoid of any consideration of humanity. This is journey that saw many Africans to rather 'unfortunate' environment were running away was outside the option as a result of distance. The areas include the Caribbean Islands. These slaves were not allowed to maintain any ancestral link having been taken from different parts of Africa. They were propelled to start a life their own in their new found world, without identity, cultural and ancestral link. This is the situation that gave rise to the African Diaspora as we have in literature and art today. Our major concern is with the situation and condition of exile of those slaves who found themselves in the Caribbean Island.

Caribbean History: An Overview

The Caribbean is made up of over 27 Island nations. The Caribbean is a group of Islands existing alongside the Mediterranean Sea. The Island was first discovered explored by Christopher Columbus and it got its name the Caribbean from the Caribs, a fearless and warlike tribe of red-Indians who were the original inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles before the arrival of the European conquistadors. The Caribbean Islands are in fact a vast chain of volcanic mountain lying along the floor of the Caribbean Sea whose tops extended the water to form the various islands of the region.

The Islands of the Caribbean are divided into three main groups – namely the Bahamas, the Greater Antilles and the Lesser Antilles. The Caribbean is also referred to as the West Indies. The term West Indies was first used in the 1400s by Columbus who thought he had found a short route to the rich Indies when he landed in the Caribbean. He later named these Islands West Indies and the Pacific Islands East Indies so as to differentiate between the two groups. The first inhabitants of West Indies were the American Indians prominent among who were the Caribs, the Arawaks, the Aztecs, the Incas, the Chamulas, the Mayas and Toltecs. These inhabitants were all but wiped out by the European conquistadors. These tribes were made up of people with various lifestyles and cultures.

The exploitation of Caribbean's dates back to the Spanish conquistadors who were the 6th century conquerors of Mexico, Central America and Peru. The Spanish were more interested in mining the Islands for gold which they carried back to Spain. By the onset of the 7th century, a more deadly set of oppressors came in the body of the Dutch, the British and the French. But that time, the indigenous Arwaks of the larger Islands had either been eliminated or taken by the Spanish. The Caribs were confined to the Lesser Antilles, which the Spanish felt were not valuable enough to be colonized. The Dutch, the French, Danish and English came and took over the areas inhabited by the Caribs. They found the sugar farming so lucrative that by the end of the 18th century sugar became the largest British import. As a result, the Caribbean became the most valued colony. The 'New World' plantations grew like wildfire to fulfill the growing need of the old world. The sugar export into Britain was at its maximum. In order to generate enough work forces who will work without wages, an organized system of slavery was employed. The institution of slavery tragically produced a catastrophic conflict into the life of the Caribbean and its people. The Native Americans, the Caribs were not easily coerced to work even under torture as a result of their stubbornness and warlike nature. They took to the mountains and posed a great deal of trouble to the colonial masters who in turn used their superior power and technology to route them out by all means. The Europeans in dire need of work force and strong workers to mine the gold and till the ground turned to Africa for the slave workforce. It has been estimated that more than 1.6million people were carried away from Africa to the new found land. The issue of running away was out of the way because of the distance. The slaves therefore became perpetually estranged from their homes and families. The development of personal lineage or family traditions was impossible because, the slave owners prohibited their slaves from marrying. They however encouraged their making and producing loss of slave children who are taken away from their mother and sold off and used to enlarge the work force in the master's plantation. Rootlessness became the portion of the slaves to the advantage of plantation owners. It was after the abolishment of slavery that the slaves began to search and form a kind of lineage and tradition. This spirit of the disposed became a predominant factor in the mindset of the Caribbean people.

Most of these Islands began to gain their independence in the 1950s as the foundation of the Next Indian. Some signaled a departure from the weight of the colonial master's influence, but other still remained trapped under the colonial influence until quite recently. Thus, these countries still experience the pains of the years of colonialism and are still striving to more of from the shadows of the departed colonial masters. The Caribbean is made up of over 27 Island nations. They are Anguilla, Antigua/Barbuda, Aruba, the Bahamas, and Barbados. Belize, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Island, Curacao, Dominica, Dominican Republic, French Guiana, Granada, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Martinique, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Martin, St. Vincent/Geraldine, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and calicos, U.S Virgin Islands. All these Islands have their different geographical proportions and historical realities.

Earl Lovelace as a Caribbean writer

The history of the Caribbean people like earlier emphasized is the history of 'unfortunate' people who were brought together from the various part of the earth especially from Africa during colonialism and slavery and

were forced to live together and forge their paths and destinies as one people towards the end of colonialism and abolishment of slave trade. This obviously has become the greatest milestone and yardstick with which we measure and assess the lives and works of Caribbean writers. This common and unfortunate experience has exerted a lot of influence on them and has come to dictate their tone and literature for years. In line with the above Ngozi Chuma-Udeh posits that:

The Caribbean writers like all others have been influenced by their environment and the circumstance surrounding their history and existence. They have been heavily influenced by historical factors which have contributed immensely to making Caribbean environment what is today. Their focus is on explaining out the socio-political dilemma of the society and to portray a way of life which has survived to a great extent despite the historical experiences which have so adversely affected them. The ethos echoing and re-echoing in this body of literature borders heavily on the struggle of the laboring of the Caribbean, the agitation for independence politically, socially and other wise, the fight against racial prejudices, social alienation and cultural dislocation as well the horrors of ancestral enslavement and the pitiable conditions of exile. (VII)

This is an overview of the Caribbean people, the historical, political, economic and social realities that have conspired to give birth to their identity and who they are. The common ideas common with the works of many Caribbean writers include that quest for identity, condition of exile, injustice of slavery, ancestral enslavement, culture dislocation, loss of self, identity crisis, search for personhood and endless longing for their original root and culture which defines every human being. It is worthy of note that these Caribbean. People were not entirely unaware of their original culture; they are burdened by the weight of their cultural loss and the task of searching out a new identity for themselves. As Mamudu Clement avers:

It is noteworthy that the aborigines of the countries where the Africans found themselves had their defined ways of life, that is, their cosmology, before the forced immigration of slaves into the areas. The Africa slaves however arrived in the countries with their own cultures or ways of life. Against all odds, the slaves ensured that the African culture survived in the new environment, following their sense of communality. (89)

Thus, this is a matter of superimposition as the original African culture was forced to exist alongside with the new found Caribbean culture and such acculturation and assimilation of both cultural values triggered an interesting but rather awkward way of life as they literature tries to point at. This unseen culture contact was explained by Roger Bastide courtesy of slavery thus:

The slave-ships carried not only men, women and children, but also their gods, beliefs, and traditional folklore. They maintained a stubborn resistance against their white oppressors who were determined to tear them loose, by force if need be, from their own cultural patterns, and acclimatize them to those of the west... (23).

This stubborn resistance to maintain their cultural link while inevitably accepting the influence of their new culture produced a kind of way of life which places the Caribbean people in the middle of it all. Many continued to yearn for their native custom yet thrive in their new culture. The product was a kind of confusion and uncoordinated clash of culture which leads many to a deeper search personhood and identity borne from the acceptance of the two cultures infused together. Mamudu Clement speaks of them thus:

Africans in the New world thus became cultural mulattoes, not only had their cultures and values been absorbed by the new world, the religious and norms of the new world were imbibed in them. The situation has remained so to this day – Africa in the New World, the New World in Africa. (19)

Since it was slavery that first brought the Africans into the new world, it followed logically that their writing will express this. Just like the novels of South African writers echo the injustice and oppressive realities on the Apartheid South Africa, which has become the major historical event that defines the South African people, so have the writings of the Caribbean writers naturally expressed the historical realities that brought them together. Their writing goes on to accommodate the heavy scars of imperial subjugation, racial prejudice cultural

dislocation, ancestral enslavement, rootlessness, and the conditions of exile. As George Lamming, a renowned Caribbean writer avers:

The exile is a universal figure. The proximity of our lives to the major issues of our time has demanded of us all some kind involvement...on the political level, we are often without the right kind of information to make argument effective; on the moral level, we have to feel our way through problems, for which we have no adequate reference...we are made to feel as sense of exile by our inadequacy and our irrelevance in a society whose past we cannot alter and whose future is always beyond us. (24)

Other Caribbean writers like Samuel Selvon, Derek Walcott, Oliver Senior, V.S Naipaul, Jamaica Kincaid, John Hearne, Orlando Patterson, Gabriel Garcia Marquez, Austin Clark, Harold, Sonny Ladoo, Shani Mootoo, Robert Antoni among others, all expressed this imposition of exile but most importantly the search for identity and a new personhood that will unchain the burdens of their hands and give them a unique new identity.

Earl Lovelace is one Caribbean writer concerned with the search for personhood in the lives of the Caribbean people. He was largely concerned about the loss of ancestral link, the enslavement of body and mind and the continual quest to assert a new identity and regain a new personhood that will cure and smooth the injustices and pains of slavery and perpetual exile. According to Ken Ram Chand on Earl Lovelace.:

Lovelace's work seeks to digest enslavement, identity, colonialism and oppressions of new form of economic and cultural imperialism, recasting beneath and behind the roles self-imposed upon us by others and put on in bad faith by ourselves; and secondly, striving for recognition, respect, and reparation for what has been abused by trying to make communal wholeness out of history of fragmentation (145).

Ngozi Chuma Udeh writes about him thus:

Earl Lovelace comes up with an unwavering commitment towards unraveling the complex political tension at work in an Island born out of a history of slavery. He creates a panoramic portrait of the Caribbean history in his ultimate search for personhood. He centers his work firmly amongst the lives and voice of the ordinary people. He uses his writings to represent the peasants striving for survival in a harsh and hostile environment. (41)

Earl Lovelace was one Caribbean writer concerned with clothing the Caribbean people with a unique identity rather than their 'mulatto' cultural life style. He created characters that continually in search of a new way of life, fighting and struggling to break free from the imposition and chains of their rootlessness and slavery. These characters are perpetually held and dangled between two options and cultures. Their cultural heritage and self and the tantalizing opportunities of prosperity dangle by assimilation and these characters though resigning to fate still manage to seek for a new identity and from beyond the confinement of their historical experiences. Lovelace questions the institution of slavery, poverty, imperialism, discrimination, oppression and injection that have come to characterize the lives of many Caribbean people and would encourage his characters to fight on until they achieve a new leash of life and identify. The novel, *The Dragon can't Dance* examines this in detail which we shall examine in this study in order to expose the concerns of Earl Lovelace as a Caribbean writer.

Loss of Personhood Cultural Enslavement and Identity Crisis in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon can't Dance*

Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance* is a novel that mirrors and reflects the very core of the many problems encountered by the Caribbean people. The novel written in well crafted mulatto style of writing hinges on the poverty, suffering, frustration, enslavement, identity crisis and continual desire and quest for a new personhood that characterize the lives of many Caribbean people. The writer did much to depict the situation of agony, imperialist and near colonialism that is part of the forces that oppress the people. Also we vividly encountered the glory picture of exploitation and insensitivity on the part of Caribbean leaders which has continued to hinder and militate against the much desired growth of the people. The novel *The Dragon Can't Dance* is a realistic depiction of the conditions of exile, loss of identity cultural enslavement, rootlessness and colonialism of the mind which an average Caribbean man has to cope with. It highlights the desires to be one and coming together of different people forced to exit in an Island by the whims and caprices of their colonial masters. The quest to be one and acceptance of this inevitable arrangement through which the people hope to lunch into the future,

carve out a destiny for themselves and make significant progress in the face of hardship and suffering formed a greater part of the novel. Ngozi Chuma-Udeh in her study of the novel posits thus:

Lovelace bequeaths on this long suffering people a kind of nihilistic vision which seems to lighten with the gyre-like preparation for carnival. This ritual is seen as an event that has gone politically rancid sacrifice of Christian's crucifixion and the mystical act of redemption. Lovelace feels the pains of his people and demonstrates it aptly. This is a pain that has gone deeper than the ephemeral masks of the carnival. The author search's for a personhood behind the play acting of the mask. (143)

In the novel, the writer demonstrated a clear knowledge of the situation, poverty and the agony of his people. Following the end of colonialism, the people of Caribbean were abandoned to their fate and unknown future with little or nothing with which they will face the future and destiny staring in their faces. Many parts of the Islands becomes the very reflection of poverty and backwardness which to be break free from entails a lot of sordid acts which betrayal of one's root and spirit of rebellion is part of them. The novelist captured in the beginning of the novel the suffering and poverty of the people confined in Calvary Hill thus:

This is the hill, Calvary Hill, where the sun set on starvation and rise on potholed roads, thrones for stray dogs that you could play banjo on their rib bones, holding garbage piled high like a cathedral spire, sparking with files buzzing like torpedoes; and if you want to pass from your yard to the road you have to be a high-jumper to jump over the gutter full up with dirty water, and hold your nose. Is noise whole day. Laughter is not laughter; it is a groan coming from the bosom of these houses-no-not houses, shacks that leap out of the red dirt and stone, then like smoke, fragile like Kate paper, balancing on their rickety pillars as broomsticks on the edge of a juggler's nose. (9)

The author did much to capture the situation of his people confined in the Calvary Hill of the Alice Street. The area is the very definition of poverty and backwardness. The Hill has no promise of the future and development for the people rather a kind of uncoordinated and frustrated lives was the rhythm of the day. The people in the Hill has nothing to boast of, nothing to show to the world and pride themselves in except poverty and backwardness. What Calvary Hill produces are innocent girls turn prostitutes, and innocent young boys turn into arm-robbers and all other different kind of evils not healthy for the society. That was why Aldrick, the protagonist of the novel voiced out his resentment for himself; the people and the kind of life which Calvary Hill can only afford to them. He had lamented thus:

In the seventeen years he had lived on this his he had seen generations of girls graduate from these beginnings to night clubs, to brothels, to the city's streets to live that strict and lascivious immodesty, like wrong sided nuns, on their way to becoming battle-axes, the mother superiors of whoredom, irrelevant and wise; if they were lucky, dropping their unwanted progeny at home of grandmother or aunt or friend and if they were not, being forced to retire periodically from the scene of their labours to nurse their children. He had seen generations of them go that route, and it always touched him to see another one-the youth, the faith. Now it was Sylvia's turn.... (30)

Aldrick was worried about the fate of the youths of Island but most especially, the girl he loves so much Sylvia but knows he can't have her because he has no financial way-withal to do so and he was aware that just like all others, the life of whoredom will rise and envelope Sylvia. As just as they wished she could be different, Sylvia was later taken over by such fated life to the disappointment of all who loved and so much believed in her to achieve the difference. We see instances of youthful exuberance, juvenile delinquency, corruption and helplessness in the people. In the discussion of Cyrus and his grandmother we see again the horrible but real picture of poverty and backwardness which the people of Calvary Hill are confined to with no reasonable way to escape. The grandmother has told Cyrus thus:

'The children big now, Cyrus,' his grandmother had said, speaking to him in that moaning tone that had known years of silence, years of being hurled back by the old man's stubborn unyielding faith, 'And the land old and thing ain't bearing right, and is all right for we old, who accustomed to this nothing, who ain't looking for no future from this world...I want them to go where they could get a chance to be somebody. Their chance, Cyprus, their own chance' (38).

Thus, we see a total resignation to the fate of the Island by the older people but would wish a better life for their children and the only way to ensure this life is to escape from the Hill to Port of Spain and other developed parts of the Island and the world. The people do not only has to cope with poverty and frustration but also discrimination been people brought together from different corners of the world especially Africa. They had to accept their fate as one and through the carnival dance they tried to assert their oneness. The song and carnival is only music and demonstrated for their quest to be one. This is as Cleothilda has exclaimed on hearing the music of the carnival thus:

You hear rhythm, miss Oliver? You hear song? Carnival! She would cry out. 'Bachana Trinidad! All o'we one'. And with the eyes of the yard upon her, and just a bit breathless from her efforts, she would pause, assuming now a tone of seriousness, already intent on contradicting an unvoiced objection, and shout for the whole yard to hear: 'Miss Olive, we is all one people. No matter what they say, all o'we is one (19).

Further she expressed this oneness of different groups of people thus:

All o'we is one. We have the same pains. Indian. Chinee, white black, rich poor. All o'we is one. All of us have here on this Island. (149)

The carnival is to them a symbol of oneness, the only thing that unites them together and makes them one. Though different people, from different areas, the need to be one and achieve a common goal and destiny for themselves. This is what the carnival is symbolic of each time they sing and dance to Port of Spain. They do it as one people who must at all time accept their inevitable fate and be together as one. The Caribbean people though accepting to be one are in continual search and quest for identity, the quest for whom they are and what in reality defines them as a people. Their rootlessness and culture of their environment is what they must endure and mix up with the new culture of their environment but not in abolition of the search for their true personality. The people while accepting their fate still search for that part of them which they believe they must have somehow misplaced somewhere.

This is an author explains thus:

With carnival just one week away, the city was hot confusion. People moving in crazy streams up sidewalks across open streets... for once, Pariag felt bigger than Port of Spain, watching the people from his bicycle, the fellars with beers and rum in their hands, women with pieces of costume, material, the tourists, white faces reddened with too much rum and sun, holding smiles of bewilderment as they swiveled their necks to gaze at the confusion into which they seemed pleased to have entangled themselves, about them an air of enquiry and surrender, as if they were searching for something, some part of themselves, which they had recently discovered that they had misplaced, that was to be found here, somewhere among these people would turn up perhaps in one of those photographs which they so greedily took. (93)

The discovery of that part of themselves which was lost, the part with which they had to reclaim and their quest for a new identity is the essence of the carnival and the message of the dragon. The carnival and the dragon dance are purely symbolic. They are symbolic as a viable way of asserting to the world, the new self, the new discovery of who they are; their identity and personhood which the world must accept and come to look at them as. This new identity and personhood share a link with their past, who they truly are and through which they hope to conquer the exploitation, oppression and subjugation in the Island. The carnival was the only time the people express their oneness and seem to shove of the pains of dehumanization to savour and glorify in the sense of what they have only discovered, their true self, who they are which they had lost. The dragon dance becomes symbolic of their discovery and assertion of who they are. The dragon dance is symbolic of their newly discovered self, the true African blood in them which the rest of the world must accept or be consumed by the dragon fire. The author expressed the symbolism of the dragon thus:

Up on the Hill Carnival Monday morning breaks upon the backs of these thin shacks with no dresses, their head tied, holding brooms made from the ribs of coconut palm-leaves, blowing whistles and beating kerosene tins for drums, moving across the face of the awakening Hill, sweeping yards in a ritual, heralding the masquerade coming, that goes back centuries for its beginnings, back across the middle passage, back to Mali and to Guinea and Dahomey and Congo, back to Africa when maskers were

sacred and revered... affirming for the village, the tribe, warriorhood and femininity, linking the village to their ancestors, their gods...(120)

This is the symbolism of the carnival to the people, a link back to their root to Africa, their origin homeland which they have long been taken away from and their cultural roots broken. The carnival is last of all that links them to the past and the dragon is symbolic of the revolutionary way of asserting their true selves, true identity and true blood while hoping to ignite and achieve a new personhood for themselves. This is the idea and feeling that makes Aldrick prospect continue to wear the dragon and dance with it to Port of Spain as the author explains:

...Aldrick Prospect, with only the memory burning in his blood, a memory that had endured the three hundred odd years to Calvary Hill felt as he put on his dragon costume, a sense entering a sacred mask that invested him with an ancestral authority, to uphold before the people of this Hill, this tribe marooned so far from the homeland that never was their home, the warriorhood that had not died in them, their humanness that was determined not by their possession of things. He had a desire, a mission, to let them see their beauty, to uphold the unending rebellion they waged, huddled here on this stone and dirt hill, threatening destruction if they were not recognized as human beings (120).

The carnival and the dragon is a means of asserting the people's identity and personhood. The author well described the symbolic essence thus:

...It was only by faith that he could bring alive from these scraps of cloth and tin that dragon, its mouth breathing fire, its tail threshing the ground, its nine chains rattling that would contain the beauty and threat and terror that was the message he took each year to Port of Spain. It was in this message that he asserted before the world himself. It was through it that he demanded the others see, recognize his personhood, be warned of his dangerousness (35).

Aldrick with the dragon wishes people to accept them for who they are while he threatens to burn them with fire if they do not. He hopes with that dance to assert his ancestral roots and the spirit of warriorhood in them. They hope with the carnival to impose on the people, a revolutionary acceptance of their new self, a new identity and new personhood born out of their discovery of their true self and identity. They often pain themselves black, making the carnival an expression of rebellion. They keep with it the practice of the warriorhood born in them and there were devils, black men who blackened themselves further with black grease to make their very blackness a menace, a threat. They accompany the dragon to Port of Spain. But later this disappeared leaving only the dragon to carry the message of a new self to Port of Spain. The author summed what they hope to achieve thus with the spirit of the dragon in these words:

...He was Manzanilla, Calvary Hill, Congo, Dahomey, Ghana. He was Africa, the ancestral Masker, affirming the power of the warrior, prancing and bowing, breathing out fire, lunging against his chains, threatening with his claws, saying to the city: I dragon, I have fire in my belly and claws on my hands. Note me well, for I am ready to burn down your house. I am ready to tear you apart, limb by limb (123).

With that dragon he dances and asserts the beauty of a race, a people with special destiny and future which they must all reclaim. But it was sadness that the author made us realize the psychological effect and trauma of the search for personhood in the lives of the people. The people at some point, perhaps as a result of frustration, poverty and quest to survive began to give up the struggle and search. Aldrick had voiced out his disappointment thus:

No, let me tell you any way, you see me here, is thirty-one years old. Never had a regular job in my life or a wife or nutten, I ain't own house or car or radio or race house or store, I don't own one thing in this fucking place except that dragon there, and the dragon ain't even mine. I just make it. It just come out of me like a child who ain't really his father own or his mother own...They killing people in this place, Phil...little girls, they have them whoring. And I am a dragon. And what is a man? What is you or me Philo? And I here playing a dragon, playing it for what I trying to say. I forget, Philo. Is like nobody remember what life is and who we fighting and what we fighting for...Everybody rushing me as if they is such a hurry. I want to

catch a breath, I want to see what I am doing, to try to remember what life is and who is I and what I am doing on this fucking Hill....(110)

It did not take Aldrick long to realize that what they were fighting for was fast been taking away from them. The dragon dance and carnival soon lost its meaning and essence as it evolved into a yearly festival with which government, tourists and other companies make money from customs, tourism and all other activities attached to the carnival and celebration. He discovered how the people were turning away from the life of the rebellion that once united them. Many had embraced colonial legacy and sing the praises to the government, and in worst cases some abandon the rebellion, the search the quest for their identity to seek escape in foreign countries. Philo is a good example of such individuals in the novel. The people were defeated, their identity was good as lost and a new culture enveloped them. The government exploited the people and frustrated them. They became helpless and had to kill all their spirit of rebellion to survive. Aldrick could not bear this change of destiny and path of live. He had organized with Fisheye and some other patriots a revolutionary measure to reclaim back their personhood and power from the government. They had gone to the street shouting and threatening violence with guns if the government does not grant them their desires. As expected, they ended up in the prison where they stayed for years. It was when Aldrick name out of the prison that he almost wept for the changes all around him. He was pitted as a martyr by his people had long ago lost themselves, conceded to defeat and moved on. The author captures his psychological disposition thus:

All the way up to Alice street, Aldrick, retuning now to the hill after five years in prison, had received from people who saw him, a welcome that at the beginning and briefly he had thought was one for a returning hero, but it soon dawned on him that it was more accurately the consoling greeting for a defeated warrior from a band of deserters who had long made peace with the enemy. Their purpose, he felt in buying him drinks...was so that they could say to him over and over again in all different tones of consolation and jubilation. That is why we deserted. Long even before you came to know it, we know that we couldn't win. You had to fight and be conquered to understand; we knew it in advance...welcome now to reality, welcome now to the Hill of accommodation. (193)

Thus, Aldrick saw all they fought for disappeared before his eyes, the spirit of the rebellion, the search for self, the personhood they wanted to impress upon the world and the dragon dance becoming a mere festival and that was how he took the decision never to dance the dragon again which formed the title of the novel – *The Dragon can't Dance*, as all was lost. But yet towards the end of the novel, we still see the undying spirit in some characters like Aldrick and Fisheye who refused to yield but continues to search for themselves, their identity and personhood which they have all but lost irrespective of where and how they will find it again.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sets out to examine the identity crisis, ancestral enslavement and loss of personhood in Earl Lovelace's *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The study through a detailed account of the historical realities of the Caribbean people was able to show who they originally were and how they were cut off from their roots, the cultures and traditions to become enslaved. We see the quest and search for identity which propelled the people to go back to their roots, their blackness and warriorhood linked to their African ancestry. They hope to use this discovery and link to reclaim themselves and give a new identity and personhood to themselves. This they expressed with the annual carnival and the vicious and revolutionary actions of the dragon dance carried to Port of Spain, the capital of Trinidad which is representative of all other parts of the world. But we see in the novel how this quest and carnival became a mere festival that long ago lost its meaning. The governments were out to cloth the people with a new identity as they were able to crush that personhood in them. The spirit of rebellion in the people was crushed they were defeated. They lost their roots, culture, tradition, identity and above all their personhood. It was the realization of this that made Aldrick to put an end to the dragon dance and the fire it breathes out which to him have obviously lost it meaning, power and essence. To this end, we conclude that literature reflects the realities of the time of writer and serves as a link between the past and present. Literature deconstructs history and reflects the milieu, moment and experiences of a particular set of people as of the time of its creation. This is what Earl Lovelace has demonstrated in with his novel, *The Dragon Can't Dance*. The novelist did much to capture the events, historical moments, actions and experiences of a people forced by colonial experiences and history to be one. The Caribbean people obviously may have moved on and have attained a greater height of development, especially the people of Trinidad and Tobago which the novelist writes

about the novel exist as a literary account of the historical realities of the people which we ought to study and acquit ourselves with for a knowledge of the past, helps us to make sense of the present and to articulate and can predict the future of a society.

References

- Beverly A.C et al. (2000) *Glencoe Literature: World Literature*. New York: Glencoe McGraw-Hill.
- Boxill, A. (1969) *Lamming George. Encyclopedia of World Literature in the 20th century*. Ed. Leonard S. Klern
New York: Continuum Publishing Company.
- Chuma Udeh, N. (2007) *Caribbean Literature: Text and Context*: Onitsha: Base 5 Press Ltd.
- Crowder M. (1976) *West Africa under Colonial Rule*. Benin City, Ethiopia Publishing Corporation.
- Gordon, E. (1964) *Introduction to Literature*. New York: Yale University.
- Hearne J. (1961) *Land of the Living*: London, Faber.
- Kurlansky, M. (1992) *A Continent of Islands: Searching for the Caribbean Destiny*. Addison Wesley Publishing.
- Lamming, G. (1960) *The Pleasures of Exile*. London: Joseph.
- Lovelace, E. (1986) *The Dragon Can't Dance*. London: Heinemann.
- Mamudu, C. (2005) "Issues and Tropes in the Fiction of four writers of the Black Diaspora" *Africa and World Literature: University of Nigeria Journal of Literary Studies*. Number 5, November.
- Mittlehoizer E. (1937) *Creole Chips George Town*: Lutheran Press.
- Morales P. (2003) *Spanish Jamaica*. Kingston: Lan Randle Publishers.
- Patterson, O. (1972) *Die the Long Day*. William Morrow and Sons.
- Rodney W. (1972) *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. Abuja: Panaf publishing, Inc.
- Sawh, G. (1992) *The Canadian Caribbean Connection: Bridging North and South: History, Influence, Lifestyle*.
Halifax: Carindo Culture Association.
- Williams, E. (1964) *British Historians and the West Indies*. Port of Span: P.N.M Publishing Company.

The IISTE is a pioneer in the Open-Access hosting service and academic event management. The aim of the firm is Accelerating Global Knowledge Sharing.

More information about the firm can be found on the homepage:
<http://www.iiste.org>

CALL FOR JOURNAL PAPERS

There are more than 30 peer-reviewed academic journals hosted under the hosting platform.

Prospective authors of journals can find the submission instruction on the following page: <http://www.iiste.org/journals/> All the journals articles are available online to the readers all over the world without financial, legal, or technical barriers other than those inseparable from gaining access to the internet itself. Paper version of the journals is also available upon request of readers and authors.

MORE RESOURCES

Book publication information: <http://www.iiste.org/book/>

IISTE Knowledge Sharing Partners

EBSCO, Index Copernicus, Ulrich's Periodicals Directory, JournalTOCS, PKP Open Archives Harvester, Bielefeld Academic Search Engine, Elektronische Zeitschriftenbibliothek EZB, Open J-Gate, OCLC WorldCat, Universe Digital Library, NewJour, Google Scholar

