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**Postcoloniality and Resistance in Earl Lovelace's *The Wine of Astonishment* and *The Dragon Can't Dance*.**

*Mawuena Logan*

**Resumo**

É relativamente “seguro”, neste século 21, opinar que nenhum povo existiu sem uma história, mesmo em sociedades pré-industriais e predominantemente orais, ou que nenhuma cultura é estática. Mas não há muito tempo atrás, dois terços do mundo estavam, de alguma forma, sob controle de outras pessoas, “os edificadores de impérios”, que pensavam de modo diferente e tentaram dominar o “Outro”. Como em qualquer parte no mundo pós-colonial, a resistência a essa episteme hegemônica — um pensamento que gerou a escravidão, o colonialismo e o neo-colonialismo na África e na sua Diáspora — tomou muitas formas: tradições orais, práticas marciais, o sincretismo nas religiões africanas e a militância, que, entre outras coisas, são parte integral dessa tradição de resistência à tirania. Essa história de resistência coincide com o que foi referido como o “momento pós-colonial”, um espaço de transição, onde as culturas se encontram e divergem, onde as identidades são continuamente criadas e contestadas, atestando o dinamismo das culturas da Diáspora Africana. Este artigo visa mostrar como as obras *The Wine of Astonishment* e *The Dragon Can't Dance*, de Earl Lovelace, criaram aquele momento de pós-colonialidade e resistência, desafiando qualquer noção preconcebida de uma cultura caribenha estática, e redefinem o sujeito pós-colonial em seus próprios termos.

Palavras-chave: Literatura Caribenha, Identidade, Pós-colonialidade,

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Descolonização, Carnaval, Igreja Batista, Folclore, Resistência

**Abstract**

It is relatively 'safe', in this 21st century, to opine that no people ever existed without a history, even in predominantly oral and pre-industrial societies, or that no culture is static. But not too long ago, two-thirds of the world was once under some form of control of a people, "the empire builders," who thought differently and sought to dominate the "Other." As elsewhere in the postcolonial world, resistance to this hegemonic thinking, a thinking that gave birth to slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism in the Caribbean, took many forms: oral traditions, martial practices, syncretic African religions, and militancy, among other things, form an integral part of this tradition of resistance to tyranny. This history of resistance coincides with what has been referred to as a "postcolonial moment," a liminal space, where cultures meet and diverge and where identities are continually created and contested, attesting to the dynamism of African Diasporic cultures. This paper endeavors to show how Lovelace's *The Wine of Astonishment* and *The Dragon Can't Dance* create that moment of postcoloniality and resistance that defies any preconceived notion of a static Caribbean culture, and redefine the postcolonial subject in his/her own terms.

Key Words: Caribbean Literature, Identity, Postcoloniality, Decolonization, Carnival, Baptist Church, Folklore

**Resumen**

Es relativamente "seguro", en este siglo 21, opinar que ningún pueblo existió sin historia. Todos tienen historia hasta las sociedades pre-industriales y predominantemente orales, también las culturas no son estáticas. Mas, en los tiempos pasados, dos tercios del mundo se encontraban, de alguna forma, bajo el control de otras personas, "los edificadores de imperios", que pensaban de modo diferente e intentaron dominar el "Otro". Como en cualquier parte en el mundo pós-colonial, la resistencia a ese pensamiento hegemónico, un pensamiento que generó la esclavitud, el colonialismo y el neo-colonialismo en el Caribe, tomó muchas formas: tradiciones orales, prácticas marciales, el sincretismo en las religiones africanas y la militancia, que, entre otras cosas, son parte integral de esa tradición de resistencia a la tiranía. Esa historia de resistencia coincide con lo que fue referido como el "momento pós-

colonial", un espacio de transición, donde las culturas se encuentran y desencuentran, donde las identidades son continuamente creadas y contestadas, testando el dinamismo de las culturas de la Diáspora Africana. Este artículo intenta mostrar como las obras *The Wine of Astonishment* e *The Dragon Can't Dance*, de Earl Lovelace, crearon ese momento de pós-colonialidad y resistencia, desafiando cualquier noción preconcebida de una cultura caribeña estática, y redefinen el sujeto pós-colonial en sus propios términos.

Palabras claves: Literatura Caribeña, identidad, pos-colonialidad, descolonización, carnaval, Iglesia Bautista, Folklore

The African taken to the Americas and the Caribbean islands... saw his languages, names, dances, religions, literature systematically assaulted by the colonial plantation system... The school curricula denied him knowledge of Africa's geography and history. Africa, for all practical purposes, was the land of savagery and continuous darkness. No history. No culture. No literature... But a history of subjugation sets in motion a process of its own negation: a history of resistance. Ngugi Wa Thiong'o (Apud SAAKANA, 1987).

The fact that no people ever existed without a history seems obvious, even in predominantly oral cultures and so-called pre-historic times, but colonial discourse was so jaundiced and biased that it became arrogantly oblivious to this commonplace reality, and consequently denigrated and dismissed African and African Diasporic narratives and epistemologies. In the words of Frantz Fanon, "colonialism is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip.... By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures, and destroys it" (Apud ASHCROFT, 2007: 120). Roland Barthes' essay on the ubiquitousness of narrative is a testimony to this inevitability of histories/stories when he aptly points out in

“An Introduction to the Structural Analysis of Narrative,” that narrative is “present at all times, in all places, in all societies; indeed narrative starts with the very history of mankind; there is not, there has never been anywhere, any people without narrative; all classes, all human groups, have their stories, and very often those stories are enjoyed by men of different and even opposite cultural backgrounds” (1975: 2). As elsewhere in the postcolonial world, resistance to European hegemonic structures (slavery, colonialism) and to neo-colonialism in the Caribbean is multifaceted: oral traditions, martial practices, syncretic African religions, and open militancy, among other things, form an integral part of this tradition of resistance to tyranny. This history or narrative of resistance has been referred to as “the postcolonial moment” where cultures meet and diverge and where identities are continually created and contested, attesting, among other things, to the dynamism and adaptability of African and Diasporic cultures. This paper attempts to underscore the ways in which Earl Lovelace’s *The Dragon Can’t Dance* (1979) and *The Wine of Astonishment* (1982) create that moment of postcoloniality and resistance inherent in the decolonization process, and redefine the postcolonial subject in his/her own terms.

Stories of slaves who committed suicide on the high seas during the Atlantic Crossing and of those who snuffed life out of their offspring or loved ones to save them from the brutality of the plantation system speak to that human yearning for freedom and resistance to the inhumane treatment meted out to the slaves. As my epigraph indicates, a “history of subjugation sets in motion a process of its own negation: a history of resistance.” Today, this history of subjugation, as well as resistance to it, is in textual form both in the metropolis and the former colonies. The advent of postcolonial studies initiated a new era of critical assessment of the colonial enterprise via texts that “write back” to the metropolis in a systematic way. As a textual practice, postcolonial criticism/theory is “preoccupied principally with analysis of cultural

forms which mediate, challenge or reflect upon the relations of domination and subordination ... between (and often within) nations, races or cultures... which have their roots in the history of modern European colonialism and imperialism..." (MOORE-GILBERT, 1997: 12). But postcolonial criticism/theory is also about self-representation, imbedded in the trope of "writing back." Consequently many postcolonial writers, among them Earl Lovelace, have committed themselves to contextualizing the plight of the colonized, reaffirming, I argue, the humanity of the colonized, while at the same time interrogating the viability of historical and cultural group identities that do not adapt to the socio-cultural imperatives of the present.

The project of cultural amalgamation and syncretism occasioned by colonization consigns and confines the postcolonial subject to what Frantz Fanon termed a "zone of nonbeing, an extraordinary sterile and arid region, an utterly naked declivity," but "where an authentic upheaval can be born" (FANON, 1965:8), a liminal space. Homi Bhabha suggests that today's existence, as far as power relations and identity are concerned, "is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival, living on the borderlines of the 'present'" denoted by the "current and controversial shiftiness of the prefix 'post': postmodernism, postcolonialism, postfeminism... The beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past" (1994: 1). Hence the colonial experience, in and by itself, constitutes an involuntary rite of passage par excellence, life on the "borderlines of the present"; it is an initiation into the colonizer's culture that transforms the colonized into a hybrid, who "passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past" (MAHDI et al, 1987: 5). And because this passage is coerced, in most cases, it often breeds resistance. In what follows I provide a postcolonial reading of both novels as instances of resistance and self-representation as postcolonial interventions where Lovelace deploys what he terms bacchanal aesthetics <sup>1</sup> the aesthetics of the

crossroads presided over by Esu/Legba, the god of indeterminacy and liminality. The fact that *Dragon* “contains obvious affection for the images of an indigenous, primordial culture of the hill, steel band, calypso, the scorn for property and material goods...” (HARNEY, 1996: 47) should not be read as Lovelace’s attempt at fashioning a national culture, because as Fanon reminds us national culture is not “an abstract populism that believes it can discover the people’s true nature. It is not made up of the inert dregs of gratuitous actions, that is to say actions which are less and less attached to the ever-present reality of the people” (FANON, 1965: 120). In fact, as we shall see, both novels resist such a reading, even as they display a variety of acts of resistance within the national ethos. Resistance, in the case of Lovelace’s Trinidad and in reference to both novels, has to do with “decolonizing cultural resistance”<sup>2</sup> that usually accompanies and/or follows territorial recovery from the colonizing powers and which still continues after nominal independence.

Bill Ashcroft et al. in their *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* argue that whatever else it may entail, decolonization is a “complex and continuing process rather than something achieved automatically at the moment of independence” (2007: 66). This never-ending process of decolonization is made more complex when the colonial apparatus, structures, and ideologies remained intact after formal independence, a paradoxical situation, played out in both works, that poses a serious threat to any dream of total emancipation and decolonization. Did the “decolonizing cultural resistance,” as Edward Said puts it, ever take place in these former colonies after formal colonial occupation and rule<sup>3</sup>? One also wonders if the Spiritual Baptist Church in *Wine* is a mere “liminal” refuge for the colonized who find no other alternative way at self-expression, or is it a real and viable avenue for self-assertion? Or is Carnival, the focus of *Dragon*, the last resort and futile attempt to claim an identity denied by the colonial powers? As we shall see, both the practices of the Spiritual Baptist

Church and the rituals that surround Carnival seem to empower the dispossessed, at least symbolically: spirit possession in the Spiritual Baptist Church “reverses the hierarchical and linear system of order” (JUNEJA, 1993: 189), the same way Carnival reverses socio-economic roles in the “al o’ we is one” trope. To attempt to answer to these queries, we must turn to Lovelace’s *Wine* and *Dragon*.

### **The Wine of Astonishment**

The language of ritual, of dance and music, of ordinary forms of self-expression among the villagers of Bonasse serves not merely to repudiate the hegemony of the existing order, it also serves as a vehicle for self-representation and self-realization. Renu Juneja (1993: 192)

*The Wine of Astonishment* captures the ordeals of the believers of the syncretic Spiritual Baptist Church in Bonasse, Trinidad, to self-define in the face a government ban. The events of *Wine* follow the historic struggle of the Spiritual Baptist Church (between 1917 and 1951) in Trinidad when the government passed the “Shouters Prohibition Ordinance”. The colonial government banned the church because it posed a (real or imagined) threat to the established colonial order and sense of respectability and decorum. As Juneja points out, entry into “ecclesiastical organizations” such as the Baptist church is through “initiation involving the Christian ritual of baptism but the initiation, as in Africa, takes place in the bush. The initiate receives a gift or power in a manner reminiscent of African religions” (1993: 193); therefore the church remains a backward and superstitious religious institution in the colonial order of things.

The Spiritual Baptist Church in *Wine* is a postcolonial intervention in that it creates that moment of liminality, in the midst of government restrictions, where “new configurations



may arise,” where self-assertion and identity are possible, albeit difficult. As the narrator, Eva, notes,

If Ivan Morton can't understand that to free the church is to free us, if he can't understand that the church is the root for us to grow out from, the church is Africa in us, black in us, if he can't understand that the church is the thing, the instrument to make us legal and legitimate and to free him, Ivan Morton, himself too, if he can't understand that...then he don't have any understanding of himself or of black people (1985: 133).

As a syncretic religion, the Spiritual Baptist Church functions as a rite of passage, standing liminally and ambiguously between an expression of selfhood rooted in the African past that is rapidly fading away, and an imposed colonial religion and outlook. The narrator describes spirit possession, commonly known as ‘catching the spirit’ in the Baptist Church, reminiscent of vodoun practices in West Africa, Brazil, and Haiti, in the following terms:

Like a strong wind, like a might water, like a river of fire, like a thousand doves with wings. It come the spirit. And I was clapping my hands and singing. And it catch Bee up and spin him round and bow him down and It hold him up and walk him down from the pulpit to the Centre Post... And in between the humming and the jumping, Sister Lucas, a round, plump black woman in blue, get up trembling...and she go to the Centre Post and she spin and she twist and she turn... (1985: 61-62).

In vodoun practice, the “center-post—poteau mitant, axis of the metaphysical cosmos is built into the very center of the peristyle, the ceremonial enclosure. Around this poteau-

mitant revolve the ritual movements and the dance..." (DEREN, 1953: 36). Juneja points out that spirit possession "empower the people" who are thus transformed (1993: 200). Arguably, it is this sense of empowerment borne out of the phenomenon of spirit possession that the ruling elite find offensive.

The people, who hope Ivan Morton would help lift the ban on the Spiritual Baptists' style of worship, elect him to the Legislative Council. But Ivan and his parents who were once Spiritual Baptists had to covert to Catholicism for Ivan to pass his entrance exams in order to pursue his studies. Although he was a bright student Ivan's affiliation with the Spiritual Baptists became a hindrance to his scholarly endeavors. Now, as an elected official he is an embodiment of colonial rhetoric and attitude. When Bee, the leader of the Spiritual Baptist Church, goes to see Ivan about the ban, the latter tells him: "We can't change our colour. . .but we can change our attitude. We can't be white, but we can act white". To him the Spiritual Baptists are "still in the dark ages". Ivan could have used his influence to help lift the ban and thus help the people assert themselves, but as Bee remarks people are "so civilize[d] they forget where they come from" (1985: 13-14).

The Spiritual Baptist Church, though a cross between African and European religious practices, was more African than European; it represents an alternative discourse to the colonial and oppressive one propagated by the plantocracy, and this fact accounts for its ban. While biblical Christianity was akin to many African religious practices such as "speaking in tongues, trance-like states, the performance of magic" (SAAKANA, 1987: 25), these African practices became an affront to colonial order. Imbedded in the style of worship of the Spiritual Baptist Church and other similar syncretic diasporic religions, these practices and beliefs helped sustain the enslaved Africans and became part of their "practical identity." The church, then, is a counter-discourse, a discourse of crossroads and of resistance to colonial

order, in the same way the griot tradition functions in the novel.

*The Wine of Astonishment* is told from Eva's perspective and in her voice; she is the storyteller par excellence, reminiscent of traditional griots in many African societies in that she is the voice of her community. Eva's perspective is another postcolonial intervention since her storytelling technique and language eschew Euro-American or Western storytelling techniques. Griots are important figures in predominantly oral cultures because they are the historians and custodians of culture. The story is crucial in maintaining a link with the past, because as Achebe writes, "it is only the story can continue beyond the war and warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of the war-drums and the exploit of brave fighters. It is the story, not the others, that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind" (1987: 114). The griot tradition is about self-representation and a means of validating and celebrating one's culture, given the colonial assault on indigenous cultural practices.

In *The Wine of Astonishment*, Lovelace fuses both the oral and scribal traditions, gives voice to the colonial subject, and highlights not only the liminality of the colonized but also of the text. His use of language recalls what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. refers to as the "speakerly text" in his discussion of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. The rhetorical strategies employed in *Wine* are "designed to represent an oral literary tradition, to 'emulate the phonetic, grammatical and lexical patterns of actual speech and produce the illusion of oral narration'" (GATES, 1989: 181). Eva's language is an example of the speakerly text; it not only validates the culture and ways of the folk, it also situates the novel at the intersection of speech and writing, a postcolonial moment when the written text refuses to be contained in a single tradition, the same way the adherents of the Spiritual Baptist Church object to being besieged by the colonial church and its practices. The griot tradition recalls

another traditional practice, stick fighting, believed to have its origins in Africa, specifically in ancient Egypt, among the Nubians of Sudan, and the Nguni of South Africa.

Derived from a stick dance called kalinda or calinda (martial art, folk dance and music), stickfighting, like the Spiritual Baptist Church, functions in the novel as an alternative discourse to the colonial one, and thus gives people a form of identity. According to Patrick Hogan, "the performance of calinda and of the stickfight that grew out of it was an act of resistance to European cultural hegemony—and not merely in a symbolic way. For a number of years, stick fighters were among the prime antagonists of the colonial police" (2000: 160). Bolo finds a sense of self and identity in the stick fight, but when the government outlaws it he turns to the Spiritual Baptist Church. But here too the restrictions on the Church turn him into a restless man: he reacts by taking two sisters from the village as concubines in an attempt to provoke the people to act against the abuses of the colonial authorities: "I want you people to be against me," he tells them, "I want you to be my enemy. I want you to come and take these girls from me" (LOVELACE, 1985: 121). His clash with the police is an archetypal battle with political and colonial forces that are intent on eradicating all remnants of what links the people to their African past: stickfighting, a liminal or postcolonial moment, a breathing room for exercising a ritual that connects the people to their ancestral past and humanizes them in the face of colonial restrictions and constant humiliation. Bolo embodies resistance, the warrior tradition of his ancestors.

The whole village talk 'bout him [Bolo]. They say in the stickfight ring, the gayelle, it don't have a man to stand up in front of him. They say he don't fight just to win battles for himself, for him stickfighting was more the dance, the adventure, the ceremony to show off the beauty of the warrior. And he do it with love and respect...as if what he really want was for people

to see in him a beauty that wasn't his alone, was theirs, ours, to let us know that we in this wilderness country was people too, with drums and songs and warriors" (LOVELACE, 1985: 21-22).

The church comes back after being banned for years but the "spirit" remains lethargic: "They went down on their knees and they testify in front of the congregation, and we sing hymns and clap our hands but the Spirit wouldn't come" (1985: 144). On their way home, disappointed, Eva notices a steelband playing, and the "music that those boys playing on the steelband have in it is the same Spirit that we miss in our church: the same Spirit; and listening to them, my heart swell and it is like resurrection morning" (1985: 146). This resurrection takes the form of steelband music, functioning in lieu of the Church and the stickfight; the steelband resurrects the Spirit. The church, the stickfight, and the steelband are all strategies that challenge/resist colonial imposition, but only the steelband survives. Bolo doesn't survive either; his demise could be read as symbolic of the precariousness of liminality, and to some extent, of the limitations of Lovelace's bacchanal aesthetics, but more so of the power of hegemonic ideologies.

### **The Dragon Can't Dance**

Chronologically *Dragon* predates *Wine*, but thematically, the former is a sequel to the latter. The steelband music with which Lovelace concludes *Wine* resurfaces, as it were, in *Dragon* and occupies center stage as an agent of cultural resistance within Carnival. It is as though the steelbands play the same role that the Spiritual Baptist Church plays in *Wine* because the steelband tent becomes a "cathedral and these young men priests...will draw from back pockets those rubber-tipped sticks, which they had carried around all year, as the one link to the music that is their life, their soul, and touch them to the cracked faces of the drums" (LOVELACE, 1988: 26). Fisheye and Aldrick

embody the warrior tradition, a resistance evocative of Bolo's in *Wine*. Carnival, the central topos of *Dragon*, is a celebration that originated in pre-Christian era with the planter class, and became for newly emancipated classes a form of rebellion and a celebration of freedom. As the narrator tells us, "Once upon a time the entire carnival was expressions of rebellion. Once there were stickfighters who assembled each year to keep alive the battles between themselves the practice of a warriorhood born in them..." (1988: 135). In his seminal work, *The Trinidad Carnival*, Errol Hill traces the origins of carnival:

Since the first masquerade held in pre-Christian times, carnival has exhibited certain recognizable features wherever it has taken root and flourished. Clearly originating in the worship of a nature deity... carnival proceedings have included street processions, costuming and masking...energetic dancing...and general revelry... When the Roman Catholic Church adopted carnival as a pre-Lenten festival, it gave religious sanction to a pagan rite too profoundly rooted in the sustenance of life to be effectively suppressed (1972: 22).

Emancipation in the West Indies brought about the participation of ex-slaves and imbued carnival with a "ritualistic significance, rooted in the experience of slavery and in celebration of freedom from slavery. In this sense carnival was no longer a European-inspired nature festival...[but] a deeply meaningful anniversary of deliverance from the most hateful form of human bondage" (1972: 21). Carnival, with its music, masquerade, pageantry, creates liminality for the "ritual subject." According to Angelita Reyes, "socio-economic roles are reversed and in the case of Carnival, 'all o' we is one'... [T]he various economic and social classes are betwixt and between the roles ascribed to them by society and history" (1984: 109). Mikhail Bakhtin's theory

of carnival, while derived from the Renaissance era, offers some insight into this reversal of roles and resistance to officialdom. In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin describes carnival as “the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals...People who in life are separated by impenetrable hierarchical barriers enter into free and familiar contact on the carnival square” (1984: 123). Bakhtin argues that laughter, the spirit of carnival, is essential to this reversal of roles and resistance. However, some critics see nothing subversive about carnival and attack Bakhtin for overlooking the tensions, anxiety, and the “self-imposed rules” that counteract the so-called anarchic “folk humor” of carnival. As Carl Lindahl aptly points out, “on the darker side [of carnival], the lower classes, in duplicating the power structure of their leaders, simply reaffirmed their submission to the social order” (1996: 65). Like the aesthetics of the crossroads, “carnival keeps the official axe, ever-ready to descend on the unruly heads of the folk, in a state of uncertain hesitation [but], and in that moment of authority’s hesitation [resides] the triumph of carnival (ELLIOT, 1999: 131), an assessment that nuances the subversive and resistance accorded carnival.

But for Aldrick, carnival is more than just a reversal of roles: he ideally believes that he is reliving and affirming the history of his ancestors through his dragon costume in an attempt to bring about change to the “little fellars” in the Yard. It is also a rebellion against and a resistance to colonial order and repression of the poor. Every year he makes a dragon costume, and

[f]or two full days Aldrick was a dragon in Port of Spain, moving through the loud, hot streets, dancing the bad devil dance, dancing the stickman dance, dancing Sylvia and Inez and Basil and his grandfather and the Hill and the fellars by the Corner, leaning against the wall, waiting for the police to raid them. He was Mazanilla, 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 is a dragon. I have fire in my belly and claws on my hands; watch me! Note me well, for I am ready to burn down your city. I am ready to tear you apart, limb by limb' (LOVELACE, 1988: 137-38)

Carnival is a rite of passage, in which the ritual subject, Aldrick, remains liminally suspended; his liminality extends beyond Carnival as he spends the rest of year, after Carnival, making a new costume. He avoids Sylvia, a woman he is interested in, because he is convinced she has "the ability not only to capture him in passion but to enslave him in caring, to bring into this world those ideas of love and home and children that he had spent his life avoiding" (LOVELACE, 1988: 31). It is noteworthy that Aldrick's disengagement from society runs counter to his reason for making and donning the dragon costume during Carnival—"affirming for the village, the tribe, warriorhood and femininity, linking the villagers to their ancestors, their Gods, remembered even now, so long after the Crossing, if not in the brain, certainly in the blood" (Lovelace, 1988: 134).

Obviously avoiding responsibility is not one of the ways in which one affirms "the tribe, warriorhood, and femininity." It eventually dawns on him that change involves more than an annual donning of a dragon costume in remembrance of the ancestors, but his next move (he becomes member of the People's Liberation Army, the Calvary Nine) which parallels the ritual of his dragon costume, is equally futile: they seize guns and confront the police because they intend to "proclaim a person for themselves and beyond themselves...looking for something to happen, not by plan but by the same magic that people who are oppressed reach for" (1988: 198). As the Calvary Nine face prison terms, it becomes evident that "their efforts at a rebellion



was just a dragon dance.” Fisheye remarks: “Eh, Aldrick? You couldn’t play a better dragon” (1988: 200). Aldrick’s costume ritual is likened to open rebellion without a plan: “we coulda do more than play a mas’,” Aldrick reflects from prison, “...we wanted to attract attention... So many things we coulda do and all we wanted was to attract attention! How come everything we do we have to be appealing to somebody else?” (1988: 202). Both the ritual dragon dance/costume and the open rebellion without a plan or definite goal constitute that postcolonial moment that is devoid of any tangible and positive results because it is lacking in thoughtful action: the ritual subject is stuck between two realities, betwixt and between the past and the future.

Like Bolo, Fisheye becomes an outcast when he denounces the commercialization and commodification of steelbands. For Fisheye, music is a sacred weapon against colonial order and should/could not be used for secular purposes, hence its commercialization is offensive to him: “People do all kinda crazy things anyway; and they pushing anybody out of anything... And instead of the little fellers pushing the pans, you had the sponsors the sponsor’s wife and the sponsor’s daughter and the sponsor’s friends, a whole section of them, their faces reddened by the excitement and the sun, smiling and jumping out of time, singing, All Ah We Is One (1988: 163). Fisheye finds solace in the steelband membership after time behind bars, but when he is squeezed out he forms the Calvary Nine in search of personhood and identity.

The narrative design of both novels raises questions as to the efficacy of resistance to colonial domination and discourse in the postcolonial novel. The title of *Wine* alludes to the Scriptures and to the hardships the Spiritual Baptist Church undergoes following the ban. The spirit Bee and Eva feel when they hear the steelband music could be read as an alternative way to self-assertion that Bolo and the Calvary Nine seek in *Wine* and *Dragon* respectively. The title “the dragon can’t dance” also

speaks to the inefficacy of the dragon ritual and costume. Both novels end on a note that is best articulated by Eva's attitude to the past and to the warrior tradition: "...the warrior tradition was dying in the village as the chief figure. The scholar, the boy with education, was taking over and if we was thinking, we wouldn't be surprised for now education was getting popular as the way to win the battle to be somebody; and the warriors, the men to fight real fight was just something to remember" (LOVELACE, 1985: 46). Resistance to the status quo, these novels seem to suggest, will have to employ, adapt, and adopt new methods, as we see with the steelband: "the music that those boys playing...have in it that same Spirit that we miss in our church: the same Spirit" (LOVELACE, 1985: 146).

The stickfight, the Spiritual Baptist Church, Carnival, and the steelband, may not be the only avenue for identity and freedom, nor the only means to fight/resist cultural hegemony. One wonders why Lovelace ends both novels on a calypso note, not with the dragon or stickfight. Stefano Harney's suggestions are quite illuminating and applicable to both novels under discussion; he posits that both Lovelace and the protagonist in *Dragon*, Aldrick, reject group identities: "Nationalism in Trinidad is too fragile, too inflexible, to assimilate and use Lovelace's text [*Dragon*] because, beneath the narrative of steelband, urban yard ethics, race relations and carnival, there is a deep rejection of group identity...Along with the badjohns and stick fights of the 1950s Lovelace discards group culture, communal expression, the national arts" (1996: 44). As Aldrick reflects, each of us "has responsibility for his own living, had responsibility for the world he lived in, and had to claim himself and grow and grow and grow..." (1988: 204). He realizes that "these days I ain't able with people" (1988: 214). Sylvia rejects Raymond, who doesn't want to do any real work but "comb up he hair in a big Afro, put on a dashiki, and spin her dreams of Africa, for Guy. The practicality of adhering to an identity rooted in a utopian past

is questioned when Cleothilda seems incensed at Raymond's suggestion that Sylvia go with him to Sans Souci and "work garden with him" (1988: 231). She tells him: How you could do that? You ain't in Africa; and even in Africa it have cities and clothes and people have to eat, you hear; and here the year is nineteen seventy-one" (1988: 231). Undoubtedly, both novels are critiques of the "forms of common cultural expression among urban African Trinidadians [that] are not replaced by any new forms of national culture that are judged worthwhile" (HARNEY, 1996: 44), as well as a call for an effective use of the postcolonial moment and liminality offered by these cultural forms.

#### Notas

<sup>1</sup> This is a reference to the works of anthropologists Arnold Van Gennep and Victor Turner, among others, who have argued that all rites of passage are "marked by three phases—separation, margin (limen), and aggregation." They note that the first phase consists of a "detachment of the individual from a set of cultural conditions;" during the second phase or "liminal period the state of the ritual subject is ambiguous," the individual "passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past, [and] the passage is consummated" in the third phase.

<sup>2</sup> Lovelace defines bacchanal aesthetics as the "folk tradition that informs his attitude and work...the vibrant cultural practices developed by the underprivileged as ways of affirming their humanity and personhood" (See *Growing in the Dark* edited by Funso Aiyejina). According to Aiyejina, bacchanal aesthetics, the aesthetics of the crossroads, "of a multiplicity of cultures, languages, and temperaments," is presided over by the Yoruba/Fon deity of Esu/Legba.

<sup>3</sup> Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, identified three main issues arising from this process of decolonization: 1) returning the "imprisoned nation to itself", that is the restoration of a national language and culture crucial to sustaining a "communal memory," 2) seeing the process of decolonization as an "alternative way of conceiving human history": recognizing "marginalized or suppressed or forgotten histories," 3) an "integrative view of human community and human liberation" (1993: 215-16).

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