

Animal Metaphors as a Narrative Strategy for Political Critique in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*

Faith Owino¹, Selline Oketch², Jane Wakarindi³

Department of Languages, Literature and Communication, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya.

Abstract: This study investigates the use of animal metaphors in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* as a narrative strategy for political critique in post-independence Zimbabwe. The study is anchored in allegorical criticism as advanced by Angus Fletcher (1964), Northrop Frye, and Jeanne-Marie Jackson, and postcolonial theory as proposed by Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. The study explores how animal characters can act as stand-ins for political actors, ideologies, and historical events. The study adopts an analytical research design grounded in textual analysis. The qualitative approach is employed since it is suitable for interpreting allegorical, thematic and symbolic aspects of literary texts. The sample population includes one primary text (*Glory*) and a curated body of between 10-20 scholarly secondary sources selected for their academic currency and relevance. The novel is selected through purposive sampling due to its focused use of animal allegory. The study establishes that Bulawayo employs animal allegory not just as a stylistic technique but as a powerful tool through which socio-political realities, postcolonial disillusionment, propaganda and authoritarianism can be exposed. The findings further reveal that other than enabling critique, employing animal metaphors equally mirrors broader African postcolonial realities thus extending beyond Zimbabwean borders. This study contributes to the fields of African literary criticism, postcolonial studies, and political allegory. It recommends a comparative approach through analysis of multiple African literary texts and with global allegorical works. It equally suggests incorporation of the novel into tertiary and secondary curricula, and the integration of additional theoretical frameworks to deepen analysis.

Keywords: Animal metaphors, Allegorical Criticism, Post-Independence, Satire, African oral traditions

1. Introduction

Animals have long held symbolic significance in postcolonial African literature functioning as cultural signposts, moral messengers, and social critics. African writers often adopt innovative narrative strategies to critique political systems, including the use of animal allegory to symbolize political realities and political systems. NoViolet Bulawayo is a renowned African writer who employs animal metaphors to construct a satirical yet deeply engaging narrative of post-independence Zimbabwe. Globally, literary scholars are increasingly becoming drawn to animal representation as a metaphor for marginalized human groups (Hossain, 2024). George Orwell's *Animal Farm* remains a key inter-text for many such works and its global influence is evident in African adaptations which employ animals to stage human resistance and conflict. Regionally, animal allegory and symbolism are deeply rooted in oral traditions including proverbs, folktales and myths. Within modern African literature, the use of metaphor has evolved over time, particularly in postcolonial fiction. According to Mangena & Ndlovu, these traditions have influenced modern African writers who now not only employ animal allegory and imagery to convey moral instruction but also to critique gender oppression,

dictatorship, colonialism, authoritarian regimes, and the failures of post-independence leadership (2016). In the Zimbabwean literary context, post-independence writing has been significantly shaped by themes of nationalism, political continuity, liberation, and authoritarianism. NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* (2022) presents an innovative and timely contribution to African literature because of its bold re-imagination of political satire using anthropomorphized animals.

Although existing scholarship has explored satire and allegory in African literature, the use of animal metaphors for political critique in contemporary African literature remains underexplored as it often overshadowed by Eurocentric exemplars resulting in a reductive interpretation which overlooks African indigenous narrative strategies such as storytelling traditions. By focusing on the metaphorical aspects of animal representation, this study acknowledges the enduring and rich tradition of symbolic animal narratives in African literature. Across global, regional, and local contexts, there remains a gap in scholarship concerning the examination of how the animal characters in *Glory* operate as metaphorical representations within a postcolonial political framework. Ultimately, this study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how African writers employ animal metaphors not only as a stylistic technique but equally as a narrative strategy to critique socio-political realities in post-independence African societies.

2. Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored in a multidisciplinary theoretical framework that draws primarily from allegorical criticism and postcolonial theory. Together, these theoretical frameworks enable a nuanced exploration of the metaphorical and symbolic use of animals in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* as a narrative strategy for political critique. Allegorical criticism is a valuable theoretical framework for examining Literature because it enables readers to move beyond the surface level of a text and engage with its deeper meaning. Allegory is pivotal to the narrative technique in *Glory*, where animal characters stand in for real systems of governance and political figures. This study draws on allegorical criticism to interpret how meaning is layered through symbolism, allusion, and metaphor.

Key theorists include Angus Fletcher (1964) who defines allegory as a 'structure of meaning over time,' stressing on the extended nature of allegorical narratives. Northrop Frye is the other proponent who argues that in political allegory, characters are not individuals but types-operating more as symbolic forces than as psychologically developed beings. Another scholar of Allegorical Criticism is Jeanne-Marie Jackson and one of her scholarly works is "*The African Novel of Ideas: Philosophy and Individualism in the Age of Global Writing*" (2021). Here, Jackson explores how African fiction serves not only as a narrative but as a philosophical mode where metaphor and allegory enable writers to reflect on moral and political questions. She highlights the African novel as a space for critical thought and speculative meaning. Her framework supports the reading of *Glory* as an intellectually and politically charged allegory where animals are not merely fable devices but vessels of complex ideological critique. Another influential scholar is Christopher Warnes with two of his notable works including "*Magical Realism and the Postcolonial Novel*" (2009) and "*Satire, Allegory, and the Politics of Reading*". He emphasizes on how allegory operates within postcolonial fiction, more so when infused with magical realism and satire. He stresses on the subversive role of narrative in African contexts where political dissent is risky.

The key tenets of allegorical criticism include personification and symbolic characters. Characters in allegory are often personified archetypes or abstractions. In political allegory, they represent real ideologies, institutions or leaders. It equally entails multiple layers of meaning including figurative and literal as allegory operates on various levels. Moudileno notes that the surface narrative often entails literal events, characters and plot and the underlying symbolic meaning often mirrors abstract ideas or real-world issues (2020). Another key tenet is its moral or didactic purpose as allegories often serve didactic purposes entailing teaching, warning or morally instructing the audience. It equally has a structural coherence of symbols as for an allegory to be termed as successful, it is vital for the symbolic elements to remain coherent and consistent across the text. Each layer entailing the settings, actions and animal characters should map logically onto the deeper meaning it represents (Verissimo, 2025). In *Glory*, each animal represents a social class, role, or

political function, helping readers reflect on the morality of that role. Intertextuality and allusion is equally crucial in allegorical criticism. Allegory often draws on existing myths, religious texts or political history to establish resonance. Ong supports this notion by stipulating that allegorical criticism unveils how texts echo or subvert canonical narratives (2017).

The second theoretical lens, postcolonial theory, aids in unpacking deeper ideological and historical complexities instead of dismissing them as simple allegorical substitutions. Besides, allegorical criticism does not fully engage questions of nationhood and identity and may risk universalizing meaning rather than contextualizing it hence postcolonial theory steps in with the necessary tools of exploring post-independence crises, nationhood and hybridity. Moreover, allegory often operates within the fictional world while postcolonial theory expands interpretation outward. Key theorists of postcolonial theory include Chinua Achebe, Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Key tenets of postcolonial theory include its critique of colonialism and aftermath as it explores the historical, cultural, and political consequences of colonialism on initially colonized communities. It unveils how colonial powers disrupted indigenous structures and imposed foreign systems of knowledge, identity and governance. Resistance and subversion are other tenets which examine how colonized peoples resisted imperial domination through culture, religion, language. They advocate for subaltern voices and grassroots narratives that challenge official histories. Resistance in postcolonial contexts entails the refusal of colonial authority and may occur through challenging hegemonic political structures, rejecting imposed identities and reclaiming suppressed histories (Dizayi, 2019). Subversion on the other hand entails destabilising colonial representations and epistemologies. It can become a literary strategy as postcolonial writers can subvert colonial representations by rewriting imperial histories and centring marginalised voices.

Cultural syncretism and hybridity as a tenet was coined by Homi Bhabha referring to the integration of colonizer and colonized cultures, producing unstable and new cultural identities. This concept challenges binary thinking. Bulawayo fuses African oral traditions including communal voice and animal storytelling with western political allegory thus disrupting colonial hierarchies of form and genre (Mahala & Mdlalose, 2025). The use of animals echoes African fables while the narrative structure borrows Orwellian satire, creating a literary hybrid. Besides the novel's idioms, rhythm, style is deeply African, even as it engages global literary forms. According to Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, hybridity enables African storytelling to critique African realities through a form that is local and grounded (2023). Language and power is another tenet of postcolonial theory as writers often reclaim, subvert or appropriate language to express their unique cultural identity.

3. Procedure

The study adopts an analytical research design grounded in textual analysis. The qualitative approach is employed since it is suitable for interpreting allegorical, thematic and symbolic aspects of literary texts. Besides, it enables in-depth textual interpretation, unveiling how narratives construct and challenge dominant ideologies. The design is interpretive, analytical, and descriptive focusing on structure, symbolism, language and cultural context. This study focuses on *Glory* (2022) which is a novel set in the fictional land of Jidada-an allegorical representation of Zimbabwe during and after Robert Mugabe's regime. The study is situated within the thematic areas of political critique, postcolonial African literature, and animal allegory in African literary studies. The unit of analysis in this study is animal metaphor and allegory as manifested in the animal characters in *Glory*. It includes individual animal characters, their symbolic meanings and lastly the ideological, political, and historical interpretations generated through these representations. The unit of observation entails the specific sources from which data is collected directly. In this study it is the textual content of the novel *Glory* specifically its narrative episodes, passages and chapters where animal characters appear. The unit of observation is determined by the qualitative textual design of the research which calls for direct engagement with the narrative content of the primary text *Glory*. To achieve its objectives, this study employs purposive sampling which is a non-probability sampling method appropriate in qualitative research. It is appropriate because the study requires a literary text that consistently employs animal allegory to represent political realities in a postcolonial African context. The single primary text, NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory* is

intentionally selected due to its relevance to the research topic entailing animal metaphor as it contains an entirely animal cast making animal allegory and metaphor the novel's central narrative strategy. Secondly, the text is selected due to its alignment with African political and literary traditions as it allegorizes post-independence Zimbabwean politics. Lastly, it holds contemporary scholarly significance as a recent novel as despite generating growing scholarly interest, it remains under-explored especially in terms of allegorical and metaphorical analysis (Mdoka, 2022; Mafu, 2024).

4. The Symbolic Function of Animal Characters in *Glory*

The animal characters in *Glory* function symbolically to represent political figures, social classes, ideologies, and historical realities in post-independence Zimbabwe. Animal characters can function as stand-ins for real political figures such as military leaders, presidents, party loyalists and opposition figures. In satirical and allegorical literature, animal characters are often employed in the symbolic representation of political actors (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2016). For instance, powerful animals such as lions or horses may symbolize authoritarian rulers or dominant political elites. Similarly, predatory animals can represent corrupt officials who exploit citizens. By assigning human ambitions, flaws, and human traits to animals, authors create a symbolic distance that exposes political realities in a more imaginative yet powerful way (Rodriguez, 2025).

In *Glory*, the sheep symbolize ordinary citizens subjected to propaganda and political spectacle. They move collectively, are easily swayed by rhetoric, and respond emotionally to political spectacle. Their passivity is reflective of how authoritarian systems cultivate dependency and fear. Throughout the novel, they gather at rallies, echo slogans, and participate in political spectacle (Bulawayo, 2022). The sheep's portrayal raises questions about agency, resistance, and complicity under authoritarian rule. They are shown cheering at rallies, embracing nationalist slogans, and internalizing propaganda which suggests partial complicity in sustaining authoritarian structures (Erden, 2024).

The dogs, representing the broader security system, reinforce the ideology that ultimate political authority does not exist in electoral mandate but in control of armed institutions (Mavengano, 2023). They symbolize the military elite and security forces that underpin authoritarian regimes. Allegorically, the dogs represent coercive state power. Postcolonial theory deepens this reading by highlighting how militarized governance often emerges from liberation war legacies (Mafu, 2024). The military, once a tool of resistance, becomes a mechanism for internal domination. Their shifting loyalty during moments of political instability reflects the instrumental role of the military in succession politics.

"...Is this really our very own intolerant Jidada where not too long ago an animal couldn't set foot on the street in the name of a demo without Defenders tearing you to pieces or actually killing you dead? Where, really, are the ugly dogs of the nation as we speak? Where is Commander Jambanja? And why, in the first place, are we allowed to gallivant like we've never been allowed to gallivant in Jidada?" (Bulawayo, 301)

Destiny Lozikeyi Khumalo, is represented as a goat who returns to Jidada after a decade of exile. She symbolizes opposition leadership in post-independence Zimbabwe. Traditionally, goats are associated with endurance, persistence, adaptability, and survival. All these qualities reflect Destiny's role in the novel as she is depicted as a determined and politically aware character who refuses to remain silent in the face of oppression (Rodriguez, 2025). From an allegorical viewpoint, the character parallels opposition leaders such as Nelson Mandela, who positioned themselves as representatives of generational renewal and democratic reform. Her struggles reflect the oppression of disadvantaged individuals who become victims of dictatorial systems while also demonstrating their potential to resist oppression. Mafu adds that Destiny also contributes to the novel's feminist and postcolonial dimensions as she emerges as a powerful female voice within a political system dominated by patriarchy (2024).

The Old Horse in *Glory* symbolizes the ideological structure of liberation-party dominance. Other than representing a specific leader (Robert Mugabe), the Horse embodies a political system grounded in an entitlement to rule, liberation war mythology, and revolutionary legitimacy as perpetual obligation (Mafu, 2024). The Old Horse symbolizes corruption of revolutionary ideals as despite once fighting against oppression, he eventually becomes an oppressor as well. His regime is characterized by intimidation and propaganda

instead of democracy. Him clinging to authority satirizes leaders who refuse political transition and surround themselves with luxury as the citizens continue suffering.

The prophet, represented as a pig, symbolizes moral endorsement of political authority and moral justification of repression. Instead of the prophet challenging injustice, he sanctifies oppression. Religion is used as a political instrument as religious leaders are close to political leaders as they reinforce their legitimacy through prayers, public pronouncements, and prophetic declarations (Mavengano, 2023). Traditionally, pigs are linked with unethical characters, dirt, and gluttony. The pig symbolism exposes the contradiction between his actual behavior and his religious image as his spirituality becomes exploitative and performative. The pig also symbolizes the politicization and commercialization of religion. The prophet uses religious language, prophecies, and spiritual authority to legitimize those in power, and influence public opinion.

“God will be commanding the whole of Jidada to accordingly cast their votes for the Saviour. And that no votes cast against His Excellency shall be counted. Because God has already called this upcoming election! It has already been won, Halleluyah!” (Bulawayo, 131)

The crocodile equally operates as a powerful symbol of strategic, cunning and ruthless political leadership. The character represents a new phase of governance that comes up after the fall of Old Horse, symbolizing the transition of power within authoritarian political regimes. Despite the crocodile claiming to be a liberator and a reformist, his leadership gradually reveals continuity instead of change. The symbolic link of the crocodile is vital because the animal is traditionally associated with danger, predatory skills, patience, and stealth. In *Glory*, the crocodile presents himself as a savior of the nation and reaps from the same structures of propaganda, control, and fear that characterized the Old Horse’s regime.

1.1 How Animal Characters Expose Political Oppression and Authoritarianism

Postcolonial African literature has been embellished with images of oppression to criticize the post-independence African states failure to attain the ideals of independence (Dizayi, 2019). The Jidada nation, has been independent for a mere forty years which makes it a postcolonial state. This was the same age as independent Zimbabwe at the time of the 2017 Zimbabwean coup. The ruling class in *Glory* is characterized by moral and political decadence. Bulawayo therefore insinuates that corruption is a structural feature of post-independence governance. She states:

“...Shonas simply don’t know how to govern! All they’re good at is corruption, looting, violence! Just look around you; behind everything that’s fallen apart, you’ll find a Shona! If that’s not enough, then look at the past, at the Gukurahundi mass murders...” (Bulawayo, 294).

The leaders abandon the ideals of the liberation struggle and use political power for individual benefit and enrichment (Hossain, 2024). Bulawayo, through her characters, depicts a ruling class that indulges in privilege, luxury, and excesses while ordinary citizens wallow in hardships and poverty. The ruling class sustain authoritarianism through patronage networks as instead of distributing resources, favors, and positions depending on competence they do so based on loyalty (Mane, 2024). The widespread corruption results in social frustration and economic instability as the Jidadans face political repression, insecurity and scarcity. In the subsection *For Rulers Do Not Bear the Sword for no Reason*, the narrator states:

“...Tholukuthi journalists were rounded up and activists were rounded up and members of the Opposition were rounded up. Dissenters were rounded up and critics were rounded up and citizens exercising their rights were rounded up. Lawyers who challenged the tyranny of the regime were rounded up and comedians who made fun of the Saviour and the Seat were rounded up and artists who produced works critical of the regime were rounded up. Tholukuthi teachers and civil servants who called for a living wage were rounded up, along with nurses and doctors who asked for equipment and supplies with which to save lives. Citizens who complained in queues were rounded up, along with anyone overheard expressing displeasure at the regime. Tholukuthi Jidada’s prisons of horror swelled with the beaten, tortured and violated bodies of the children of the nation...” (Bulawayo, 330-331)

1.2 The Role of Satire and Allegory in Shaping Political Critique in Bulawayo’s *Glory*

Bulawayo in her text *Glory* presents satire through irony, humour, absurdity and exaggeration to expose the failures and contradictions of political governance. Instead of availing a direct political commentary, she

employs ridicule to unveil serious political and social issues including corruption and authoritarianism (Erden, 2024). Bulawayo sarcastically notes:

“We love the Father of the Nation, nobody loves him like we do, it’s just in our blood! And is there a greater legacy than love? -nossir, there’s none! But I’ll say the one thing that’d make me love him even better would be a job. Just a small job is okay, it doesn’t need to be a big thing at all because who I’m I to want big things? That way I can pay for the one room I’m renting and maybe afford proper clothes instead of these rags. Buy good food for my children every once in a while so they too can know just a little bit of dignity-not a whole lot. Maybe also send them to school. Small, basic things like that. (Bulawayo, 19)

She further notes, “Well, me myself I don’t mind that Dr Sweet Mother actually kicked us off our land to make way for her farm! I really don’t mind at all, not a bit, kana, ngitsho, I mean it made us homeless, but otherwise where was she going to farm? In the air? On a tree? Inside her mansion?... Why on earth would I ever think to war against Dr Sweet Mother? (20-21)

On the other hand, she employs allegory by mapping animal characters and their interactions onto human political realities. This way, the animal characters do not just function as symbolic figures but are reflective of political figures and institutions. The allegorical technique enables Bulawayo to universalize Zimbabwe’s political struggles enabling them to be relevant to broader postcolonial African contexts. According to Erden (2024), satire and allegory work together to intensify political meaning as satire avails the rhetorical and emotional energy of critique through irony and ridicule while allegory avails structural depth by embedding political meaning within narrative symbolism. Their interaction avails a double-layered reading experience whereby surface-level storytelling about animals encompasses a deeper commentary on human political behavior.

1.3 The Significance of Animal Metaphor in Contemporary African Political Fiction

The use of animal metaphor in contemporary African political fiction is vital because it enables writers to indirectly critique political realities that may be repressive, sensitive, or difficult to address directly. In numerous postcolonial contexts, writers have employed animal figures to critique oppressive regimes, authoritarianism and postcolonial betrayal (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2016). This technique establishes a safe narrative distance at the same time enabling sharp political commentary. Ultimately, animal metaphor operates as an aesthetic and strategic tool of resistance. Animal symbolism equally operates as a means of universalizing local political experiences. Although *Glory* is founded on Zimbabwean national context, the use of animal symbolism enables the narrative to transcend geographical boundaries and speak to broader postcolonial conditions across the globe. Therefore, it makes critique relevant to multiple African societies experiencing similar political issues (Verissimo, 2025). Animal metaphors further help in reframing understandings of citizenship and leadership. Animals are employed in representing political figures, elites, and ordinary citizens hence exposing patterns of domination and hierarchies of power. Through this symbolic system, readers are obliged to interpret political behavior in ways that highlight exploitation, resistance, and injustice.

5. Conclusion

Animal metaphors in the novel demonstrate the hierarchical organization of the society as powerful animals represent the ruling elite while the vulnerable ones symbolize ordinary citizens who experience political exclusion, economic hardship, and marginalization. This aspect mirrors the embedded economic and social inequalities that continue to characterize many postcolonial states (Dizayi, 2019; Erden, 2024). The allegorical representation of animals further exposes the gap between the ordinary citizens and the ruling elites, exposing the shortcomings of governance systems in addressing social inequalities. Through satire, the novel unveils the contradictions between the realities of post-independence governance and the ideals of liberation, unveiling how political leaders often engage in self-serving behaviors while presenting themselves as heroic figures who fought for national liberation. Ultimately, the use of animal metaphor as a narrative strategy for political critique enables writers to expand imaginative expression, to critique authority, and engage readers in deeper reflections on power and society.

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Corresponding Author: Faith Owino, Department of Languages, Literature and Communication, the Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Kenya

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