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POLITICS OF SUFFERING IN SAMUEL KOLAWOLE’S *THE BOOK OF M.*

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Abstract

The post independence Nigeria witnessed the incursion of military into politics. This invariably led to a politics appropriated on the threshold of despotism with its attendant suffering, disillusionment and privation. The politics of death brought about by the military intervention in Nigerian politics engendered a narrative of suffering, disorientation, moral atrophy, etc in the Nigerian state. The quotidian experiences of the masses during the military rule aptly depict the social, political and economic plagues that ravaged the nation. This paper explores the evils associated with military rule in Nigeria looking at the suffering and hardship that characterized it. Suffering was a common phenomenon that characterized the people's experience during this reign of terror. This was appropriated across the population through the instrumentality of the soldiers and police, who were necropolitical machines that annihilated and plunged the masses into suffering and privation. This essay goes further from a necropolitical point of view to capture the horrendous predicaments of the people caused by the brazenness, tyranny and despotism occasioned by the emergence of the military in the arena of politics. Through this postcolonial approximation, the complexities of the suffering narrative are enunciated with copious exemplification from Samuel Kolawole's *The Book of M*. This essay, through the lens of Achille Mbembe's Necropolitics, a postcolonial assumption, reflects the different shades and colours of suffering perpetuated on the people through the political ineptitude, despotic tendencies, necropolitical machines, and failures of the military in the arena of politics. The submission here is that the military presence in politics was a blatant error, a misnomer and a misfortune that should not have taken place in the theatre of African history and development.

Keywords: Suffering, Military Rule, *The Book of M*, Despotism, Necropolitics, Achille Mbembe

Introduction

Sociopolitical realities in Nigeria are central to the literary commitment of Nigerian writers. These realities have informed the different artistic articulations and ideological standpoints of writers. The writer being "a chronicler of the permeations occurring in [the] society" takes the posture of a revolutionary, a humanist, a non-conformist bohemian, an activist among others (Agbasiere, 73). Notwithstanding his stand, he is inevitably a transformative agent in the society. As such, in the words of Egudu as cited by Ezenwa, the writer is seen as a "god-sent gadfly to his society" who "persistently endeavour to raise the society from its social, political, moral and intellectual slumber" (51).

Obviously, the social function of literature enables writers to come to terms with social ills with a view to liberating the people from the shackles of suffocating necropolitical machines and sociopolitical dysfunctions. Thus, the writer becomes a person who, with his art, runs with a social vision. He assumes the posture of a revolutionary who is not only "in the vanguard for revolutionary change", but also "one of the frontrunners of that vanguard" (Osundare, 36). Thus, the portrait of the writer is one of a social crusader. Whether he writes as a revolutionary or as a humanist or even as a radical non-conformist, his aim is to bring about change in society. Going by this, the "socio politically committed writer creates great work of art" and has the ability "to rise above the sociopolitical data and explores the inner man in all its rawness. Thus, he explores the human condition." (Agbasiere, 76). With this, the literary artist becomes a humanist portraying the human condition (in its entirety) as it is affected by repressive political structure. Although his work sounds political, he shows how politics and social realities affect the human condition. This is why Izevbaye remarks that 'as a humanist, a novelist can hardly deal with politics, society, or civilization without relating it to its effects on the human personality' (18).

The commitment of literary artist is one of writing to reflect the human condition in society. This reflection highlights "the good, the bad and the ugly" realities that are visible in society (Ogbeide, 1). Literature as a reflection of life is a potent and of course a reliable artistic form with accurate portrayal of social realities. The literary artist subscribes to literature to portray among other things, the human condition in society. With this mode of apprehending reality, literature becomes a humanistic tool in the hand of the writer to project the exactitude of the human condition. Literary and social commitments of the writer set him

apart not only as a social commentator but also as a social righter. Thus the writer's social commitment makes him "get involved in the efforts to make society a better place to live in". (Agbasiere, 71). Committed literary writers concern themselves with what they think should be changed in society. They do not just write in vacuum; they commit themselves into projecting the anomalies in the social milieu. As such, they become writers in politics as Ngugi puts it that "every writer is a writer in politics. The only question is what and whose politics?" (Preface). The idea of politics here is an idiom of the writer's social and political stands and his perspective on sociopolitical realities.

Military Literature

Military literature captures the despotic, tyrannical and repressive realities that characterize military rule. Military rule is a postcolonial reality in Nigeria and Africa at large. This ugly political reality brought about a form of literature otherwise referred as military literature. Works under this categorization explicitly set out to capture the ordeal of military in the political scene of the Nigerian nation. Hence, military themes are not far-fetched in them. Many writers like, Helon Habila, Tanure Ojaide, Wole Soyinka, Chimamanda Adichie, Remi Raji, Samuel Kolawole, Joy Chinwokwu, among others, wrote about the unfortunate intervention of the military in politics. These writers subscribed to the three genres of literature, poetry, drama, and prose to engage the oppressive and tyrannical tendencies of the military. Many of them did this at the expense of their lives. Many like Wole Soyinka, Chris Anyanwu, among others, were incarcerated. Some fled the country to escape incarceration. Some like Ken Saro Wiwa, Dele Giwa, etc, were killed. Despite the overwhelming situation then, writers continued to write to decry the evil that characterized the despotic regimes. There are also post military era writers, who began to write after the walls of tyranny and despotism have been brought down. These writers, many of whom had personal experiences of the military dictatorship, write to reflect on the realities of the era. For some of them, it is more like chronicling the realities of the time as they seem relevant to the present democratic dispensation.

Military literature is an aspect of political literature that spotlights on the intrigues of military takeover of government. The logic here is the way literary artists respond to the reality of military incursion into politics particularly in Africa where it was a notorious political tradition. Historically, by 1960 many African countries had gained independence and most of them had their self-rule stillborn as they plunged into coups and counter coups. It was as if the soldiers were waiting for the colonialists to leave in order to strike. These coups ushered in a new model of politics by boot and guns. The realities in many African countries depicted the creation of the living dead. Suffering, brutality, oppression, incarceration, killings, among others, became the norm.

In Nigeria, it was a tale of woe. Soon, the literature of the time changed to portraying all the perceived tyranny and oppression occasioned by the military. Some of these literatures turned out to be autobiographical and fictional. In a way, military literature shares semblance with war literature with regards to its economy of death. War literature for one thing foregrounds the consequences and politics of warfare with its attendant economy of death, that of the disposable lives at the periphery. Military literature, in its reality of death and suffering, particularly in the locus of the postcolony, tilts towards war literature. Thus literary documentation about military despots like Idi Amin (Uganda), Sani Abacha (Nigeria), Ibrahim Babangida (Nigeria), Jean-Bedel Bokassa (Central African Republic), Mobutu Sese Seko (Democratic Republic of Congo), Omar al-Bashir (Sudan), to mention but few, could not be differentiated from civil war scenario given the suffering, violence and death that characterized their regimes. Works with this commitment are what Ogunjimi tags as 'war and military literature' (93).

Writing after the military era, Kolawole looks in retrospect to spotlight on the evils of military dictatorship and its attendant suffering on the people. His short story collection *The Book of M*, aptly captures the traumatizing aspects of the militarization of Nigeria. The collection foregrounds the suffering that characterized the daily experiences of the people occasioned by the military. Kolawole, through this short

story collection, joins other Nigerian writers to decry the evils of the military and how they perpetuate suffering, oppression and disillusionment on the people. Earlier writers, most of whom subscribed to the novel, used their works to tell in one voice the single story of the military incursion into politics. However, Kolawole's work, engaging the same narrative does it uniquely. Thus, the focus of this work is to explore how Kolawole uses a collective voice to tell the single story of the military in Nigeria. He does this through the different stories as he creates characters, who, through their different experiences accentuate the politics of suffering that characterized the military rule in Nigeria. The short story collective voiceness is seen in its logic of foregrounding multiple nodes of the same reality, thereby reinforcing the exactitude and magnitude of the actual experience. Through the different stories in Kolawole's collection, one is able to see the different dimensions of the experiences of the people during the military rule. This transcends the logic of, say, a single story like the novel (for the novel at best offers a single story of lengthy narration); the short story has the tendency of presenting the reader with different experiences, characters, settings, narrations, and realities though in short length.

The short story is a literary mode with overwhelming searchlight on sociopolitical permutations in society. As a form of prose fiction, it bears semblance with the novel. The novel and the short story considering their viability in portraying reality have been "mostly deployed by writers in trying to expose the abnormalities inherent in the neo-colonial establishment" in the country's political structure (Agho, 25). The short story, just like the novel, has been notably used by writers to examine the post-independence realities of betrayal, military dictatorship and neo-colonialism which have become the norms in the African postcolony.

The Postcolony and the Reality of Suffering

The logic of the postcolony is that of landscapes which had antecedence of colonial subjugation. According to Mbembe, the "postcolony identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization and the violence which the colonial relationship involves" (102). Commenting on the intricacies of the post colony, Mbembe further states that "the postcolony is characterized by a distinctive style of political improvisation, by a tendency to excess and lack of proportion, as well as by distinctive ways identities are multiplied, transformed, and put into circulation.... The postcolony is also made up of a series of corporate institutions and a political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence" (102). Nigeria is a metaphor of the postcolony. Postcolonial reality of military intervention in politics and its ambivalence of suffering, violence and death suggests a postcolonial reality of Nigeria as a postcolony of terror where human dignity and values are suspended in the face of oppression, tyranny and despotism. This political decay, invariably informs the abnormality of the military incursion into politics. Suffering thus, becomes a trope that permeates the stories in Kolawole's collection. This is evident in the various experiences of the characters in the short stories. The metaphor of suffering in the collection indeed amplifies the author's concern about the unfortunate experiences of the people during the military era.

The military plundering of Nigeria's sociopolitical system is seen as a postcolonial tendency in the Nigerian postcolony. The post colony according to Mbembe is chaotic. Perennial rule of the military in Nigeria, and of course, many African countries, depicts postcolonial regimes with full blast despotic and repressive machinations. This was a period of colonialism in new order, when black imperialists occupied the echelon of power with guns, decrees and death machines. Thus, a postcolonial regime "is by its very character, a repressive machine. Its very being, in its refusal to break with the international and national structures of exploitation, inequality and oppression, gradually isolates it from the people. Its real power base resides not in the people but in imperialism and in the police and army" (Ngugi, 163).

Suffering, considered from the stark reality of contemporary human condition, is the outcome of traumatizing human experiences arising from such tendencies that undermine human dignity and value. It denotes in its literal sense, the experience of pain, distress and hardship undergone by people. Suffering as a

post-independence reality in Nigeria arose from the tendencies of the political class who hide under the guise of politics to perpetuate poverty and disillusionment on the people which invariably had its effects on the psyche of the nation. Post-independence realities in Nigeria and Africa by extension are testaments of the pain, anguish and hardship that the people have and still continue to go through. Nigeria, barely some years after independence, witnessed the incursion of the military into politics. This singular event brought about myriads of sociopolitical issues in the Nigerian state. Its effects are felt all across the different sectors of the Nigerian state.

The attempt here is to look at the sociopolitical and psychological dimensions to the trope of suffering, oppression and tyranny in Kolawole's *The Book of M*. As a writer, Kolawole concerns himself with the different forms in which oppression, anguish, suffering and tyranny reared their heads during military rule in Nigeria. He does this by subscribing to "the most convenient means of reporting upon life and of underscoring such reporting by an expressive point of view" (Irele, 71). *The Book of M* is characteristically a literary piece with accurate portrayal of the human condition under a tyrannical and necropolitical regime. It is an impressive short story collection with adequate treatment on the dilemma, suffering, oppression, anguish, and death occasioned by military dictatorship in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Suffering as a deep-seated reality in postcolonial Africa and Nigeria in particular has raised series of concerns. The reality of suffering considered from political violence and dysfunction is a postcolonial issue whose logic engenders excruciating pain in the psyche of its victims, the disposable lives at the periphery. The economy of suffering breeds death and produces both the living dead and the mortal dead. This makes Mbembe's Necropolitics, a theory of the living dead appropriate as a theoretical guide for this essay. The living dead and the mortal dead divides of a necropolitical state inform the nature of its politics. As a postcolonial theory, Necropolitics states that the "ultimate expression of sovereignty resides in the power and capacity to dictate who may live and who must die" (Mbembe, 11).

The living dead logic of Necropolitics establishes the stark reality of deprivation and suffering at the centre of human condition in a necropolitical state. Mbembe thus, interrogates the nexus of suffering and death in the process of making die and letting live. Suffering within the ambit of political calculation, and of course, the outcome of such politics, reveals the logic of human commodity (the reduction of the human body to mere commodity marked by its disposability, abandonment and destructibility) that characterizes a repressive regime. The relationship between suffering and death goes beyond the former being in many cases a precursor to the latter. It portrays how they reconfigure the human body through 'violence of negativity' (Mbembe, 14) which allows the oppressed to be stripped of their human dignity as they become the very subjects of tyranny. According to Wallace, Mbembe's conception of necropolitics builds upon both Foucault and Agamben's approach to biopower. For Agamben, biopower and the exercise of sovereignty create the 'bare life'; for Foucault, biopower, the real outcome of biopolitics works on the approximation of politics to the economy of life. Necropolitics for Mbembe, centres on the contemporary violence and oppression within the very space of the postcolony. Necropolitics "account[s] for the various ways in which, in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*." (Mbembe, 40).

The Book of M: An Overview

The Book of M is a short story collection with clear exposition on military tyranny, avarice and postcolonial atrocities. It is indeed an inward-looking narrative on the postcolonial atrocities in the Nigerian postcolony. This book spotlights on the phases of disillusionment, disorientation, betrayal and plundering perpetuated by the military incursion into Nigerian politics.

The stories are in-depth portrayal of the suffering, oppression, poverty, depression, abuses, killings and predicaments of the people under the military rule. Many of the stories in this collection vividly capture the experiences of the masses as victims of oppression, violence, abuse, brutality, corruption and tyranny of the

military rule in Nigeria. The stories have similar treatment on the military high-handedness, brazenness and repressive rule. Kolawole's preoccupation in this short story collection is perhaps laudable. He tries to project the "creeping anomie that threatens our collective national effort at greatness" (Olaopa1). *The Book of M* is indeed a meditation on the suffering and the disillusionment of the post-independence Nigeria, a nation beclouded by the suffocation of military despotism. The stories in the collection have comparable tone in ascertaining the untoward and unimaginable atrocities of the military rule in Nigeria.

Politics of Suffering in Kolawole's *The Book of M*

For the purpose of this work, the short stories are selected to portray the thematic treatments relevant to this work. It is interesting to know that all the stories in the collection begin with letter "M" and this may inform why Kolawole gives the collection such a probing title.

"My Meat was Tough, My Blood was Bitter," centres on the horrible experience of two school teachers, Sisi and Ngozi, who, like others, become victims of men in the military as they are killed for ritual. The story in a way amplifies the mystic and diabolical dimension of despotism and how the military rule in Nigeria makes of its population the living dead as well as the mortal dead. Sisi and Ngozi, together with others in their predicament, become sacrificial lambs, the very bare lives offered for the life and tenure elongation of the Commander-in-chief. "What is meant to be a midnight excursion begins [their] journey of no return" (*The Book of M*: End note). The story by extension captures the predicaments of the masses as they struggle to survive in a society full of social and economic ruins. Two blocs of people in the society are pitched against each other: Ngozi and her friend Sisi, who represent the impoverished masses that struggle hard to eke out a living, and the military and their bootlickers like Chief Ekponta, who go about spending money lavishly on frivolities. Sisi's remark on this is poignant as she says that:

Soldiers always offer the highest price. They are money bags. They actually distribute money in sacks. I heard the Head of state once called the mint company in the early hours of the morning to print money for him because he wanted to prove to a hooker that money is heavy. The soldiers who carried the sacks were sweating like Christmas goats (*The Book of M*, 23).

Military recklessness is in contrast to the hardship and suffering that plague the people. The economic and social injustice against the masses is seen in the disparate economic strength of the masses and the military men. Government workers are paid meager and ridiculous salary while the military government prints and lavishes money recklessly. The teachers work to earn two thousand naira as salary which is nothing compared with what a soldier spends on alcohol and pleasure in a night. The narrator excruciatingly reveals that:

The government paid them [teachers] two thousand naira, minimum wage, a level they attained after about two months of strike action for salary increment, after the workers marched to town, singing solidarity songs and offering up prayers to the God who answereth by Holy Ghost fire to intervene against injustice and oppression; this protest started with peaceful intentions but ended in an attack with tear gas and the discharge of bullets, which killed the national union of teachers president and seven others in front of the state secretariat (*The Book of M*, 15).

"My meat was tough, My blood was bitter" aptly describes the hardship and death of the masses as they grope under the cruel touch of poverty, suffering and anguish. The outcome of this is a sort of desperation for a better life by hook or by crook. Hence, this pushes school girls and even women into prostitution. They do this not for the gratification, but to eke out a living in order to survive the economic hardship in the nation. Thus, for survival sake, the end justifies the means. The story is a reflection of the excesses of the military politically and economically. It is a story of hopelessness, poverty, anguish, suffering, injustice, decadence and oppression. The predicament of Ngozi and Sisi, the two teachers aptly show the ordeals of the people during the repressive and self-absorbed military rule.

"My boyfriend who went to Germany" takes the form of an epistolary narrative. The style here is a deliberate attempt by the author to capture the suffocating experiences of the people through the exposition of

letters between two lovers. It centres on the experiences of two lovers, Candy and Henry and their series of letters that project a sordid reflection on the situation and living condition in the nation during the military rule. The story portrays the lopsided and anomalous situations in the nation and their attendant suffering and hardship. Commenting on the state of the nation, Candy in her letter to Henry writes that:

Even the blind know we are suffering in this country. Most people can't even afford to eat two meals a day. There are no jobs, no power supply, and the roads are bad. The whole country is languishing in poverty while the soldiers and their bootlickers are living large. They throw big parties, fly prostitutes into the country from India and spend the country's money as though it grows on trees (*The Book of M*, 60-61).

The anomaly in the society is portrayed in the untold hardship and suffering that the people go through. The social system is bastardized. Dividend of good governance is non-existent. Social amenities are grounded and every aspect of the economy is dysfunctional. The nation is plunged into the vicissitudes of strike, fuel scarcity, and bastardised educational system, unemployment, inflation, among others. Candy in her letter remarks that:

The Nigeria Labour Congress started a general strike three days ago to protest the state of the economy. University lecturers, civil servants and even petrol tanker drivers are on strike. The roads are deserted, cars are either parked on roadsides or abandoned on queues at petrol stations (*The Book of M*, 62).

There is a portrayal of a country where every socio economic progress is in limbo because of the mediocrity, visionlessness and selfishness of the leaders that pilot its affairs. Kolawole's disposition is a brilliant attempt to explore and expose the political, social and economic failures that were prevalent in Nigeria during the heydays of military rule. He portrays these and their psychosocial effects on the people who are disillusioned and fixated on anguish and suffering.

Candy's epistles to her boyfriend, Henry aptly reveal the quandary of the people under a repressive rule. There is total relapse in the progress of the nation. Candy tries to inform her boyfriend, Henry who is in Germany about the sociopolitical oddities bedeviling the nation. The letters become a solace for her to ease herself of the trauma induced by military tyranny and at the same time expose the vicissitudes occasioned by the military rule. She becomes a typical living dead together with others in the nation who have been plundered and rendered hopeless and helpless due to the failures of the military. The nation has become a common place for all sorts of social vices. Soldiers beat "people on the street and in their homes and people are disappearing mysteriously" coupled with the fact that "several foreign countries have placed sanctions on us demanding democracy and a return to civil rule" (*The Book of M*: 67). Suffering and hardship of course become the common experiences of the people. The national life is in a state of decline and dysfunction because of series of strike actions. The government cares less about the predicament of the people. Candy demonstrates this that:

The strike is still on and people are starving. You can't buy enough food because they are too expensive. The market women blame it on the high cost of transportation. NEPA too has gone on strike, so that the once erratic power supply has now become a scarce commodity. While it's dark, we light candles. And even the price of candles has gone up. We can't use lanterns because of the scarcity of petroleum products. The strike has crippled the economy. (*The Book of M*, 66-67)

Police Brutality and the Reality of Suffering

"Memories and Penitence" combines in a complex and suspenseful way the story of unfulfilled love and repentance. On the surface, it is a story of love and penitence but on a closer look, it has a deep-seated reality of suffering and brutality. The story talks about a school boy and a girl, Anthony and Adaobi and their unfulfilled love. It is epistolary in form. "Memories and Penitence" beyond love can be seen as a short

narrative that chronicles the excesses, evils and corruption of the police. The police force is seen as a corrupt and decadent system; an institution bastardized by the brazenness, brutality and inhumanity of police officers in the way they oppress, brutalize, extort and unleash terror on the masses. The violence, brutality and corruption of the police are aptly foregrounded in this story. Adolphus, a police officer in the story depicts a struggling young man trying hard to survive. He comes into sudden affluence through corrupt means in the police force. Adolphus determines to be a policeman on account of his suffering and disillusionment with the belief that the daily illegal returns (bribe) collected by the police from motorists will in no time make him a rich man. His character is the portrait of a young man propelled by suffering to evil. His situation portrays everything that is wrong with a society where suffering and political decay are commonplace realities.

He ... noticed a traffic police man as he collected bribe from bus drivers before granting them passage through the intersection. The police officer wore a creased uniform and held a gun sling over his shoulder.... It was then that Adolphus decided to become a policeman. Why nurse empty dreams when I can wear a uniform, carry a gun and obtain money from drivers? (*The Book of M*, 90)

The story resonates with factual treatment that depicts the reality of police brutality, corruption and violence. Of course, one is not oblivious of how the police extort money from motorists and take bribe from criminals, the story accurately projects this evil. The police abet and collude with criminals. In his confession, Adolphus tells of how he was involved in the murder of an innocent man, whose wife was in labour in the hospital. Ironical, the man he murdered happens to be the only son of the priest he is making confession to. He narrates how he got much more enticed by the way police do collect money illegally from people.

Adolphus kept the image of the money-extorting police before him as he nursed the ambition of becoming a policeman. All he saw was the opportunity to make crumpled notes from the streets. However, not long after he had joined the police force and had risen through the ranks to become a station officer, then a Divisional police officer, things began to change for the better or so he thought. His prestige grew beyond his wildest dreams gifts poured in. Soldiers visited, carrying big sacks, sweating like Christmas goats. They would say the sack contained money and that it was for him and the boys for their service to the nation. Sometimes robbers would bring money. They would then tell him about their plans to rob three banks in a row.

The money was for him to look the other way (*The Book of M*, 98-99).

The story reveals the corruption at the core of the police force. As an agency of government with the responsibility of combating criminality, socio vices and corruption, the police ironically embody these anomalies.

The portrayal of the police in this short narrative, appropriately describes the reality of the Nigerian police force. The police in actual fact are a vital organ in the nation that should see to the safety of life and property of the people, but compromising this, such devastating experiences of insecurity, brutality, extortion, corruption, bribery, murder and abuse of human right become the order of the day. The police have degenerated to a crop of criminals, extortionists and mercenaries used to hunt down innocent citizens and protect the bad and criminally minded people. Hence, Solomon is deliberately taken as a scapegoat on the street to die in place of Paddy a notorious criminal.

Despotism and Suffering

The excesses, brutality and repression of the military is portrayed in "My short life military men and Sherlock Holmes". The story is the author's attempt at reflecting on the military high-handedness and brutality against the people. They are portrayed as sadists who take pleasure in the pain and suffering of the masses. They relish torturing and inflicting pain on the people. The military rule witnessed a time when the soldiers oppressed people with impunity. This period was characterized by gross violation of human rights by the military. In Nigeria, during the military rule, especially in the 80's and 90's, people lived in awe of soldiers because of their bully, violence and brutality. There were cases of soldiers deliberately shooting people while calling it accidental discharge. At the scene of an accident, in the story, instead of the soldiers to rescue the accident victims, they begin to threaten and harass the sympathizing public. The officer

demonstrates this when he says “I say who killed this man? I will take all of you to the barracks if someone does not speak now. If you try to escape, I will tell my boys to open fire” (*The Book of M*, 197).

“Mania” shares similar treatment with the commitment in “My short life, military men and Sherlock Holmes”. “Mania” centres on the moral recklessness and ruthlessness of the military. In this short story, the immoral and flirtatious life of military men is brought to limelight. The soldiers are portrayed as morally reckless. This is seen in Brigadier Maruwa, whose passion and dissipation for sex overrides sympathy and human feeling. He only sees in Remi, a mourning widow, a sexual ecstasy and the fact that the death of her husband is an opportunity for him to bed her.

Others felt sorrow for her; he felt something of physical longing. He had been struck by her nicely proportioned figure when Dakolo, her friend and one of Brigadier Maruwa’s mistresses first introduced her to him at a function. He had relished her contours and her plentiful posterior. Then he had been completely smitten by her. He had felt a tenderness for her that was impossible to describe. No doubt it was something carnal but it also much more than that. Thoughts of her filled his day. He saw her in dreams. She became the angel who rescued him from his nightmares. He moaned her name whenever he plunged himself into the girls he picked on campus (*The Book of M*, 206-207).

The death of Osas, Remi’s husband is a clear indication of the wickedness and ruthlessness of the military. “He was shot by a soldier” and they give a report that “it was an accidental discharge” (*The Book of M*, 209). This evil leaves Remi devastated and inflicted psychological pains on her even as Brigadier Maruwa tries to have a romantic relationship with her. It is traumatic for her that a soldier killed her husband and even worse to know that another military officer wants to use it as an opportunity to sexualize her. Consequently, the stories in this collection aptly describe a “response to the traumatic political and cultural changes since independence” which have overtly brought about painful experience to the people (BernthLindfors, 26). The nation’s plight since independence has been aggravated by the intervention of the military in politics.

The Book of M is a collection of stories with treatment on the disheartening and traumatizing experiences that Nigeria has passed through since independence. The book is more or less a faction taking into account the series of sociopolitical and economic dislocations in the country, which in effect have wrecked and disenchanted the people’s sense of better life after independence. The perceived disillusionment and disorientation of the people by successive repressive military rule is consequently an outcome of their unmitigated suffering.

The author’s commitment is chronicling the realities embedded in history of a nation plunged into utmost socio political crisis immediately after independence. Thus, Nigeria’s history politically has been a long journey punctuated by so many odds such as military tyranny, repression, brutality and suffering. The military presence in Nigerian politics has spelt doom for the masses and also brought about a gross betrayal of the people’s hopes and aspirations. The military messiahship mission to rescue the nation from the quagmire of visionless politicians never did any good but aggravated the ills and decadence they came to fight. Thus, military rule in Nigeria was a period of sociopolitical and economic doldrums in Nigerian history. It ushered in a politics appropriated on the threshold of suffering and death. Hence, from 1966 to 1999, Nigeria underwent a journey through the valley of the shadow of death.

The collection is preoccupied with stories that make the reader feel a sense of anger towards the unpleasant experiences of the people such as suffering, poverty, imprisonment, murder and rape. Kolawole in this book portrays through different short narratives the destiny of Nigeria, a nation trapped in the ordeals of military dictatorship. The stories in this collection though with different story lines and subject matters, conform together in their treatments of post independence military dictatorship in Nigeria. Hence, the book is a notable example of contemporary Nigerian short narratives that foreground the politics of death that plagued Nigeria after independence.

The book is a political narrative with focus on necropolitical dilemmas, sufferings, dislocations and disillusionments occasioned by the military incursion in Nigerian politics. In an interview with Myne Whitman at the Garden city literary festival in Port Harcourt, Samuel Kolawole comments that:

My primary goals as a writer (is) to invent good stories create believable characters and evoke emotions within my reader. I am of the belief that writing is not an end in itself but a means to an end; it must be with a purpose. I started the book with a theme in mind, tyranny in the 90's under military rule. I wanted to tell stories that had not been told before about that era. But then I discovered as I progressed that the subject of tyranny is not restricted to the military or a particular moment in history. So the scope simply expanded and the characters assumed their own lives. *The Book of M* is about oppression. It's about greed corruption and desire. It's about the repercussion of the choices we either make for ourselves or others make for us. It pretty much reveals the dark and unfortunate side of human experience (Whitman,np.).

The stories in the collection are full of exciting and spectacular factual events that are not far-fetched in the Nigerian socio political landscape. The Nigerian situation portrayed in this collection, is that of chaos and unprecedented political upheaval; a national space where "bullets replaced ballots as instrument of governance" and where "the pre-independence dream of a brave new world had turned into a nasty postcolonial nightmare" (Lindfors, 25).

Language and Style

The Book of M is a conscious artistic production stylistically woven. The title of the collection is incredibly stylistic. The 'M' in the title is a conscious stylistic representation of all the titles of the stories in the book. This is because all the stories in the book have titles starting with letter "M". Hence, it sounds strange and raises many questions in the mind of readers to come by the title *The Book of M*. Symbolically, the title can be said to symbolize a book on military necropolitics or better still a military literature since the overriding motif in the book is military tyranny and dictatorship. Indeed *The Book of M* depicts a vivid picture of the militarization of Nigeria and its attendant miseries.

Conclusion

This collection is thus, a literary documentary about the evils of the military rule in Nigeria. The tyranny of the military government is considered to be responsible for the suffering and disillusionment of the people. Hence, the military has been seen as an illegal political instrument that perpetuated unimaginable socio-political crises of suffering, oppression, despair, poverty, and disillusionment which have become perennial social issues in Nigeria. The stories in this collection portray Kolawole's proclivity for vividness and exactitude in foregrounding social and political realities. They, as such, amplify the very nature of the quotidian experiences of the masses as unfortunate victims of successive despotic neo-colonial governments not only in Nigeria, but also in Africa as a whole. This collection of short narratives aptly depicts the author as a contemporary Nigerian writer imbued with the very knowledge of the sociopolitical happenings in the Nigerian state.

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