

**JULIA ALVAREZ'S *IN THE TIMES OF BUTTERFLIES*: AN AGENCY OF
INTERROGATING "THE POSTCOLONY" IN THE CARIBBEAN**

MOSES AULE
DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND LITERARY STUDIES
AHMADU BELLO UNIVERSITY, ZARIA
KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA

Abstract

This paper offers a fresh perspective in reading postcolonial novels by Caribbean women writers by adopting Achille Mbembe's "On the Postcolony" (2001) as a model of postcolonial discourse. By doing this, the paper argues that postcolonial novels, as tools of resisting hegemony, a process of reclaiming the humanity of the oppressed and a mode of regaining the voice of the colonized people should go beyond deploying history in literary works as a means of writing to the exploiting-centre. It should also work out theoretical prototype for interrogating the inhibiting proclivities of the "forces within" which have and are still perpetuating social, economic and political violence on their people. Using Mbembe's model, the paper finds that the freed colonized people "...could continue to kill each other even without a *colonial* dictator to tell *them* to" (Alvarez 1997:336, our emphasis).

Conceptual Premise

The term 'postcolony' as a concept in postcolonial studies is, according to Ashcroft et al (175), associated with the work of the Francophone Cameroonian critic Mbembe. His overall interest encoded in the work "*On the Postcolony*" (2001), they maintain, is to account for how power and oppression actually work in the post-colonised states. The concern of this concept is to enable the colonized "to reflect broadly on the types of rationality used to rule men...since the end of direct colonization" (Mbembe24). It is set, therefore, to ask questions about the circumstances in which the activity of "regulating human behaviour (in other words, the activity of governing) has recently fallen from the hands of those supposed to be exercising it, paving the way not for some sort of revolution but for a situation of extreme material scarcity, uncertainty, and inertia" (Mbembe,24).

The notion of “postcolony” Mbembe (2001) expatiates, “identifies specifically a given historical trajectory – that of societies recently emerging from the experience of colonization (102). This historical trajectory, however, points not towards the colonizing powers as it does, to borrow from him, the mostly “chaotically pluralistic” colonized nations. It is essentially a simulacrum of the colonizing powers whose violent relationship is mimicked (almost directly) by the emerging crop of leaders handed down to the colonized. Based on this, the postcolony is therefore, “...a specific system of signs, a particular way of fabricating simulacra or reforming stereotypes.” (Mbembe, 102).

With this, it can be said that postcolony is not only marked by ‘mimicry’ as proposed by Bhabha (1994), but it also corresponds, in a straight line, with “...series of corporate institutions and political machinery that, once in place, constitute a distinctive regime of violence” (Mbembe 102). The institution of this sovereignty is, therefore, based on violence which, to all intents and purposes, destroys parity and negates the sense of nationhood. This reality has, in no small way, effaced or undermined the collective efforts of the colonized to establish and maintain the collective sense of dignity which the mechanism of colonialism had denied them.

The Postcolony as a Tool for Exploring the Banality of Power in the Caribbean

In effect, postcolony works within the architecture of state power in postcolonial state. Most of these postcolonial states have inherited “the regime of impunity” (Mbembe 27) of the colonial power structure. Within this colonial structure are banality of power – that is, those elements of the “obscene and the grotesque” (Mbembe 102) that Mikhail Bakhtin (1970) claims, have been “located in ...all systems of domination”. The concern with this power structure and its overbearing consequences are captured in Julia Alvarez’s *In the Times of Butterflies*. The novel

brings to light, and by so doing, criticizes the traumatic regime of power in the Dominican Republic during the thirty-five years rule of Trujillo.

Set in 1934, the novel foregrounds various forms of violence perpetuated by the government of Trujillo and how it reshapes the consciousness of the people. This situation captures the strand of postcolonialism which maintains that “as the colonized become better educated and able to live as their white counterparts, they become increasingly imitative” of the lifestyle of the colonizers. The imitation projected in this novel is at the level of violence directed towards antagonizing and repressing in order to dominate the people for the purpose of legitimizing supremacy. First, the novel unveils how Trujillo’s government mimics colonial sovereignty that rested on three sorts of violence. Following Mbembe’s (2001) formulation, the first level of violence is “the founding violence” the sort that helped to create the space over which it is exercised. This sort of violence which “regarded itself as the sole power to judge its laws – whence its one-sidedness, especially as to adopt Hegel’s formulation, its supreme right was (by its capacity to assume the act of destroying) simultaneously the supreme denial of right”.

In a dialogue between Maria Teresa and Minerva, this metaphor of vindictiveness, first, of the colonial regime and then of the post-colonial Dominican state (both of which indicate the supreme right to kill) are juxtaposed in order to show that violence against the Caribbean people is an “authorizing authority...designed to ensure *its* maintenance, spread, and permanence” (Mbembe, 25 my emphasis). This is captured thus:

I sympathized with our patriots. But what could we do against the Yanquis? They killed anyone who stood on their way. They burned our houses down...
The way we Dominicans do, eh? Minerva said with sarcasm in her voice...
Maria was silent a moment...at last she added, you’re right, they’re all scoundrels – Dominicans, Yanquis, every last man (75).

By pointing to this institutionalization of violence in the Caribbean, the novel – *In the Times of Butterflies*, reveals its subjectivity – to show how the Caribbean society has “inherited this...regime of impunity that was its corollary” (Mbembe26).

Because it is “intrinsic to all system of domination” (Bakhtin, 1970), banality of power is, therefore, “...the predictability of routine if only because it is made up of repeated daily actions and gestures” (Mbembe 3). In this sense, banality in the postcolony implies such mechanism of state that dramatizes subjection and subjugation. Projecting this imagery of banality in the novel, Minerva laments:

I see a *guardia*, and I think, who have you killed. I hear a police siren, and I think who is going to be killed... I see the picture of our president with eyes that follow me around the room, and I am thinking he is trying to catch me doing something wrong (57).

This fear is symptomatic of a society webbed in a socio-political world which has been “turned into a part of people’s common sense not only by instilling it in the minds of the *cibles*, or target population” (Foucault 1989) but also by “integrating it into the period’s consciousness” (Mbembe 3). This consciousness is often realized through brutality aimed towards stifling resistance. As Mbembe puts it:

In a postcolony, the *commandement* seeks to institutionalize itself, to achieve legitimation and hegemony, in the form of a fetish. The signs, vocabulary, and narratives which the *commandement* produces are meant not merely to be symbols; they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart or challenge (103).

Narrating the experiences of Sinita in the novel “whose body began to shake all over with sobs...” (33) as she relates how such brutal incidents affected her family, Minerva reports:

It took some coaxing, but finally she began. She told me stuff I didn’t know about her. I thought she was always poor, but it turned out her family used to be rich and important. Three of her uncles were even friends of Trujillo. But they turned against him when they saw he was doing bad things (33).

In the words of Sinita: "...my uncles, they had a plan to do something to Trujillo, but somebody told on them, and all three were shot, right on the spot" (33).

The killing of these people, as Sinita narrates, is not only symbolic. As quoted above, "they are officially invested with a surplus of meanings that are not negotiable and that one is officially forbidden to depart or challenge". This is demonstrated in the novel, as Sinita relates; "people who opened their big mouths didn't live very long...like my uncles...then my father...then this summer, they killed my brother" (34-35). As captured by Schatzberg (1988) to ensure that no one challenges them, "the champions of state power invent entire constellations of ideas; they adopt a distinct set of repertoire and powerfully evocative concepts." To advance this position, Mbembe (104) adds; "...they also resort, if necessary, to the systematic application of pain." It is the entrenchment of this inhibiting strategy in the Dominican Republic that Sinita decries: "Trujillo is having everyone killed" (36).

To show that "literature has a bearing on society" (Harris, 37), the gamut of this novel is held together by the tissue of antagonism that foreshadows the atmosphere of gloom in the Dominican Republic during the regime of Trujillo. This atmosphere does not only create fear among Dominicans but, in so many ways, dehumanized them. As captured by Dedé,

my family had not been personally hurt by Trujillo, ...but others had been suffering great losses. There were the Perozos, not a man left in that family. And Mertinez Reyna and his wife murdered in their bed, and thousands of Haitians massacred at the border, making the river, they say, still run red – IAY, Dios Santo! (70).

The point here is that, in the specific historical context of domination and subjection, "the postcolony neither *minces words nor spares its words*. Indeed, the purest expression of the *commandment* is conveyed by a total lack of restraint, a greater delight too in getting really dirty" (Mbembe, 108, my emphasis). This position is justified as the novel is replete with occasions where Trujillo orders his police to arrest all dissenters, many of whom are killed.

Attesting to this, Papa laments "... I know of at least three of Virgilio's friends who have disappeared" (107). Decrying this obscenity of power in the Dominican Republic, Dedepoints that, "...the regime was going insane, issuing the most ludicrous regulations...this was an absurd and crazy regime..." (94).

Lending credence to the banality of power in the regime, Trupe (2011) asserts that: "Trujillo does not forgive offenses" (37). This assertion is illustrated in the novel when

Minerva was getting her law degree...The whole Mirabal – Rayes-Fernández-González-Tavárez – clan gathered for the occasion. It was a pretty important day – Minerva was the first person...to have gone through university. What a shock, then, when Minerva got handed the law degree but not the license to practice. Here we all thought El Jefe had relented against our family ...But really what he was planning all along was to let her study for five years only to render her degree useless in the end. How cruel! (160).

Deprecating the puzzling nature of this new political order in the Caribbean, Alvarez's novel, as a testament of political cruelty, becomes lucid when Minerva declares: "this little Tyrant's torturing us" (159). The novel, therefore, is not just an indictment of the Caribbean leadership, it is essentially a symbolic portrayal of "modern colonial" literature – one held bound by "the emergent national bourgeoisies" (Ngugi 57).

Pointedly, the seizure of Minerva's license is not only the result of her refusal to yield to Trujillo's regime characterized by seductiveness, it is in another way an avenue "to exercise authority ...to tire out the bodies of those under it, to disempower them not so much to increase their productivity as to ensure their maximum docility" (Mbembe, 110). In Minerva's words "...this regime is seductive. How else would a whole nation fall prey to this little man?" (113). One feature common with Trujillo that makes young girls prey to him is that he "wouldn't take no for an answer" (38). He does not only follow under age school girls like Lina but compels their schools to also offer them certificates without having to complete their education. As captured in the novel,

For her seventeenth birthday, Trujillo threw Lina a big party in a new house he had built outside Santiago. Lina went away...weeks went by, and Lina didn't return. Finally, the Sisters made an announcement that Lina Lovetón would be granted her diploma by government orders in *absentia* (39).

When Minerva complains that:

Trujillo is married...How can he have Lina as a girlfriend?
Papá looked at me a long time before he said; He's got many of them, all over the island, set up in big, fancy houses... (40)

For Minerva to deny Trujillo her body, therefore, is to deny him his "...national treasure" (116); and to deny him the right to conquer her "...as El Conquistador conquered our Island" is tantamount to breaking the law. This, on the whole, is because as Papá whispered, "Trujillo is the law" (107). This follows Mbembe's proposition that in a postcolony, "sovereignty was its own end and came with its 'instruction for use' ...it introduces virtually infinite permutations between what was just and what was unjust, between right and not-right...Anything that did not recognize this...that contested it...was...outlawed" (26). On the basis of this, since Minerva is "not bedding down with him" (130), El Jefe, aside having her father tortured and disfigured with "such a pitiful sight. His face ... gaunt, his voice shaky; his once fancy *guayabera*...soiled..." (130) (an event that led to his eventual death) had her license to practice the law profession withheld. This agrees with Mbembe's (2001) summation that in a postcolony, "...the male ruler's pride in possessing an active penis has to be dramatized, through sexual right over subordinates, the keeping of concubines and so on..." (110).

This absurdity is further seen in ways through which the people are deprived of their fundamental rights – the freedom of association. This restriction is done, as is common with postcolony, to ensure that "no...challenge takes place" (Mbembe 103) in the country. Consequent upon this, the fictitious world of Alvarez's *In the Times of Butterflies* adopts Miller's (1978) position and "...describes the fortunes of an emergent country" (75). The truth of this emergent

politics, Miller emphasises, “is that they are a charade” (75). Following this line of argument, therefore, *In the Times of Butterflies* reflects the travails of these “...derelict men in the derelict island” (Naipaul 190). This travail is captured in the novel when Trujillo passes “...a new law... If you were caught harbouring any enemies of the regime even if you yourself were not in their schemes, you would be jailed, and everything you owned would become the property of the government” (191).

In pursuit of this obscene law, the novel graphically records moments when the SIM – the security stooge of Trujillo, as Dede recounts, overrun their house in search of Pedrioto and Nelson who they suspect have affinity with some dissenting elements opposed to the government. In her words:

Mate...and Leandro had been asleep just couple of hours when they had a knock that didn't wait for an answer. The SIM had broken down the door of their apartment stormed inside, roughed up Leandro, carried him away. Then they ransacked the house, ripped open the upholstery on the couch and chairs and drove off in the new Chevrolet...

They tore the house apart, hauling away the doors, windows, the priceless mahogany ...all of it violated, broken, desecrated, destroyed. Then they set fire to what was left (217-218).

Lamenting, Dedé posits, “...they'd been living in this hell of terror and dreadful anticipation” as “...Everyday there were more and more arrests. The lists in the newspapers grew longer” (221). Worst still is that “there was nothing...anyone could do” (222).

Devastated by this spate of dehumanization and gross violation of human rights, Padre Gabriel cries out, “All human beings are born with rights derived from God that no earthly power can take away...To deny these rights is a grave offence against God, against the dignity of man...” (233).

Dissidence and Heroism: A Reprobation of the Postcolony in the Caribbean

In the words of Nawal El Saadawi (172) “...the *dissident*...means the fighter who cooperates with others to struggle against oppression and exploitation, whether personal or political.” The word ‘dissidence’, therefore, underscores a latent human drive which, on a social basis, shows “...responsibility towards oneself and others...” (Saadawi,172). Conscious of this, Julia Alvarez’s *In the Times of Butterflies* offers a gaze at the struggles that arise when power and power structure conspire to smudge in order to disrupt “...accepted notions of community” (Ink, 789).

Through this novel, Alvarez rekindles one of the finest moments in the history of the Caribbean when citizens – abandoning their ambition, their families, and ultimately, themselves – struggled, in spite of all odds, against dictatorships that characterized the post-independent Caribbean states (especially the Dominican Republic, Cuba and Haiti). Alvarez’s role, from the beginning, has been, to use Fanger’s (1975) analogy “...that of the writer as witness who testifies to the truth s/he has lived, seen and discovered” (164, my emphasis). In all variety of its form, that testimony remains social both in its referents and in the effects it seeks to (re)produce. The purpose, in this regard, is to show how gender – a social constructed phenomenon – was decimated and by so doing produced women with admirable tenacity who, by giving themselves up, provided the impetus for political dissidence during the brutal regime of Trujillo.

The story is about the Mirabals – three beautiful, convent-educated sisters – who, to borrow from Harris (1978), “...find themselves placed within a dangerous...reactionary treadmill” (33). Dissatisfied with this reactionary regime which, Dedé asserts, “was...absurd and crazy...” and hence, “...had to be brought down!” (94), they undertook a salient and purposeful

agitation aimed towards achieving this goal. This struggle, therefore, provides and extends the plot of the novel.

Several reasons account for this disenchantment. First, Trujillo monopolizes the country by making “...his handsome son, Ramfis... a full colonel in the army since he was four years old” (44). Also, “...all the streets are named after Trujillo’s family...” (152). In a satirical manner, “Minerva told a joke about how to get to Parquet Julia Molina from Carretera El Jefe...” (152). In her words:

You take the road of El Jefe across the bridge of his youngest son to the street of his oldest boy, then turn left at the avenue of his wife, walk until you reach the park of his mother and you’re there (152).

This act of inscribing his name on national monuments and institutions accentuates Mbembe’s (2001) position, which holds that in a postcolony, “the state was embodied in a single person, the president” (105).

Further to this and most eminent too, is that Trujillo puts the entire country in absolute fear and hence, becomes an object of reverence. As Minerva relates,

It was our country’s centennial year. We’d been having celebrations and performances ever since Independence Day on February 27th... That’s how my family got around having to give some sort of patriotic affair to show their support of Trujillo...

It wasn’t just my family putting on a big loyalty performance, but the whole country...our history now followed the plot of a Bible. We Dominicans had been waiting for centuries for the arrival of our Lord Trujillo on the scene (41).

Putting himself on a par with some revered Bible figures in the catholic faith like Mary, Minerva explains, “last time at the party at Hotel Montana, we got paper fans with the Virgencita on one side and El Jefe on the other” (108). In yet another instance, the elevation of Trujillo to the status of God is brought to the fore when, in responding to Minerva’s wish that “We’ll be in Puerto Plata by noon. *Si Diosquiere*...the young soldier’s head nod in agreement – until he added, ‘God and Trujillo willing’” (320).

This status of lordship is heightened by the imposition of the law that everyone should hang Trujillo's picture in their houses. Anyone who opposes this command finds himself in trouble. A point in hand is Don Horacio, "...who is in trouble with the police because he won't do things he's supposed to do, like hang a picture of our president in his house" (56). This is in line with Mbembe's position that life in the postcolony requires "...adherence to the innumerable official rituals...such as wearing uniforms and carrying the party card, making public gestures of support and *hanging portraits of the autocrat in one's home*" (108, my emphasis).

Worst of all, and in agreement with Mbembe's proposition above, is that in order to perpetuate himself in office Trujillo outlaws opposition party (94) and enforces a one party state in the Dominican – the Dominican Party. And, as Dedé affirms, "...belonging to the party was an obligation unless, of course...you wanted trouble for yourself and your family" (95). This means, therefore, that they had no hope of having the firm dictatorial grip of Trujillo loosened by going to the polls. Expressing her frustration, Minerva quarrels that "...this country hasn't voted for anything in twenty-six years..." (159).

It is worthy of note, however, that as Trujillo is administering a torturous regime in the Dominican Republic, Fidel Castro of Cuba was also working hard towards deposing Fulgencio Batista, whose party (the Authentic Party) "...riddled with corruption, had betrayed the ideals of the Revolution of 1934 when it came to power in an overthrow of the Machado dictatorship" (Prevost, 19). As reflected in the novel:

they had just tuned into Radio Rebelde to hear the New Year's news, and they had been greeted by the triumphant announcement that Batista had fled! Fidel, his brother Raul, and Ernesto they call Che had entered Havana and liberated the country. *¡Cuba Libre! ¡Cuba libre!* (175).

It is, therefore, the aggregate of these (among other factors) that eventually resulted in the political dissidence captured in the novel – the collective struggle to oust Trujillo from the

misappropriated leadership in the Dominican. As Patria puts it “...so it was between these walls hung with portraits, including El Jefe’s, that the Fourteenth of June Movement was founded. Our mission was to offer an internal revolution rather than wait for an outsider rescue” (193). Even though “...there had been demonstrations at the university, led by young professors, all members of Communist Party” (90), the one headed by the Mirabals’ – “the national underground”, is the most potent of all as it has “...enough guns to start a revolution” (165).

This effort, however, is not without sacrifice – of properties, of families, of freedom, and above all, of lives. This is why Saadawi (176) posits that “...the dissident is punished and cursed like the devil...” because s/he has “...become the symbol of...disruption of the existing order”. Consequent upon this, Trujillo’s dictatorship snowballs to include hunting down and killing dissenters, rampant imprisonment, and desecration of the church. In one instance, Patria reports:

The campus is buzzing with the horror story. Disappearance happens every week, but this time, it’s someone who used to teach here. Also, Galindez had already escaped to New York so everyone thought he was safe. But somehow El Jefe found out Galindez was writing a book against the regime. He sent agents offering him a lot of money for it – \$25,000, I’ve heard – but Galindez said no. Next thing you know, he’s walking home one night, and he disappears. No one has seen or heard of him since (159).

In justifying his actions, Trujillo warns that “the university is...full of communists and agitators who want to bring down the government...But we’ve been teaching those teachers their lessons all right” (116). And because of the prevalence of dissidence in the university campus, Trujillo says he is “...thinking of closing the university” (117). The closure of this university would, therefore, mean closing down “...the first university in the New World” (117), which, to Minerva, “would be such a blow to the country” (117).

By expressing its discontentment with the regime, the church is also webbed in the collective struggle against Trujillo. As captured by Dedé, “the bishops had gathered together

earlier in the week and drafted a pastoral letter to be read from every pulpit...the church had at last thrown its lot with the people!” (234). The reason for this, as Padre da Jesus proclaims, is that “they could not wait forever...The time was now, for the Lord had said, I come with the sword as well as the plow to set at liberty them that are bruised” (189). Following this position, the church, in equal proportion, is to confront and be confronted with the fiery wrath of Trujillo. Therefore, in one of the instances, Dedé reports, “...down in the capital somebody had tried to assassinate the archbishop in the cathedral while he was saying mass” (234).

In yet another instance of Trujillo’s response to the church’s stance against his regime, Dedé explains further:

Sunday after the pastoral, we were visited by a contingent of prostitutes. When it was time for communion, there was such sashaying and swaying of hip to the altar rail you’ll have thought they were offering their body and blood, not receiving His. They lined up laughing, taunting Padre Gabriel by opening their mouths for the Sacred Host and making lewd gestures with their tongues. Then one of them reached for the chalice and helped herself.

This was like gunshot in our congregation...Then they marched off to the SIM to collect whatever...charge was for desecrating.

The following Sunday we arrived for the early mass and we couldn’t get in the door for the stench inside...they had come into the church the night before and deposited the content of latrines inside the confessional... (234-235).

The reason for this, no doubt, is to gag the church from prodding the people into revolting against the government. But because the church would not succumb, “the regime responded with full-force war...A campaign began in the papers to cancel the concordat with the Vatican. The Catholic Church should no longer have a special status in our country. The priests were only stirring up trouble. Their allegations against the government were lies” (245). Wondering on this overt display of Trujillo’s hatred for and confrontation with the church, Dedé laments, “The more I tried to concentrate on the good side of him, the more I saw a vain, greedy, unredeemed

creature. Maybe, the evil one has become flesh like Jesus! Goose bumps jumped all up and down my bare arms” (253).

As this is going on, individuals were also subjected to a wholesale deprivation and dehumanization either as a result of their involvement with or as masterminds of the struggle against Trujillo’s dictatorial regime. A case in point is the Mirabel sisters who feel they have no recourse but to engage in a full-scale revolution in order to “...slaughter the goat...” (308). As dissidents, they realize, as Saadawi (2007) would say, that:

every struggle has its own unique theory inseparable from action...you may be alone in the beginning, but somehow you feel responsibility toward yourself and others; towards those who are not yet aware of this discovery, who share your struggle; towards those who have lost hope and have submitted...All you can do is open up closed doors... (174).

This consciousness is brought to the fore when Dedé, admonishing Minerva, one of her sisters and head of the revolution, to “calm down...putting down Gandhi from the shelf” saying: “...being passive and gentle could be revolution...” (294). She objects by arguing that, “Today, Gandhi would not do. What I need was shot of Fidel’s fiery rhetoric” (294).

By this decision, the Mirabal sisters offer themselves as heroines in the struggle; willing to be “...the first to be killed in the battle” (Saadawi 176). Afraid of this decision, Dedé cautions them to “think of how many orphans you’d be leaving behind, how many widowers, a mother *de luto* for the rest of her life” (298). Aware of the efficacy of their action, El Jefe, on the other divide, confesses that “...My only two problems are the damn church and the Mirabal sisters” (315). Hence, speaking of Minerva, Dedé reveals that, “...rumours were everywhere. Trujillo wanted her killed...she was becoming too dangerous, the secrete heroine of the whole nation” (225). In this regard, the Mirabal sisters become symbolic, not just of courage and sacrifice – both being attributes of womanhood – but largely as emblems of patriotism. Hence, Dr Viñas,

speaking to Minerva says, "...What you can do is to keep our hopes up. You're an example, you know. The whole country looks to you" (307).

In response to this growing threat to his regime, Trujillo orders that the Mirabal sisters and other dissidents be spied upon. And when the SIM eventually came into the house, they "...scoured the property, dug up the fields, and found...buried boxes full of incriminating cargo...inflammatory materials..." (218). The Mirabal sisters and their husbands were, therefore, "...accused of being traitors" (275) and hence, apprehended. The reason for this, on the one hand, is to curtail the threatening activity of the "Politicals" (as they were called) and on the other, to subject them to punishment for daring the regime. Above all, as María Teresa observes "so that we politicals can be snuffed out just like that. A visit to La 40, that's all it takes. Look at Florentino and Papiliñ – I better stop" (255).

In spite of all these, the Mirabal sisters and their husbands are driven by the consciousness that they "cannot be dissidents without hope" (Saadawi 176). This consciousness is expressed by Manolo who, having been manhandled threatened and taunted by the prison guards "stood up as straight as he could and said, Comrades, we have suffered set back but we have never been beaten. Liberty or death!" (261).

In this regard, the experiences in Julia Alvarez's *In the Times of Butterflies* offer differing perspective from Mbembe's (2001) theoretical rhetoric which offers the postcolony as a passive space where the

dictator can go to sleep at night lured by roars of adulation and support only to wake up the next morning to find their golden calves smashed and their tables of law overturned. The applauding crowds of yesterday have become today a cursing, abusive mob...the process is fundamentally magical...it does not do violence to the *commandement's* material base (10).

In contradistinction to the above position, the novel projects passivity in the postcolony as a corollary of the mythicization of power by the dictator who creates and infuses fear in the psyche of his citizens. One of the ways they achieve this is by proliferating and empowering armed services and using same to hunt down oppositions. This institutionalized fear, in the context of the Dominican Republic, is captured by Dedé who affirms that, “we kept our sentences incomplete whenever we were criticizing the government inside the house. There were ears everywhere” (235). Commenting on this state of fear in the Dominican, María Teresa submits:

fear is the worst part. Every time I hear footsteps coming... I’m tempted to curl up in the corner like a hurt animal whimpering, wanting to be safe. But I know if I do that I’ll be giving in to a low part of myself, and I’ll feel even less than human. And that is what they want to do (255-256).

But when these agencies of domination and oppression are demystified, open-ended opposition and unhindered violence become the ultimate means of self-expression and self-rediscovery in the postcolony. Those who yield themselves to and eventually overcome these strategies of domination – torture, incarceration, deprivation and death (among others), are not only seen as superhumans but in the same token, provide the collective impetus for resistance. This is the case with the Mirabal sisters in Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of Butterflies*. Because she, together with her sisters, is able to overcome these, Minerva reports that she is “...elevated...to superhuman status...” (291). Following their tenacious efforts to “...challenge[d] our dictator” (291) (to use Minerva’s expression), the Dominican Republic ruptures into violence and hence, “...most families in Salcedo had at least one son or daughter or husband in prison” (293).

To limit their growing popularity with the people, and in order to douse the tension their imprisonment generates, the Mirabal sisters, as Minerva recounts, had their “...five year sentence ...commuted to house arrest. Instead of the restrictions of prison...had only a few rules to

obey...No trips, no visitors, no contact with politicals” (292-293). In spite of these, “the butterflies” as these Mirabal sisters are called “were not about to give up” (302). Pushed by the obstinacy of the Mirabal sisters and “...with everyone against him and no one left to impress, Trujillo didn’t have to hold himself back anymore” (300). He, therefore, orders the SIM, among other things, to kill the girls “...good and dead” (335). In keeping to this, the three sisters were killed. As Dedé confirms:

I saw the marks on Minerva’s throat; fingerprints sure as day on Mate’s pale neck.
They also clubbed them...
After they were done, they put the dead girls in the back of the jeep, Rufina in front...then pushed car over the edge (335).

By this, Alvarez foregrounds that the responsibility of a writer “... means trying to eradicate ...oppression” (Saadawi 176). And by (re)presenting the efforts of the Mirabal sisters, she implicated this by offering her subjectivity in *In the Times of Butterflies* – that there is something “...patriotic about how when you die for your country, you do not die in vain” (342). This is why these martyrs “...became icons, emblazoned on posters” (324). Because of their superhuman efforts, they are able to carve out their own niche in the history of their country. This is why when their bodies were carried in a truck “people came out of their houses...Many of the men took off their hats, the women made the sign of the cross. They stood at the very edge of the road, and when the truck went by, they threw flowers into the bed” (340).

Ultimately, their dreams of deposing Trujillo did not die with them; rather, it sparks fiercer momentum to the revolution. To this end, more Dominican people joined the revolution and barely a year later, Trujillo is killed. After his fall, the new government under the leadership of President Juan Bosch built a monument in honour of the Mirabals. This is the touching tribute to the influence and power of the butterflies.

Conclusion

At the heart of this paper is to argue that some Caribbean women writers, have very often, engaged in writing to question, and by so doing, criticize the attitude of the post-colonial leadership in their countries. In this regard, postcolonial novels have moved a step further from writing to the mainstream – which of course occupied the concern of early Caribbean writers – to more pressing needs of looking inward and interrogating political systems and the conundrum of leadership that have hindered the Caribbean people from forgetting their past and realizing their collective potentials. Hence, by reading Julia Alvarez's *In the Times of Butterflies* through Mbembe's postulation on the theory of the Postcolony, the paper maintains that the freed colonized people, if not constantly attacked through literary works, "...could continue to kill each other even without a *colonial* dictator to tell *them* to" (Alvarez 1997:336, my emphasis). The whole point in this work is to foreground that if you do not study your history, you are going to repeat it.

Works Cited

- Alvarez, J. *In the Times of Butterflies*. New York: Penguin Group, 1995. Print.
- Ashcroft, B. , Griffiths, G., and Tiffin, H. (2007). *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts*. 2nd Ed. London: Routledge, 2007. Print.
- Bakhtin, M. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. C. Emerson. Manchester: Manchester U. P, 1970. Print
- El Saadawi, N. "Dissidence and Creativity". Ed. Tejumola Olaniyan and Ato Quayson, *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (pp 274-277). Malden: Blackwell, 2007. Print.
- Fanger, G. "Solzhenitsyn: Art and Foreign Matter." in John B. Dunlop, Richard Haugh, and Alexis Klimoff. Eds. *Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: Critical Essays and Documentary Materials*. 2nd ed. (NY Collier Books, 1975), PP. 164-6, 1975. Print.
- Foucault, M. "Governmentality." In G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller, eds., *The Foucault Effect*. Chicago: University of Chicago U. P1991. Print.
- Harris, W. "Tradition and the West Indian Novels." In *critics on Caribbean Literature: Readings in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen, 1978. Print.
- Ink, L. C. "Remarking Identity, Unmaking Nation: Historical Recovery and the Reconstruction of in *In the Times of Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones*." In *Callaloo* 27.3 788-807, 2004. Print.

- Mbembe, A. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California U. P, 2001. Print.
- Miller, K. "V. S. Naipaul and the New Order: A View of *The Mimic Men*." In *Critics on Caribbean Literature: Readings in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen, 1978. Print.
- Naipaul, V. S. *The Middle Passage*. London: George Allen, 1962. Print.
- Ngugi W. T. "George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*." In *Critics on Caribbean Literature: Readings in Literary Criticism*. Ed. Edward Baugh. London: George Allen, 1978. Print.
- Provost, G. "Fidel Castro and the Cuban Revolution." In *The Faculty Journal of College of Saint Benedict and Saint Johnm's University*. Vol 24 (1), 19-33, 2012. Print.
- Trope, A. L. *Reading Julia Alvarez*. California: Greenwood, 2011. Print.