

CAPONEU - The Cartography of the Political Novel in Europe

NoViolet Bulawayo

Glory

Presented by: Sarah Colvin

Glory is set in a fictional Zimbabwe, called Jidada, and its characters are anthropomorphised animals (it has been compared to Orwell's Animal Farm). It tells the story of a goat called Destiny, who left Jidada after receiving a brutal beating from state forces, and now returns home.

An authoritarian regime is suppressing history and memory in Jidada, particularly of a genocide called Gukurahundi, which was perpetrated on Jidada's Ndebele population, including Destiny's own family and village. The fictional genocide recalls the historical genocide in Zimbabwe, also called Gukurahundi: a Shona word for spring rain that washes away the chaff. When a Parker pen that had once belonged to her grandfather mysteriously appears behind her ear, Destiny sits down to write the story of her murdered family, and of other Jidadans who have been 'disappeared' by the regime. It is an act of resistance that has major consequences.

Bulawayo uses a free indirect narrative voice that gradually becomes a 'we'-voice as the animals of Jidada find their collective capacity to resist an oppressive regime. The novel has strong comic elements that expose the absurdity of authoritarianism, alongside its brutality. It is politically hopeful: at the end of the novel, the animals of Jidada have learned to articulate their oppression through storytelling, and have begun the process of fighting back against a cruel autocracy.

The novel was shortlisted for the Booker Prize in 2022.

References

Booker Prizes, 'NoViolet Bulawayo interview: "Tyranny isn't just a Zimbabwean problem"' <https://thebookerprizes.com/the-booker-library/features/noviolet-bulawayo-interview-glory>, accessed 28 June 2024

Mpofu, William J. 'Gukurahundi in Zimbabwe: An Epistemicide and Genocide'. Journal of Literary Studies 37 (2021), 40-55

LANGUAGE: English

CENSORSHIP STATUS:

Politics of literature • Political novel • Fiction • book club

Resources for Reading Groups

A key focus of the CAPONEU project has been to produce materials on political novels for community reading groups and to organize book clubs across Europe. This collection brings together resources and reports on those activities which will be useful for anyone who runs or attends a reading group.

Audience:

Reading Groups