



## An Analysis of Foucauldian Power in Jojo Rabbit Movie (2019)

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### Abstract

*This research is titled Foucauldian power in the film Jojo Rabbit (2019). This research aims to uncover how Foucauldian power is depicted through Jojo from the movie Jojo Rabbit using Foucault's theory of the use of power. The analysis uses scenes, images, dialogues and narratives contained in the film, then looks for contextual similarities with Foucault's concept. A qualitative descriptive approach is applied in this study which includes the main data from the film, equipped with various references. Ten-year-old Jojo Betzler was educated by the Nazis to imagine Hitler, the Nazis, and the Aryans superior and the Jews considered weak. It was only when he met and befriended Else, a Jewish girl hiding in his attic, that he was able to break free and begin to recognize and deconstruct the superior and weak that he had imagined all along. This film contains all elements based on dialogue, main characters, scenes, images and narratives contained in the film. The findings of the study show that there are three important elements to reveal Foucault's power such as acceptance toward nazi ideology, power for protecting others and power for being acknowledged.*

## **1. Introduction**

In the context of literature, the issue of power has a great influence on the way these works are created and received. Literature is not just a work of art; It also serves as a tool to question, discuss, and even challenge existing power structures in society. By conveying experiences, views, and voices from different social strata, literary works can expose injustice, oppression, and the struggle for freedom and human rights. Through literary works, humans can understand various problems that exist in life. Literature often reflects reality, as the works come from various cultural contexts in society (Afrianto & Gulö, 2019).

The flexible nature of literature makes it a force capable of entering all aspects of life. Thus, literature becomes a forum for humans to express thoughts, emotions, experiences, concepts, and challenges through the medium of literary creation, using language as a means of communication. In it, marginalized voices can be raised, and alternative narratives can be created to expand our understanding of power and its impact in everyday life.

The human experience relates to the way they interact with power, or more commonly referred to as power relations. Foucault stated that power is very dynamic; Power is not only present everywhere because it is practiced, but because it has the potential to emerge and be realized. According to Foucault (2009), power itself is intangible, but everything that affects history, individuals, knowledge, and truth is the result of power relations. This is a "double articulation that explains that power relations are ubiquitous and inevitable" (Hardy, 2015, p. 411). This potential for power can be seen through the concept of panopticons, which explains "the way power works through unidirectional surveillance.

Individuals feel they are always being watched" (Foucault, 2009, p. 195) and because of this feeling of constant supervision, individuals automatically regulate their behavior according to the norms set by power without the need for direct intervention. Power is practiced in daily life through discourse (Siregar, 2021). For this reason, power is not only oppressive, but also productive and can be found everywhere. The current practice of power is very different, where power has largely been institutionalized and eventually internalized by individuals.

The exercise of power cannot be entirely attributed to the individual subject, since power transcends this realm. However, the individual remains an important site where power and resistance continue to manifest. Foucault's concept of power seeks commonality, limiting individuals and individual subjectivities to exercise control. Conversely, resistance takes various forms and thrives on differences, thus posing a threat to the authority of power. Resistance evades capture by disguising itself in various discourses, and like power, resistance is also ubiquitous. Social resistance is particularly worrisome for those in power because it challenges institutionalized knowledge, traditionally considered objective and scientific. The practice of power seeks efficiency by hiding itself behind objective knowledge, just as resistance hides itself through various forms of expression.

Shared belief in knowledge and reality is essentially a symbol of objectivity. A fundamental component of social power relations is the discursive power to create knowledge about reality that can be integrated into cultural and political life (Fiske, 2016). Building knowledge that advances the goals of existing power is necessary to build hegemony. When society begins to believe information and facts disseminated by individuals with authority, society becomes vulnerable to deception and manipulation. Thus, according to Manias and Street (2000), “knowledge created in discourse is governed by certain limitations, rules, exceptions, and decisions” (p. 52).

This is in line with Foucauldian theory. Individual subjects are guided in certain ways that support the goals of prevailing power through the construction of various discourses. Humans can be controlled without always having to use physical force because they can always create their own world. Furthermore, Foucault argues that the creation of this knowledge must be kept secret “not because its object is despicable, but because it must be guarded with the utmost care, since tradition dictates that its integrity and efficacy would be lost if it were dismantled” (Foucault, 1990, p. 48). Knowledge and truth become more credible the better they are at concealing the consolidation of power and, more specifically, the process of knowledge creation.

This study will analyze the film *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) which focuses on the experience of a child named Jojo with a Nazi setting at that time. Jojo internalizes himself as a Nazi in facing life in the pressure environment of Nazi Germany. The existence of his mother and his friend Elsa who are anti-Nazi, encourage Jojo to do various forms of struggle to face this. In his imagination with Hitler, Jojo sees himself as a Nazi while covering up his condition of having anti-Nazi friends and mother. The issues in the film are very appropriate to be analyzed using Foucault's theory of power.

Previous research on *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) using Foucault's power theory has never been conducted. Mochammad Alfi Fauzan & Adrio Kusmareza Adim (2024) analyzes the reality of the Nazis in this film through John Fiske's three levels of semiotics—the code of reality, representation, and ideology—with a qualitative interpretive approach. William Skiles (2024) examines the image of a Nazi friend both by focusing on how image and language undermine that image and Elsa's role in changing Jojo's view of Jews. Ramdhani & Ananda Rizal (2020) examined verbal discrimination using Roland Barthes' semiotic analysis. Ni & Wang (2022) explores the absurdity in this film, focusing on human alienation, loss of harmony, and emptiness of life, as well as analyzing Jojo's mother and military children from a metaphorical perspective. Thus, the purpose of this study is to find the embodiment of Foucault's Power in the movie *Jojo Rabbit*.

## 2. Method

According to Creswell (2009), research designs are plans and procedures that guide the entire research process, from broad assumptions to detailed methods of data collection and analysis. He identifies three types of research designs: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, each involving strategies of inquiry, philosophical worldviews, and research methods. This research employs a descriptive qualitative method, defined as an inquiry that explores social or human problems through detailed, holistic analysis in a natural setting.

The purpose of descriptive qualitative research method is to analyze the content that clearly describes a message or moral value of a text (Mahendra & Amelia, 2020). The primary data comes from the film *Jojo Rabbit* (2019), supplemented by various references. In this research, the dialogue, scenes, images and narration are collected through movie script. Furthermore, the writer uses the qualitative method as another supporting tool that can help to strengthen the analysis result

## 3. Result & Discussion

In this journal, the author presents an analysis of Foucault's power. Based on Foucault's concept, there are several images, dialogues, narratives taken from the *Jojo Rabbit* movie that refer to Foucault's power. This study will analyze the film *Jojo Rabbit* (2019) which focuses on the experience of a child named Jojo with the Nazi setting at that time. Jojo internalizes himself as a Nazi in facing life in the pressure environment of Nazi Germany. The existence of his mother and his best friend Elsa who are anti-Nazi, encourages Jojo to do various forms of struggle to face this. In his imagination with Hitler, Jojo sees himself as a Nazi while covering up his condition of having friends and a mother who are anti-Nazi.

### *Acceptance Toward Nazi Ideology*

Jojo Betzler was obliged to take part in war training. The story is set in the town of Ost Falkenheim, a suburb of Nuremberg, an important city in the National Socialist state. Various clues inform the viewer of the location. The badge on Jojo's Hitler Youth uniform (though only visible for a split second in the opening scene) marks it, as does an advertising poster hidden in the background of the town square. The name of the town is most often given very quickly or from a distance, and always in Fraktur Deutsch.

The recent government asked every child to have this training. Jojo joined with other children under the supervision of Captain Klenzendorf. Thus, the children followed the pre-military training. In the opening of the *Jojo Rabbit* movie, there is a Germany's song sung by children. The end of the song followed the other scene which leads to a boy wearing a Nazi uniform. The boy then seemed to recite Adolf Hitler's oath.

### Scene 1 (Minute: 00:44 - 1:46)

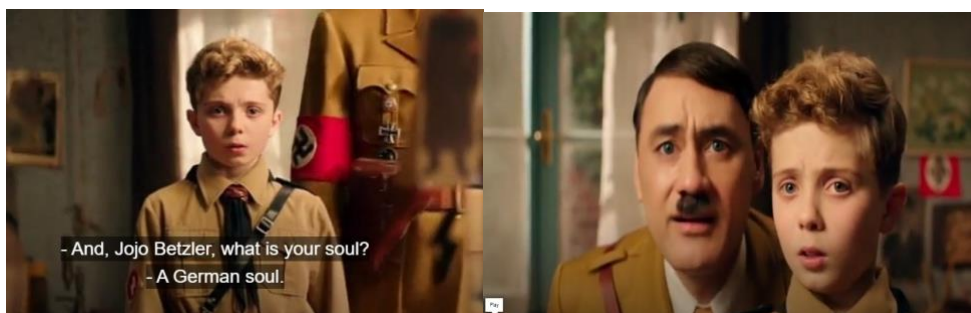


Figure 1. Jojo puts on his Nazi uniform

- Jojo* : *Jojo Betzler, Ten years old. Today, you join the ranks of the Jungvolk, in a very special training weekend. It's going to be intense. But today you become a man. I swear to devote all my energies and my strength to the savior of our country, Adolf Hitler. I am willing to give up my life for him. So help me God.*
- Hitler* : *Yes, that's right!*
- Hitler* : *Now, Jojo Betzler, what is on your mind?*
- Jojo* : *Snake mind.*
- Hitler* : *And Jojo Betzler, what is your body?*
- Jojo* : *Wolf body.*
- Hitler* : *Jojo Betzler, what is your courage?*
- Jojo* : *Panther courage.*
- Hitler* : *What is your soul?*
- Jojo* : *German soul.*
- Hitler* : *Yeah man, you're ready*

The scene shows Jojo with the imaginary figure of Adolf Hitler. The opening scene of the film reveals the Führer coming to life in Jojo's mind. Ten-year-old Jojo looks in the mirror, dressed in his Hitler Youth uniform, preparing for a grueling weekend of training, confidently swearing an oath of allegiance to "Der Führer." Jojo recites the oath that Hitler Youth boys and girls took to Adolf Hitler. In this scene, the interaction between Adolf Hitler and Jojo's imagination about animals, is to reveal the nature and emotions of the character in Jojo. Jojo looks very confident.

When the imaginary figure of Hitler asks what his soul is, Jojo confidently answers "A German soul". In this scene, Jojo comes under the influence of Adolf Hitler as Führer and best friend, and this relationship shapes his character. From the beginning, the audience understands that Jojo has been deeply influenced by Nazi ideology.

This opening scene shows Jojo being raised to be a tough "Aryan" in Hitler's image, cunning, physically strong, and brave for the Fatherland. At first, Hitler is a blur in the scene, an unidentified figure surrounding Jojo. Hitler's face cannot be seen because the camera is focused directly on Jojo's upper body and face, but later

his face is revealed as the boy's best friend. Hearing Jojo recite the oath, he responds sarcastically, *"Yes, that's right!"* which inspires him to Nazi ideology.

Jojo in this study is seen as a child who has Nazi ideology. This is as seen that Jojo is convinced to have German Soul. Jojo seems to have strength and power after saying the word or oath. When asked many times, Jojo remains convinced of the ideology. Jojo does this even though it is only an imaginary act. This means that the Nazi ideology has penetrated Jojo's mind. In Foucault's panopticon theory (2009), how power works through one-way surveillance. Individuals feel that they are always being watched, so they act according to the rules, even though there is not always someone who is really watching. Jojo feels that Adolf Hitler always exists in his surroundings. This can be seen in the scene where Jojo with his imaginary Hitler in his room.

Nazi ideology was the ideology of the Nazi Party, the ruling party of Germany from 1933–1945. The Nazi Party believed that superior races should be promoted and considered inferior races unworthy of moral consideration. The Nazi Party's rule emphasized the need for blind obedience to a leader appointed from above. The Nazi Party wanted to create a community of Germans loyal to their führer.

### ***Power for Protecting Others***

Jojo Betzler is a boy who idolizes Hitler and wants to become a strong and passionate National Socialist and a productive member of the "Aryan" Volksgemeinschaft. However, things get worse when Jojo finds a hiding place for a Jewish girl named Elsa, living behind a wall with a small door in her deceased sister's room. Jojo, who had just returned from his duties again, namely distributing propaganda and sending military conscription letters in his Nazi clothes, then he entered his sister's room, knocked on the small door where the Jewish girl was hiding, then after Jojo knocked on the door, he turned around and ran to the outside of the room door and hid his body a little behind the wall while watching the Jewish girl open the door and say something to the Jewish girl.

### **Scene 2 (Minute: 00:44 - 1:46)**



Figure 2. Jojo talks to Elsa

*Jojo : Oke, here's the situation. If I tell you, you'll be in big trouble, and I don't think you don't want that. But then you'll tell me and my mother, and we'll be in trouble, which I don't want. And if you tell my mother I know, then she'll kick you out, which you don't want. And if I tell my mother I know, then you'll cut off my Nazi head, which also I don't want. So, it's a Mexican stalemate.*

*Elsa : It's just a normal stalemate.*

*Jojo : I have some conditions for allowing you to stay here.*

*Elsa : Conditions ?*

*Jojo : Yes. Tell me everything about Jews ' race.*

*Elsa : Okay.*

The scene shows Jojo talking with a Jewish girl named Elsa. Jojo looks a little scared and hides his body behind the wall after he knocks on the small door where the Jewish girl is hiding and after that Elsa opens the door a little. In this scene, Jojo says that it would be better for all parties involved not to tell anyone that they have met, especially Rosie. After Jojo said that he began to dare to show his body in front of the Jewish girl and was followed by Elsa coming out of her hiding place. In this scene, Jojo says that he will protect Elsa and let her stay in his house. Jojo, although he does not tell the authorities about the Jewish girl who lives behind the wall, he still maintains his very anti-Semitic views and his friendship with an imaginary Hitler.

While his feelings have become complicated since he met Elsa and his realization that his mother was part of the resistance, Jojo remains a proud Nazi. As a way to remain silent and be a good Nazi, Jojo devises a project where he will conduct research for a book for the Nazis that defines certain Jewish characteristics, using Elsa as the main subject. Jojo is shown to be providing protection for both the Jewish girl and her mother by not outing them to the authorities. Jojo not only comes face to face with a Jew, the most vilified group in Nazi Germany, but also learns that his mother was part of the resistance, helping to protect the Jews from the very forces he had dedicated himself to. He is horrified to learn not only that there is a Jew in his home, but that his mother played a role in betraying their leader, Hitler, whom he idolized.

In this scene, Jojo is in a situation that illustrates Foucault's concept of the panopticon, where power operates indirectly through internalized surveillance. Jojo has been indoctrinated by the Nazis, exercising control over himself. When he tells Elsa, *"If I tell you, you'll be in big trouble, and I don't think you don't want that,"* Jojo feels the need to keep Elsa's secret as part of an effort to maintain his image as a devout Nazi. Although there is no direct supervision from the authorities, the Nazi ideology embedded in his mind acts as a disciplinary force that makes him afraid to break the rules, while also creating conflict within him because of his awareness of the truth that is contrary to his beliefs (Macey, 2009).

Meanwhile, Elsa represents a form of resistance to Nazi rule. Although she is in a physically threatened position, Elsa has narrative and intellectual power in her relationship with Jojo. In this moment of hesitation, Elsa says, "It's just a normal stalemate," implying that their situation is balanced. In this context, Elsa implies that the situation between the two of them is not developing in a decisive direction; no one wins or loses. Each has strengths and weaknesses, so their situation is stuck in a balanced position or there is no significant change.

Elsa, despite being in danger, realizes that Jojo is also caught in a conflict between ideology and reality. By acting as Jojo's research subject, she controls the information that Jojo receives, showing that power is not always top-down. The relationship between Jojo and Elsa demonstrates a complex power dynamic, where the ideologies that govern one's behavior can be questioned and challenged through personal interactions.

### ***Power for Being Acknowledged***

Jojo is a boy who idolizes Hitler, so in his life, he has an imaginary friend, Adolf Hitler. Jojo is under the influence of Adolf Hitler as Führer and friend, and this relationship shapes his character. Jojo has been deeply influenced by Nazi ideology, one of which is the understanding that Jews are enemies, weak, strange, who deserve to be destroyed, while the "Aryan" race is superior. Hitler's arch illustrates how fascism and authoritarianism work. However, Jojo's understanding and belief in Hitler as an imaginary friend continues to decline as he slowly builds a true friendship with Elsa, a Jewish girl. Elsa, tells the truth about Jews in Nazi Germany, thus exposing the Nazis' falsehood.

When Jojo was exploring the city, there was a war between America and Germany. Jojo saw that Germany had lost the war against America. Furthermore, Jojo felt disbelief when Jojo's friend Yorki said that Hitler was dead, he surrendered and shot himself in the head. After the war ended, he returned home. Jojo reflected and now he began to be grateful for his life. He banished the fanatical thoughts within himself so that he would not have any feelings of anxiety about the mortal demands of Nazi Germany.

### **Scene 3 (Minute: 1:38:30 - 1:39:57)**



Figure 3. Jojo talks to Adolf Hitler

*Adolf : So, here's what's gonna happen, you little shit. You're gonna put this on, okay ? You're gonna forget about that disgusting Jewy cow up there. And you're gonna come back to me, where you belong. Right ? . Put it on! And then, we're gonna pretend none of this ever happened. You got it ?*

*Jojo crumpled and threw the cloth with the swastika symbol given by Hitler.*

*Adolf: You're not gonna heil me ? Come on ? For old times sake ? . Heil me little man*

*Jojo : No*

*Adolf: Heil me*

*Jojo : No*

*Adolf: Give me a little heil, just a little heil, please ?*

*Jojo : Fuck off, Hiltler!*

In this scene, Jojo is standing in front of the mirror, looking at himself with a sigh. He smiles flatly and is wearing a typical child's costume. When Jojo is about to leave his room, Hitler's imagination appears as a barrier. With a gaping wound on the side of his head from a self-inflicted gunshot, this imaginary figure does not want to let Jojo leave without wearing a swastika armband as a symbol of loyalty to Adolf Hitler. However, Jojo, in annoyance, squeezes and throws away the swastika armband. Adolf Hitler's imagination is shocked when he sees Jojo refusing his order; the figure then asks Jojo to greet him by saying the word "heil." However, Jojo refuses the request, and afterward, he kicks Hitler's imagination out of the window.

This scene reflects the concept of resistance in Foucault's thinking, where resistance takes various forms and develops because of differences. This resistance often poses a threat to the authority of power. In this context, Jojo's act of refusing to greet Adolf Hitler is a form of rejection of the power represented by the imaginary figure. As seen when Hitler forces Jojo to salute with the phrase, "Give me a little heil, just a little heil, please?" Jojo replies firmly, "Fuck off, Hitler!" This action reflects Jojo's changing understanding and belief in Adolf Hitler, showing that individuals can resist oppressive power structures.

Foucault argues that power is not only repressive, but also productive, shaping identities and social relationships. In this scene, we see how Jojo attempts to overcome the dominant influence of the intimidating figure of Hitler. Jojo's refusal to wear the symbol of power, as well as his action of kicking the imaginary figure, signifies the rise of self-awareness and individual freedom that resists forms of social control.

Furthermore, Jojo's actions reflect a search for recognition in the context of an identity trapped in a narrative of power. In a relationship of power, recognition is often given to those who submit to the norms set by authority (Haugaard, 2022) However, by refusing to wear the swastika armband and kicking out the Hitler

figure, Jojo refuses to allow his identity to be defined by oppressive power. He chooses to define himself outside the boundaries set by totalitarian ideology (Ade-Jojo, 2012). In this case, Jojo's refusal becomes not only a form of resistance but also a powerful statement of identity, asserting that true recognition cannot be granted by oppressive power, but must be earned through courageous action and self-awareness. Thus, this scene not only depicts individual resistance, but also highlights the complex dynamics between power, identity, and recognition, and how individuals can find strength in refusing to shape their own narratives in the face of domination.

#### 4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions of Foucault's theory of power in the film *Jojo Rabbit*, there are three important issues: acceptance of Nazi ideology, power to protect, and power to be recognized. Adolf Hitler (imagination) in Jojo's mind propagated Nazi ideology, teaching that Aryans were superior and Jews were weak, in accordance with Foucault's concept of power working through internal oversight. However, resistance arises through Jojo's friendship with Elsa, which changes his view of Jews, as well as from Jojo's rejection of symbols of power, demonstrating self-awareness and freedom. This study shows the importance of knowledge and sensitivity to get out of the domination of power.

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