

Allegorical Constructions of Repressive Power in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*

Author

Justus Kyalo Musuva 

Author's email: musuvajustus@gmail.com

University of Nairobi, Kenya.

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Abstract

This study examines the allegorical construction of repressive power in *Glory* by NoViolet Bulawayo, focusing on how the novel represents postcolonial political realities through symbolic narration. Guided by Fredric Jameson's theory of national allegory, the study explores how personal and domestic events in the novel function as symbolic representations of national crises, authoritarian governance, elite succession, and resistance. Set in the fictional nation of Jidada, the novel uses animal characters and satire to mirror Zimbabwe's 2017 coup and broader African leadership crises. The research adopts an interpretivist qualitative approach using close reading and thematic coding to analyse allegorical figures, institutional violence, and ironic reversals within postcolonial and narratological frameworks. The findings reveal that Bulawayo constructs repressive power through symbolic figures such as the Old Horse, militarised defenders, and competing political elites, whose interactions reflect authoritarianism, succession struggles, and institutionalised violence. The study further demonstrates that allegory operates as both a narrative and political tool, exposing cycles of corruption, betrayal, and failed liberation in postcolonial African states. It concludes that *Glory* extends the African allegorical tradition by transforming historical and political realities into symbolic fiction that critiques authoritarian rule. The study recommends further research on succession crises, digital media in political legitimation, and representations of state violence in contemporary African allegorical texts.

Key terms: Allegory, NoViolet Bulawayo, postcolonial literature, repressive power, satirical fiction

INTRODUCTION

This article examines *Glory* by NoViolet Bulawayo with the aim of analysing how it constructs an allegorical representation of repressive power in postcolonial Africa. Specifically, the study identifies the allegorical strategies and animal characterisations used to represent authoritarian governance, analyses how narrative techniques such as satire and irony construct meanings of political decay and institutional violence, and interprets the depiction of political transitions as either transformative or cyclical forms of repression. It is grounded in the understanding that contemporary African literature often engages with political realities through fictional and symbolic modes of narration, particularly in contexts marked by authoritarian governance and post-independence disillusionment. In *Glory*, Bulawayo uses animal characters and a fictional state, Jidada, to depict systems of political domination, corruption, and resistance, thereby creating a layered narrative that reflects broader African socio-political experiences.

Bulawayo's writing is consistent with her broader literary trajectory, which has been associated with critical reflections on governance and social injustice. Her earlier work, including the short story "Hitting Budapest," has been read as an allegorical engagement with political oppression in Zimbabwe (Bulawayo, 2022). In *Glory*, this allegorical approach is intensified through the use of satire, anthropomorphism, and historical allusion, allowing the narrative to comment on real political events while maintaining fictional distance.

This study is informed by the recognition that postcolonial African fiction frequently functions as a site of political commentary, where narrative form becomes a tool for critiquing power structures. The novel's depiction of leadership transitions, elite domination, and popular resistance reflects recurring themes in African postcolonial discourse, particularly those concerned with the betrayal of independence ideals and the persistence of authoritarian rule.

The study is based on textual analysis of *Glory*, guided by postcolonial and narratological perspectives as outlined in the broader study framework. These approaches enable a close reading of narrative

strategies, character construction, and symbolic representation of power.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly work on postcolonial African literature consistently shows a strong concern with the representation of power, governance, and social inequality through literary form. Rather than merely summarising individual sources, it is possible to synthesise them around a central tension: the distinction between literature as historical reconstruction versus literature as ideological critique. For example, Simoes Da Silva (2000) emphasises that postcolonial writing involves deconstructing the past to make it usable for understanding present conditions, while Traore et al. (2022) argue that post-independence African fiction is shaped by a Marxist-informed critique focused on corruption and failed liberation. These two positions are not contradictory but complementary: Simoes Da Silva prioritises narrative temporality, whereas Traore foregrounds class analysis. Together, they suggest that African fiction operates simultaneously as historiography and political economy. Similarly, Mbembe's (2001) conception of the postcolony as a space of domination and disorder provides a theoretical bridge between these views, showing how narrative and power are structurally entangled.

Narrative form and technique are also central to how meaning is constructed. Mugambi et al. (2022) demonstrate that narrative voice is deliberately shaped to reflect ideological perspectives, while Rinkanya (2020) observes that African women writers rely on characterisation as a strategy for engaging with patriarchy and political domination. Across these studies, a shared finding emerges: formal choices in African fiction-like voice, perspective and character are never neutral but always political acts.

The use of allegory and animal representation has been widely discussed. Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm* provides a key reference point for indirect political critique. Extending this, Mierek (2010) and Dunn (n.d.) argue that animal characters allow writers to represent human society in interpretive ways. However, a limitation of these older allegory frameworks is that they tend to treat animal representation as a stable, trans-historical device,

often overlooking how contemporary African texts adapt it for specific postcolonial contexts, such as satirising not just tyranny but the failure of opposition movements to offer alternatives (Zito, 2018).

More recent Bulawayo-specific and contemporary African fiction studies have moved beyond general allegory theory. For instance, Muponda (2023) argues that *Glory* distinguishes itself from Orwellian allegory by refusing a clear revolutionary resolution, instead emphasising cyclical stagnation. This move is significant because it shifts the focus from revolutionary hope to the mechanics of political repetition. Moreover, Bulawayo's use of anthropomorphism, blurring the boundary between human and animal, can be read as a narrative strategy that questions the very possibility of rational political agency under authoritarianism. Together, these observations indicate that scholarship is shifting from asking “*what does the allegory represent?*” to “*how does the allegorical form itself encode political hopelessness and repetition?*”

Despite this rich body of work, a clear research gap remains: few studies have systematically analysed how *Glory* combines three specific narrative mechanisms: animal characterisation, ironic naming, and digital media representation to construct repressive power as simultaneously personalised and embodied by the Old Horse and institutionalised as embedded in the Dogs, ministries, and succession protocols. Moreover, the question of whether political transitions in the novel represent genuine rupture or ritualised continuity has not been examined through close narratological attention to plot structure and repetition. This study directly addresses that gap by positioning its analysis within the intersection of postcolonial allegory theory, narratology, and recent Zimbabwean literary criticism.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative research design grounded in textual analysis of NoViolet Bulawayo's novel *Glory*. The specific qualitative tradition is interpretivist and hermeneutic, meaning that analysis focuses on interpreting symbolic meanings, narrative strategies, and authorial constructions of power rather than measuring quantifiable features or conducting discourse analysis of broader social

language patterns. The approach was informed by the need to closely examine how repressive power is constructed and communicated through allegorical narrative strategies within a fictional postcolonial African setting. The novel was treated as the primary source of data, with emphasis placed on its language use, characterisation, plot structure, and symbolic representations.

The selection of *Glory* as the sole primary text is justified on three grounds. First, its sustained use of animal allegory across an entire national scale, unlike shorter or more realist Zimbabwean novels, which makes it uniquely suited for examining how fictional states function as symbolic political systems. Second, the novel's direct but fictionalised engagement with the 2017 Zimbabwean coup provides a rare contemporary case of satirical allegory responding to a specific succession event. Third, its integration of digital media (X, formerly Twitter) as a narrative force distinguishes it from earlier allegories such as *Animal Farm* or Ngũgĩ's *Wizard of the Crow*, allowing examination of how contemporary repressive power interacts with digitally mediated public spheres.

Data collection was conducted through intensive library-based research and consultation of relevant online academic sources that engage with postcolonial literature, narratology, and allegorical interpretation. The analysis was further supported by secondary scholarly works that examine themes of power, governance, and literary representation in African fiction.

The study was guided by a close reading technique, which enabled systematic identification and interpretation of textual evidence that reflects allegorical representations of authoritarian governance. Attention was paid to how animal characters, narrative voice, irony, and satire are employed to construct meanings related to repression, political control, and social stratification in the fictional state of Jidada. Thematic coding was applied to passages representing four pre-identified narrative mechanisms: animal figures of authority, scenes of state violence, ironic naming and institutional satire, and political transition sequences.

The analytical process was interpretive in nature, allowing themes and meanings to emerge inductively from the text while also being guided by the theoretical framework. The theoretical orientation drew from narratology, formalism, and postcolonial literary criticism, which collectively facilitated an examination of how narrative form and content interact to produce allegorical meaning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Allegory as a Vehicle for Representing Repressive Power

The analysis reveals that *Glory* constructs repressive power through sustained allegory in which the fictional state of Jidada mirrors postcolonial African political realities. Following Jameson's view that Third World narratives often operate as national allegories, the text transforms individual and domestic experiences into representations of broader political conditions. The use of animal characters allows Bulawayo to indirectly critique authoritarian governance while maintaining narrative distance from real political figures and events. This allegorical strategy enables the narration of political oppression, succession struggles, and state control in a symbolic form that reflects wider socio-political concerns.

Animal Characters as Symbolic Representation of Political Power

A key finding is that animal characterisation is central to the representation of repressive power. Characters such as The Old Horse, the Dogs, and Dr Sweet Mother embody political roles within an authoritarian structure. The Dogs function as defenders of the regime through violence and surveillance, reinforcing state control. The Old Horse represents entrenched leadership that sustains power through institutional manipulation and coercion. This anthropomorphic design, as supported by Mierek (2010) and Dunn (n.d.), allows the narrative to translate political oppression into symbolic form, making the critique of governance indirect yet effective.

The findings further show that animalization reduces political authority to structured roles within a system of domination, where legitimacy is maintained through fear, loyalty networks, and institutional control rather than democratic principles.

Satire and Irony in the Representation of Political Decay

The study finds that satire and irony are central narrative strategies used to expose repressive governance. Irony is evident in the contrast between political claims and actual governance practices. The text repeatedly presents situations where leaders claim legitimacy and stability while simultaneously presiding over corruption, violence, and exclusion.

The use of exaggerated institutional naming, such as ministries associated with corruption and propaganda, demonstrates deliberate satirical distortion. In line with Kaminsky (1976), such stylistic exaggeration reflects ideological inversion and societal decay. In *Glory*, satire intensifies the depiction of political dysfunction by exposing contradictions within the governance system.

Institutionalised Violence and Normalisation of Repression

The findings indicate that repression in *Glory* is institutionalised and normalised within the governance system of Jidada. Violence is not portrayed as episodic but as a routine mechanism of maintaining political order. The Dogs' role in suppressing demonstrations illustrates how state violence is legitimised under the guise of protecting national stability.

Arrests, exile, and elimination of dissenting voices are embedded as standard political practices. This reflects Mbembe's (2001) conceptualisation of postcolonial states as spaces where power operates through both coercion and normalised fear. The narrative shows that repression is both physical and psychological, functioning as a regulating mechanism for compliance.

Digital Media as a Site of Political Communication

The study also finds that digital media is integrated into the narrative as a space through which political events are communicated and circulated. Platforms such as Twitter are used to report coups, leadership changes, and public reactions.

Digital media in the narrative amplifies political awareness and enables the rapid dissemination of events. However, this visibility does not necessarily disrupt existing power structures, as control over

governance remains intact despite increased information flow.

Cycles of Political Transition and Continuity of Repression

The analysis reveals that political transitions in Jidada do not result in meaningful transformation but reproduce existing systems of repression. Leadership change is presented as a moment of potential reform, but ultimately results in the continuation of corruption and authoritarian control.

This cyclical pattern reflects Mbembe's (2001) argument that postcolonial power structures are characterised by repetition rather than rupture. The narrative shows that new regimes adopt the same practices of exclusion, patronage, and coercion as their predecessors.

Social Stratification and Ethnicised Governance

The study further finds that repressive power is reinforced through social and ethnic stratification. The division between groups within Jidada reflects unequal access to political and economic opportunities. This stratification contributes to social fragmentation and reinforces elite dominance.

The findings show that such divisions are strategically maintained to sustain political control, making inequality a structural feature of governance rather than an incidental outcome.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that *Glory* employs allegory as a central mode of representing repressive power in postcolonial Africa. This aligns with Jameson's argument that literary texts from the Third World function as national allegories, where individual narratives are inseparable from broader political and historical conditions. In this regard, Jidada operates as a symbolic reconstruction of postcolonial African states characterised by authoritarian governance, political succession struggles, and institutionalised control.

The use of animal characters reinforces the allegorical structure of the text by translating political actors into symbolic figures of authority and repression. As Mierek (2010) and Dunn (n.d.) observe, animal

representation in literature allows for indirect critique of human society through symbolic displacement. In *Glory*, this strategy enables the author to critique political domination without direct referentiality, thereby expanding the interpretive scope of the narrative. The Old Horse and the Dogs, for instance, do not merely function as fictional characters but as embodiments of systemic political authority and coercive state power.

The discussion further establishes that repressive power in the novel is not only represented through individual characters but also through institutional structures embedded within the narrative world. The organisation of power in Jidada reflects a system in which legitimacy is maintained through coercion, surveillance, and loyalty networks. This supports Mbembe's (2001) conceptualisation of postcolonial states as spaces where power is exercised through both physical force and normalised fear.

Overall, the allegorical construction of repressive power in *Glory* enables a layered reading of political authority, where fictional representation becomes a means of interrogating real postcolonial governance systems. The narrative thus positions itself within a broader tradition of African literature that critiques political decay through symbolic and allegorical storytelling.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study examined the allegorical constructions of repressive power in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*. The analysis established that the novel represents repressive power through a sustained allegorical framework in which the fictional state of Jidada functions as a symbolic reflection of postcolonial African political realities. Through this framework, issues of governance, leadership struggle, and institutional control are presented in symbolic form, allowing the narrative to communicate broader concerns about authoritarian power.

The findings further confirmed that animal characterisation is central to the allegorical representation of repressive power in the novel. Characters such as The Old Horse and the Dogs function as symbolic embodiments of political authority, coercion, and enforcement. These

representations construct a layered depiction of governance where power is maintained through fear, control, and institutional dominance.

The study also established that allegory operates as the primary narrative framework through which political oppression and leadership cycles are represented. The fictional world of *Jidada*, therefore, becomes a symbolic site for the projection and critique of repressive governance. Overall, the study concludes that *Bulawayo* effectively employs allegory to construct and represent repressive power in a postcolonial African context.

Recommendations: Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that further scholarly work should continue to explore allegorical representation as a key interpretive framework in contemporary African fiction, particularly in relation to the depiction of political power and governance systems. Such studies would deepen understanding of how African writers use allegory to engage with complex socio-political realities. It is also recommended that scholars of African literature pay closer attention to the construction of fictional states as symbolic representations of real political environments. This would help to further illuminate how writers translate historical and political experiences into imaginative

literary spaces. In addition, more research should be conducted on the use of animal characterisation as an allegorical tool for representing authority, repression, and state control in postcolonial narratives. This would contribute to a broader appreciation of the symbolic and interpretive functions of such narrative strategies.

Literary criticism should continue to prioritise allegorical readings of African texts in order to enhance critical engagement with the ways in which political realities are encoded within fictional works. Building on the specific findings of this study, future research could extend the analysis by comparing *Glory* with other recent African coup-based allegories (e.g., Ondjaki's *Transparent City* or Habila's *Oil on Water*) to examine how different national contexts shape the narrative representation of succession and state violence. Additionally, longitudinal studies tracing the evolution of animal allegory in Zimbabwean fiction from *Animal Farm* adaptations to *Glory* would help determine whether contemporary texts have developed distinct narrative grammars for representing repression in the digital age. By pursuing these directions, scholars can move beyond identifying allegorical content toward theorising how allegorical form itself mutates in response to changing political technologies and censorship environments.

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