

Violence and Targeted Erasure of Black Cultural Artists in Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

Dr Manish Singh

Asst Prof, Dept. of English, Ram Jaipal College Chapra

ABSTRACT

Marlon James' *A Brief History of Seven Killings* won the Man Booker Prize in 2015. James' writings are often inspired by the systematic violence against those who are on perils and who put up some kind of resistance. The forces of domination have always used brutality of every kind against the artists who bear the responsibility of reviving and keeping the flame of their culture lightened up in every situation. Writers, Historians, Singers, Musicians, sports persons and others are all in the circle of Bull's eye of the domination forces. Bhagat Singh is more problematic than any other revolutionary for the British because he is also a writer. Mahatma Gandhi, Jawahar Lal Nehru, they are survived by their writings more than their acts and therefore are still relevant today. Writings contribute to the immemorial nature of rememberings. This same idea belongs to the hero of this novel, Bob Marley. Here the domination comes from USA and the resistance is from a Jamaican, who is not white who is not in the cultural embargo of USA; rather Marley put up a resistance from the cultural, historical, sociological and communitarian backgrounding and want to transmit them through his songs:

The novel at making sense of, mostly, the very turbulent decade of the 1970s on Jamaica, as well as its consequences, which extend historically until the 1990s and geographically until New York. (Perejoan)

The spring of domination from one single centre and that centre puts out its own colour, flag, codes and wants all others to embrace them at their own cost and erase out their own, this is the first problem and second problem arises when even after adopting and coloring the dominant force the others will remain others. There could be mixing but there is no assimilation, rather the others will face more powerful segregation and otherness and now they don't have any means to resist it and without any memory they have to lose the war for forever. Here comes the relevance of songs, writings, folklores, idioms etc. and they put up such a huge resistance of memory and remembrance that even if they lose they can still contest and here comes the more problematic relevance of artists. That is why Bob Marley was attacked seven times according to the fictional analogy of this novel and succumbed to the seventh one. The theme of this novel is how dominant powers plan all this and who along with many others were hit and it displays a more horrifying picture of the abuse of power. This paper will try to explore this theme with the post colonial theory of Frantz Fanon and cultural theories of Stuart Hall:

Colonisation is not satisfied merely with holding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it. (Fanon)

In postcolonial scholarship, Black expressive culture, most visibly roots that appear rugged, is frequently conceptualized as counter-hegemonic resistance, offering spiritual and political defiance against structural disenfranchisement. However, in *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Marlon James subverts the romanticized myth of the transcendent Black musician. James deconstructs the near-fatal attack on "The Singer" to show that artistic prominence does not liberate the Black cultural worker from state-sanctioned and partisan violence; rather, it exposes the artist to unique forms of commodification, surveillance, and physical elimination:

The ways in which black people, black experiences, were positioned and subject-ed in the dominant regimes of representation were the effects of a critical exercise of cultural power and normalisation. (Hall)

Set against the historical backdrop of mid-1970s Kingston, the novel traces the collision between: Michael Manley's socialist People's National Party (PNP), reflected in the novel as the National Party and Edward Seaga's Western-backed Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), represented as the Jamaica Labour Party and third but most important is the covert machinery of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA):

However, the novel also tells of the internecine fighting between Jamaica's political parties in the 1970s and its devastating effects on Kingston's ghettos. The governing People's National Party (PNP), led by Michael Manley, and the opposition Jamaica Labour Party (JLP), led by Edward Seaga, oversaw what Obika Gray calls

“predation politics”: politicians preyed on, armed, and empowered rude boys to intimidate Kingston’s ghetto voters . The novel traces the effects of this terror and the gang violence that led to the drug culture that infiltrated America in the 1980s and 1990s. (First)

Within this hyper-partisan grid, the Black artist's body becomes a battleground. James demonstrates how global and local apparatuses demand the artist’s symbolic allegiance, stripping artistic production of its autonomy and converting cultural capital into raw partisan collateral.

Partisan Enclosure and the instrumentalization of "The Singer" throughout the novel, "The Singer" is never named directly, an intentional narrative strategy that renders him both omnipresent and an empty vessel for external political ambitions. Both political factions seek to instrumentalize his cultural authority: Partisan Co-optation: The upcoming "Smile Jamaica" concert, nominally organized as an apolitical gesture of national unity, is perceived by rival factions as an implicit endorsement of the PNP administration on the eve of general elections. The artist's refusal to align formally does not protect him; within a polarized ghetto-garrison system, neutrality is interpreted as betrayal. This moves side by side with the power struggle within the same domain but grouped differently or rather further sub nationalism and other types of divisions have been created.

There is one this geographic division where Kingston’s political tribalism transforms physical neighborhoods (such as Tivoli Gardens / Copenhagen City) into fortified territorial strongholds managed by politically affiliated dons (such as Papa-Lo and Josey Wales). The artist’s physical presence at 56 Hope Road—a borderland between uptown bourgeois privilege and downtown street violence—disrupts this geographic segregation, turning the artist's domestic sanctuary into a combat zone.

As Achille Mbembe notes in *Necropolitics* (2019), “sovereign power dictates who matters and who does not, who is disposable and who is not.” In James’s depiction, the Black artist is subject to a modified necropolitics: their symbolic voice is venerated as vital to national prestige, yet their physical life is entirely expendable when it challenges electoral or imperial outcomes.

James extends the critique of political violence beyond domestic borders, dissecting how US Cold War foreign policy engineered destabilization across the Caribbean. Through figures like Alex Pierce (an investigative journalist) and CIA operatives embedded in Kingston, the text also covers Washington's geopolitical anxieties regarding Cuba’s regional influence. James also exposes the CIA in supplying weapons to neutralize perceived leftist drift:

Pretty much all of them are fictional although some, such as the journalist Alex Pierce, are based on actual people. Perhaps the most interesting is that of Sir Arthur Jennings, a murdered Jamaican politician, again fictional, who becomes a sort of one-man Greek chorus narrating from the grave. As he says right at the beginning of the novel, “dead people never stop talking”. (Third)

The Black artist occupies a precarious nexus in this imperial machinery. This international circulation offered a pan-African critique of capitalist exploitation (the "Babylon system"). Consequently, foreign intelligence apparatuses viewed the artist not as an entertainer, but as an uncontrolled ideological conduit capable of mobilizing the subaltern masses. This novel also put up the functioning of CIA from Cold War Hegemony, where weapons and funds are channeled Territorial coercion and street enforcement to assassination of The Singer and then to super trade of Narcotics.

The novel follows their fictional deaths over the coming years, a gruesome catalogue of violence fuelled by cocaine and guns, with the truly demonic Josey Wales at its centre. (Third)

The December 1976 assassination attempt functions as an act of political discipline: an imperial and local syndicate warning that aesthetic power cannot override the hegemony of state and corporate dominance. Rather than granting "The Singer" a central, authoritative voice, James fragments the narrative across more than seventy distinct voices, ranging from teenage gunmen (Demus, Bam-Bam) to dead politicians (Sir Arthur George Jennings) *“Living people wait and see because they fool themselves that they have time. Dead people see and wait.”* (James) This polyphonic structure serves essential theoretical functions: De-centering the Icon: By refusing to center the artist’s interiority, James prevents the myth of exceptionalism from overshadowing the widespread trauma inflicted on working-class Jamaicans.

The shift between Patois, bureaucratic intelligence memos, American media vernacular, and cocaine-era slang foregrounds the systemic unevenness of power. The language of the gunmen reveals a desperate socio-economic precarity where contract violence is one of the few avenues for financial survival. The narrative reveals how violence against the artist echoes throughout the diaspora. As the novel progresses into the 1980s and 1990s, shifting from Kingston to Miami and New York, the gunmen who carried out the assassination attempt are absorbed into the

transnational crack-cocaine trade. The violence initially mobilized to control a cultural figure metastasizes into an autonomous global drug economy that cannibalizes the very youth who enacted it.

In the novel's later sections, James interrogates the posthumous sanitization of Black musical rebellion. Once the physical body of the artist is dead, international capital and the state bureaucracy combine to strip the art of its revolutionary critique with phase wise modality of violence and cultural consequence. From 1976 Direct assassination attempt at Kingston to partisan street intimidation, physical silencing of political solidarity to transnational gang consolidation and structural neglect of the voices and then pushing of working-class/Black artists into narco-economies. Finally the novel reaches to Post-1981 Global Market posthumous commodification, tourism branding and wiping of anti-imperialist critique into harmless lifestyle aesthetics. It also dissects the crony form of habitation and ghetto as also discussed above.

"There's a reason why the story of the ghetto should never come with a photo. The Third World slum is a nightmare that defies beliefs or facts, even the ones staring right at you. A vision of hell that twists and turns on itself and grooves to its own soundtrack. Normal rules do not apply here. Imagination then, dream, fantasy. You visit a ghetto, particularly a ghetto in West Kingston, and it immediately leaves the real to become this sort of grotesque, something out of Dante or the infernal painting of Hieronymus Bosch. It's a rusty red chamber of hell that cannot be described so I will not try to describe it. It cannot be photographed because some parts of West Kingston, such as Rema, are in the grip of such bleak and unremitting repulsiveness that the inherent beauty of the photographic process will lie to you about just how ugly it really is." (James)

The state and global consumer culture transform the radical Black artist into a harmless, depoliticized brand used for nation-branding and tourism campaigns. The novel demonstrates that political violence operates on two axes: physical terror during the artist's life to curtail material political impact, and hermeneutic distortion after death to neutralize systemic critique. "If it no go so, it go near so." (James)

Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* offers an unsparing historical critique of the structural violence waged against Black artists. By embedding the assassination attempt on "The Singer" within the wider matrix of Cold War covert operations, garrison politics, and transnational drug distribution, James dismantles romantic narratives of musical immunity. The novel demonstrates that Black expressive genius cannot exist outside the material conditions of its production. Instead, the Black artist stands as an exposed cultural operative: courted for legitimacy by political elites, disciplined with extreme violence by imperial regimes, and packaged for commercial consumption by the global market.

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