



INVISIBLE EYES AND VISIBLE BODIES: A FOUCAULDIAN CRITIQUE OF SURVEILLANCE AND CONTROL IN NOVIOLET BULAWAYO'S *GLORY*

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between surveillance, power, and social control in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*. Drawing on Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism, it explores how surveillance functions as a mechanism of discipline and authoritarian governance. Although *Glory* has received considerable scholarly attention for its political satire and allegorical portrayal of postcolonial Zimbabwe, its representation of surveillance has received limited critical attention. Addressing this gap, the study employs close textual reading informed by a Foucauldian framework. The analysis reveals that Jidada's security apparatus, public rituals, and culture of constant observation compel individuals to internalize authority and regulate their own conduct. At the same time, the novel demonstrates that surveillance is never absolute, as individual and collective acts of resistance expose the limits of authoritarian control. The study contributes to African literary scholarship by offering a Foucauldian perspective on the intersections of surveillance, power, discipline, and resistance in contemporary postcolonial fiction.

Keywords: *Disciplinary Power, Glory, Panopticon Surveillance, Postcolonial Literature, Resistance.*

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1. Introduction

Surveillance has become an important mechanism through which authoritarian regimes exercise power, regulate public life, and maintain political control. In contemporary literature, representations of surveillance reveal how systems of power influence individual behavior and shape social relations. African postcolonial fiction frequently explores issues of political oppression, state violence, and authoritarian rule, reflecting the historical and contemporary realities of many postcolonial societies. Among contemporary African writers, NoViolet Bulawayo presents a powerful critique of these issues through her fiction.

NoViolet Bulawayo is a Zimbabwean novelist whose works examine themes of identity, displacement, political violence, and social injustice. Her novel *Glory* (2022) is an allegorical political satire inspired by Zimbabwe's political history and the transition of power following the fall of Robert Mugabe's regime. Through the fictional nation of Jidada, Bulawayo exposes the practices of authoritarian governance, highlighting the role of surveillance, propaganda, and state violence in controlling society. At the same time, the novel portrays the resilience of ordinary people who continue to resist oppression despite constant observation and intimidation.

Although *Glory* has received considerable scholarly attention for its political satire and allegorical representation of postcolonial Zimbabwe, limited research has examined the novel through Michel Foucault's concept of panopticism. Addressing this gap, this article explores the manifestation of Foucauldian panopticism in *Glory* by examining how panoptic structures operate through Jidada's security apparatus and public rituals. It further analyzes how surveillance and disciplinary practices shape the behavior, identities, and self-regulation of the characters while reinforcing authoritarian governance. Finally, the study investigates how Bulawayo portrays individual and collective resistance against panoptic authority, demonstrating that surveillance, despite its pervasive nature, cannot completely suppress resistance. By applying a Foucauldian framework, this article contributes to African literary scholarship by offering a deeper understanding of surveillance, power, discipline, and resistance in contemporary postcolonial fiction.

1.1. Research Objectives

1. To explore the manifestation of Foucauldian Panopticism in *Glory*.
2. To analyze how surveillance and disciplinary practices shape the behavior, identities, and self-regulation of the characters in the novel.
3. To evaluate how Bulawayo critiques authoritarian governance by depicting surveillance as a pervasive instrument of political domination.
4. To contribute to literary scholarship on African satire and power structures.

1.2. Research Questions

1. How does the Panoptic structure operate in Jidada's security apparatus and public rituals?
2. In what ways do characters internalize surveillance, leading to self-discipline?
3. How does Bulawayo portray resistance against panoptic authority?
4. How does *Glory* critique authoritarian governance through its portrayal of surveillance, power, and resistance from a Foucauldian perspective?

2. Literature Review

NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* (2022) has rapidly garnered critical attention as a sharp political satire that allegorizes Zimbabwe's postcolonial trajectory, particularly the Mugabe era and the 2017 coup d'état. Scholars situate the novel within the tradition of African allegorical fiction, drawing explicit parallels to George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) while emphasizing Bulawayo's distinct engagement with contemporary Zimbabwean realities, gendered power dynamics, resistance, and temporality. This review synthesizes existing scholarship on *Glory*, broader Foucauldian applications in African and postcolonial literature, and the specific relevance of Michel Foucault's concepts of the panopticon and surveillance to the novel's depiction of authoritarian control. It identifies a gap that the current article addresses: a sustained Foucauldian analysis of surveillance mechanisms in *Glory*.

Critics frequently highlight *Glory's* use of animal fable as a vehicle for political critique. Attree (2022) positions the novel as a Zimbabwean counterpart to Orwell, noting how animal characters unmask the "ruthlessness required to uphold the illusion of absolute power." Bulawayo transforms historical events—Mugabe's long rule, the Gukurahundi massacres, land seizures, and the military intervention—into a multispecies satire of Jidada, underscoring cycles of oppression and the public's oscillating hope and disillusionment. Similarly, Mavengano (2023) employs an ecofeminist lens to examine the novel's portrayal of phallogentric power, particularly the vilification of the First Femal (Marvelous/Dr. Sweet Mother) as an "Eve" figure blamed for national woes. This reading reveals how patriarchal and religious discourses reinforce female subordination and normalize authoritarian violence.

Manawar and Fiaz (2024) focus on memory, resistance, and the politics of time in *Glory*. They argue that the regime imposes a "pseudo-temporality" that distorts collective history, trapping citizens in cyclical violence while resistance—through protests, remembrance, and electoral moments—disrupts this imposed order. The authors invoke Foucault's theorization of temporality and resistance (via Lilja, 2018) to show how acts of remembering and bodily defiance challenge authoritarian control. This temporal focus complements analyses of power but stops short of a detailed examination of spatial and visual mechanisms of discipline.

Other studies explore biopolitical and allegorical dimensions. Mavengano (2024) reads *Glory* alongside Orwell through a biopolitical framework, highlighting spectacles of power, the figure of *homo sacer*, and conviviality in the postcolony. Musuva (2026) applies Fredric Jameson's national allegory theory to demonstrate how personal and domestic events symbolize broader crises of authoritarianism, elite succession, and institutionalized violence. These works affirm Bulawayo's text as a multifaceted critique of postcolonial governance but rarely foreground surveillance as a primary analytic category.

Foucauldian theory has proven productive in African literary and cultural studies, particularly for interrogating power, discipline, and subjectivity in postcolonial contexts. Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) describes the panopticon as a model of modern power: an architectural and social arrangement that induces self-regulation through the possibility of constant, unverifiable observation. "He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power" (Foucault, 1977). This produces docile bodies and normalizes judgment without perpetual physical coercion. In African modernities, Mungwini (2012) adapts panopticism to cultural surveillance, arguing that traditional and modern mechanisms of social control in African societies function analogously to Bentham's/Foucault's model, fostering conformity through visible authority and internalized norms.

Postcolonial scholars have extended Foucault to literature addressing dictatorship and resistance. Analyses of Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, for instance, often highlight how colonial and neocolonial regimes deploy surveillance to manage populations. In Zimbabwean contexts, studies of state violence and propaganda implicitly engage disciplinary power, though explicit panoptic readings remain underdeveloped for recent fiction like *Glory*. Mbembe's (2001) *On the Postcolony* complements Foucault by theorizing the "commandement" and vulgarity of power in African dictatorships, where spectacle and banality coexist with invisible monitoring. Bulawayo's Defenders (the armed dogs), public rallies, disappearances, and cult of personality around the Father of the Nation exemplify this fusion of sovereign spectacle and disciplinary surveillance.

Scholarship on surveillance in literature frequently invokes the panopticon to explain how regimes render subjects visible while power remains strategically opaque. In *Glory*, the opening Independence Day rally at Jidada Square functions as a panoptic space: citizens endure prolonged visibility under the sun and security forces, internalizing loyalty through chants, regalia, and fear of the Defenders' batons and guns (Bulawayo, 2022). The Sisters of the Disappeared's naked protest reverses this gaze temporarily, exposing state violence but provoking spectacular repression—illustrating Foucault's interplay between disciplinary and sovereign power. Existing readings of gendered resistance and temporality in the novel (Mavengano, 2023; Manawar & Fiaz, 2024) touch on bodily

visibility and memory as counter-practices but do not systematically apply panoptic surveillance to the novel's mechanisms of control, such as propaganda, religious sanction (via Prophet Dr. O. G. Moses), social media monitoring, and the normalization of fear.

This article builds on these foundations by centering Foucault's panopticon and surveillance. While prior studies excel in allegorical, feminist, and temporal analyses, they under-examine how *Glory* dramatizes the capillary nature of power—how invisible eyes (Defenders, informants, the regime's aura) produce visible, self-disciplining bodies. Integrating Mungwini's cultural panopticism with Bulawayo's satire addresses this lacuna, revealing continuities between colonial discipline and postcolonial authoritarianism. It also engages broader surveillance studies that question or extend Foucault in digital and postcolonial settings (e.g., Caluya, 2010).

In sum, literature on *Glory* robustly establishes its political and stylistic innovations, while Foucauldian scholarship provides theoretical scaffolding for power in Africa. However, a dedicated panoptic reading of surveillance and visibility in Bulawayo's text is absent. This review underscores the need for such an approach to illuminate how the novel critiques the persistence of disciplinary regimes in ostensibly liberated postcolonial societies.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Approach

This study employs close reading as its primary methodological approach, combining detailed textual analysis of characterization, narrative voice, dialogue, symbolism, and representations of surveillance with Michel Foucault's conceptualization of panopticism, disciplinary power, and subject formation. The analysis moves from close examination of textual representations of observation, control, and self-regulation to broader interpretations of how surveillance functions as a political technology that sustains authoritarian power. It is both interpretive and theoretical, placing *Glory* in dialogue with Foucauldian discourse to demonstrate how Bulawayo's narrative form and political satire collectively expose the mechanisms of surveillance, normalization, and resistance that shape power relations in postcolonial Zimbabwe. Through this approach, the study illustrates how literary representation not only reflects authoritarian structures but also interrogates their operation and ideological consequences.

4. Theoretical framework

This study is grounded in Michel Foucault's theory of Panopticon surveillance, which provides a critical framework for understanding the relationship between power, discipline, and social control. Foucault elaborates this concept in his seminal work "Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison" (1975), where he draws upon Jeremy Bentham's architectural design of the Panopticon. Bentham's Panopticon consists of a circular prison structure with a central watchtower from which a single guard can observe

all inmates without being seen. Because prisoners are unable to determine when they are being watched, they internalize the possibility of constant observation and regulate their own behavior accordingly.

Foucault extends Bentham's model beyond the prison and conceptualizes the Panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary societies. According to Foucault, power in modern institutions does not operate primarily through physical coercion or overt force but through mechanisms of surveillance that produce obedient and self-disciplined individuals. The effectiveness of power lies in its invisibility, as individuals modify their actions due to the perception of being constantly monitored. Consequently, surveillance becomes a technique through which social institutions maintain order and exercise control over individuals.

Foucault argues that disciplinary power is diffused throughout various institutions, including schools, hospitals, military organizations, factories, and governmental structures. These institutions employ systems of observation, classification, and normalization to regulate human behavior. Through continuous surveillance, individuals internalize societal norms and become agents of their own discipline. Thus, power is decentralized and functions through networks rather than through a single authoritative source.

Within literary studies, Foucault's concept of panopticism offers a valuable lens for examining the ways in which surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms shape social relations, identities, and forms of resistance. Literary texts often depict societies where individuals are subjected to constant scrutiny, ideological control, and the fear of punishment. Such representations reveal how power structures influence behavior and construct compliant subjects.

In the context of this study, Foucault's theory of Panopticon surveillance serves as the principal analytical framework for investigating the operation of power and discursive control in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*. The framework facilitates an examination of how surveillance, both visible and invisible, contributes to the maintenance of political authority and the regulation of citizens' thoughts and actions. Furthermore, it enables an exploration of the ways in which characters internalize mechanisms of control and how resistance emerges within a system characterized by pervasive observation and disciplinary power.

5. Textual Analysis

5.1. Invisible Eyes at Jidada Square

The Independence Day rally at Jidada Square introduces the novel's central logic of surveillance through spectacle. What should be a national celebration becomes a controlled public performance in which the crowd is forced to wait for hours under an unbearable sun while wearing party regalia that marks them as loyal subjects of the regime

(Glory, 2022). This waiting is not incidental; it is part of the political message. The people's endurance is tested, their bodies are exposed, and their loyalty is measured through visible submission (Glory, 2022). The square therefore functions as more than a physical location. It becomes a symbolic space where power is enacted through delay, discomfort, and the forced visibility of bodies gathered under authority.

Bulawayo uses the scene to show that authoritarian power does not always appear as direct violence. Sometimes it works through ritual, pageantry, and the emotional manipulation of a crowd. The Father of the Nation's delayed arrival heightens his importance and transforms the event into a theatrical display of domination (Glory, 2022). The public is expected to wait, to watch, and finally to applaud. This pattern reflects a system in which observation and obedience are intertwined. The people are not only being watched by the state; they are also learning to watch themselves and one another, regulating their own behavior in order to survive within the system (Glory, 2022).

5.2. The Defenders and Fearful Compliance

The Defenders embody the regime's most immediate form of coercive surveillance. At the gate, they stand armed with batons, ropes, clubs, tear-gas canisters, shields, and guns, making the boundary of public space a place of intimidation rather than freedom (Glory, 2022). Their presence is enough to force the dissenters to turn back, which shows that surveillance in Jidada does not depend only on constant physical punishment. It depends on the expectation of punishment. In other words, fear becomes internalized, and citizens begin to discipline themselves before any actual violence occurs (Glory, 2022).

This scene is important because it reveals the way authoritarian power controls movement and speech. The people do not leave simply because they dislike the event; they leave because the state has made resistance seem dangerous and futile (Glory, 2022). Bulawayo presents this as a social atmosphere of fear in which obedience becomes the safest option. The Defenders are therefore not only soldiers of the regime but also symbols of a wider political order in which the population has been trained to associate dissent with bodily harm (Glory, 2022).

5.3. Media, Repetition, and Control

Another major form of power in Glory is the circulation of political messages through media and repetition. The novel shows how rumor spreads on social media, especially in the case of the repeated claim that the Old Horse has died in Dubai, a claim that becomes so widespread it begins to sound true (Glory, 2022). This detail matters because it shows that modern political control does not rely only on official speeches or physical force. It also depends on controlling narratives, shaping belief, and flooding public space with repeated versions of events (Glory, 2022). The same dynamic appears

in the crowd's use of phones and gadgets to record the procession of power during the rally (Glory, 2022).

The event is not only watched; it is documented, circulated, and reproduced. This turns spectacle into a political tool that survives beyond the moment itself. Once the scene is captured and replayed, it becomes part of a larger system of visibility that reinforces the regime's authority (Glory, 2022). In Foucauldian terms, this is significant because it shows how surveillance can become participatory. People contribute to the spread of political images and rumors, helping power to travel through ordinary communication channels (Glory, 2022).

5.4. Gendered Bodies Under Scrutiny

The novel also makes clear that surveillance is deeply gendered. Marvelous, the First Femal, is not simply a political figure; she is a body that must be admired, judged, and controlled in public space (Glory, 2022). Her presence beside the Father of the Nation reflects the close connection between gender and authority in Jidada, where women linked to power are celebrated but also watched carefully (Glory, 2022). Bulawayo suggests that female visibility is never neutral. It can elevate women into positions of influence, but it can also expose them to moral scrutiny and public insult.

This is even more apparent in the case of the Sisters of the Disappeared. Their naked protest is immediately framed as shameful by the regime, which responds by labeling their bodies obscene and disrespectful (Glory, 2022). The language used against them shows how female bodies become sites of political control. Their nudity is not treated as a form of protest at first, but as a violation of social order. The state therefore attempts to control not only what women do, but how their bodies are seen and interpreted (Glory, 2022).

5.5. Resistant Visibility

The Sisters of the Disappeared transform visibility into a weapon of resistance. By storming the stage naked and carrying placards with names and photographs of the disappeared, they interrupt the ceremony and expose the violence that the regime has tried to hide (Glory, 2022). Their protest is powerful because it turns the body into testimony. Instead of being passive objects of the gaze, they become active speakers who use visibility to accuse the state (Glory, 2022).

The crowd's reaction shows the emotional force of this act. Some animals are shocked, but others begin to chant along because the women's protest awakens memories of missing relatives and friends (Glory, 2022). This moment is one of the novel's most important reversals of surveillance. The state has long controlled who can appear, speak, and be remembered, but the women force hidden suffering into the open (Glory, 2022). Even though the Defenders violently drag them away, the protest is not defeated in

meaning. It has already succeeded in revealing what the regime wanted to keep invisible (Glory, 2022).

5.6. Surveillance as Social Order

Taken together, these scenes show that Glory presents surveillance as a whole social order rather than a single act of watching. It is present in public rituals, in the violence of the Defenders, in the circulation of political rumors, in the recording of spectacle, and in the policing of women's bodies (Glory, 2022). The novel suggests that authoritarian control works best when it becomes ordinary, embedded in public habits and collective expectations (Glory, 2022).

Bulawayo's satire is especially effective because it exposes the absurdity of this system while also showing its brutality. The people are made to celebrate a ruler who is clearly decaying, yet they still participate in the performance because the regime has made loyalty a condition of safety and belonging (Glory, 2022). In this sense, the "invisible eyes" of the title refer not only to the state's surveillance but also to the internalized fear, repetition, and compliance that allow the system to continue (Glory, 2022). The novel therefore presents control as something collective, cultural, and deeply psychological, not merely political.

6. Conclusion

This study explored the manifestation of Foucauldian panopticism in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* to examine how surveillance operates as a mechanism of power and social control in the fictional state of Jidada. The analysis showed that the regime establishes a panoptic system through its security apparatus, political institutions, and public rituals, creating an environment in which individuals are constantly aware of being watched. As a result, surveillance becomes internalized, leading characters to regulate their own behavior and conform to the expectations of authoritarian rule. However, the novel also demonstrates that panoptic power is not absolute. Through acts of individual and collective resistance, Bulawayo reveals the limitations of surveillance and highlights the possibility of challenging oppressive systems. By combining political satire with Foucauldian theory, *Glory* offers a powerful critique of authoritarian governance and exposes the relationship between surveillance, discipline, and power in postcolonial Zimbabwe. This study contributes to literary scholarship on African political fiction by showing how Foucauldian panopticism provides a useful framework for understanding the novel's representation of authoritarian control, resistance, and the complex dynamics of power.

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