



Social Media Storytelling in NoViolet Bulawayo's *Glory*

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Abstract

The article explores the extent to which social media operates as a metanarrative in NoViolet Bulawayo's (2022) novel, *Glory*. Breaking free from rigid literary etiquette to use the storytelling habits and concerns of the world as a *mise en scène*, the Zimbabwean transnational writer has embraced various media tools in her novel. Within a transmedia space, Bulawayo has succeeded in marrying prose text with social media storytelling, embedding a Twitter narrative conveyed through the voices of characters' followers and displaying the degree of connectedness of characters who use social media platforms for different purposes. This analysis focuses on the role of Twitter and YouTube in the novel. *Glory*, emerging in the gatehouse of Afropolitan literature, illustrates the African experience in a new world overwhelmed by such evolving communication technologies. The social media-addicted and digitally wired characters use these platforms to feed and express their grandiose narcissism in the sociopolitical sphere, or else challenge and vilify the dictatorial regime, which itself operationalises these communication technologies as warheads or political propaganda, numbing people's minds by purveying inaccurate information. This article analyses these features of the novel to argue that, through her intermedial approach, Bulawayo speaks truth to power, holding up a mirror to society in contemporary Zimbabwe and across the world.

Keywords

Social media, narcissism, storytelling, NoViolet Bulawayo, tweet novel, panegyrics

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Introduction

NoViolet Bulawayo is the pen name of Elisabeth Zandile Tshele, an author born in Zimbabwe in 1981, a year after political independence. It is Zimbabwe's political history upon which Bulawayo's second novel, *Glory* (2022), is grounded. The nation's political tribulations are satirically represented in the novel through the sociopolitical turmoil occurring in the fictional republic of Jidada, and are intertwined with social media narrative. Positioned within the 'digital age,' the omniscient Narrator and characters of the novel engage profusely with social media platforms such as YouTube, Twitter (now known as X), WhatsApp, Instagram, and Facebook. Bulawayo's characters depend upon these communication technologies to convey their worries and express their perspectives regarding ongoing corruption, persistent joblessness, tribalism, and rigged elections, or else to employ them as a means of political propaganda with a recurrent wielding of hashtags to meet engagement targets.

This engagement with social media is a defining feature of *Glory*'s (2022) language, tone, and stylistic approach. In Zimbabwe, contemporary usage of the local word *Tholukuthi*, meaning in Shona 'how it happened,' is inspired by a viral video clip of a young South African artist named Killer Kau, which gained outstanding popularity on the internet. The song was released around the time of the 2017 Zimbabwe coup, in which dictator Robert Mugabe was overthrown (Asuelime, 2018; Tendi, 2020; Mutanda, 2023). Thus, *Glory*, fictionalising the sociopolitical fall out of this pivotal moment in Zimbabwe's contemporary political landscape, carefully employs this charged phrase. Embedded within the narrative structure of the novel, *Tholukuthi* becomes an obsessional refrain, a catchphrase, or a meme that appears at least once on each page.

Bulawayo's debut novel *We Need New Names* (2013) was an overwhelming success, winner of the 2013 Los Angeles Times Book Prize for First Fiction and shortlisted for the Booker Prize. Narrated in the spirited voice of a 10-year-old girl named Darling, it has provided an utterly fresh and new perspective on life in Zimbabwe. Bulawayo's second novel, *Glory* (2022), is a complex work of allegory, satire, and fairy tale, earning the 2022 Booker Prize and revealing how gifted the young novelist is. Tapping into the ancient storytelling tradition of using animal characters and blending it with social media narrative has enabled the author to craft an Afropolitan narrative that explores themes of exoticism and worldliness. The novel, characterised by its presence of techniques of African oral tradition and animal characters who 'whipped out their phones and gadgets to take pictures and videos of the precession of power' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 3), can be considered what Edward Said (1993) describes as a 'contrapuntal reading' to refer to the analysis of dominant narratives against those that have been 'forcibly excluded' (pp. 66-67). *Glory*, as a contrapuntal reading of Zimbabwe's postcolonial narratives, examines the relationship between official histories and popular discourse, while aligning with the ethos of the

Afropolitan narrative that 'embraces and celebrates a state of cultural hybridity—to be of Africa and other worlds at the same time' (Gikandi, 2011 p.9). In Bulawayo's novel, the local is intricately linked to the global.

The presence of digital communication in the structuring of African fiction is recognisable in *Americanah* (2014) by Nigerian female novelist Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie. On the very first pages of the novel, the reader meets Ifemelu, the main protagonist-blogger, through an anonymous blog on race: *Raceteenth or Various Observation American Blacks (Those formerly Known as Negroes) by Non-Black Americans*. Given the swift development of technological inventions and innovations, blogging, while relevant when Adichie released her novel, has now become largely obsolete. Following in Adichie's wake, NoViolet Bulawayo has substituted this platform with those more reflective of her time. It should be noted that there are many creative and critical works of African literature in the digital age, including those of Shola Adenekan (2021), Warsan Shire (2022), and Adichie, authors who regularly collaborate with video producers and photographers on digital projects.

In the novel *Glory* (2022), social commentaries on political issues in the fictional republic of Jidada cycle back and forth, moving across time, and from social media to narrative prose. In this way, social media emerges in *Glory* as both a theme and metanarrative device. Through the lens of a socio-critical and psychoanalytical approach, this article analyses the extent to which *Glory* is a social-media-saturated narrative, although interwoven with oral storytelling techniques. The first section of this article, exploring characterisations of grandiose narcissism through the use of social media, will introduce the concept of 'grandiose narcissism'. The second section on social media and self-enhancement will be geared toward this emotional fixation on oneself, symptoms which are more conspicuous in the social media-addicted characters of the novel. The following section will deal with Bulawayo's representation of the Twitter novel, before turning to a section on social media and panegyrics as conveyors of narcissistic behaviours. Revolving around the embedded and ostentatious African oral genre, panegyrics, along with social media, will be discussed as fostering characters' self-enhancement. Finally, the last section will present entitled social media as a political battlefield, examining the way social media is handled as a weapon by both the ruling power and the opposition leaders to win the battle of opinion.

Glory (2022) chronicles the unexpected ousting of Old Horse (Robert Mugabe), the president of Jidada (Zimbabwe), following forty years in power. The nation, populated by animals, grapples with the transition, with various factions vying for power. The novel also introduces Destiny, a woman who returns to Jidada after a self-imposed exile to bear witness to the revolution and explore the nation's history. Other characters include the defenders, alluding to the Old-Horse militia, and the dictator's wife, who is referred to as Donkey, Marvelous, or Dr. Sweet Mother, and the Sisters of

the Disappeared, a women's movement that claimed the corpses of their loved ones, allegedly killed by the Old-Horse. The Inner Power Circle and the Party of Power are, respectively, the close collaborators of the dictator and his leading political party, ZANU/PF. The vice president, the young horse, Tuvy, is a former companion and a brother-in-arms of the dictator. Tuvy takes power after a bloodless military coup, which prevents the Old-Horse from handing over the power to his wife.

Characterisations of Grandiose Narcissism Through Social Media Use

In *Glory* (2022), 'The First Femal,' Dr. Sweet Mother, a character who is assigned many demeaning and discrediting names such as 'Donkey' and 'Marvellous,' can be read as an egomaniac. Eager for power and glory like her husband, the dictator, she can be read as conveying behaviours associated with narcissism, engaging with social media platforms that undoubtedly offer space to obsessively devote herself to self-contemplation, ranging from her person to her deeds, which are always deemed extraordinary. Many definitions revolve around the concept of narcissism, which is often understood as a dimensional personality trait that consists of a grandiose self-concept, as well as behaviours intended to maintain this self-concept in the face of reality (Mort and Rhodewalt, 2001). In scientific literature, the term narcissist is often used to identify individuals who score higher on inventories of narcissistic behaviours, such as seeking out attention and praise. Narcissists, like all the ruling authorities portrayed in the novel, trapped in the backbiting circle of the conquest for power, employ interpersonal strategies like bragging (Buss and Chiodo, 1991), as well as interpersonal techniques associated with high status, self-promotional behaviours like downward social comparison (Campbell, et al., 2000). This also includes self-serving attributions (Rhode, Walt, and Morf, 1998) to maintain high self-esteem.

According to Cain, Pincus, and Ansell (2008), there are two types of narcissism: grandiose narcissism and vulnerable narcissism. Grandiose narcissism, also known as overt narcissism, is characterised by extroversion, an excessive feeling of superiority, entitlement, self-importance, and an obsessive need for admiration. Individuals exhibiting this type often crave recognition and validation, while displaying a lack of empathy towards others. A character like Dr. Sweet Mother can be read as a grandiose narcissist, often using opprobrium, belittlement, and abusive language bordering on scorn and obloquy. This is especially evident when the naked women, the Sisters of the Disappeared,' unexpectedly break into a gathering to claim their assassinated kinsfolks' corpses. Dr. Sweet Mother, in a display of narcissism, responds in a merciless and remorseless manner: 'If you don't respect your bodies as the father of the Nation said, then just go to a brothel and be proper itchtails and leave us alone' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 28).

Furthermore, in the writing of Dr. Sweet Mother's title, 'the First Femal', one among the character's numerous cognomina, the omission of the vowel 'e' in the last word is significant. This apocopation can be read as a way of lopping off part of her humanistic sentiment (sensitiveness and sense of desolation). She failed in her assignment as the 'First Lady' of Jidada, who is expected to nurture and cherish all and sundry. Further in the novel, the dictator's spouse experiences immense joyfulness when she repeatedly watches the video of her 'stunning' speech, a crystallised moment on social networks where she insults the women dissidents with incredible offensiveness. In this context she crudely utters these provocative statements: 'This is not an animal farm but Jidada with a da and another da! And if you have any ears at all you'll heed my advice because what you are doing is swallowing all manner of big rocks, and very soon it shall be seen just how wide your asshole is when those very rocks will need to be shat' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 35). The narcissistic First Femal utters these words, drained of kind-heartedness, in front of an audience just after the Sisters of the Disappeared have been clubbed and sent to prison by the Defenders. Such an episode comes about under the cold, impassive glare of the Donkey, who embodies the antagonism and lack of empathy of the grandiose narcissist.

As described by Back, et al. (2013), grandiose narcissism manifests in '[s]ocial potency based on a grandiose self and charming self-assured behaviors,' as well as 'antagonistic orientations' that lead to interpersonal conflict 'based on devaluation of others and hostile aggressive behaviors' (p. 1014). Through the lens of the heterodiegetic narrator, readers understand that Dr. Sweet Mother believes that the more she chastens, the more she draws attention to herself, thereby rendering her more superior and distinguished. The character's behaviour, specifically the disinhibition, audacity, and malice that emerges upon her viewing of the clip, suggest that she not only lacks apathy, but garners pleasure from the devaluation and misfortune of others. This can be seen as she howls with a burst of sordid laughter and jerks so hard that she has to sit on the bed, heaving and out of breath (Bulawayo, 2022, p.45).

Social Media, Self-Enhancement, and Storytelling

Dr. Sweet Mother's need for external validation always overshadows the negative drawbacks she gleans from her behaviour, as evidenced in the character's fondness for social media. This characterisation of narcissistic social media use echoes scholarship that highlights the ongoing increase of narcissistic behaviours and empowered by the popularity and widespread use of social media websites such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter (Diller, 2015; NPR Staff, 2015). These media platforms are undoubtedly a boon—a real windfall—for individuals such as Dr. Sweet Mother, who spends almost sleepless nights looping the video of her 'so wonderful' speech with pride and self-admiration. The ubiquitous broadcasting of everyday content

(pictures, food, speech), however banal, becomes a compulsive ritual among the novel's narcissistic characters. The heterodiegetic narrator demonstrates a sharp awareness of these contemporary digital trends, positioning them as witness to these narcissistic social media performances:

[...] It rarely ever happens nowadays that she speaks anywhere, goes anywhere, or does anything without ending up on social media like this. And rightly so, for she's by no means an extraordinary First Lady [...] It's all there on YouTube, the entire world has seen it for she's gone viral—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, you name it, tholukothi everywhere, she's there, everywhere, she's trending, everywhere ruling. She watches on her screen as spellbound animals, both under the tent and in the sun, follow her every move, riveted. She simply can't get enough of; the unwavering attention, the looks of awe, reverence, and admiration—all of it fills the donkey with a thrill that makes equanimity impossible regardless of how many days it's been, no matter how many times she's viewed the video. Now Dr. Sweet Mother is on her feet once again, pacing and reciting, along with the clip the famous lines she has said so much so in her speeches they have recognized slogans in their own right. (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34)

The all-knowing narrator breaks into the Donkey, Dr. Sweet Mother's, private bedroom—a penetration into her inner life to draw the link between self-isolation and social media addiction: 'A whole three, four hours past her bedtime, and Dr. Sweet Mother still can't stop playing and replaying the YouTube clip of herself dishing out, yes Tholukuthi telling like it is in the whole nation at the Independence celebration a few days before' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 32). This demonstrates the ways in which social media use has brought about what Buffardi (2001) calls *self-enhancement*, in which social media provides useful platforms to promote and enhance the self. This is how narcissistic characters like the Donkey are liable to drown in social media in the effort to fulfill their desire for self-enhancement. McCain and Campbell (2018) share a similar viewpoint, suggesting that social media is suitable for narcissistic individuals, such as the character of Dr. Sweet Mother, in offering a reasonably favourable environment for gaining admiration and esteem to reinforce the narcissistic self. The narrator sustains their intrusion into the life of Dr. Sweet Mother, observing her tapping the red 'play' icon again and again and watching her clip from beginning to end without pause. With pointed irony, the narrator argues that 'it's not in Dr. Sweet Mother's nature to toot her own horn, but she must agree she utterly dazzles in this latest clip which has become viral on YouTube' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34). While Dr. Sweet Mother is wholly submerged in what she views as her tremendous accomplishment, the narrator puts forward: 'hands down her best performance so far ever since she began speaking at rallies three, four years since—she has simply outdone herself is what it is' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34).

Considering the typical pattern of narcissistic social media use (Diller, 2015), the reader may infer that there is a growing need for Dr. Sweet Mother to continually re-experience her masterstroke. For Dr. Sweet Mother, and, by extension, those her character satirises, YouTube has become a fundamental digital tool to display her ‘greatness’. By the same token, the narrator discloses the sense of individual achievement and self-esteem that drives the character, emphasising, ‘[t]he applause at the end of the delivery rings right in her heart all over again and she increases the volume, feels the sound hit her bones, whip and stir the blood before lifting the intestines’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34). The last words of the video clip, ‘Viva, Dr. Sweet Mother, Viva!!!’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34), as exclaimed from the audience, echo psychological theorisations that argue overt narcissists are confined to a perpetual search for admiration and praise, only subdued by what Cixous (1964) terms ‘[t]he dialectic of Recognition’ (p. 388). In search of this recognition, Dr. Sweet Mother comes to discover that ‘watching the clip in the absence of sounds’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 42) allows her to experience it anew. While watching the muted video, Dr. Sweet Mother realises for the first time that her husband, ‘the Old Horse,’ loves and admires her political undertaking and courage. As the omniscient narrator specifies, ‘[f]or the length of the clip, Dr. Sweet Mother marvels at how the father of the Nation’s warm eyes glued on her never heaving, never flickering, as he intends to keep her in his eternal memory’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 42). This realisation, gained through her obsessive use of social media, impels her to ‘learn forward, to lick the screen with her nose’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 42) highlighting the level of self-absorption, and echoing the classical myth of Narcissus, who perished gazing at his own reflection. The overflowing bliss experienced by Dr. Sweet Mother has not only enhanced her narcissistic self but has also made her grow wings—political designs born from her belief that she has the abilities, the shoulders broad enough, to take over from His Excellency. The narrator sarcastically reports that the latter’s reign has persisted for so long that the ‘only thing that can spew out the ruler from power is Age, the enemy that no dictator, though mighty and callous, can tame, jail, or murder’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 80).

The function of social media within the novel, beyond its capacity to encourage characters’ narcissistic behaviour, functions as a narrative anachronism, namely analepsis, allowing the narrator to recount an event that occurred before the present moment of the main story. The boundless viewing of the video clip by the narcissistic donkey has permitted the narrator to return to the event, which he had earlier omitted or passed over in silence. For instance, through this social media clip, readers are able to understand the nuanced instance when the dictator’s vice president, Tuvy’s mood changes upon seeing Dr. Sweet Mother take the floor: ‘and which is how Tuvy sits in this latest clip. Dr. Sweet Mother taps Play, leans back on her chair’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 47). This moment seems to foreshadow Tuvy’s future as a central figure in the coming regime after Old Horse is

ousted. Her worst nightmare has come to fruition. Tuvy has unseated her husband. Such a physiognomic reading has been possible thanks to a loop video playback. Instead of using more traditional literary devices, such as dreams or broken memories, to set up the game of narrative anachronism, the narrator has adapted to the lifestyles of the characters who evolve with the increasing use of new information and communication technologies. Here, excessive use of social media content such as YouTube and Facebook becomes a literary pretext for making flashbacks, in which watermarked video images and undescribed events can bear and move forward the thread of the story.

While, in Bulawayo's creative narrative, characters demonstrate a specific 'paradigm of traits' (Chatman, 1978, p. 48), that can be associated with definitions of narcissism, conceptualisations of narcissism are complex and multifaceted. For example, vulnerable, or covert, narcissism differs from the grandiose narcissism that Dr. Sweet Mother represents. Vulnerable narcissism is characterised by underlying insecurity, low self-esteem, and hypersensitivity to criticism, even if these traits do not always visibly prevail (Mahadevan, 2024; Rohmann et al., 2012). None of the main characters in the novel can be read as fully embodying such a psychological state. The Old Horse cannot be judged to be hypersensitive to reproof and blame for 'confiscated farms,' mines, and industries from white settlers (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 4). He clumsily and corruptibly redistributes them to members of his political party for the sake of unbridled and misunderstood nationalism disrupting and undermining the economy. Notwithstanding the grumbling and ceaseless denunciations of the Old Horse, at no time in the novel are readers given the impression of him being affected or disturbed by what people may think about his power management. He is also portrayed as a character gifted with great eloquence and intelligence, with some other negative traits such as arrogance, antipathy, and stubbornness—attributes which are not necessarily specific to 'textbook' or vulnerable narcissists. The same attitudes are also observed among characters like Dr. Sweet Mother, Tuvy the vice president, and General Samson Chigaro, as well as all of the other individuals that belong to the Seat of Power Inner Circle. These characters are all obsessed with power and constantly seek to be under the spotlight. Thus, they cannot be read as vulnerable narcissists. Even though the author does not associate them with the permanent use of social media, with the exception of Dr. Sweet Mother, these grandiose narcissistic characters with oversized egos and grandiose views of themselves are most likely to be 'hyped' on social media.

Throughout Bulawayo's (2022) novel, social media operates not only as a means of enhancing the self but also as a place of memory. 'Lieu de mémoire' is defined as a physical place or object which acts as a container of memory (Nora, 1989). Such a form of memorisation correlates with the process of preserving memories of people or events. Social media platforms like YouTube are technological tools with a great capacity to allow viewers to become so engrossed in audiovisual content and the virtual

representation of personal and collective experiences that these can even come to constitute memories, occupying individuals' psyches alongside lived experiences marked by remembrance and commemoration. For Dr. Sweet Mother, the narcissistic Donkey, the desire to remain present in Jidada cultural memory leads her to engage with social media, which becomes a platform that will act as a memory site upon her political retirement:

While I watch YouTube videos of myself during my gone days of glory so I can better prepare for the coming ones. While I continue to write my memoirs in my own head so that one day my enemies don't try to soil my legacy (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 43).

It is evident that Dr. Sweet Mother's reference to memoir here is not related to paper-based written memoirs, but rather to the digital memoirs she would delightfully compile in her head and mind, valuing them with a sense of self-absorption and vanity. The so-called Marvelous is certain that YouTube is the best way to preserve her legacy without her reputation being tarnished by her enemies, particularly in this satirical world of mistrust, defiance, and sabotage (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 43). This preoccupation with potential damage to her legacy can be viewed as an admission to popular rumours, such as those that she cheated to get her doctoral degree, implying that she was not capable of earning it through talent or intellect. While offering an interesting commentary on the hierarchical and colonial systems through which education in Jidada, and, allegorically, Zimbabwe, is structured, Dr. Sweet Mother's lack of Western education is highlighted by the all-knowing narrator, who portrays her a gifted speaker in her African mother tongue:

She can pull whatever move, do anything, you name it, only coming short of raising the dead in her mother tongue. Many times she has regretted not having had the option of her first language her instruction throughout her schooling—who knows, she might've altogether had a positive learning experience, yes, tholukuthi, in her own language, she may very well have appreciated those hard subjects she otherwise failed to grasp, let alone enjoy, and so systematically and inevitably failed. And as a result she was marked by a humiliating dunderhead career in her primary and secondary school education that earned her all sorts of embarrassing nicknames, altogether an experience that not only left her insecure, her self-esteem in tatters, but continued to haunt her long after leaving school (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34).

By revealing the truth about her intellectual and educational experience, the narrator provides the reader with two avenues for analysis. First, through this passage, it can be understood that the narcissistic tyrant's wife intentionally crafts a social media presence that serves as a place of memory, as, due to lack of English language mastery, she cannot produce

the classical memoir. Second, this passage indirectly critiques the education system of Jidada, suggesting that, while education in Africa, particularly due to colonial influence, privileges Western language and perspectives, education that utilises African languages and traditions would allow for better access to indigenous knowledge and development. The narrator acknowledges that, had Dr. Sweet Mother studied in her mother tongue, she could have avoided the setbacks and impediments that threaten her legacy (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34). While Dr. Sweet Mother is far from a sympathetic character, this reads as Bulawayo's appeal to challenge Eurocentrism and decolonise education in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe. It is clear that, during her teenage years, Dr. Sweet Mother suffered from a dearth of self-esteem due to the scornful comments about her below-standard performance at school because of a foreign language that she did not master, a language which is not hers. She was enabled to take her social revenge through power, corruption, and wealth, ultimately allowing her to regain confidence in herself and develop into the grandiose narcissistic 'First Lady' that the reader encounters mining YouTube for perpetual validation.

Twitter Novel, or Twvel, Representation in *Glory*

Through *Glory* (2022), NoViolet Bulawayo, a modern-age novelist, solidified her role as an author of current and politically salient critique, characterised by the excessive use of social networks such as Twitter in a mirroring of contemporary social landscapes. The author goes so far as to craftily embed within *Glory* what is known as a Twitter novel or 'twvel' (James, 2022) setting this form characteristic of 'Twitterature' (Castro-Martinez, 2021) within the novel's broader narrative prose to extend over several tweets and shape a longer story. These Twitter narratives, compiled by named groups, individuals, and anonymous flat characters, feature comments on stories, as characters share their thoughts with other characters through retweets, subsequently bringing about an increasing fictional readership. While maintaining and adding to the storyline, new perspectives are opened up while avoiding straying from the main narrative, supported through a format structured by Twitter's character limits. The chapter 'Tholukothi Fugitive' is crafted entirely through this format, presented as a collection of tweets primarily published by **The African Voice@TVA**, whose storyline revolves around the subsequent hashtag #Tuvy's'Flight'ToExile, in correlation to Jidada's breaking news. Bulawayo's work illustrates an innovative approach to the embedded Twitter novel, through which the story bounces from one Twitter account to the other through retweets that can be browsed at full tilt. As Crouch (2014) suggests, the Twitter novel takes form in 'tweeting and retweeting and subtweeting it one day at a time,' which results in a creative audience who actively carve out its meaning by contrasting it with a one-directional flow of information it receives' (Castells, 2009, p. 132) or in a 'seamless continuity with these media flows' (Guarracino, 2014, p. 21). In *Glory*, all the flat character-users'

stunt stories are sharply geared toward the topic at hand (the forced exile of Tuvy, the Vice president of the Republic of Jidada) using inventive pithiness jam-packed with aphoristic, satiric, and humorous phrases that do not allow for deviation from the subject, let alone unrelated narratives:

The African Voice@TVA

Ousted #jidada vice president 'flees' to South Africa due to death threats, vows to come back to lead.

Sister of the Disappeared@ Shami

Replying to @TAV

He will be back. And one way or the other, one day we will get our justice, you can run, but you cannot hide.

FreeJidada@ freedJidada

Replying to @TAV

This gives me life. Welcome to the Opposition experience

Bull of Bikita@truthful

Replying to @TAV

Coward, hope the long arm of #Jidada catches your ass.

The African Cow@the_Africancow

Replying to @TAV

Too bad to think the leadership of the Hold Horse may be over. The region has never had a better statesman.

The American Voice@TAV_NEWS

Sacked#Jidada leader flees country. All Eyes On #Jidada!

Talks of succession amplify.

RamoftheSoil@ros

Replies to @TAV_NEWS

#Sitdown#Notyourstory#Jidadaspeaksforitself

The Voice of Jidada@VOJ_NEWS

Dismissed, Disgraced, Dishonored#Jidada vice president flees.

MadeinJidada@MadeinJidada

Replies to @VOJ_NEWS

So #Jidada's top terrorist is crying about being terrorized now (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 64-65)

Twitter, as an example of contemporary diverse social networking mediums, has become a very successful platform, with the initial purpose to enable individuals to exchange ideas, news, and information, as revealed in the narrative framework depicted above. Twitter was launched in 2006 and the first Twitter novel appeared in 2008. American author Nicolas Belardes, after joining Twitter in 2008, claims to have written the first Twitter novel under the title of *A Love Story*, consisting of 900 tweets (Belardes, 2018). But as for the term Twittiterature, it is difficult to determine its origin, with some critics asserting that it was popularised by Aciman and Rensin (2009) through their work *Twitterature: The World's Greatest Books Retold through Twitter*. The twvl offers a blend of brief digital stories displaying stylistic word economy, succinctness, symbolic structure, and implied narrative (Al Sharaqi, 2016). Successfully employing

this form to engage with hinted narrative and symbolic and stylistic structuring, Bulawayo's novel features tweets such as those of anonymous character-user, **My Two Cents@mac2cents**, who replies to **@TAV**, 'Tholukuthi eish! #Tuvy#Jidada. My thoughts and prayers are in my head (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 65). Representing the contemporary digital landscape, the novel's twitter mechanism is reflective of the platform in reality, where some tweet stories can be easily grasped and engaged with, while others, like that of @mac2cents, conceal entire mythos behind simplistic words.

The embedded twvel also operates as another entire chapter, entitled under the hashtag '#FreeFairCredibleElection,' composed of seven pages of tweets and retweeting series, all centred around the first presidential election in which the ousted president, the Old Horse, modeled after Robert Mugabe, will not take part. Despite the attention paid to the so-called #FreeFairCredibleElection by both election observers on Twitter, and the Jidadans' African siblings in countries near and far, some character-followers convey scepticism about the sincerity of the seemingly hollow catchphrase—a scepticism that proves apt. These social media users experience foreboding, suggesting that the presentation of a fair and free election is nothing but a smokescreen, and that these elections will be rigged as usual:

JIDADA VOTES IN FIRST POST-OLD HORSE HARMONISED ELECTION

POTUS@bigbaboonnoftheUS

US election observers will be on the site for the Jidada upcoming election because they have a tremendous record of STEALING elections and DISRESPECTING the WILL of voters over there. And that's SAD! And very BAD! And NOT Democracy! It's DICTATORSHIP!

GoldenMaseko@GoldenM

Replying to@ bigbaboonnoftheUS

It's spelled Dictatorship bruh. DICTATORSHIP. I mean, you should know the spelled seeing it's on your forehead.

SonofBulawayo@SonofByo

Replying to@bigbaboonnoftheUS

Says an unqualified pussy grabber, liar, cheat, conman, racist, misogynist, bully, predatory, and and and...

ComradeLiberator@CdeLiberator

Replying to@SonofByo

And tweeting from stolen land, yazi the audacity, nxaaa!

SmallHouse@MsMoyo

Replying to@bigbaboonnoftheUS

Thank you, Mr. President. Democracy in Jidada is a farce!
#freefaircredibleelection

LionofJidada@LOJ

Replies to @bigbaboonoftheUS

The Saviour for Life! Jidada Party for Life! We will WIN regardless of the voice, what will you do @Potus? A tantrum? Impose more sanctions? #notoregimechangeforlife (Bulawayo, 2022, pp.161-162)

Social media references spring up through another narcissistic individual whose name is not mentioned. But any reader acquainted with American political news understands the tweeting POTUS represents Donald Trump—who has often been described as demonstrating prototypical narcissist behaviours (Ashcroft, 2016)—with the narrator describing him as ‘the Tweeting Baboon of the United States,’ who, despite lacking any qualifications, has ruled one of the most powerful countries in the world. When the Generals of Jidada gather in Tuvy’s abode to find a way out to carry out a coup against ‘the Father of the Nation,’ who is eager to hand the power to his wife as if ‘leadership is sexually transmitted’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 62).

Social Media and Panegyrics: Conveyors of Narcissistic Behaviours

In *Glory* (2022) the narrator character sometimes turns into a ‘praise singer’ who serves as an entertainer hired to flatter the rich and socially prominent through panegyrics and act as the real master of ceremony for Dr. Sweet Mother. As Finnegan (2012) describes, the panegyric ‘seems to go with a particular ethos, a stress on royal or aristocratic power, and an admiration for military achievement’ (p. 109). The succinct praise poem the narrator provides embeds a kind of genealogy whose purpose, apart from fawning, is to preserve the family, tribe, or lineage history. The proclivity and wholeheartedness to these laudatory epithets applied to Dr. Sweet Mother would cause one to think that she has completely sunk into narcissistic behaviours. It should be admitted that this African oral narrative, proudly evoking the names of the glorious past, is an ostensible sign of narcissism. In this way, the narrator sings, ‘Sweet Mother, Marvelous, Daughter of Agnes, herself the daughter of Chiriga, herself the daughter of Tembeya, has absolutely no fear, anytime, any day, anywhere, anyhow, she will reduce the whole animal to size, shred it, squash it under her Gucci heels’ (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 34). Any reader with awareness of recent developments in Zimbabwe’s sociopolitical landscape is bound to recognise that Dr. Sweet Mother represents no one else but Grace Mugabe in this satirical work. Due to her expensive shopping habits, Grace Mugabe earned the nickname ‘Gucci Grace’ or ‘the First Shopper’ with a penchant for Ferragamo heels (Alisson, 2017). Such a ‘culture industry concept,’ a term coined by Theodor Adorno in the 1920s which combines the excessive consumption of technologies and fashionable items, is described by Ponzanezi (2014) as ‘the consumption of postcolonial products (p. 55), as it is done by the so-called upper-middle postcolonial classes that are

demographically young and urban in location but cosmopolitan in orientation.

The evocation from this pithy praise almost causes the song to be viewed as an ethnographic finding, as revealed in the collection of historical and cultural data tracing back the origin of an individual or ethnic group. However, in the African oral tradition from which Bulawayo (2022) has taken inspiration, it operates as a means of identification with ancestors (from distant lineage to one's parents) who have either a good reputation or have accomplished extraordinary things that deserve to be retained and housed in the personal repertory of the griot, or the *imbongui*, or in collective memory. In this context of praise poetry unveiling the verbal artistry and individuals' indigenous knowledge, Jahn posits (1962) that 'the appearance of a person from an important compound will provoke some old person to sing the history of his family' (p. 62). Therefore, any individual like His Excellency's wife, Dr. Sweet Mother, has a body of poetry attached to her name. The frequent and spontaneous poetisation of deeds or characters in the African world performed or invented by relatives, neighbours, or the griot himself by relatives is described by Beier (1970) in the introduction to his collection *Yoruba Poetry: An Anthology of Traditional Poems*. Challenging the false impression that African oral literature is merely restricted to myths, legends, and tales, he argues that, in reality, poetry is more common in African oral literature than prose (p. 111).

In the narrator's short panegyric musing directed towards Dr. Sweet Mother, the inclusion of a line about the brandy Gucci heels with which she hopes to smash her foes aligns with representations of narcissistic literary characters, often depicted through a luxurious persona who may don 'the most exquisite cloth, expensive jewellery, and precious accessories of adornments' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 4). Dr. Sweet Mother's narcissistic consumerism manifests through the purchase and display of trendy, classic, symbolic, and expensive items. Such a consumeristic social psychology is evident in her purposeful adjustment of appearance to express and exhibit the most perfect and sophisticated image of herself. Reflective of the songs of many African oral societies, beyond the glorious names and epithets intended to flatter the ego of the hero or the individual who belongs to the upper class, the narrator's praise song contains paralinguistic items, like accoutrements ranging from valuable clothes to jewels of the prevailing trend, that highlight wealth and consumption. Dr. Sweet Mother's long-lasting search for positive social feedback, as shared by His Excellency's family members, friends, and honored guests—The Jidada Chosen Ones—demonstrate the significance of managing a cared-for image among these elite. As such, readers may interpret the values emphasised within this setting as signifying characteristics of narcissistic orientation, while being acutely related to luxury displays typical of modern, capitalist, and materialistic societies like the fictitious Jidada. While personality and dress-sense can represent two different dimensions of personal expression, in Bulawayo's narrative, they appear as inextricably

connected. Dr. Sweet Mother's fashionable clothing manner aims to naturally draw attention to her, with physical appearance being used here as a trait-connecting metonymy. Dr. Sweet Mother's traits, interests, values, social position, and experience all present a tangible sense of self-absorption, which is only amplified through the narrator's satirical praise.

Social Media: A Political Battlefield

Bulawayo (2022) is demonstratedly aware of the power of social media, where democracy can be promoted with the mere click of a button, as this technology allows for the 'free and democratic exchange of ideas across multiple interconnected platforms' (Saco, 2002, p. 67). Due to this power, social media is a strategic tool both feared and utilised by the repressive Jidadan government, thus functioning as a new struggle for social justice and equity. The narcissistic behaviours of characters are further highlighted in their use of social media as a means by which they pride themselves on power. Such is the case of Vice President Tuvy when renaming his pet parrot after he overthrew the Old Horse, assigning him the title, 'the New Dispensation,' whose mission is 'to tweet eulogies and accordingly glorify the Saviour throughout the airs and skies of the nation' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 110). This satirical nod to social media evokes the ways in which propaganda is disseminated across the virtual sphere, as New Dispensation's tweeted eulogies are spread through the skies, aiming to delude and fool the Jidadans. Hiring a lecturer in English from the University of Jidada, Tuvy requires that New Dispensation songs are boundlessly sung with an English accent that even outshines that of the Old Horse.

Meanwhile, the hashtag `#TomakeJidadaGreatAgain`, reminiscent of the ways in which Donald Trump's 'Make America Great Again' slogan has been brandished as a political campaign motto by Power Inner Seat (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 189). Additionally, the creation of the ministerial position, the Minister of the Internet, is also very telling about the use of social media as a political warhead. Having understood what is really at stake with this tool, the Minister sets up a strategy for combatting those activists fighting for change that populate social media platforms. Conveying his confidence in this approach, he contends, 'our team is on social media, telling them what time it is. I am not worried' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 125). This calculated strategy represents a 'computational propaganda' (Howard, 2021) that involves the work of hireling cybernauts ready to defend the interests of the Power Inner Circle. The government is even backed by the Minister of Propaganda, a position that invites the reader to remember Joseph Goebbels, the Nazi politician who held a similar position under Adolph Hitler's Third Reich (Lemmons, 1994).

The Minister of Things, Dick Mampara, does not share the Minister of the Internet's viewpoint insofar as he thinks that allowing the Jidadans to use the Internet is perilous for the government. Therefore, his ultimate solution is to deprive them of access by all means necessary. His distrust of social

media stems from a previous history related to the advent of the civic movement, Free Jidada, which emerged from the bowels of the Internet (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 125). A series of interrogative sentences serving as both reminder and warning denote the mess that can be brought about by the power of the Internet, the outcome which the Minister of Things fears:

Do you mean to tell me you've so very quickly forgotten the free Jidadan movement? To begin with, was it or wasn't it born on the internet itself? Did it, at some point, garner the support of hundreds of thousands of Jidadans? Didn't the thing spread over, including the West, making the Party of Power look like fools? Didn't they hail it the most potent democratic movement in Jidada with a-da and another-da? (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 125).

The great majority of government ministers who attend an emergency meeting readily admit that the movement, though having started as a harmless spark, had swiftly spread like a 'mad inferno and galvanized Jidada right in front of the Seat of Power,' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 125) with individuals draping the flags of the nation around their bodies in videos in which they expressed their lamentation against the regime. The Minister of Things is all the more upset since the technological device, the Internet used by activists, cannot be controlled by the government whose *modus operandi* is to "unleash the Defenders to bite and beat and butcher like they knew how to do best, it was at first, somewhat difficult to control" (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 126). The Party of Power had been baffled about how best to deal with an enemy they didn't have much experience with, 'an enemy that grew to the point that it got the confidence to take its business off the unreal world of the internets' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 126) to the real world of Jidada's streets.

However, the limits and the security breach of Internet users who have not used anonymous identities have been raised by Comrade Lutherreck, who hopes to 'delete' their enemies—here employing Internet slang (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 126). In order to spot and identify the troublemakers, the party implements a super database. As Comrade Lutherreck proclaims, 'we must not forget the same internet is helping us keep tabs on our enemies,' (Bulawayo, 2022, p. 126) and the strategy employed involves recording everything about these enemies, from faces and names to phone numbers, addresses, and information about families. To this superdatabase must be added the prominent Opposition activists with 'two, three hundred thousand on Twitter, Facebook, and WhatsApp' (Bulawayo, 2022, p.127). As Comrade Lutherreck argues, when used properly, the internet can enable the Party of Power to win the political battle. Comrade Lutherreck's surveillance strategy aligns with Adenekan's work, *African Literature in the Digital Age* (2021), which argues that, although social media is a democratic tool that can allow people from different parts of the globe to communicate through live interaction, 'simultaneously it can permit political and corporate entities to monitor people, enforce surveillance laws and restrictive measures and

in the process censor and stifle dissenting voices' (p. 27). In the satirical narrative of *Glory* (2022), this sociopolitical reality of the digital age in Africa is replicated, as the new regime, led by the Jidadan Power Inner Seat members, attempts to monitor, censor, and 'delete' their enemies in the social media political battleground.

Conclusion

Glory (2022), by Zimbabwean author NoViolet Bulawayo, is a political satire that employs a cast of anthropomorphic animals to illustrate the story of the fictional African country, Jidada, as it experiences transition from a long-standing dictatorship to a new regime bent on perpetuating oppressive systems, a narrative that mirrors the 2017 coup that unseated Robert Mugabe's rule. Within this story, even the most reluctant characters, such as Destiny, who are nostalgic for the past and afraid of change, are bound to adapt themselves to the modern lifestyle characterised by an increasing use of communication technologies, gadgets, and social media. Such characters finally agreed to have the Internet on their phones and desktops in order to view and monitor what the nation was doing and saying. Analysis of the role of social media in this novel, which informs the novel's language, themes, and stylistic 'twvl' approach, reveals the fictional republic of Jidada as a mirror for the various purposes and effects of social media use in contemporary society, in Zimbabwe, across Africa, and globally. For some characters, social media is a way to seek validation and praise, feeding self-absorption and narcissistic tendencies. For others, it is used as a political tool, whether as a venue for communicating dissatisfaction with the sociopolitical landscape, as activism against tyranny, or as a propaganda warhead for the dictatorial regime. The recurrent usage of communication technologies in politics and writing, especially as resonant with postcolonial studies, has been highlighted in Bulawayo's text. Mixing African oral literary narrative techniques with social media, the novel is an innovative addition to Afropolitan literature that centres on the African experience in today's digital and polarised world. While Zimbabwean, Bulawayo joins the likes of the Third Generation of Nigerian Writers² such as Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie, Teju Cole, Dinaw Mengestu, and Taiye Selasi in describing a new way of being 'African in the world,' challenging Afro-Pessimism, and claiming a fresh aesthetic and philosophical outlook on Africa and Diasporic Africa (Guarracino, 2014, p. 9). In addition to the author's use of social media, which works as a metanarrative in the narrative framework, Noviolet Bulawayo, positioned in a spiral of cultural asymmetry, does not restrain herself from speaking truth to power by employing an intermedial approach.

² The term Third Generation of Nigerian Writers was first used by Professor Pius Adesanmi and Chris Dunton in their book entitled *Nigerian Third Generation Writing: Historiography and Preliminary Theoretical Consideration* (2005). This generation is characterised by the use of new media technologies as a medium to showcase their stories and poetry to a worldwide audience.

She writes urgently and courageously, holding up a mirror to contemporary Zimbabwe and the world.

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