

## Exploring Mechanisms of Disciplinary Power:

### A Foucauldian Reading of Ben Okri's *The Freedom Artist*

Rehmat Hafeez, Hooria Liaqat

#### Abstract

This article aims to investigate the omniscient presence of State power in citizens' life which controls their freedom by creating a disciplinary society and recreating the truth. Building upon Ben Okri's *The Freedom Artist*, this research article interrogates different disciplinary tools adopted by State power in order to form a disciplinary society. This study analyzes the idea of Repressive State Power by using Foucault's concept of power, surveillance and controlling gaze which manipulates ideological and physical aspects of an individual's life. Repressive State Power monitors thoughts and actions of its subjects and constructs a disciplinary society quite similar to Bentham's Panopticon. *The Freedom Artist* envisions the idea of an oppressive State beset with civil war, misuse of power, corruption and disillusionment in the post-independent Nigeria. However, Okri's representation of an oppressive State transgresses the spatio-temporal boundaries casting a worldwide projection of State power. Exploring the intersection of the fictional narrative of *The Freedom Artist* and Foucauldian notion of power, this paper aims to examine the ways in which State power regulates our lives by forming an apparatus of control at the heart of which is surveillance and disciplinary mechanisms. Furthermore, this research intends to explore the conversion of individuals into docile and obedient subjects in order to execute coercion on their bodies.

**Keywords:** Discipline, Freedom, Power, State, Surveillance.

## Introduction

This research article builds upon Foucauldian analysis of Ben Okri's *The Freedom Artist*. In light of Michel Foucault's power theory, this article aims to explore the significant concepts of power, control and discipline in establishing a disciplinary society as presented in *The Freedom Artist*. Authorities in order to cultivate their benefits employ power through several subtle means and resultantly power and control work hand in hand in establishing a societal framework as proposed by Foucault on the image of a disciplinary system. This study explores the salient features of Foucault's power theory intertwined with the lyrical and fictional narrative of Ben Okri's *The Freedom Artist*. The supporting research questions in carrying out the investigation will be rigorously addressed so that all arguments can be substantiated from the novel and validity can be assured. Firstly, this perusal will thoroughly investigate how Ben Okri treats concepts of power, control and surveillance in establishing a disciplinary society in the fictional narrative. Secondly, it will investigate the significance of the prison in the novel and how it reflects on Foucault's concepts of prison.

*The Freedom Artist* hinges upon the themes of discipline and power exploitation. The novel is set in a futuristic dystopian setting, presenting a society where authorities make decisions for the public and decide what they are allowed to think and read. Surveillance is a key mode of monitoring individuals. Their minute actions and thoughts are being controlled by the state. The central question "who is the prisoner?" seems simple but it carries with it a whole baggage of mystery and truth. It is the society where people have stopped reading, books are banned and bookshops are eradicated from the very basis of societal structure. Myths are rewritten and surveillance is deeply rooted in the system of government where people are continuously being watched for their actions.

This research article uses Michel Foucault's power theory which is derived from his book, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (1975), in which he elucidates the history of punishment and incarceration. In doing so he has overtly explained the intentions of sovereignty and power in general. In ancient times, torture and menacing were prominent means to control people. Public punishments and physical torture were commonplace tactics but now such tactics, aimed at establishing a coercive institution, have taken the shape of discipline and coercion. Instead of physically torturing people, authorities have devised methods of training individuals by disciplining their attitudes, language, routines and thoughts. Foucault, in his theoretical postulations, emphasizes the idea that individuals are administered by various institutions. He claims that power is everywhere and it exerts control over bodies through infinite means (Foucault 177). In other words, Disciplinary power is omnipresent and works in subtle ways. Similarly, in *The Freedom Artist*, we observe that Hierarchy, representative of the government, is exerting its power and control over public by censoring books and installing disciplinary mechanisms such as surveillance, punishment and discourse.

## **Literature Review**

The existing corpus of research in the area of Foucauldian Discourse Analysis theorizes the nature of freedom: freedom to live under the control of disciplinary power. However, this perusal, in light of Okri's *The Freedom Artist*, not only navigates the mechanisms of disciplinary power but also highlights why it is imperative to examine and question the hegemonic social and political structures. Imran Hussain in his endeavor to comprehend the message interlaced between the lines of *The Freedom Artist* describes that it portrays "a state of affair where no one is without chain i.e., books, common people and artists. Here, everyone was a prisoner though unconscious of the fact" (70). The affairs and decisions of the state are taken by "Hierarchy"

which “being the tyrant has entangled the everyday matter of the societal setup. Everyone who resists such oppression is tyrannized. State of unknowing is being cherished, artists are banned” and they have to bear “an unannounced censorship” (Hussain 71).

Okri’s *The Freedom Artist* can be placed in the context of Africa and simultaneously he addresses the whole world without any distinction. “Okri is well known for blurring the frontiers between the nations and traditions, and for resisting the pigeonholing of writers for strict geographical and literary categories” (Guignery 999). His novel, *The Freedom Artist* transcends the boundaries and borders and spreads worldwide indicating its significance in the modern world where freedom of men is reducing day by day. Okri, while talking about the novel in an interview, says, “for me it’s an essential warning about the slow erosions of our freedoms. For me it’s also very deep warning about what’s happening to truth in our times” (Okri 0:47-01:02). Hence, his engagement with themes of surveillance, control and punishment is an indication and alarm for the world which is heading towards loss of freedom.

Dystopian fiction or political fiction engages with the subjects of surveillance, power and coercion by using literary troops. Similarly, Ben Okri’s *The Freedom Artist* presents a society that functions allegorically and unravels the political intricacies of our real world. The subtle means of power in regulating minds and behaviors are also discussed by a theorist, Louis Althusser. He while discussing Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) gives the idea of Interpellation which refers to the process of internalizing norms without being mindful. He states that:

I shall then suggest that ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals (it recruits them all), or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects (it transforms them all) by that very precise operation which I have

called interpellation or hailing, and which can be imagined along the lines of the most commonplace every day police (or other) hailing (Cain et al. 1936).

According to Althusser's theory, human beings are born subjects but they are made to believe that this subjectivity is self-generated. In other words, the agenda of interpellation can be observed as, "we live to serve systems, even if it may seem that we are free to make our own choices. We are not fully aware of how intricately the web of compliance is woven" (Zipes 246). Interpellation can take place through ideology which is enforced by institutions. In this way, ideological state apparatuses discipline the masses through censorship and overt control. In *The Freedom Artist*, one of the ideological state apparatuses working subtly is education. People are educated on false and generated myths which have instilled ideas of conformity and obedience in them.

Ben Okri has extensively discussed the menacing and coercive nature of state power in *The Freedom Artist*. Institutions wield power and the motive behind this is to create productive and submissive bodies. Academics is a major state institution which is majorly influenced by power tactics, as Lenta puts this idea in these words, "disciplinary power is geared towards the regulation, disciplining, and subjection of academics in order to provide trained and submissive employees" (4). The disciplining mechanism that is adopted in a micro-world of academics, is a replica of the same governing technology which is being used in a macro-world of the state. In *The Freedom Artist* Hierarchy has used books as a tool to discipline the minds of citizens. This is how it takes control over the interior of a person to regulate and manipulate ideologies. They have changed their thinking patterns to the form desirable for the status quo to attain its purpose.

Surveillance has become the biggest reality of today which is more like an invisible trap. Citizens are watched to make sure that they do not derail from the set track chosen by the authority. Philip G. Zimbardo explains the whole idea of coercion, state control and power principle in his essay in these words,

The system loses if even one person is able to maintain autonomy, preserve free will, and sustain a sense of compassion for fellow human beings. The absolute power of this oppressive system is threatened by the presence of even a single dissident, someone who can laugh at its pretentiousness, energized by remembering when life was different and better, and by imagining future realities, future possible selves, with meaningful options and viable choices.... And the Party uses all its might to cleanse such stains from the fabric of its domination. (127)

Incarceration is at the center of the novel. Prison is not visible to human eyes but its existence is undeniable. Rosemary Gray has reinforced the same idea in one of his articles, he writes that “Okri’s antidote to the proposition that the ‘normal’ world is an asylum for mind control, coupled with endemic violence” (Gray 51). Gibson concludes her article by elucidating that “the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the diffusion of the ideal of the reforming penitentiary from Europe and the United States to the rest of the world through a variety of means: direct imposition by colonial administrators, indirect diplomatic pressure from imperialist powers, and active appropriation by modernizing nation-states” (1062). In this way, each state has molded and adopted the ideals of prison and reformation according to their need.

Ben Okri has presented a modern society where the structure and mechanism of prison are established to curtail delinquency and ensure homogenous discipline by removing the revolutionary spirit from society. No one has the audacity to ask questions about their conditions and imprisonment in societal chains of norms, behaviors and rules. Asking questions is still a step further, in this society only having a non-conformist thought can put citizens in jeopardy. There are several instances in the novel that reflect on the socio-political paraphernalia around us and make valid comments on an individual's freedom. For instance, in the novel artists and philosophers are enticed by money to justify the altered myth. Citizens have to follow a specific path of life and above all, media has become the helping hand of power figures. It is in itself a question mark on the nature of freedom and power politics.

### **Research Methodology**

This research is conducted to excavate and unveil the power tactics in a disciplinary society. The qualitative method is the one employed in the current study. In this process novel's characters are analyzed to map out the influence of power on their life and society as a whole. Michel Foucault's book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* provides theoretical framework for the analysis of *The Freedom Artist*. Ben Okri has manifested pertinent points of Foucault's theory in the fictional narrative of *The Freedom Artist*. The life of one of the protagonists is fastened in invincible chains of power, control and surveillance that his body has become unquestionably docile and obedient. Hence, Foucault's ideas with regard to punishment and discipline provide conspicuous points in developing the conceptual foundations of this paper.

Foucault in the section on Punishment describes the transformation in the history of punishment. Elucidating the same argument that punishment is a symbol of power, he explains the major objective of reforms is “not to punish less, but to punish better---to insert to punish more deeply into the social body” (82). In “The General Art of Punishment”, Foucault refers to the obstacle sign technique of punishment. In the eighteenth century, punishment refers to the sign whose role is to function as obstacle in the way of crime. Punishment should be enough to stop the recurrence of the crime. Punishment is set to ensure “lateral effect” and “sufficient ideality” which means the punishment of crime should be enough to impact those who are not part of crime and only imagination of punishment should stop anyone from crime (Foucault 94, 95). In *The Freedom Artist*, fear is generated by using the sign-obstacle method. The particular uniform of those who come to arrest, their vans and their gestures serve as a sign and create an obstacle in the path of other citizens to commit the same crime.

Incarceration is another system of punishment that does not stand as a sign and an obstacle but with prison, the focus has shifted to criminal’s habits, attitudes and behaviors. In short, soul of the culprit is subjected to change through “a strict time-table, a system of prohibitions and obligations, continual supervision, exhortations, religious readings, a whole complex of methods ‘to draw towards good’ and ‘to turn away from evil’” (121). In the novel, the amalgamation of these methods is evident as people are punished in ways that serve the purpose of regulating their behaviors through obstacle-sign technique and the method of incarceration. This is referred by Foucault as, “the prison, though an administrative apparatus, will at the same time be a machine for altering minds” (125). This is how power has deeply penetrated individuals’ bodies and social structures. Building on these arguments, Foucault has highlighted the establishment of a coercive institution which manipulates the mind and soul.



In *Docile Bodies*, Foucault uncovers that body has been central to all kinds of power mechanisms. Docility means a new range of controlling mechanisms. At the heart of all power mechanisms is the agency that is bent to make the body docile which means that it “may be subjected, used, transformed and improved” (136). In the eighteenth century, the operation of docility was extended through the “new scale of control” which means “a subtle coercion, of obtaining holds upon it at the level of the mechanism itself - movements, gestures, attitudes, rapidity: an infinitesimal power over the active body” (137). Along with the behavior of body, its economy and “efficiency of movements” become significant (137). *The Freedom Artist* explicates how the range of control on human subjects has increased manifold to the extent that their movements, daily life and even their thoughts are prone to control.

Foucault uses the term “docility-utility” and sometimes “disciplines” for these methods which have become “general formulas of domination.” (137). He says that new methods of coercion and policies are constructed which elucidate new mechanics of power. In this way, the whole political setup has changed. In other words, “power mechanics” are established with the only purpose of increasing “the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience)” (138). This kind of disciplinary power works more subtly and is more diffused in the society, Foucault calls it “a new micro-physics of power” (139) which is oozing with cunningness and meticulous details. Another postulate of Foucault’s theory that can be substantiated from the novel is docility-utility. In the novel, Hierarchy has individualized bodies not only as submissive, docile and compliant but also productive by indulging them in a monotonous routine. They follow a systematic routine and do not deviate from it. Hence, increasing their productivity and making them docile at the same time.

Foucault highlights that “the chief function of the disciplinary power is to ‘train’” (170). One of the means of applying discipline is ‘hierarchical observation’ which means to exert power only through surveillance and coercion. The structure of observatories or camps was to create a “diagram of a power that acts by means of general visibility” (171). “The spatial nesting of hierarchized surveillance” has become part of every building including schools, hospitals, factories, etc. (171). “The disciplinary institutions secreted a machinery of control that functioned like a microscope of conduct; the fine, analytical divisions that they created formed around men an apparatus of observation, recording and training” (173). “The perfect disciplinary apparatus would make it possible for a single gaze to see everything constantly” (173). Normalizing judgment is another way of ensuring discipline which implies that “at the heart of all disciplinary systems functions a small penal mechanism” (177). Individuals who deviate from the norm or normal are punished. “Normalization becomes one of the great instruments of power at the end of the classical age” (184). Examination on the other hand is combination of both hierarchical observation and normalizing judgment. It is a “normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish” (184). In examination, Disciplinary power is “exercised through its invisibility; at the same time, it imposes on those whom it subjects a principle of compulsory visibility” (187). In the novel, actions of the people are navigated, there is an invisible gaze that is monitoring them. The State has also devised methods to ensure continuous observation of citizens. They are under observation while sleeping, working and even thinking.

Through the concept of Panopticism, “Bentham dreamt of transforming into a network of mechanisms that would be everywhere and always alert, running through society without interruption in space or in time” (209). The diffusion of power at the micro and macro level of

power is done by “the discipline-mechanism: a functional mechanism that must improve the exercise of power by making it lighter, more rapid, more effective, a design of subtle for a society to come” (209). In the image of Panopticon, “the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their spread throughout the whole social body, the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society” is established (209). The trope of prison and the question of prisoner throughout the novel carries paramount importance because it reflects on Foucault’s concepts of Panopticism and the formation of prison. Ben Okri through the fictional warning, gives us a practical demonstration of such transition in *The Freedom Artist*. Hence, the echoes of ‘human beings are born in prison’ can be heard throughout the novel. The society is a mirror that reflects the image of prison and continuous surveillance makes its structure resemble Panopticon. Therefore, Foucault’s concept of power provides theoretical foundations to this research article and the novel *The Freedom Artist* provides theoretical evidence to validate its particular points.

## **Analysis**

This research paper analyzes the power mechanisms in regulating the body and soul of the citizens. In a Disciplinary Society as represented in the novel; power exercises itself through discipline, control and surveillance in the process of converting citizens into docile bodies. Ben Okri describes a panoptic like structure as a prison in the society of *The Freedom Artist*. Prison refers to a geometrical building and within its boundaries, power exercises on a subject through disciplinary mechanisms in order to correct and train him into an obedient individual. The novel, *The Freedom Artist* portrays two faces of prison. One with physical attributes, where delinquents are taken to after removing them from the society. Considering the architecture and model of Panopticon, the novel exhibits the spatial existence of prison. A

tower of Hierarchy is located at the center of the world which has concrete foundations, “it was made of led, concrete, iron...” yet invisible (Okri, Book 6). Hierarchy is carrying out its actions from that tower and the public has not ever seen them. “No one had ever seen the Hierarchy .... They had never seen the tower either” (Okri, Book 5). Nobody knows how the Hierarchy looks like and who are the people who flawlessly regulate public’s life? The boundary of Earth makes the annular structure of Panopticon whereas the central tower maintains the visibility-invisibility aspect of it.

The other aspect of prison is the society where disciplinary mechanisms are functioning in order to train subjects by the means of coercion and surveillance. When the mechanisms of prison expand beyond its geographical limits and encapsulate the premises of a society then that becomes a disciplinary society. In *The Freedom Artist*, the society represents a disciplinary society that has incarcerated human beings in order to apply the technique of corrective training. “Humans are born in prison” is indicative of the same idea that prison has stretched to this extent that it has also occupied the place which is inhabited by human beings (Okri, Overture 2). In short, their inhabitation has incarcerated them. In this fashion, Ben Okri reflects and establishes a correlation between prison and disciplinary society.

Through the life of the protagonist, Karnak, Okri explores the life of an individual who is imprisoned in a society. Karnak is one of the docile characters in the beginning. He trusts status quo for its actions and orders. He is the emblem of docility and obedience until his lover is arrested. Even when Amalantis talks about the prisoner and the most controversial question “Who is the Prisoner?” the reaction of Karnak is the manifestation of docility (Okri, Book 1). His body language represents how much he thinks it is bad to ask

such a question. He immediately says, “we’re not supposed to say that word” (Okri, Book 1). His impulsive “startled” reaction and his body movement of shutting the door “quickly”, all symbolizes his submissiveness towards status quo and its commands (Okri, Book 1).

The life of Karnak particularly and citizens generally address the power’s ability in creating docile bodies. Hierarchy has made citizens internalize disciplinary behaviors which they do not question despite how gravely they impact their lives. When Amalantis questions Karnak about the disappearance of his parents, he replies that “there must have been a good reason why they vanished” (Okri, Book 2). Docility is an internalized behavior that blinds the vision and makes you trust what authorities train you to trust. In this way, a disciplinary society generates docile bodies where obedient citizens have never protested. Disciplinary mechanisms are inclined to increase the docility of human subjects by training their behaviors and that is why Karnak and citizens are not taught, “how to ask questions” (Okri, Book 1).

One of the major aims of disciplinary power is to create a docility-utility relationship. Power intends to make human beings not only docile but submissive and productive simultaneously. Like prison in the disciplinary society of *The Freedom Artist* a certain set of activities and routines are expected of citizens. Status quo provides a general path and inculcates certain desires in them, according to which they want to live their life. From Karnak’s life, readers become familiar with the general prevalent ideas and desires of people which include getting married, having children and screaming at night. The set of activities expected from citizens was that “they did their work, fulfilled obligations, raised their families, read the newspaper, absorbed all they read, watched television, and believed all they saw” (Okri, Book 1). The emphasis of Hierarchy on the work, on the institution of

marriage and family hints at their focus on increasing the utility of individuals. Obviously, for raising families, citizens have to work and fulfill the requirements of their jobs which is important in a capitalist economy. People are compelled to work by telling them that “living is work” (Okri, Book 2). Moreover, watching TV, reading newspapers and believing in it suggests that Hierarchy is making them docile by accelerating the process of interpellation. Okri has used the word “asleep” for the docile bodies who are asleep yet engrossed in working. “They were all asleep. They slept while doing their jobs. They worked efficiently” (Okri, Book 3). Hence, the basic purpose of disciplinary power is to ensure the obedience and efficiency of the subjects.

*The Freedom Artist* projects training individuals as another objective of Disciplinary Power as it conditions the behaviors of individuals. In the novel, some of the traits inculcated in people were that they “spoke less” and had “stopped looking one another in the eye” (Okri, Book 1). Moreover, “intelligent learnt to be foolish” (Okri, Book 1). In this way, their manners, attitudes and gestures are disciplined. Ben Okri through the fictional narrative debates over the role of Schools, Hospitals and Psychiatric wards in the state governed by Hierarchy. For psychiatric wards and hospitals, Okri has specifically referred to them as “Houses of Renormalization” (Okri, Book 4) where people who are declared mad are kept. They are sent to hospitals as mad people where they are subjected to renormalization.

Ben Okri in *The Freedom Artist* has undertaken this task of exposing disciplinary mechanisms embedded in considerably the most neutral space. It can be inferred that it is the state that decides what is normal and what is abnormal? Who is sane and who is insane? In order to implement these standards state takes the help of institutes like Psychiatric wards. Other than Psychiatric wards, schools are working to discipline kids. Teachers are the tools to

execute and propagate disciplinary mechanisms installed by the State. Foucault says that children are easier to be individualized. In the world of Karnak as well, children are the target of disciplinary power. Amalantis comments on the school in these words, “teaching does all the damage. I would like to unteach” (Okri, Book 1). Teachers and the institute of education embody all techniques of disciplining individuals and turning the students into docile bodies.

The authorities, represented through the term of, Hierarchy, have utilized obstacle-sign technique of punishment. Hierarchy spreads fear among public by creating spectacle of arrests. Their attire, appearance, behavior and actions establish a space of shock and fear. Their significant “three knocks”, “grey suits and ties”, “grey van” and their attitude of not giving any reasons of arrest and not speaking at all, are the attributes which create an environment of fear not only for the culprit but also for those who see that happening (Okri, Book 1). They enter a state of distress and bafflement on witnessing it. Okri describes crime punishment relationship and its effect as, “those who were not arrested, but witnessed the arrests of others, went around in a constant state of fear” (Okri, Book 1). It prevents reoccurrence of crime of asking questions. The extreme punishment is “devouring”, police is ordered to devour those who do not follow the instructions (Okri, Book 5). The spectacle of arrests creates the lateral effect of it by influencing others around it. Moreover, it creates pain of the idea of pain (sufficient ideality) in them that by simply assuming themselves in that place, the horror of being imprisoned in an unknown prison forbids them to think of any controversial thoughts or speak something other than clichéd conversation. “Their conversation became neutral”, they started following certain code of conversation (Okri, Book 1).

The corrective aspect of punishment refers to disciplining these bodies so that, such kind of obedient subjects can be produced who only do what they are told to do. This kind of discipline has been a part of prison punishment. Now, it is the part of society as well. Okri defines Disciplinary society in the novel as “from the prison were conducted all the rigorous obscure rites. Here priests were ordained. From here the economy was run. The prison was the true center of government” (Okri, Book 6). The society depicted in the novel is disciplinary one and prison functions at the center of it.

In a disciplinary state, the gaze plays an important role as it sees things constantly without any break. One of the techniques and elements in exerting disciplinary power is hierarchical observation that is the gaze of surveillance which keeps an eye on everyone and everything. Hierarchy ordered that “everyone would be placed under surveillance” (Okri, Book 1). It means those who are commoners and those who are spying, all without any discrimination will be spied on. The society presented in the novel carries spatial nesting of surveillance. People are being observed in the streets as well as in the houses. They are monitored while sleeping and working. The gaze of Hierarchy in the novel is microscope of conduct, it watches for the behaviors and the actions of citizens. Hierarchy has planted “spies and informers” throughout the society to monitor people and point out the ripple causing agents in it (Okri, Overture 5). They are always around yet invisible. When Amalantis asks Karnak about his opinion regarding prisoners, all of a sudden “they heard three knocks at the door” (Okri, Book 1). The men instantly arrive and come in to arrest her. Other than spies and informers, Police is also set on this agenda to watch everyone at every place. Police “patrolled the streets” and “searched the area thoroughly” (Okri, Book 1). Even the houses,



the most private place are not free from surveillance. Police can search rooftops and backs of houses.

Moreover, technology is also an emerging trend and sportive agency in performing the task of surveillance. Technology works as a gaze that identifies and assists in asserting discipline. Hierarchy of the novel has deployed “sophisticated devices for spying on people” (Okri, Book 1). Such kinds of devices are installed in the society which are “listening in on every activity of the citizen” (Okri, Book 2). The next step towards surveillance is to penetrate the gaze inside a person. It does not care for privacy and limits. They just have to devise “inward surveillance” for maximizing discipline and docility (Okri, Book 1). Observers not only spy on the public but also identify crimes and punish the culprits. Ruslana’s father is taken away because he is found to be protecting books which are banned by Hierarchy. His all actions are monitored, his suspicious activities are identified and as a result he is arrested by the people of State. In this way, through mere gaze, people are regulated and disciplined in the world of Hierarchy.

The motive behind surveillance is to navigate and control citizens’ behaviors. A disciplinary society perpetuates discipline through control and surveillance. In *The Freedom Artist*, one of the methods of exerting control is force which “suppress[es] these subversions” (Okri, Overture 4). Control is exerted through the technique of Normalizing Judgment. The iota of human actions is analyzed, judged and penalized in case of err. The crime and nature of control in the novel are defined as, “anything could be a crime: deviation from normal thought, unusualness in dress, questions about the nature of time, speculations about the nature of the soul, paintings that distort reality, writings that cause unease, the inclination to

think too much. The most serious crimes were those that questioned the nature of reality” (Okri, Overture 6).

Newspapers have also become the mean of disciplining and control. It is stated in the novel that they have become “organs of state” (Okri, Overture 7). Moreover, language is also used by authorities to control the public. Language is a building block in thought process and in order to avoid any disturbance, citizens are restricted utilizing specific words like, “hope”, “rights”, “truth” and “freedom” (Okri, Book 1). These words are turned into controversial and rioting words. In addition to that, control is exercised on thoughts as well. In the novel, control is at such extremity that they are not even “allowed to think” (Okri, Book 1). Hierarchy is working on this strategy that if they limit and control thoughts, they can curb revolution and resistance. Moreover, at night it is not permitted to go out of house and there is “curfew” at night (Okri, Book 1). State has limited and controlled their movements, actions, language, thoughts and their daily life in order to make them do only those things which state wants them to do.

Books have always been source of nourishment for minds. Hierarchy has confined their minds by coercing them to not read and meanwhile “police confiscated large numbers of books. They imprisoned publishers and booksellers. They destroyed all forms of printing .... people were forbidden to read them under punishment” (Okri, Overture 4). In this way, the State is moderating, controlling and coercing the citizens in the fictional world of *The Freedom Artist* from their interior to exterior. Okri defines the controlling nature of Hierarchy as, “the Hierarchy had control over the weather, over night and day, over the flow of rivers, over the growth of crops. The Hierarchy was the power that governed, dictated, enforced. It was the invisible will” (Okri, Book 6).

One of the characteristics of disciplinary society is that it has a state apparatus for controlling individuals. Through which it directly exercises power. In the novel *The Freedom Artist*, state or Hierarchy has employed police to maintain discipline and decorum in society. State has “confiscated books” from the society through police (Okri, Overture 4). People are arrested and carried away by police in case of any deviance in their actions and behaviors. They have “silently invaded” the streets and houses (Okri, Book 1). Other than police, there are “figures in white” who maintain discipline and circulate commands by removing and collecting flyers and papers containing revolutionary words (Okri, Book 1). “Police officers and soldiers were deployed across the land” just to carry out the commands of Hierarchy, regulate people to follow what is asked of them and remove and punish them in case of rebellion and crime (Okri, Book 5).

The novel unveils the deceptive nature of power as an entity that deceives and terrorizes us. *The Freedom Artist* is a call to wake up and see the tactics embedded in the disciplinary society. Social institutions are occupied with disciplinary mesh and have caught individuals in its web. Hence, Okri’s treatment of power urges us to think about power structures and how they are oppressing us as subjects of power. Simultaneously, he highlights the importance of resisting subduing power to claim our freedom.

## **Conclusion**

This research investigates power mechanisms in *The Freedom Artist* to agitate the reader’s consciousness. This investigation gathers Okri’s underlying opinion from the fictional narrative of *The Freedom Artist* that freedom is diminishing from every part of the world because each human being is enchained in invisible shackles of mechanisms of

Disciplinary Power. This study reveals that these chains are of policies, state governed ideas, gender, race and beliefs. Resultantly, *The Freedom Artist* is not simply an African narrative or only applicable to the African context rather it has global relevance.

This critical study primarily addresses the question, who is the prisoner? This study projects human beings as prisoners in the prison of disciplinary society. This argument is justified by scrutinizing the character of Amalantis who has been courageous enough to ask difficult questions. Ben Okri raises finger towards the educational system, health care centers, religious institutions, media and politicians for converting society into prison and individuals into docile bodies by enforcing disciplinary mechanisms. Ben Okri's *The Freedom Artist* as a dystopian novel underpins human beings' depleting freedom and fabricated reality which has become a common phenomenon these days.

This critical exploration of narrative exposes capitalist logic which uses discipline as a helping hand. Hierarchy keeps people busy in rearing their families, arranging marriages and collecting money for happy life that imposes on them docility-utility relationship. Money has become significant for commoners as well as for noted personalities like writers and intellectuals. To expand capitalist venture, disciplining subjects is important so that they do not deviate from the path of producing capital.

This research analyses two contrasting personalities, Karnak is initially a representative of a disciplinary society whose perspective of life is limited to what power has instilled in his mind, who follows Hierarchy's commands blindly and never asks questions. Whereas, Amalantis is opposite, she asks questions. She knows the true face of disciplinary power and Okri tells readers that those who question power are punished and incarcerated

like Amalantis. Simultaneously, Okri through the struggle of the same characters put emphasis on the need to resist dehumanizing power structures and claim our on freedom. Hence, this study analyses the mechanism of disciplinary society which compels people to follow the status quo but at the same time foregrounds the idea that how power should be critiqued.

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