Literator - Journal of Literary Criticism, Comparative Linguistics and Literary Studies
ISSN: (Online) 2219-8237, (Print) 0258-2279

Biopolitical rulership and motifs in Bulawayo's *Glory*: A Zimbabwean version of Orwellian society

Author:
Esther Mavengano[1,2,3]

Affiliations:
[1]Research Institute for Theology and Religion, College of Human Sciences, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa

[2]Department of English, Faculty of Linguistics, Literature and Cultural Studies, English and American Studies Technische Universitat Dresden, Dresden, Germany

[3]Department of English and Media Studies, Faculty of Arts, Great Zimbabwe University, Masvingo, Zimbabwe

Corresponding author:
Esther Mavengano,
esthermavengano@gmail.com

Dates:
Received: 30 Jan. 2024
Accepted: 30 Sept. 2024
Published: 11 Dec. 2024

How to cite this article:
Mavengano, E., 2024, 'Biopolitical rulership and motifs in Bulawayo's *Glory*: A Zimbabwean version of Orwellian society', *Literator* 45(1), a2058. https://doi.org/10.4102/lit.v45i1.2058

In this study, I reread George Orwell's remarkable text *Animal Farm* together with Noviolet Bulawayo's second novel, titled *Glory*. Orwell's allegoric novel remains astute in its account of the fate of living under the shadow of an autocratic state whose leadership is haunted by the paranoia of losing power. Orwell deploys symbolic animals, including dogs, hens, pigs, horses, sheep and donkeys, to function as salient embodiments permeated with figurative meanings about a corrupt regime which lashes out at its victims. I deploy Giorgio Agamben's concepts of bare life, *homo sacer*, state of exception and suspension of law in reading the Zimbabwe electoral politics and biopolitical imaginings of the postcolonial state. I foreground contemporary power mechanisms, unruly manifestation and performativity on the body and mind of the *homo sacer(s)*. I also interrogate the Napoleon forms of power exercised by state 'security agents' – renamed growling dogs and defenders in modern Zimbabwe. I conclude that biopolitical power, in an environment where the exception has become the rule, serves in the management of perturbed citizens.

Contribution: Giorgio Agamben's biopolitical conceptual framework has rarely been used to examine the intricate and often paradoxical relations between those in power (rulers) and ordinary citizens (the ruled) in present-day Zimbabwe. This study brings to attention spectacles of power, the fate of *homo sacer* figures and their conviviality – as central tropes complexly enunciated and thematised in both Orwell and Bulawayo's fictional writings. The parallel analyses of the two novels from different historical periods and literary traditions in this study offer fresh reflections on the complexities that arise from living under autocratic rule.

Keywords: Agamben's biopolitical theorisation; *Animal Farm*; growling dogs; menacing defenders; Napoleon power; suspension of law; Zimbabwean literature.

Introduction

Literary narratives that capture Zimbabwe's historical trajectory from the attainment of independence to the current post-Mugabe era have a shared reflective preoccupation with palpable misery, which, with time, has developed into a perpetual state of lingering misery and nervous conditions, to evoke Tsitsi Dangarembga's (1988) notable title. The post-independence period in Zimbabwe is defined by a growing culture of autocracy, coercion, corruption, self-interest, violence, political bigotry and tension, economic implosion and grotesque use of silencing mechanisms by the state (Alexander & McGregor 2013; Mutanda 2019, 2024). Over the years, the government has deployed varied techniques against dissenting voices, including statutory silencing (Muchemwa 2010; Vambe 2004). However, the creative industry has proved to be a thorn in the flesh of the rulers in Zimbabwe, because artists such as musicians and fiction writers remain defiant in subverting the expressive barricades (eds. Chidora et al. 2024; Dube 2016). In the current article, I reread Orwell's (1945) *Animal Farm* together with Bulawayo's (2022) *Glory*, with a particular focus on their intertextual and biopolitical enunciations of autocracy, in order to expand the conversations about governance in general and the crisis of leadership in contemporary Zimbabwe.

Biopolitical inquiry

Giorgio Agamben's (1998) critical biopolitics paradigm is adopted and applied during a close textual reading in order to evaluate the gripping thematic motifs of political repression. My reading of the chosen texts focuses on biopolitical techniques and the manifestation of conviviality by the ruled masses. It is undoubtedly productive to also direct our critical gaze towards the

emergence of some petty sovereigns among the subaltern population who disingenuously connive with the despotic rulers, only to enjoy a cheap imitation of power, as elaborated by Mbembe (2001). The discussion demonstrates how this uncanny relationship between the oppressive rulers and oppressed people poses a challenge because, as the discussion will show, it sustains problematic regimes in power. I further interrogate the creation of the *homo sacer*'s bare life and the influence of biopolitics on democratic principles in the selected allegorical fictional texts. Agamben (1998:71) uses the term 'bare life' to denote an unprotected body that may be killed and yet not sacrificed (embedded in the oxymoronic figure of speech, 'living dead'). The notion of the *homo sacer* (the sacred man ambiguously placed outside the law but monitored by the law) refers to one whose 'life can be taken with impunity' (Agamben 1998:72). He further explicates that present-day biopolitical schemes manifest through 'exclusion from the political community and deprivation of a voice' (Agamben 1998:21). The sovereign power reduces the relegated people to 'animal bare life', denied protection from the sovereign. The primary argument which I submit in this study is that the intertextual awareness and biopolitical inquiry of the chosen texts provide a rich discursive site in which the appearance of sovereign power and its ensuing disciplinary techniques and state of exception can be highlighted. The lives of personified animal characters are prisms through which one can examine the production of postcolonial biopolitics, its rationality and its effects on the lives deemed worthless. In this study, I also question the place of the *homo sacer* figure in modern-day politics in Zimbabwe. I regard literary works as important dialogic and transformative sites that invite readers to analyse, reflect and reproach oppressive sociopolitical cultures in present-day world. I further contend that the novels discussed here contribute to a burgeoning body of work that exposes the tricky imbroglio between rulers and the ruled, as well as the execution of state-sponsored violence in the postcolony, to borrow from Achille Mbembe's (2001) postulations.

Rationale for reading together Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) and Bulawayo's *Glory* (2022)

Animal Farm is a classic allegory which continues to be relevant to contemporary readers because of its primary focus on political matters. An allegory is one of the powerful modes of literary expression that operates on two levels: the overt narrative and the symbolic representation of abstract ideals (Gibbs 2011). In autocratic societies, allegory serves as a subtle critique or commentary. Creative writers utilise symbolic characters and events to address penetrating political issues such as violence, censorship and power dynamics. By layering meaning beneath the surface narrative, allegory allows writers to express dissent while avoiding direct confrontation. My choice of these novels, which have different historical and geographical settings, is informed by their conspicuous tropes of political suppression; use of brute force against political rivals and alleged enemies; curtailment of freedom, signified through the motifs of vicious dogs (or ruthless defenders in Bulawayo's text); and public killings, which together speak about the imminent presence of a cruel sovereign power. Both writers deploy euphemistic metaphors in titling and characterisation to make compelling thematisation of arrogance and the mortifying nature of power. The pitiable conditions of the ordinary animals (citizens) convey an evocative culture of political deceit that interjects the official narratives about socialism and egalitarianism constructed in state discourses. The reality reveals a yawning divide between the ruling elite and the wretched of the earth, in Fanonian vocabulary. The gulf between the marginalised animals and the rulers, as depicted in both texts, is a cause of concern as it increasingly widens – replaying a Cartesian power structure and suggesting the failure to move beyond the coloniser model of the world (Blaut 1993; Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2023). The living conditions of ordinary citizens evoke the poignant memory of the colonial encounter aptly defined by Frantz Fanon (1963) in his cherished text the *Wretched of the Earth*. The rich rulers with their lavish lifestyles on one side are juxtaposed with the wretched ruled living at the margins. The detachment further speaks of the unfulfilled democratic visions about classless societies and the existence of many countries within a country, to use Bulawayo's words in *Glory* (Mavengano 2023). In both texts, the achievement of a free society remains an elusive reverie, because the rulers quickly discard such an ethos and embrace biopower methods of ruling.

A brief synopsis of the novel *Animal Farm*

Eric Blair, popularly known by his pen name, George Orwell, is a British author of a classic allegorical text, *Animal Farm*. Orwell's fulfilling career as a writer is evident in his several fictional works. The setting of *Animal Farm* is the Manor Farm, which is initially run by Mr Jones, a harsh man who ill-treats the animals living on the farm. One evening, Old Major, a boar, mobilises all oppressed animals and instigates a revolutionary struggle against their common tyrant – the man, Mr Jones. Old Major later dies, but the radical spirit does not die with him. The song 'Beasts of England' in the text symbolises the living memory of Old Major and his liberation vision. His revolutionary role and fight for justice significantly parallel that of the renowned *First Chimurenga* or *Umvukela* fighters in Zimbabwe. Old Major believes in democratic principles, and his function in *Animal Farm* reminds us of the heroic speeches and resistance of colonial conquest by Nehanda Nyakasikana, Lozikeyi Dlodlo, Kaguvi and Mkwati, among other hailed heroines and heroes in Zimbabwe's historical struggle. Their radical inspiration saw the rise of Joshua Nkomo, Robert Mugabe, Josiah Tongogara and Joice Mujuru, among other protagonists of the second liberation struggle. In *Animal Farm*, the two pigs, Snowball and Napoleon, take up Old Major's central political ethic, which declares that all animals are equal, and motivate

other animals to fight against Mr Jones, their mutual foe. The political events in the novel represent Russia and the Bolshevik rebellion that occurred in 1917–1923, led by Vladimir Lenin in the Soviet historiography, who, like Old Major, passed away before the attainment of the freedom and fulfilment of the utopian dream. Stalin and Trotsky took over the leadership positions, just like Snowball and Napoleon in the text. However, Napoleon's rise to power indicates the horror of totalitarianism in the same way that Bulawayo's novel disapproves of Robert Mugabe and his successor Emmerson Mnangagwa's models of governance in post-independence Zimbabwe. The political revolts of Napoleon on Manor Farm and Tuvius or Tuvy in modern Jidada do not offer respite to the woes of ordinary animals. Therefore, these novels are convincing examples of the textuality of history and historicity of literary texts.

A Zimbabwean version of the Orwellian world in *Glory*

Born in 1981, *Glory*'s author was named Elizabeth Zandile Tshele but is famously known by her pen name, Noviolet Bulawayo. She is a Zimbabwean writer of two successful novels, *We Need New Names* and *Glory*, published in 2013 and 2022, respectively. Bulawayo is currently based in America. Her first novel, *We Need New Names*, continues to fascinate literary scholars, readers and critics – a claim supported by the ever-increasing scholarly reviews of the novel. Bulawayo's second text, *Glory*, suggests that Zimbabwean fiction authors writing from the diaspora enjoy the artistic liberty to boldly examine, question and express the sociopolitical and economic challenges and the dire conditions that make Zimbabwean society a crisis-ridden national space, an unhomely homeland to the majority of suffering citizens, to borrow from Homi Bhabha's (1994) jargon. In Bulawayo's writing, what is most pitiful is the fate of the languishing masses, whose abject condition is magnified by the visible marginality and destitution of Othered citizens. The citizens' bare lives are overwhelmingly marked by perpetual conditions of abandonment, precarity and unsacrificed killability or disposability (Giroux 2006). Together, these interlocking problematics serve as telling evidence of the crushing, precarious conditions and the visible absence of an idyllic home (Motahane & Makombe 2020). Yet the government refuses to acknowledge the unhomeliness of the 'homeland.' Generally, Zimbabwe is depicted as a choking national space characterised by a prolonged sense of entrapment. This absurd 'home' generates a deep longing for alter-native lives elsewhere. Thus, the country of Jidada, which typifies Zimbabwe in Bulawayo's fictive writing, is a metonymical trope that is deployed to highlight the citizenry's loss of fundamental rights and their thwarted attempts to engage in subversive acts. The novel is set in 2017, a year that saw the removal of Robert Mugabe, who ruled Zimbabwe for 37 years. The plot of the novel follows the dramatic overthrow of Mugabe (the anointed Horse) from power by his right-hand horse, the vice president who became a formidable enemy, Tuvius Delight Shasha, Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa's fictive doppelganger. The plot is characterised by a series of flashbacks which capture the different historical moments in a cyclic mode that conceivably defines Zimbabwean politics and historiography. Apparently, the plot serves to delineate the problematic historical demarcations in (post)colonial Zimbabwe because of the deeply felt, continuous presence of the colonising sovereign power. The citizens' yearning to have dignified livelihoods is expressed in their regular, active participation in elections, where they vote in countless numbers against the ruling party. Yet Old Horse and his successor Tuvy's administrations deny them this indispensable constitutional right. Most significantly, the novel conveys a sad political reality in Zimbabwe, where allegedly elections could not be used to dislodge the Zimbabwe African National Union Patriotic Front (ZANU PF) from power for the past 43 years. The Jidada animals are tricked by the 'coup' leaders to support the toppling of the Old Horse in the same way the ordinary animals in *Animal Farm* fight alongside the pigs, including Napoleon, to remove Mr Jones from Manor Farm.

Growling dogs and menacing defenders: The Napoleon logic and unspeakable horrors

In this section, I focus on how Bulawayo's novel *Glory* dialogues with the precursor text, *Animal Farm*, with regards to the representation of what I consider the Napoleon logic of rulership, that is, enforcing sovereign power over politicised lives in modern-day Zimbabwean society. Giorgio Agamben (1998) in *Homo Sacer*: *Sovereign Power and Bare Life* brings to the fore how political power is used to engender division between recognised life, that which is considered valuable and protected, or later re-theorised as grievable lives – lives that are considered worthy of mourning after they are lost, according to Judith Butler (2016) – and bare life, a worthless and ungrievable life. According to Agamben (1998), it is the state or the figure of the sovereign who confers this differentiation through suspension of law or stripping of rights and creation of death zones for the abandoned populations. Through a sovereign ban, the fated *homo sacer* becomes 'a human victim' who loses their humanity and may be killed but not sacrificed (Agamben 1998:53). The troubling question is what the defining features are that allow stripping of rights and prescribing *homo sacer* status. In *Glory*, readers encounter performances of grotesque power by the Old Horse's government (a symbolic representation of the Mugabe-led government). One such incident is captured through the appalling ordeal of SaCetshwayo Khumalo, a freedom fighter residing in Bulawayo, who is butchered to death on the callous instruction of the state defenders (the army commanders and soldiers who participated in political and ethnic civil war between 1983 and 1987) in postcolonial Zimbabwe. SaCetshwayo Khumalo and his family are

among the victims in the novel who are accused of supporting an opposition party (dissidents in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces). The commander of the defenders scornfully demands (Bulawayo 2022):

> Since you claim not to know any Dissidents, where's your Jidada Party card? the Commander said. Then, turning to us, Where are your Jidada Party cards? Whoever has a Jidada Party card please stand up and let's see them. (p. 210)

In another telling passage, one member of the Khumalo movement responds to the defender's inquiries (Bulawayo 2022):

> I belong to the Jidada Union, sir. It has its roots in this whole [*Matabeleland*] region as you know so naturally, we all belong to it. The Defenders roared with laughter. And why on earth do you belong to a party of Dissidents? Of terrorists? 'It's not – we're not Dissidents, we're not terrorists. We're just a party like any other party, and we're Jidadans, sir.' 'Just a party? And Jidadans? Who told you that you were Jidadans? Was your great-great-grandfather born on this land or he came from somewhere else to seize territory from our [*Shona*] ancestors and rubbish their kingdom?' the Commander barked. The Defenders howled and wagged their tails. (p. 211)

The dialogic extract is laden with the troubling forms of exclusions at play. Bulawayo stresses the problematic ethnic and political Otherness which is conferred on the Ndebele people and members of the opposition parties. As the passage exposes, Ndebele people and political opponents across the tribal divide are located outside the body politic entitled to live. These sections of postcolonial Zimbabwean society are stripped of all the constitutional rights and protection as citizens because of their Othered ethnic and political statuses. The question of belonging is posed in the above passages. The Khumalos belong to the Ndebele tribe, and they find themselves in trouble because they cannot produce cards for the Jidada Party which is in power. Reference to the ruling party as the Jidada Party reflects how the nation is paradoxically imagined in a monologic sense that takes away citizenship from all those who disagree with the ruling class's political ideology. The ruling party, ZANU PF and the nation of Zimbabwe are problematically fused together to become a single entity in biopolitical imaginations of the postcolonial politics (Muchemwa 2010). This account of the historical atrocities in the novel disrupts the fragile boundary between real-life experiences and artistic imaginary.

Amanda Hammar (2008:419) posits that Gukurahundi (the civil war that took place between 1983 and 1987 in Zimbabwe) was dubbed Operation 'Weeding Out' of the alleged dissidents, yet in practice it used wartime logic aimed at crushing the then-formidable opposition party Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU), an imagined or real threat to Mugabe's rule. It is suspected that about 20,000 lives were lost during the Gukurahundi assassinations – an obnoxious memory which still haunts some Zimbabwean communities, especially in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces (Hammar 2008). This historically situated narrative of assassination, rape and trauma in Bulawayo's novel tells a macabre story of the death of conscience and the genesis of autocratic tendencies during the seminal stage in post-independence Zimbabwe. The death trope in the novel conjures numerous semantic implications. On one hand, it mirrors the political treachery of the fecund ideals of liberation by postcolonial despots. On the other hand, the death of Butholezwe Henry Vulindlela Khumalo and Sibo's rape by the commander of the state defenders (the armed forces) inscribe constrictions and silence imposed by the ruling party in Zimbabwe. The self-serving autocratic power repudiates individuals' political autonomy and the constitutional rights to elect leaders of their choice. The surviving victims' voice and memory later in the text disclose the failure of the sovereign to permanently stifle the *homo sacer* figures' expressive voices. Survivors of the Gukurahundi in Matabeleland and Midlands provinces, or survivors of other forms of state ordeals like Simiso and Destiny in the text, live to tell the excruciating stories. The grotesque performance by the defenders and petty sovereigns is evident in the ensuing extract (Bulawayo 2022):

> Okay, this is what'll happen. One of you, we don't care who, really, will pick up that ax and chop the other. That's what we want to see here right now. And not just chop but chop to pieces, proper pieces, not parts, you understand? Or else we'll finish every one of you today and I'm not sure you want that. Or maybe you do, I don't know, only you know. It's your choice, really, it's a free after the country Commander barked. About then we heard a volley of gunshots. Just *pha-pha-pha-pha-pha-pha-pha.* (p. 214)

Through imagery, sarcasm and descriptive language, readers are made to picture the horrific sight of the chopped body of SaCetshwayo. We are also told that when the victim SaCetshwayo finally dies, his family is ordered not to weep, thereby imposing an ungrievable status which denies the humanity of the condemned. It is heart-rending that SaCetshwayo's son is forced to chop his own father into pieces while other family members helplessly watch. The remains of the state victim after the chopping no longer look like a human body but mere pieces of crushed bones mixed with meat and blood. The same violent techniques are used during elections: members of the opposition parties are battered and butchered to death and women are raped. Both protagonists in the novel, Destiny and her mother Simiso, are devastated by their memories of rape and torture in the hands of 'the terrorist devil defender, commander Jambanja' (Bulawayo 2022:186). The years 2008, 2013 and 2018 correspond correctly with Zimbabwe's previous elections, which were marked by violence and the alleged kidnapping of members of the opposition parties (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya 2020). The text makes an intertextual reference through a flashback to the infamous 2013 elections, when Bornfree, a fictional character in *We Need New Names*, was kidnapped and killed in order to highlight the enduring culture of violence.

The absurdly named Gukurahundi – a Shona term which refers to a sinister hurricane that forcefully washes away the chaff (Hammar 2008) – in the novel is called 'a soundtrack of terror' to underline the ridiculous naming of state-sanctioned violence in Zimbabwe. The *homo sacer* figures assume the image of undesired chaff or trash to be get rid of. Those who disregard the warning 'beware of the dog *bhasopa lo inja*' (Bulawayo 2022:72) suffer the consequences. The image of the vicious dog here is an important symbolic trope which personifies the police, army or any other fanatical petty sovereigns granted the power to beat up, rape, kill or terrify. The Mugabe-led government adopted a violent mode of state-making (Ndlovu-Gatsheni & Ruhanya 2020). Gibson Ncube (2018), commenting on crisis of political change in Zimbabwe, posits that:

> [*D*]irt, filth and disease are tropes that figure prominently in Zimbabwean politics and political discourses. These tropes have been used by the ruling party and government to frame dissenting voices and all other forms of being that are perceived as deviating from the normative codes of the so-called Zimbabwean national [*and political*] identity. (p. 41 *author's own emphasis*)

Matabeleland is portrayed as the locus of the state of exception in Agamben's language or Butler's (2004) unruly site of the living dead – the ungrievable bodies. The entire Jidada army is made up of dogs like the rest of the security forces, and these dogs are impetuous and malicious, because they always carry 'typical weapons such as batons, tear-gas, canisters, guns, shields and clubs', prepared to blindly render their 'defending' services to their master (the sovereign) who could be 'a brute, murderer, sorcerer, tyrant or devil' (Bulawayo 2022:13). Apparently, the defenders, dogs and other low-ranked animals – the supporters – are not reasonable, because they do not question their participation in violence. The repressive state apparatus, according to Louis Althusser (1970), or the dogs' gullibility, is also articulated in Orwell's earlier novel when the anonymous narrator tells readers that 'it was noticed that they [the dogs] wagged their tails to him [Napoleon] in the same way as the other dogs had been used to do to Mr. Jones' (Orwell 1945:35). Napoleon owns 'nine enormous dogs' which follow him everywhere (Orwell 1945:34). One common aspect discernible in both texts is that the sovereign is in perpetual fear of losing autocratic power, and the public killings and brutal tortures are meant to scare away the rivals from the seat of power.

These novels also blur the difference between human and animal characters, a scenario that troubles human and nonhuman dichotomies. For instance, Tuvy is depicted as a horse, a greedy mongrel and a wandering crocodile that scares children after the demise of the Old Horse. The carnivorous metaphor, which (un)intentionally coincides with Mnangagwa's wartime name, appears to suggest the presence of life-threatening conditions embedded in despotism and brutalisation of the political Others. Readers and critics do not miss the arresting semantic innuendos in the details about Tuvy, who is from the horse tribe, which therefore connote resemblance to the removed Old Horse and party of power in the same way that Napoleon belongs to the preeminent pig tribe – the ruling elite and think-tanks in *Animal Farm*. The ironic presence of the lurking, roaming croc in the bush also suggests that the national space is no longer a sanctuary but a site of menace. In the same way, Napoleon is a pig but becomes a dangerous dictator who does not hesitate to kill whoever is deemed a threat to his political power. In the epilogue of *Animal Farm*, the ruling pigs enjoy good food, sleep in beds and walk on two legs just like humans – a parallel account is made through a description of a magnificent sight involving members of the Inner Circle of the Party of power in *Glory*. Members of the Inner Circle are dressed up in expensive apparel and glittering jewellery. This image of the mighty is juxtaposed with the hungry ordinary animals (the majority) sweating under the sizzling heat and watching from a distance the favoured ones of Jidada country. Perhaps the two writers pose a critical question about the exact features which make humans different from other animals when the former show loss of conscience and engage in irrational callousness. The existence of the wall of the dead in the novel *Glory* indicates both the state's sadistic nature and the endless endangered condition or the near-death experience of bare lives. This striking symbol is further employed to convey the thin line between life and death, because the wall of the dead is located in Lozikeyi township in Jidada's capital city. Lozikeyi is an abject space where the debased people, living dead, reside under the state of exception (Agamben 1998). Yet the oppressed populations also show an enduring quest to reclaim their lost humanity. Thus, the wall of the dead is a densely layered allegory which also signifies a collective memory of pain inflicted by the state. The relatives of the state victims come from diverse parts of the country to write the names of their slain loved ones on the wall. One of the strategies employed by Napoleon as well as Jidada's politicians is to create a huge gulf between the rulers and ruled animals. Orwell (1945) writes:

> Nowadays they did not sit all together as they had done in the past. Napoleon, with Squealer and another pig named Minimus […] sat on the front of the raised platform, with the nine young dogs forming a semicircle round them, and the other pigs sitting behind. The rest of the animals sat facing them in the main body of the barn. (p. 97)

Similarly, in Bulawayo's text, the Old Horse, his wife and the Inner Circle of the seat of power occupy a hoisted podium during the independence celebration ceremony. It is ironic that the ordinary animals have no freedom even to leave the 'independence' event because the dogs threaten to tear them into pieces. Nevertheless, the tumbling of both Mr Jones and the Old Horse (epitomising the late Mugabe) from power validates the African adage captured in Bulawayo's text, 'power is a kind of dew' that vanishes into air (Bulawayo 2022:67), and a provocative proverbial declaration that reads,

'even monkeys fall from trees' (Bulawayo 2022:83). Readers note that the pigs, mongrels and horses who led the revolutionary battles against the toppled dictators in both *Animal Farm* and *Glory* do not seek to bring independence to all animals but rather do so for their self-interest, to accumulate riches and attain self-glory through holding threatening political power.

(Dis)information, suspension of law, anti-animalism and violent modes of state-making

Agamben's (1998) astute ideas are informative in the discussion of the use of propaganda and state of exception in both texts. I also find his concepts of the state of exception and suspension of law helpful in the exploration of politics in postcolonial Zimbabwe. The hallmark of tyrannical governance does not only hinge on the use of violent modes; we also need to critically reflect on the intricate spectrum of entanglements in an attempt to gain more insights about overt and subtle forms of biopolitical regimes. This renewed analytical attention brings to the fore modes which include the suspension of law; regular censoring techniques; verbal attacks on state critics, such as artists, intellectuals and independent media practitioners; misrepresentation of banned people; and misinformation, or what Hannah Arendt (1993:253) qualifies to be 'organised lying' undertaken through systematic distortions or denial of historical evidence (Arendt 1993). For instance, the Zimbabwean government constantly denies its alleged role in fuelling violence against political opponents and their supporters, especially during elections. Yet the rhetoric of entitlement and (il)legitimacy discourses are punctuated by the grammar of violence. It cannot be inflated that such discourses reinforce binaries that exclude bare lives from the imagined political community, as postulated by Benedict Anderson (1983). The frontiers are further utilised in influencing political beliefs and most notably encourage politically motivated violence against those branded as enemies of the state. The rhetoric of 'sovereignty' which insinuates ZANU PF's sovereign 'right' to rule is legitimised with the adage 'we died for this country so we will we rule Zimbabwe forever' (Mavengano 2023). It is only those carefully granted the status of those who 'died for the country' (*vakafira nyika* in Shona language – a privileged version of the living dead) who should enjoy the national cake. The illogicality embedded in this monolithic rhetoric of indigeneity is that the dying for the country is not for every liberation heroine or hero, even within the ruling party, not to mention that members of the opposition parties, irrespective of their ethnic identities, are excluded from the blood that was shed during the liberation war (Mavengano 2023). This narrative re-enacts the white colonisers' fabricated superior sense of humanity over the degraded African people, while ZANU PF's discourse of entitlement masks and sanitises the violence of exclusion. It is also used to justify the horrors of torture, rape and killings which are used to 'discipline' the supposedly unbridled bare lives. Such a totalitarian ideological construction of Zimbabweanness complicates the earlier projected ethnocentric philosophies because the Shona–Ndebele divide is distorted in recent categories of assumed adversaries.

In *Animal Farm,* the narrative of entitlement is used to propel the status of Napoleon's ruling tribe of pigs that lives in extravagance while common animals (ordinary citizens) suffer in abjection and scarcity (Orwell 1945):

> We pigs are brainworkers. The whole management and organisation of this farm depend on us. Day and night we are watching over your welfare. It is for your sake that we drink that milk and eat those apples. (p. 59)

Notably, in Zimbabwe, these biopolitical scripts and mechanics are most overt during elections, and in the post-2000 era, violence has been an enduring feature of the biopower (Hammar 2008). The state-run television and radio will be awash with images of the liberation struggle and reconstructed heroic narratives which compel the animals to express gratitude to the gallant fighters. Napoleon and Snowball renamed Manor Farm to Animal Farm and reduced the principles of animalism to seven commandments, but several ordinary animals are unable to read. To make these seven commandments more effectively implanted, Snowball reduces them to a single maxim, namely: 'Four legs good, two legs bad' (Orwell 1945:100). Similarly, Tuvy and his cadres rename Operation Restore Legacy – a term which was used to justify the removal of the Old Horse from power. The ruling party in Zimbabwe has been involved in constitutional amendments to align it with its immediate political interests amidst futile protests from the opposition and civil society. The ruled animals no longer endeavour to evaluate the ethics of animalism. They simply mimic the aphorism 'four legs good, two legs bad' (an emblematic image of the despised coloniser, Mr Jones) in the novel *Animal Farm* (Darmawan 2020). Ostensibly, the politics of deceit is also a fundamental biopolitical mechanism which functions with the subaltern classes' conviviality of consent.

In *Animal Farm*, Squealer is one of the significant characters in representation of central tropes. He is loyal to Napoleon, and the narrator describes Squealer as a brilliant talker and very persuasive, to the extent that 'he could turn black into white' (Orwell 1945:16). This description is later sanctioned when Squealer hides the truth from other animals about Napoleon's cold-hearted attitude towards Boxer – a hardworking horse who is sold to the slaughterers because of an injury that was sustained in the process of rendering service to the ungrateful regime. Squealer constructs a different narrative, and readers are told (Orwell 1945):

> Squealer appeared, full of sympathy and concern. He said that Comrade Napoleon had learned with the very deepest distress of this misfortune to one of the most loyal workers on the farm, and was already making arrangements to send Boxer to be treated in the hospital at Willingdon. (p. 207)

> Three days later it was announced that he had died in the hospital at Willingdon, in spite of receiving every attention a horse could have. (p. 214)

In another telling passage, Orwell (1945) also makes use of intertextual reference to bring out how election discourses require oratorical skills:

> Snowball, who had studied an old book of Julius Caesar's campaigns which he had found in the farmhouse, was in charge of the defensive operations. He gave his orders quickly, and in a couple of minutes every animal was at his post. He had not only a mind for war, but also a great charisma and action. (p. 40)

Equally, 'the Minister of Propaganda, the Minister of Homophobic Affairs, the Minister of Disinformation' in *Glory* (Bulawayo 2022:13) hold critical positions in the business of defending the sovereign power and acts of sovereignty undertaken in the country. The roles require rhetorical and defensive skills. The security forces, the police and army under the scandalously named ministry of Homophobic Affairs are responsible for unleashing weapons of destruction against 'perceived rowdy populations. The Minister of Disinformation functions to deal with the interferences of regional and international communities when such acts of defending the state draw the attention of prying eyes. The state organ of 'defending' is effective in Zimbabwe because in 2017, it was officially announced that the former president, Robert Mugabe, and his family were under protection from criminals. As a result of the 'effective' function of the Ministry of (Dis)information, the removal of the late president is still not officially declared a coup.

Quite strikingly, the Old Horse and Tuvy's relation is comparable to the comradeship between Napoleon and Snowball in *Animal Farm.* In both cases, it is the desire for absolute power, *hamartia* (a fatal error that causes a tragic disgrace or brings about an unexpected twist of events or *peripeteia*), to use Shakespearean language, which clouds a sense of reason and tears apart long-time allegiances. Elsewhere, I regarded this self-destructive attitude as the silliness of trusting in political strength. The foregrounded rhetoric about free and fair elections in the following excerpt of (Bulawayo 2022) attempts to conceal the realities of the intimidation, violence and alleged election rigging which have characterised Zimbabwean elections from the year 2000 (Hammar 2008).

> Only the Savior Will Save Jidada … Vote Tuvius Delight Shasha for President! … Vote Party of Power for the Seat of Power … The Voice of the Masses is the Voice of God, Your Vote is your Voice, Vote Tuvius Delight Shasha, a Savior, THE Savior … FREE AND INCREDIBLE ELECTIONS! (p. 177)

We need to remember that the killing of other animals by Napoleon's regime undermines the spirit of Animalism, a symbolic signification of democratic ideals (Gnanasekaran 2017), in much the same way the ethos of the liberation struggle and democracy are violated by Zimbabwe's postcolonial rulers, which is enunciated in the novel *Glory*. In his later work, *State of Exception* (2005), Agamben affirms that the sovereign has the power to introduce a *state of exception* or suspension of the law, which speaks about the limit of the law under tyrannical rule. This rekindles the memory of the Ugandan Idi Amin and other dictators of the modern world. Paradoxically, it is the glory of the elite in corridors of power, not the subaltern animals, that Bulawayo's title mocks. This attitude is succinctly expressed by the statement 'man serves the interests of no creature except himself,' (Orwell 1945:14). Likewise, Bulawayo employs imagery and metaphor to create the deflated mood of postcolonial subjects because, as Kizito Muchemwa (2010) accurately avows, postcolonial politics mirrors the colonial logics of domination. 'Simiso remembers how at the end of that terrible war, the hoped-for future lay broken, bloodied' (Bulawayo 2022:172). The blood imagery once again conjures the lasting memory of Gukurahundi and the mass killings which shut down the dream for peace and nation-building during the formative years of the postcolonial Zimbabwe. We see that propaganda and falsehoods are critical, because the state's exercise of grotesque and obscene power should be obscured to deceptively represent the sovereign as an upholder of the law or a custodian of constitutionalism (Mbembe 2001). Essentially, this ambiguous duality and astonishing dynamics are conceivable because the laws are malleable, as evident in the novel *Animal Farm*, where the sovereign has the liberty to abolish or alter the laws. Both texts send compelling messages about false revolutionary leaders who put on democratic political outfits only to take power and turn out to be worse than their predecessors.

The Sugarcandy Mountain and new dispensation

Some of the shared tropes in the studied texts include the alarming political stasis and subjectivisation of the ordinary animals, which invoke the image of a dystopic national space. Such a melancholic state of affairs sharply contradicts and mocks the discourses about new dispensation and post-repressive eras. The title of Orwell's novel inscribes democratic tenets of common citizenship and shared responsibility and instils a sense of belonging for all animals (Nur & Arabah 2020). Yet the transition from Manor Farm to Animal Farm is troubled by inconsistencies signifying arrested change. The collapse of Mr Jones's rule (a loathed human tyrant) is hazy because the farm remains a site of abjection for the common animals. The concept of the 'Sugarcandy Mountain' serves as a commanding symbol. This fictional place denotes the animals' hope for a better life beyond their current hardships. Much like the Christian concept of Heaven, the Sugarcandy Mountain promises freedom from subjugation, deprivation and misery. Moses, the novel's 'religious' figure, spreads tales of this paradise to the other animals. The fable of the Sugarcandy Mountain is initially dismissed by the pigs, but they later on support it when it is deemed to be a necessary diversion. The Sugarcandy Mountain becomes a manipulative instrument, keeping the animals docile and optimistic, even as they continue to labour under the pigs' biopolitical grip. Orwell's critique extends beyond religion itself, stressing how those in

power can exploit hope and belief to preserve their authority. This inconsistency denotes the allusive utopian vision of the world which only serves to hide the painful realities of inequalities and injustices.

The same can be said about the conditions of Jidada animals living in a culture of violence that remains intact irrespective of the change of rulers from colonial to the Old Horse's postcolonial rule, followed by the 'post-coup' period when Tuvy takes power from his political mentor. The fictional Tuvy, just like the current Zimbabwean president Emmerson Mnangagwa, stresses a shift from his predecessor's repressive rule, which has given birth to corruption, dishonesty, a failing economy, penury, nepotism, general decay and other problems. According to Oswell Binha (2021:214), Mnangagwa (mis)represents himself as the theological redeemer and vows to embrace the servant leadership philosophy which demands one to climb down from 'the leadership high horse.' The post-Mugabe government utilises the new dispensation narrative to memorialise Zimbabwe's lost glory – a land of milk and honey 'when Jidada was such an earthly paradise … the promised land, the stunning Eldorado … musings of glory' (Bulawayo 2022:13). The unfolding realities concerning the potent fiascos and the visible decline in the rule of law from 2017 reflect the politics of arrogance and continuation of militant nationalism that is lamented by Vambe (2023). This situation aligns with Agamben's suppositions in biopolitics. Bulawayo extends this contemporary mode of governance beyond the Zimbabwean border through reference to the shooting and killing incidents of black people in America. These analogous incidents interject (mis)construed ideas about America and Europe as ideal models of democracy. In this way, the writer underlines slanted claims of democracy in societies where there is still evidence of human rights violations, repression and management of lives across the world.

Conclusion

It is rather perturbing to note that the denouements of both Orwell and Bulawayo's texts do not offer a respite or suggest an end to despotism. In *Animal Farm*, the seven commandments are contemptibly reconfigured to set the ruling pigs apart from the rest of the subaltern animals. The seven commandments are repeatedly reconfigured, including the one that reinstates the ruler–ruled or sovereign–*homo sacer* divide which proclaims that 'all animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others' (Orwell 1945:76). The hopes for an adherence to constitutionalism and attainment of an egalitarian society, which were raised at the beginning of the novel, are completely abandoned. Napoleon is successful in reverting to an antidemocratic society. The pigs rule Animal Farm just like Mr Jones once did. In *Animal Farm*, the dramatic end of the novel is quite revealing, because it points at the crisis of political change in societies where autocratic culture has been normalised. The common animals are terrified to see Squealer and all pigs walking on two legs and Napoleon carrying a whip. This cyclic development provides a reflection on how difficult it is to undo an age-old systemic repressive political culture. The interminable exploitation of power by dictatorial politicians continues in spite of rhetorical renaming or misnaming of the perceived 'new dispensations' in the guise of democratic outfits. Eventually, the regimes in both texts and their leaders are indistinguishable from the ones they have substituted. Much like the Soviet intelligentsia, the rivalry between Leon Trotsky and Stalin of the Orwellian world, the pigs establish themselves as the ruling class in the new society, in the same way the 2017 'coup' (or not-so-coup) leaders in Zimbabwe emerged from tensions within the ruling party and took over the seat of power. In both countries, as depicted in the texts, despotic regimes survive through a shift from founding principles of the revolutionary struggles.

The other highlighted challenge is that the sovereign power is strengthened by some sections of the masses' gullible conviviality. Oppressive rulers and victims strangely participate in sustaining the biopolitical models of governance. Radical voices are silenced, and the oppressed populations fight each other and gullibly support the state of affairs. This weakens the potential to dislodge the biopolitical system from power. Astonishingly, the revolutionary governments bear the trappings of the previous oppressors. Regrettably for the ordinary citizens, despotic regimes are not self-critical or introspective. Instead, they prefer dishonest and sanitised narratives that do not solve the challenges encountered by the people. In other words, the illusion of economic and political freedom which inspired the majority to fight against the previous oppressors is a dream deferred (à la Langston Hughes) for the majority of ordinary people. The return of living queues towards the end of Bulawayo's novel reinforces Muchemwa's (2010) earlier observation that Zimbabwe is a nation in crisis. Apparently, the Queuenation is generally affected by the arrested transition or change in crisis. In both texts, the alleged new dispensations are the illusory Sugarcandy Mountain in *Animal Farm* which questionably denotes visions of utopianism and a world of political hypocrisy. The birth of postcolonial order is deferred, evoking Ayi Kwei Armah's (1969) *The Beautyful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. However, in the later novel *Glory*, citizens do not give up their dream to redeem their land and restore moral conscience in the political life of the county.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The author declares that they have no financial or personal relationships that may have inappropriately influenced them in writing this article.

Author's contributions

E.M. is the sole author of this research manuscript.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and are the product of professional research. It does not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated institution, funder, agency, or that of the publisher. The author is responsible for this article's results, findings and content.

References

Agamben, G., 1998, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*, Stanford University Press, California.

Alexander, J. & McGregor, J., 2013, 'Introduction: Politics, patronage and violence in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Southern African Studies* 39(4), 749–763. https://doi.org/10.1080/03057070.2013.862100

Althusser, L., 1970, *Ideology and ideological state apparatuses*, La Pensee, Paris.

Anderson, B., 1983, *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*, Verso, London.

Arendt, H., 1993, 'Truth and politics', in J. Koln (ed.), *Between past and future. Eight exercises in political thought*, pp. 227–264, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex.

Armah, A.K., 1969, *The beautyful ones are not yet born*, Heinemann, London.

Bhabha, H.K., 1994, *The location of culture*, Routledge, London.

Binha, O., 2021, 'Rhetoric of political servant leadership – A review of Zimbabwe's New Political Dispensation (NPD) Servant Leadership Pledge', *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications* 11(2), 214–234. https://doi.org/10.29322/IJSRP.11.02.2021.p11025

Blaut, J.M., 1993, *The Coloniser model of the world: Geographical diffusionism and eurocentric history*, Guilford Press, New York, NY.

Bulawayo, N., 2022, *Glory*, Vintage Books, London.

Butler, J., 2004, *Undoing gender*, Routledge, New York, NY.

Butler, J., 2016, *Frames of war: When is life grievable?,* Verso, London.

Chidora, T., Rumbidzai Tivenga, R.D. & Chitando, E. (eds.), 2024, *The Zimdancehall revolution critical perspectives*, Palgrave Macmillan, London.

Dangarembga, T., 1988, *Nervous conditions*, Women's Press, London.

Darmawan, R.I., 2020, 'Revisiting Bhabha's Mimicry in George Orwell's Animal Farm', *Pioneer: Journal of Language and Literature* 12(2), 141–156. https://doi.org/10.36841/pioneer.v12i2.731

Dube, Z., 2016, 'Dancehall music and urban identities in Zimbabwe – A Constructive postmodern perspective', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 72(4), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v72i4.3461

Fanon, F., 1963, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Grove Press, New York, NY.

Gibbs, R., 2011, 'The allegorical impulse', *Metaphor and Symbol* 26(2), 121–130. https://doi.org/10.1080/10508406.2011.556498

Giroux, H.A., 2006, 'Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, class, and the biopolitics of disposability', *College Literature* 33(3), 171–196. https://doi.org/10.1353/lit.2006.0037

Gnanasekaran, R., 2017, 'Orwell's early experiences on communism with specific reference to Animal Farm', *International Journal of English Research* 3(3), 17–19.

Hammar, A., 2008, 'In the name of sovereignty: Displacement and state making inpost-independence Zimbabwe', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 26(4), 417–434. https://doi.org/10.1080/02589000802481999

Mavengano, E., 2023, 'The phallocentric paradox and semantics of Eve's myth in Zimbabwe's contemporary national politics: An ecofeminist reading of Bulawayo's novel, Glory', *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79(3), 1–9, a8070. https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i3.8070

Mbembe, A., 2001, *On the postcolony*, University of California Press, Berkeley, CA.

Motahane, N. & Makombe, R., 2020, 'Not at home in the world: The home, the unhomely, and migrancy in NoViolet Bulawayo's we need new names', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 61(3), 262–273. https://doi.org/10.1080/00111619.2020.1713715

Muchemwa, K.Z., 2010, 'Galas, Biras, State Funerals and the Necropolitan imagination in the re-construction of the Zimbabwean nation 1980–2008', *Social Dynamics, A Journal of African Studies* 36(3), 504–514. https://doi.org/10.1080/02533952.2010.517623

Mutanda, D., 2019, 'Post-colonial violence in Zimbabwe and the significance of peacebuilding premised on civilian survival strategies', *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 14(2), 179–192. https://doi.org/10.1177/1542316619850159

Mutanda, D., 2024, 'Social media and human development in Zimbabwe: Opportunities and challenges', *Cogent Arts & Humanities* 11(1), 2313850. https://doi.org/10.1080/23311983.2024.2313850

Ncube, G., 2018, 'Of dirt, disinfection and purgation: Discursive construction of state violence in selected contemporary Zimbabwean literature', *Tydskrif Vir Letterkunde* 55(1), 41–53. https://doi.org/10.17159/2309-9070/tvl.v.55i1.1548

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J., 2023, 'Beyond the coloniser's model of the world: Towards reworlding from the Global South', *Third World Quarterly* 44(10), 2246–2262.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S.J. & Ruhanya, P., 2020, *The history and political transition of Zimbabwe: From Mugabe to Mnangagwa, African Histories and Modernities Series (AHAM)*, Palgrave Macmillan Press, New York, NY.

Nur, N.A. &Arafah, B., 2020, 'The reflection of Classless Society in George Orwell's Animal Farm', *Jurnal Ilmu Budaya* 8(1), 91–96. https://doi.org/10.34050/jib.v8i1.9113

Orwell, G., 1945, *Animal farm*, Secker and Warburg, London.

Vambe, T.M., 2004, 'Versions and sub-versions: Trends in *Chimurenga* Musical discourses of post-independence Zimbabwe', *African Study Monographs* 25(4), 167–193.

Vambe, T.M., 2023, 'Zimbabwe: The Fall from a Jewel Status', *Third World Thematics: A TWQ Journal* 8(4–6), 181–188. https://doi.org/10.1080/23802014.2023.2287495