The Tragic Vision in George Lamming's *Natives of my Person* (1972)

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Abstract

*The link between George Lamming and the Caribbean world is consistently addressed in* *Natives of my Person* (1972) *through its depiction of black and white protagonists and its reflection of colonial travel literature. This paper moves on to establish Lamming’s vision of evil and explores his tragic vision which is in its essence ambiguous: triumph and destruction, mourning and rejoicing. This exploration leads to the study of key patterns of West Indian history from the subjugation and exploitation of the Caribbean islands to the heart-breaking monstrosities that marked European hegemony during the slave trade. This present work ultimately examines Lamming's challenging perception of Europe as a repository of evils through its major institutions and his insistence on the necessary emergence of non-European society, outside Europe and free from moral corruption.*

**Key Words:** Lamming- Literature-Europe-Island—Tragic-Vision- Voyage

Résumé:


**Mots-clés :** Lamming- Littérature- Europe- Île- Tragique- Vision- Voyage
INTRODUCTION

The significance of actions and situations meant to arouse hostility, terror or mercy through the various scenes of catastrophes and passions, is central to Lamming's treatment of tragedy in *Natives of my Person* (1972). In this novel, the author’s tragic vision is used to investigate, through an historical perspective, as many areas as Caribbean colonialism, the triangular route from Europe to the Guinea Coast and thence to the West Indies. The exploitation of the islands and their colonial populations, the bloodiest scenes of slavery, the plundering of West Indian and African civilisations are all highlighted under various forms of European colonialism. Moreover, *Natives of My Person* (1972) challenges, through the colonial adventure, the established assumption that non-Europeans lack humanity, while questioning the so-called humanist ideal underlying and justifying the exploitation of foreign lands.

1-The Setting as a framework for the motivation and situation of characters

*Natives of My Person* (1972) opens on a maritime scene that shows a ship undertaking an illegal expedition which foreshadows the tragic events that occur later in the novel. Moreover peoples’ desire and determination to dominate other lands may derive from whims or mere trifles which can involve social catastrophe:

> The wind was rising again. It rode up the mainmast, and a sail struggled lazily into action. But the ship didn't stir where the cables held it fast to the rocks on the shore. The afternoon had brought an early darkness down from the trees. The clouds swung low, then divided, and a fleet of shadows passed over the men on the deck. They were eager to be gone ; but no orders had been given for them to depart. (Lamming 1972 : 9)

The physical external features of the sea environment clearly maps out Lamming's agonized vision of the imaginative journey of the ship "Reconnaissance". When it anchors at the mouth of the river, Sasha, one of the members of the crew, draws attention to the darkness and
calmness of the water as well as to the terrifying animals whose sight inspires horror and terror:

The boy watched the river groove around the ship. The water was dark and still as mud until the surface began to stir. A large family of reptiles was migrating from the shore. The boy couldn't tell whether these monstrous creatures would swim or fly until he saw the river shake and tremble from the lash of their tails. They were longer than the yards that held the sails; and the bodies spread thicker than the timbers of the ship's mainmast. The river made him shudder. (Lamming 1972: 90-91)

The plain hostility of the near-Gothic surroundings, through the fearsome allegory of the monster-ocean, is most suggestive of evil and death:

The sea whipped up a cold, blurring spray across the deck. The ocean rose like a huge fist of wind pounding their ears. The night was salt and heavy in their throats... Ivan heard the wind like a warming of trouble (Lamming 1972: 26-27)

The striking relevance of history also characterizes Lamming's work, since historical events are connected to evil memories which are awakened by some manifestations of the external world. The author of Natives of My Person (1972) refers to the voyages of Marcel, both a fisherman and a native of Lime Stone which, in the novel, represents England and Europe. The novel also stages terrible and monstrous figures like Master Cecil, a man of infinite avarice and crazy no less (Lamming 1972: 38). In order to give specific meaning to the setting, such a character is then associated with meteorological phenomena, with the evil of atmospheric effect conjugated to the evil of the voyage undertaken by Master Cecil, Commander-in-chief of San Cristobal, Lamming's imaginary island: it was the smell of these winds coming from Guinea coast that lit up my memory and sharpened the agony I was to endure after our defeat... (Lamming 1972: 38)

As a result, the setting can be viewed as a repository from which Caribbean writers draw the creative imagination that moulds the fictional situations, at the same time offering a variety of insights and flavours. Similarly, in Lamming's In the Castle of My Skin (1983) whose action takes
place on street corners, beaches or backyards, the story opens on a rainy weather which is a traditionally convenient opportunity to announce a birthday. Such a happy coincidence in communal Caribbean life is emphatically narrated:

Rain, rain, rain…..my mother put her head through the window to let the neighbours know that I was nine, and they flattered me with the consolation that my birthday had brought showers of blessing. (Lamming 1983 CS1 : 9)

From a different perspective, the same birthday coinciding with heavy rains bears a double-faceted significance, as it also constitutes a real threat as it nearly sweeps Creighton village into the sea, with a disastrous situation verging on tragedy. At this stage, peasant consciousness is revealed through the villagers' heroic resistance to the flood and their attachment to their native land.

In No Pain Like this Body (1972) by Harold Sonny Ladoo, another Caribbean writer, a stormy weather sets the tone in the opening paragraph and is pregnant with evil, since it stands as a harbinger of untoward events in Pa and Ma's family life:

Crax Crax Cratatax doom doomed! the thunder rolled, Balradji looked at the sky; it was blacker than dream of snakes and evil spirits. (Ladoo 1972 : 18)

The evocation of wild animals by both Lamming and Sonny Ladoo in their respective settings shows the importance of the fauna as a catalyst of action which, at times, turns out to be an act of ferocity in murderous conflicts. In Natives of My Person(1972), the voyage on "Reconnaissance" takes place in terrible conditions which end in catastrophe, thus revealing human weakness in front of evil:

The men watched from the decks, alternating between feelings of wonder and fear. The ship might have been in danger. (Lamming 1972 : 104)

Such a gruesome setting obviously breeds terror and moral confusion among the crew since the men trembled and prayed for a miracle that would rescue them from this terrible avalanche of sea fowl descending on the ship...(Lamming 1972: 104). The "avalanche of sea fowl" the "miracle" that would rescue them" are all allegories of the human condition in the

1- CS : In the Castle of My Skin
development of the narrative; such events remain at the heart of the action for narrative effectiveness and may be purposefully created to represent the climax of the plot.

In the minute account of Pierre's voyage, Lamming's imagination seems obsessed with forthcoming tragic events which might, any time, befall the crew:

The fog that put us out of sight for eleven days was truly fearful, and then the great wave of fowl striking like a hurricane over the decks came near as any tempest to burying the ship alive... (Lamming 1972: 106)

Lamming's welding together religion, God, Satan and human preoccupations, is narrated in a language that unveils the terrified consciousness of the individual men on the ship. By isolating themselves from humanity, they endure the torture of both deprivation and loneliness:

There be such creatures here as no man can in his ordinary language describe, monsters that do try to resemble men as though the power of Satan was marvellous enough to rival the Almighty. (Lamming 1972: 106)

The author of Natives of My Person(1972) invests heavily in compassion. Even Satan has his moment of human feeling in sending what appears as a kind of challenge to the faith of poor wretched souls on an adventurous voyage. The single resort is Almighty God as the author clearly explains:

We were now holding chapel with regular fervour, begging Priest to intercede on our behalf should our God in a harsh moment of his judgement deem it wise to abandon us to this great pestilence of devils which live in the river and forest beyond. (Lamming 1972: 106)

We are exposed, in exploring Lamming's setting in Natives of My Person(1972), to the chaotic mass of psychological insight through the tragic power of supernatural beings, the subtlety and complexity of human tendencies in critical circumstances.
2- The Colonial Enterprise as an Expression of Tragedy

Lamming's work is mainly about the process of colonisation and its effects on European settlers and natives, with geographic features and place names all drawn from the West Indies. Most of the colonial enterprise is described through voyages all over the Caribbean Sea. It also examines Caribbean colonialism essentially concerned with tragic action in the enslavement of colonial populations, the exploitation of the Islands, the misrepresentation of West Indian culture in works stressing European superiority. Rhonda Cobham, in analysing the West Indian historical background says:

From the time of their discovery by Christopher Colombus at the end of the fifteenth century, the islands of the West Indies… were seen as objects to be exploited rather than as colonies to be settled. Their early history is dominated by the 'pacification and extermination of the native population, and the fierce naval rivalry between successive European powers.(Cobham 1979 : 9)

In his Colonial Desire, Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race (1996), Robert J.C. Young, in stressing the destructive effect of colonialism and its negative impact on the disruption of domestic culture and stability in the process of the deculturation of the less powerful society and its transformation towards the norms of the West, argues that

The globalization of the imperial capitalist powers, of a single integrated economic and colonial system, the imposition of a unitary time on the world, was achieved at the prices of the dislocation of its peoples and cultures. (Young 1996 : 4)

Lamming's Natives of My Person offers a foretaste of the journey on the ship in describing the crew with details that bring to light the preoccupations of the colonial enterprise. In spite of the impressive expedition which enables a more appropriate imaginative exploration of the narrative, the "Reconnaissance" fails to secure an official permission from the authorities of the kingdom of Lime Stone: whether they knew it or not, they were about to violate the most
sacred law of the kingdom and its House of Trade and Justice. (Lamming 1972 : 10)

Moreover, expeditions of this kind are sometimes carried out with a lot of trouble and, to a large extent and in many instances, prove perilous for the crew: *There were older men who knew from previous experience that a voyage to the Indies would be long but none could predict the perils of this particular enterprise.* (Lamming 1972 : 10)

The Caribbean Sea which is referred to by West Indian authors in colonial voyages is an area much covered by imperial countries, as is noted in the *Compton’s Pictured Encyclopaedia and Fact-Index*:

*The busy Caribbean Sea, the "American Mediterranean", is a crossroads of the Western world. Because it is the Atlantic gateway to the Panama Canal it is of vast commercial and strategic importance. Through it pass the ships of many nations bound for the canal or carrying on a lively trade between ports of the Americas.* (CE 1952 : 122)

The people on the ship "Reconnaissance" bound for the New World from Europe via Africa, have various political, social and economic motivations when boarding; indeed, the hope for better living conditions in a new place they haven't reached yet is central to their quest, as Lamming points out: *but hunger had recruited most of the men. And all were driven by a vision of gold.* (Lamming 1972.: 13)

The situation on the ship is reminiscent of the voyages undertaken by the Pilgrim Fathers in the 17th century from England to America; this is a well-known fact, the search for religious and political freedom as well as greater economic opportunities mainly led British settlers to America. Seemingly, such sufferings naturally go hand in hand with colonial expeditions because of the inherent tragic events which are enhanced by the strong emotions they arouse whenever secure human conditions are seriously jeopardized. Men hence are tormented by forces they can neither control nor understand; Marcel’s moving account of their expedition is a typical case in point. After their "Miserable defeat off the shoals of Guinea", in his Fourth Voyage under master Cecil, he is left behind and tortured in the prisons of Antarctica. He himself confesses:

3- CE: *Compton’s Pictured Encyclopaedia and Fact-Index*
It was only when the sun started to burn a fresh wound over my temples that I tried to touch my ear, which was no longer there. .... I was a prisoner in solitary enchainment for six years, not uttering so much as syllable to any man. (Lamming 1972 : 39)

This heartbreaking sequence from Natives of My Person (1972) could be easily understood through the words of the Commandant of "Reconnaissance", when he stresses his steady colonial ambition to subjugate new areas outside Lime Stone:

I would plant some portion of the Kingdom in a soil that is new and freely chosen, namely the Isles of the Black Rock, more recently Known as San Cristobal. For I have seen men of the basest natures erect themselves into gentlemen of honour the moment they were given orders to seize command over the savage tribes of the Indies. (Lamming 1972 : 17)

Obviously, the quest for glory and better hierarchical position and wealth, lies at the core of the tragic action in Lamming's Natives of My Person(1972) where the Commandant’s assertion clearly bears evidence of his ruthlessness whenever he deals with native tribes, in order to fulfil his aims for the greatness of Lime Stone and his own honour:

Second to none is exercising the terrors which forced the Tribes to volunteer their services to us... we had to drive them like cattle from the fields and pastures, leaving ripe grain to rot, and a mighty famine that would over take even the unborn. But such was the necessity of circumstances if the mines and rivers were to yield the yellow fortune before the rival thieves of Antarctica were upon us. (Lamming 1972.: 17)

In this colonial context, such phrases as "rival thieves of Antarctica", "yellow fortune "for gold and wealth, "drive them like cattle", are redolent of systematic exploitation and human wickedness, mainly through dispossess and misappropriation. Lamming's terrified vision is extended to other places where colonial tragedy reaches a peak of horror. Resistance to persecution is quelled without mercy whenever the Tribes are on the defensive:
At San Souci it was. After we had freed the Tribes from the rival thieves of Antarctica. Stubborn, I tell you. Those native beasts were a stubborn breed. They’d rather eat the metal than guide us to the mines. We had to open them up with knives, it's true…(Lamming 1972 : 98)

In the colonial adventures, the natives are also victims of the most abominable moral attitudes on the part of the colonizers, as the former’s visions and purposes stand directly in contrast with the latter’s quest for fortune and opportunities for their imperial countries:

Antarctica, our chief rival in these adventures, did leave wherever they go a most terrible record of debauchery and unjust licence over the victims of their rule…. Their blasphemies in war and peace did surpass all outrage ; for it was told us on authority how they would defile their blood by unholy concubinage with the women of this black coast. (Lamming 1972 : 25)

The colonial enterprise along the Demon Coast also affects the women of the Tribes. After being separated from their male partners, they are often humiliated and sometimes treated like beasts. They are turned into puppets of fate and shaken to the depths in the hands of wicked settlers, with tragic consequences. The metaphor of the Voyage on the ship "Reconnaissance" is hence a journey into the soul of both coloniser and colonised through the recurrent patterns of violence, humiliation and death:

The madness that a separation could afflict on the women of the Tribes who had to wait..., labour and wait until their bodies grew frail as Bramble that the wind would break..., herded like cattle across the farms, digging the earth with sticks and naked hands.... The corpses of the children went without count. We couldn't number them where they lay. (Lamming 1972 : 84)

At this point, we find in Natives of My Person (1972) a major shift in critical consciousness with the focus on women as victims of colonial biases and blindness. However, the Natives' attempts to remove the yokes of foreign domination and exploitation are also examined,
together with their eagerness to turn away from dependence and persecution.

The Hostility to Interlopers and the Quest for Freedom

Natives of My Person (1972) also depicts natives’ endeavours to overcome the horror imposed by settlers, which can be seen as a form of nativism in the rejection of the Colonial presence and fetters. In "Out of Africa : Topologies of Nativism", (1991) Kwame Anthony Appiah maintains that the appealing ideology of 'nativism' is a simple reversal of Western hegemonic universalism, and it remains within the terms dictated by its adversary. (Appiah 1991:8)

From an historical perspective, J.H. Parry and P.M. Sherlock find in A Short History of the West Indies (1963) that the native populations of the islands did not get much from the colonists who were often unsuccessfully driven out and according to both authors:

Hundreds of ships, thousands of men and great stores of treasures have passed through the Caribbean, bound either east or west, but in the early days at least, relatively few people and little wealth settled voluntarily in the islands. (Parry and Sherlock 1963 : VII)

The resulting disasters of West Indian resistance to foreign oppressors brought about heavy losses, especially in the British West Indies during the Seven Years War which was caused by a steady competition between imperial countries:

The British West Indies had been the scene of the fiercest and most destructive of the Caribbean land fighting during the War... And the British West Indies were the worst sufferers by the terms of the Peace, which recognized the United states as an independent country. (Parry and Sherlock : 1963 : 139)

The turbulent conditions of the Tribes of the Caribbean islands and the Guinea Coast are of the utmost relevance to their bitter hostility to European settlers who seem to refurbish the dictum smash the enemy and then bend a paternalist ear from a position of strength in period of conflict. Moreover, in investigating the intricate issues of race and racialism, Dominick Capra, in
The Bounds of Race, Perspectives on Hegemony and Resistance (1991) pointedly raises the embarrassing superiority of one social entity over the others, on the basis of colour or culture and whose valorisation entails forced submission and exploitation with far-reaching consequences for local communities and their institutions:

It is decidedly difficult to overcome the tendency to privilege whiteness as the master-text, the valorized and often unmarked center of reference and to identify the non-white as "other" or "different." (Capra 1991: 2)

Franklin Knight and Margaret Crahan in "the African Migration," Africa and the Caribbean: the Legacies of a Link (1979) stress the biases of colonialism and slavery in foreign cultures as well as their outstanding repressive nature in historical processes. Both asserts that:

The western historical tradition was... thoroughly ethnocentric and ill-adapted to the investigation of other societies...
The slave trade was a commercial system to recruit forced workers in one society and transport them to another with a vastly different culture. (Knight and Crahan 1979: 3)

In Natives of My Person (1972) Lamming insists on the fact that the young Commandant is aware of the refusal of the Tribes to surrender in their exasperation and determination to resist attacks from foreign oppressors: He heard voices come from the Creek of Deception, a ceremonial call of drums riding up from the river bend. They were refusing to die... One legend says they vanish, Later to return. (Lamming 1972: 71)

Colonial war is a central dramatic episode and a major fictional thrust in Natives of My Person (1972). There is no possible rapprochement between the warring entities; the fierce attacks of the Tribes and the settler's desperate repulses irremediably widen the gap between the different groups living side by side on the island:

A soldier arrived; there was trouble. The man was clutching at his throat. 'Water, a little water', he begged. The man struggled to say what he had seen; but he was loosing too much blood. 'Where were you when the arrows hit your throat? the Commandant asked. But the man couldn't talk. (Lamming 1972: 71)
The crisis reaches its peak, with the tumult still going on in spite of the Commandant's upbraiding the soldier for not being able to defend himself:

A shout came up behind them; another soldier had arrived, panting like an animal. 'Dog, the dog'; he coughed, as his tongue tripped between his teeth; the dog - vanished, gone, sir, the dog gone.' The Commandant was furious…(Lamming 1972: 69)

A simultaneously - hurled volley of arrows are shot in order to stop the radical assault and forceful presence of the settlers. Lamming assumes this alternative with moral intensity, when he highlights the heroic initiative taken by the Tribes, in their attempts to avoid a collapse of their communities, by simply relying on traditional weapons and their own abilities: and now a most terrible battle was raging, with arrows coming fearful and fast where we lay. (Lamming 1972: 110)

The grim picture of the Guinea Coast is a sort of re-enactment of what happens at San Cristobal where the natives devised a system of battle which could cause heavy losses to the enemy in period of war. Lamming uses such a literary device to demonstrate the superiority of the native traditions over the brutality of the settlers, the African cultural values over the putative universal standards proposed by the West. Remarkably, the pronounced conflict of power with submissiveness, the concerns about race, culture and civilization run through Lamming's fiction. However, the pretended civilizing influence involves rivalries and violent actions on the part of settlers. Nativism hence entails incredibly barbarous consequences on individual human beings.

Authorial consciousness is also perceptible in In the Castle of My Skin (1983), with the compassion the reader senses in the preacher's words when the latter hears the boy say that he is frightened by the cradles which are used to keep away the spirits. Looking at the tears that fill the boy's eyes, the preacher cries out: Good, Lord be merciful ….Spare the innocent from the guiles of Lucifer, and show them the way.(Lamming 1983 : CS : 162). In Natives of My Person (1972), such innocent people who deserve mercy are unmistakably the Tribes whose peaceful lives are embittered by foreign invaders whose sole aim is to make as much profit as possible, and as J.H. Parry and P.M. Sherlock say in "A Short History of the West Indies (1963), the importance and
vulnerability of the West Indies, naturally tempted …… the English, to put forward open claims to navigate, trade and settle. (Parry and Sherlock 1963 : 47)

Deborah Jenson in "Mimetic Mastery and Colonial Mimicry in the First Franco-Antillean Creole Anthology", (2004) proceeds on the assumption of cultural superiority by arguing that,

Cultural 'hegemony' is the reality to which colonial representation is in thrall… Colonial literature...would be can attempt to impose (literally) a dominant cultural paradigm of the real on members of a subordinate culture. (Jenson 2004 : 86)

The monstrous, crushing force of the European settlers in the Caribbean area in their quest for fortune is multi-edged, as it involves outburst of violence, mutiny, murder etc…

4- Misadventure and the tragic end : human dignity at stake.

The sea voyage and its disastrous consequences in Natives of My Person (1972), added to the variation of contexts mainly characterized by hostility and tension, intensify misapprehensions and mishaps which are as many sources of tragedy for human beings whose dignity suffers severely until death happens. In referring to the European settlers, Rhonda Cobhan, in West Indian Literature (1979) argues that The European population of the West Indies always balked at being identified as 'West Indian'. Most came as temporary settlers to manage estates or make quick profits as pirates. (Cobhan 1979 : 11)

Similarly, the situation occurs on two massive structures in Lamming's Natives of My Person : Lime Stone which symbolises England and Europe and the House of Trade and Justice which combines in a single entity the whole and thrust of colonialism over several centuries (Munro 1979 : 138). Misadventure and tragedy are closely related in the narrative of the novel ; the narrative focuses on characters’ fate and environment and how both are managed to give thematic relevance to the plot. In this process, human dignity is often frustrated and even annihilated ; the only alternative offered is violence or ultimately death. Human's propensity for adventures, which, at the end of the day, turn into misadventures, is stimulated by ambition, a quest for wealth and honour as Lamming puts it:

Everyday you hear of a new adventure. East and West in every corner of the earth men are declaring fortunes that make your
head Swim... Ships like "Intrepid" and "Salomon" coming home for the third time with proof of conquests...(Lamming 1972 : 187)

The Commandant's plain depiction of the faulty and dubious nature of the expedition on the "Reconnaissance", proves as a true source of misadventure: Remember, we have broken loose from the restrictions of Lime Stone, and therefore free from all previous philosophies of the Kingdom. (Lamming 1972 : 250)

The potential causes of misadventure are plainly delineated at the end of Natives of my Person (1972) with political speculation leading to the conspicuous risks taken during the expedition. The rampant fear of military intervention carried out by the admiral from Antarctica, a rival kingdom, clearly reflects in the eyes of the narrator, especially after the meal the latter shared with the Commandant of the "Reconnaissance" whose crew incessantly complains about this ritual and the treaty which brings about peace between the two kingdoms:

I fear the Commandant is too liberal in his affection for foreigners. The feast was a grave error. To feed that foreign dog whose appetite was to subvert our enterprise to San Cristobal. What better cause for a open fight ? To be frank. He was never in favour of any Treaty. The Admiral, you say !.(Lamming 1972 : 288)

In Natives Of My Person (1972), Boatswain's tragic end comes gradually in a kind of self-examination. He may not have been understood in his professional career at sea ; he should let everybody know that he has been a worthy man, that his dignity should not suffer shame and humiliation at this very period in this life : Now I must tell them now. They have to know. No later than this moment they must (Lamming 1972 : 268).The recurrent use of "tell" to externalise inner thoughts and of "must" to express obligation, clearly suggests human preoccupation in crucial moments when dignity and truth should be valued instead of being annihilated because of misconceptions, especially when Boatswain declares to have killed the Lady of the House, the Commandant's lover and one of the high ranking authorities in Lime Stone: I had no other reason to kill her, ... I murdered her to save myself in my own eyes. But it was no punishment for what she was doing. To spare a holy wish for such a harlot (Lamming 1972 : 263).
Boatswain's moral disturbance is pitched to a climax; he can no longer bear his new tensed environment; he then ultimately chooses tragic action to show his inability to cope with the new context on the vessel:

*His hands were clasped in the sign of prayer, as though the sun had built an altar before his eyes. And the men looked up from below, pondering the disfigurement of Boatswain's face. His blood ran like a river into his mouth.... The men had rushed forward to break the fall of Boatswain's body, somersaulting through the air.* (Lamming 1972: 269)

Besides, due to the injury he does to himself through his own hands, Boatswain's collapses, and after all the outrageous words he said against the Lady of the House, he could no longer be regarded as an officer whose opinion might decide an issue. The past had taken over his judgement, forcing him into relations which had brought about his downfall (Lamming 1972: 294).

Not surprisingly, fear also constitutes one of the major features in Lamming's fiction, as it transpires through Steward's view about the possible retaliation from the House of Trade and Justice: the House of Trade and Justice will declare its vengeance. The Commandant knows it (Lamming 1972: 303). Again, the same feeling of awe is shared by Priest who felt his authority slip. Premonitions of vengeance were never far from his mind after he heard Boatswain's Story (Lamming 1972: 303).

Still, Surgeon, another member of the crew, expresses more obviously Lamming's attitude towards human condition, in that very episode of the expedition on the ship. The Commandant's fate is undoubtedly at stake, the persistence of danger, death and anxiety is pervasive and obsessive; tragedy may happen anytime, alter all perspectives and bring the adventure to an end:

*They won't let him go free and on his own", said surgeon, ....Either the House with all Lime Stone will bring the commandant to his knees. Or ask Antarctica to do them that favour. If necessary, the two will join to crush him... The vengeance of the House was enough to darken any further prospect for the enterprise.* (Lamming 1972: 303)
Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* also addresses seemingly inevitable tragic events which often occur at sea, when the young sailor unintentionally hits the master-at-arms to death on the "Indomitable". Melville here shows that such voyages can be dangerous because of misunderstandings in human relationship. Billy's hurriedness and brutality cannot leave the reader indifferent: *the next instant, quick as the flame from a discharged cannon at night, his right arm shot out, and Claggart dropped to the deck... A gasp or two, and he lay motionless.* (Melville 1979: 58-59)

Before any sentence is meted out, there are attempts to explain the death of the master-at-arms which Billy caused inadvertently. At this very critical stage in the development of the plot, Melville tries to reveal that human beings are not perfect and are often blamed and condemned for the evil actions they undertake. In this respect, Billy's statement to explain his case to the Captain of the 'Indomitable' plainly demonstrates his natural sincerity and his godly manners. Still, in spite of the repentant tone of Billy's explanation, there is no way out, no forgiveness, no other prospect except death decided by a summary court that tries him and hence turns Billy's journey into a tragic misadventure.

In *Natives of My Person* (1972), the moral hardships the crew faces do not deter some members from willing to reach the island of San Cristobal, which is their aim. They experience the negative freedom of leaving Lime Stone without official permission; they also know, at this very stage of their voyage, the delusory freedom of exploiting others in their homelands. The point is that such freedom is now turning into tragedy which tremendously jeopardises their expedition, with some crew members hesitating whether or not they should pursue their ends: *They would have to choose between the strategy for the Commandant's delay and the powder marker's plan to lower the boats and continue the enterprise to San Cristobal on their own* (Lamming 1972: 310).

Such alternative does not seem entirely viable since the crew pathetically gives an admirable account of the candid nature of the commandant whose figure is more and more isolated. All the same, they agree that he should not be rejected in a period of systematic degradation of their condition at sea: *Whatever makes the delay, the Commandant is no coward. Consult his record in open conflict with Antarctica and you will see. That's true. And it is known*
he fought against the Treaty (Lamming 1972 : 311).

After the chorus of agreement which had brought the men to the Commandant's defence, Lamming puts forward the assumption that contradiction is an essential part in the process of his artistic creation. Their self-confessed testimony seems biased for the other crew members:

The Commandant will hear of this, a voice was warming. That you tried to make rebellion against his command. That you ask us to pollute the name of Lime Stone and the reputation of the Commandant, which everyone in the Kingdom honours. (Lamming 1972 : 311)

This heart-rending cry is difficult to square, let alone its tragic implication. It is also symptomatic of a violent situation in which there will be no mercy, with oppression as the only mode of self-affirmation. The Commandant installs himself at the centre of a system where he is trapped in the grinding contradictions among brutal tormentors. As a consequence, his murder, judging from the way it is remorselessly carried out, appears as crude and gratuitous as ever … They heard a fresh report of gunfire from above: two rapid explosions tearing through the night. The sound died with little trace of echo. A ripple of voices broke through the silence…(Lamming 1972 : 313).

Truly, the Commandant's death derives from his intention of reuniting Surgeon and Steward with their wives in San Cristobal, but ironically, he is violently murdered by the very people he wished to protect. The passionate atmosphere which prevails among the crew sheds light on the unpleasant face of the Commandant's naked power and the subsequent collapse of his authority:

They have killed the Command... Surgeon and Steward. They have murdered the Commandant. A label of voices came tumbling around….. The men had entered into a state of frenzy with their questions. There was no pause in their appeal for enlightenment. (Lamming 1972 : 313-314)

The criminal gesture of Steward and Surgeon is coupled with passionate intensity and Ian Munro comes to the conclusion that the officers' failure to show humanity and compassion
towards their women….is the ultimate cause of the expedition’s failure. (Munro 1979 : 139)

Even though this brutal scene represents a specific form of violence pertaining to the general colonial enterprise, it stands to reason that such tragedy, in Lamming's *Natives of My Person* (1972), stems from a confrontation of interests between individuals whose sole aim is the quest for wealth, superiority and honour.

**CONCLUSION:**

While expressing, among other concerns, his anti-colonial commitment in *Natives of My Person* (1972), George Lamming highlights outstanding issues which address the inherent tragedy that accompanies colonial domination. This tragedy, most often, stems from the author’s dramatic use of the inevitable antagonism between characters, in their quest for better opportunities on the one hand, and their attempt to resist colonial assaults on the other hand. In using violence against colonialism, the Native communities do not seem to realise the extent to which their actions are dictated by the historical circumstances against which they are struggling. The drift toward violence appears as the very source of the tragedy that characterised the antagonism between the two social entities which incessantly fought for either hegemony or survival in colonial times.
REFERENCES:


