

Marlon James' A Brief History of Seven Killings: A Historiographic Political Metafiction

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Abstract

This article proposition on the attempted assassination of Bob Marley and about political violence in the postcolonial Caribbean land Jamaica. The study therefore explores the elevation of history into metafiction in the heart-breaking novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. The article is not only discusses the literary elements in the work of art but it attempt to bring the USA's politics behind the death of reggae superstar Bob Marley with the reference of Man Booker awarded fiction *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

Key Words

Metafiction, politics, Assassination, political violence, History.

The article entitled "*Marlon James' A Brief History of Seven Killings: A Historiographic Political Metafiction*" proposes the politics of United States of America in Jamaica and details how historiographic metafiction as a device used to stage out the hidden past events. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a voluminous book not in terms of its size but for its scope, the fiction closely related to history and politics. *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is a Historiographic Political Metafiction that has kindled the spark for research adding to this the hasty politics of United States behind the death of Marley. Bob Marley a reggae superstar who largely worked for black liberation and peace through his lyrics. In the novel, one can trace out the indirect contribution of Marlon James to find out the reason for the attempted assassination and for cancerous death of Marley.

A Brief History of Seven Killings is a Historiographic Metafiction because the fiction's plot are derived from history and major part of the events in the novel reminds the past historic events of Jamaica and the heart of the novel is the attempted assassination of Bob Marley is a historic bloody event in Jamaican history. Marlon bring the political history and imagination under same umbrella.

There is a keen relationship between history and the writing of fiction, The early beginning of writing history had its origin in the form of 'stories'. *Herodotus*, The father of Greek history started writing history as stories. History and fiction both are dealing the words but with different perception and aim. History dealing the past, it records what had already happened but in the fiction, it deal the imaginary events which may probably happened.

This historic fiction waves about the black's world and Marlon dealt with cultural variance through the characters Alex, Chief CIA officer of Kingston, and the cacophony culture through weeper a Gang enforcer of Copenhagen city. Political frictions through two political parties People' National Party and Jamaica Labour Party, they kindle the problems between gangsters to attain political benefit. Black women liberation through Nina Burgess, who sexually harassed even by the Jamaican police and she had the nostalgia to move out of Jamaica finally she shift herself to United States of America. Marlon James staged everything happened after 1970 in Jamaica. The main heart of the novel is the attempted assassination of Marley in 1976 during Smile Jamaica Concert, The figure like prophet is attempted to kill and the people in Jamaica and conspiracy theorists claiming that the Cancerous death of Marley is completely American Politics and executed by its intelligence agency CIA. Most of the writers took literature as their tool to stage their land's history but here Marlon took this as his weapon. The novel sounds all oppression and turmoil of Jamaica. Socio cultural variance, hidden politics played by CIA, racism, sexual harassment, homosexual culture, Rastafarianism, Politics, Violence and most of the ill happenings around 1970s is outburst by Marlon James.

The historic characters renamed in the novel as Singer is Bob Marley, papa lo is Claude Massop, the don of posse gang Shotta sheriff is Bucky Marshall, Josey Wales is Lester Lloyd coke, Peter Nasser is Edward Seaga. The fictional characters played the role to bring back real dons and drug dealers and cruel politicians and poor people.

The quality of the historiographic metafiction is the appealing of history in the imaginative fiction. Marlon James's *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is completely political and historiographic, Most of the characters and events in the novel resembling the real life history. Marlon changed historical event into fictional plot with social concern. We can find resemblance with the character papa lo / Raymond Clarke, the don of Copenhagen City from 1960-1979 with the real don Claude Massop (1949-1979) who was the leader of the Phoenix gang later it renamed as posse gang. He controlled wellington street, Denham Town and the surrounding areas of West Kingston. Claude Massop was born in west Kingston in a normal Jamaican family and he involved in criminal activities during his teen age later he became a building contractor as well as head of posse gang. Claude and his gang supported Jamaica labor party and another Don George "feather mob" Spence who is also a contractor supported People's National Party and there is always a smoke between them. The gang leaders control the different areas of Kingston, These gang leaders dominated Jamaica to the maximum when we compared with the politicians of Jamaica. If any political party want to win the election they expected have the support of gangsters. There are many gangs controlled Jamaica and this gang violence is reflected in the novel *A Brief History of Seven Killings*.

In 1967 Claude Massop was a big influence among the people because he emerged a housing project for the urban poor. Later he acknowledged Lester Lloyd Coke as the head enforcer but he started to dominate Claude Massop and he became the reason for more violence in West Kingston. Claude Massop lost his power in his own gang. These changing of power from Claude Massop to Lester Lloyd is depicted in *A Brief History of Seven killings* by the below lines

They think my mind is a ship that sail far away. Some of those people in my
own district. I see them in the corner of my eye. After I help them grow, they

think me is the one now blocking progress. So they treat me like old man
already, and think I don't notice when A sentence cut short because the rest
of it not meant for me. That I don't notice the phone come to ghetto for
talking but not to me. (*Brief History* 86)

In the political fiction *A Brief History of Seven killings*, character Papa Lo is framed as the friend of Singer and in real history Claude Massop had the good relationship with the singer a reggae super star Bob Marley. In the novel many passages expose the relationship between Bob Marley and Claude Massop who renamed as Papa Lo in *A Brief History of Seven Killings* is reflected in the novel as "Here is my friend the biggest superstar in the world and yet him have some of the smallest mind to come out of the ghetto as friend (23).

Singer's friendship with papa lo in the fiction expose the mutual understanding and the records too prove that Marley and Claude Massop are friends since from their childhood. They played football together and the entry of politics inside Kingston came only through the football game, the politicians sponsored local matches to attain attention of the people. In real Jamaican violent history Posse gang leader Claude Massop was shot dead by the Jamaican police and about 50 bullets were taken after postmortem this was equaled with the fiction that Papa lo was shot dead after the attack by Police who are referred as Babylon's in the text. The political move of both Jamaica Labour Party and People's National party is pictured through the characters like Alex, Josey, papa lo. Bam-Bam who is the person imagined by the author to shot Bob Marley. In Jamaica there is two political parties People's National party and Jamaica Labor party, In 1972 general election Peoples National Party formed its government because they promised lot of things to do and their famous slogan " Better Must Come" This manipulation of people too paved the way for their victory. This event is recorded in the fiction in fragments through many characters.

Jamaica Labor party rule the country in the sixties but the people's National
Party tell the country that better must come and win the election in 1972.
Now Jamaica Labor party want the Country back and there's no word
named can't there is no word People still want to know how JLP lose
Kingston when they have Copenhagen city (36).

In *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, Marlon characterized the a gang head enforcer of Copenhagen city is Josey wales between (1979-1991) who occupied the place of papa lo after his death in 1979 and also before his death. This fictional character Josey wales is the projection of real character Lester Lloyd coke who act like left hand to Claude Massop.

In the novel Josey wales had a relationship with the Peter Nasser the politician, who is a real character depiction of Edward Seaga politician of Jamaica who belong to Jamaica Labor Party. Now he is the leader of JLP adding to this once he was the fifth Prime Minister of Jamaica he actively involved in politics till 2005 and he is the only politician in Jamaica who entered to politics before independence. In the novel the depiction of Edward Seaga is different when we compare with the current circumstance because the writer connected

Edward Seaga with the CIA agents. Throughout the novel Peter Nasser is behind the plan of assassination.

The head enforcer Josey Wales in *A Brief history of seven killings* is Lester Lloyd coke, the real don of posse gang between 1969 and 1992. His nickname is Jim Brown. The emergence of Lester Lloyd coke into Jamaican violence in 1966 due to the political warfare kindled a state of emergency into west Kingston. On one Sunday after the politics enter into the community in Kingston, Lester Lloyd was shot by some gunmen at least four or five times recalled by his friend Carl. Once Lester was a normal Jamaican youth who worked under the blacksmith but after this shot experience Lester emerged as don and he involved in gunmen activities. We can find the psychological trace in Lester to become don, this psychological transformation of Lester can find in the character Josey Wales and most of the characters are affected by the socio-political turmoil of the Nation. The character Josey Wales linked with the CIA agents and he was introduced to these white men by Peter Nasser who is Edward Seaga in real life. In 1992 Lester Lloyd coke or Josey Wales in novel, his son Mark Antony Coke became victim for political violence when he riding along Maxfield Avenue he was attacked by a mob. Even though it is declared as the result of gang war but it seems to be a political attack while walking with the novel.

Nurse? The doctor says. I hook it up to the man's arms without looking at him. I didn't want him to give me the eye of recognition. I'm not so kindred spirit. Who's this Benjy? The doctor asks again and I want to say shut the fuck up, when I finally look at the man he was giving the doctor this stare, eyebrow raised and indignant like he's thinking, what do mean who's Benjy? I certainly did not want to know. Benjy Wales, the son of the don of dons, the man says (613).

In *A Brief History of Seven Killings* Josey Wales is remained about his son's death while he is in jail by Peter Nasser. This incident merged and conformed the history behind the fictional plot. "When they lowered Benjy in the grave, a bunch of men and women formed two lines right? Don't talk about my boy (627).

In February 1992, the same year Lester Lloyd coke arrested by Jamaican police and Lester Lloyd died in a mysterious fire in the cell. In *A Brief History of Seven Killings* the same incident carved by the writer and he made a guess on the death of Josey Wales, he is often met by Peter Nasser, a politician. In the fiction Marlon James made the readers to understand that the mysterious death of Josey Wales is political. Marlon James convey that the death of Josey Wales is due to the attempted assassination of Bob Marley because the CIA had chosen Josey Wales and his men to assassinate Marley in 1976. But the Target missed again so they made an attempt in 1978 that too missed so they planned to finish Josey Wales because there is a chance to reveal the truth regarding assassination. So they burnt Josey Wales in cell. In real history Lester Lloyd coke was mysteriously burnt to death in prison in 1992 and his son too killed by the mob.

The man turns up the volume yet I'm still not hearing a thing. Some man naked

from waist up, skin shiny like it was melting from all the heat, chunks of his chest and side blackened, large spots white like only his skin was burned off. Skin peeled of his breast like a sucking pig. I really couldn't tell if the photo was out of the focus or he really melt...

It's running across the screen now: JOSEY WALES FOUND.

BURNED TO DEATH IN PRISON CELL*JOSEY WALES FOUND

BURNED TO DEATH IN CELL...(685)

In *A Brief History of Seven Killings*, the gang violence between gang Copenhagen city and eight lanes picturing the real violence between posse gang and Mathew lane, Former is governed by Claude Massop and later is governed by Bucky Marshall. Violence in Jamaica is induced by the political parties through local gangsters, these two men belong to different parties one belong to Jamaica Labor party and another is the supporter of People's National party. Prison has become a second home for Bucky Marshall when he walks out of prison in Jan 9, 1978 he calls Claude Massop, posse gang leader, a PNP enforcer to meet immediately after release. This is the first thing he does when he released. That evening in west Kingston both men participate in a candle light and call for peace. The reason for this peace treaty is to unite their people and Bob Marley played major role to bring these men under same umbrella. Bob Marley know all the rotten turmoil about Jamaica even though he is out of Jamaica for some years but he voiced out for the voiceless especially for black liberation. Marley had a friendship with both opposite gang leaders and he tried to unite them and also the people from different gang and different parties.

singer smart. He is friend with me and he is friend with Shotta Sheriff.

The singer said If puss and dog live together, why we can't love one another? No so Jah say? But puss and dog don't want to live together, I tell him. But me think about it hard and come with reasoning. When dog kill puss, and puss kill dog, the one happy is the John -crow (88).

Both gangsters Claude Massop (papa lo) and Bucky Marshall (Shotta) sheriff got united for peace in 1978. The unity between these gangs are expressed in the below lines.

Me release from jail first, and in January them release Shotta Sherriff. First thing him

do is find me. That night, January 9, 1978 people with me and people with him put down gun, light candle and start sing we aren't gonna study war no more...(335).

The peace treaty has been initiated by Bob Marley and after a long struggle the gangsters agreed to unite one of the important easing attempt to unite these gangs is peace truce conference in London with Claude Massop, Bucky Marshall, Tek and other gang leaders.

In *A Brief History of Seven killings* the author exposed the urge in both gang leaders for peace and the sense of the author present a picture of these incidents in front of readers. The main plot of the Novel is the attempted assassination of Bob Marley in 1976. In real history the attempted assassination on Marley is recorded as, it was the brutal attack by the gangsters but Marlon James differ from this record by writing *A Brief History of Seven Killings*. On 1976 Dec 5 , 'Smile Jamaica' a free concert arranged by the Prime Minister Michael Manley (PNP) in an attempt to ease the tension between two political parties JNP and PNP at National Hero's park. Two days before the concert Bob Marley, His wife Rita Marley and his manager got injured by the violent attack .The reason supposed to be murmured as , people thought the concert is the supportive rally for PNP so opposite party motivated politically. But the conspiracy on Bob Marley is still under debate. *Marlon James* used this conspiracy to bring the structure of historic fiction and he pictured the attempted assassination of Bob Marley.

And I and I

Bam Bam

Jah Rastafari shot you in the heart

You call out Selassie

You get him? I say to Josey

Yeah

I get the wife too

Go 'round the front

Straight through the head with one shot

Bitch fly and crash on the ground... (241).

Even though Bob Marley injured severely he played the concert on time Dec 5 1976 with the bullet inside his body.

"They say he coming, they it right there in the wall that poster with

Singer pointing to the sky, smile Jamaica a public concert, Sunday

December 5 at five p.m. He beat death like Lazarus, like

Jesus"(255)

After the concert he left Jamaica for two years and he spend those years in London and he busy with his new album kaya. The two gangsters Bucky Marshall (Shotta sheriff) and Claude Massop (papa lo) requested Marley for the concert again in 1978 Marley agreed, The result is "One Love Peace" concert.

Marley's second peace concert in Jamaica is due to the unity of these gangsters. According to these gangsters, The One Love Peace Festival is to fold the two and the income of this concert planned to provide the financial assistance and sanitary facilities to the suffering in West Kingston. The One Love Peace Festival scheduled on April 22, 1978. The peace

festival goes very superbly by the performance of Marley and his wailers at The National Stadium in Kingston, Jamaica. At the end of the concert Marley joined the hands of political rivals Michael Manley and Edward Seaga during his fiery performance of "Jammin". During the concert people met all the rivals including Bucky Marshall, Claude Massop and political rivals Edward Seaga and Michael Manley on same stage during the concert Marley unite the hands of these rivals Bob Marley said I just want to shake hands and show the people we gonna make it right we're gonna unite... The above words uttered by Marley on stage. The peace concert may show the unity but that was not such successful after this concert. Jamaica underwent a political violence and the gangsters who initiated peace were killed within two years after peace concert. There is a mystery behind the death of gangsters Lester Llyod coke and Claudie Massop. The novel pictures the death of these gangsters through the fictional characters papa lo and Josey Wales.

The second coming of Marley for peace was illustrated with the conspiracy and the writer used the conspiracy theory and his research on Marley's death thereby he provide the information with the aesthetic quality. The death of Bob Marley is under debate, in this situation Marlon's *A Brief History of Seven killings* give readers an idea about the influence of United States of America in Jamaica and in its politics. Bob Marley died of cancer in 1981. The important conspiracy in the history of Jamaica is Marley's death, this was reflected in the Novel. One of the conspiracy is, Marley intentionally killed by America's Intelligence Agency CIA. This was reflected in the novel of Marlon's. "Burn white skin man don't want Peace, he want Jamaica become the USA state number fifty -one, shit, he would settle for just a colony" (338).

Marlon James supported the argument, that the death of Marley is completely political and carried out by America. In the novel the attempted assassination of Marley skillfully designed by the author with the help of his research. The characters Bam Bam, Demus, funky chicken, weeper, Heckle, Leggo Beast, Josey Wales and other two jungle men are required by the CIA to kill Bob Marley with the Awareness of Peter Naseer a politician of Jamaica as pictured in fiction.

Leggo beast in the Jail begging and pleading and weeping and Wailing
and saying is Josey Wales recruit him and the white man who train them
was CIA. CIA man wearing brown pants and shades even at night take
them into the high bush ... (342).

The cancerous death of Marley is questioned by the conspiracy theorists adding to this Marlon too questioned through his novel. In real history the conspiracy is CIA induced cancer by gifting him a pair of boots and Marley tried them on, a radioactive copper inside the boots pricked his toe later the same toe become the source of cancer.

You can't even remember him now, but he came like one of the three Wise Men, with
a box wrapped like Christmas. You opened it and jumped - somebody knew that
everyman in the ghetto Wished he was The Man That Shot Library Valance. Brown
boots, snakeskin, flirting with red; somebody knew you loved boots. almost as much

as you loved brown leather pants. You pulled on the right boot and screamed like a boy

who chopped his foot trying to split a coconut. Your big toe spurt blood (430).

The cancerous death of Marley is implicated by the author through the utterance of politician Sir Arthur Jennings a ghost who murdered by Peter Naseer in the fiction. The actions of the fictional characters provide readers about the real political violence and may be the real history behind the death of Marley.

Marley converted to Christianity in 1980, which is indicated by the lines "November 4. Your wife arranges a baptism in the Ethiopian Orthodox church. Nobody knows that your name is now Berhane Selassie. You are a Christian now"(435).

In the novel Marlon bound the character Peter Nasser having the relationship with CIA and white men, Peter Nasser reflecting the politician Edward Seaga "for three months now, two white men come to the ghetto along with Peter Nassser only speak English, They come to see Josey wales not me"(88). The political fractions and the thirst for power made the political leaders to engage the unlawful things.

In 1980, Edward Seaga's Jamaica Labor party won election with the majority of seats, According to reports the bloodiest election of Jamaica is 1980 election there are about 800 people were died because of the political violence.

"Something new is blowing. November 1980. A new party wins the general election and the man who killed me steps up to the podium with his brothers to take over the country. He has been waiting for so long he leaps up the stairs and trips" (436).

In *A Brief History of Seven Killings* Marlon James bring out the pungent smell of Jamaican politics and the socio-economical deflation and also political influence of America. The oppression of First World countries on Third World countries still continuing but the Method of oppression only varies. Once they directly govern the colonized countries but now they implement their ideas through policy and agreement. The reason for the aggressive politics on Jamaica by United States is the creeping of communism. Everyone knows that USA having some interest on Jamaica because of its wealth Mostly Africa and Caribbean lands are colonized only for its Natural Resources and they looted her wealth. Jamaica attained its freedom in 1962, but still the whole banking sector under the control of USA. In the Novel Marlon James echoed his country's history with the fictional Power. After reading the epic history through Marlon's Novel It create the impression that the attempted assassination and the cancerous death of Marley is the planned one and the reason for the continuous attempt on Marley is he tried to incite his people. He is considered as the Most dangerous black man on Earth because his songs vibrates Freedom and Black Liberation . Another reason is, they feared about the support among the people for Marley and there is a chance for the formation of Third New Party that may be communism because Marley had a good relationship with the communist leaders especially with Fidel Castro who is attempted to kill by CIA several times. Marlon transferred the historical events into fictional plot with the responsibility of finding the truth in history.

First World countries claim themselves as First world, In the present scenario the political influence of these countries on the other countries is completely to loot their resources not only the natural resources, also they loot the knowledge of the people by rewriting their history. The first world countries cannot step into one country without the help of that country's politicians. one the colonized people asked the whites to leave the country but today's scenario is totally different, The government welcome the foreign people for investment by creating policies and these investments are not loss but it is for the profit of particular group in society and not for groundlings. The influence of America in Jamaica is different in 1960s and Now. The presidents of America had their eye on Jamaica and other Caribbean island. Visit of Barack Obama to Jamaica and the change of the name auditorium to Town hall during Barack's visit showed the influence of America on Jamaica.

The attempted assassination of Marley is not only for the government it is for the creeping of the thirst of democratic freedom and unity among Jamaicans. The fiction stuffed with the facts in the name of imagination. Marlon seriously handled his land's history to expose the reality what happened in three decades before. This novel act as the detective one to find truth behind the death of Marley, The genre Historiographic metafiction added a kind of strength to the writer and the reflection of real characters in the fictional characters not only expose the history but also this history expressed the strategic move of United States of America and its Intelligence Agency CIA.

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