



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>
 Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#5755-5765
 Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21916261) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21916261)
 Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21916261)
<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21916261>



**The Predictive Panopticon and Somnoptic Surveillance: Extending Foucault in Laila Lalami's
 The Dream Hotel**
Maryam Rafique

M.Phil. Scholar, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus,
 Pakistan

maryamrana628@gmail.com

Dr. Azam Sarwar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad
 Campus, Pakistan

Azam.Sarwar@riphahfsd.edu.pk

Kashaf Zulfiqar

Lecturer, Department of English, Riphah International University, Faisalabad Campus, Pakistan

Kashaf.zulfiqar@riphahfsd.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

*Algorithmic surveillance has become a defining feature of contemporary life. Governments and corporations increasingly deploy predictive systems that forecast human behavior from aggregated data, pre-crime risk assessment tools now inform decisions in criminal justice and immigration enforcement, and neural monitoring devices capable of tracking brain activity during sleep are entering commercial markets. These developments raise urgent questions about privacy, autonomy, and the reach of surveillance into domains once considered beyond its grasp. This research is relevant precisely because existing surveillance theory has not kept pace with these technological realities: the dominant frameworks continue to assume a conscious subject who is watched in the present, and cannot account for surveillance that predicts future crime or penetrates the unconscious mind. This article addresses that gap through a study of Laila Lalami's speculative novel *The Dream Hotel* (2025), which dramatizes both frontiers. Drawing on Michel Foucault's panopticism alongside the post-panoptic frameworks of Lyon, Zuboff, Deleuze, and Agamben, the article introduces two original conceptual extensions of panoptic theory: the Predictive Panopticon, which theorizes surveillance operating in the future tense through algorithmic pre-crime detention, and Somnoptic Surveillance, which theorizes the extension of the surveillant gaze into the unconscious mind through neural monitoring. The analysis demonstrates that both concepts name genuine gaps in existing theory and argues that the novel both critiques contemporary algorithmic governance and affirms the persistence of resistance within totalizing systems of control.*

Keywords: Panopticism; Algorithmic Surveillance; Pre-Crime Detention; Somnoptic Surveillance; Predictive Panopticon; Resistance; Speculative Fiction

1. Introduction

Surveillance has occupied a central position in social and political thought since Jeremy Bentham designed the panopticon prison in the late eighteenth century, but it was Michel Foucault who transformed that architectural design into a comprehensive theory of modern disciplinary power. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault argued that the panopticon was

not merely a prison but a diagram of power relations characteristic of modernity as a whole, a mechanism that induces compliance by making subjects permanently aware they might be watched. Since that foundational articulation, panopticism has become one of the most productive frameworks in the humanities and social sciences, extended by scholars including David Lyon, Shoshana Zuboff, Gilles Deleuze, and Louise Amoore to account for distributed digital monitoring, surveillance capitalism, societies of control, and algorithmic prediction.

Contemporary speculative fiction has become a significant site for imagining and critiquing these developments, and Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel* (2025) represents one of the most theoretically sophisticated recent contributions to this tradition. Lalami is a Moroccan-American novelist whose earlier works, including *The Moor's Account* (2015) and *The Other Americans* (2019), explored the precarious citizenship of racialized and immigrant subjects within American society. *The Dream Hotel* marks her first venture into speculative fiction. Its protagonist, Sara Tilila Hussein, is a thirty-eight-year-old museum archivist detained at Los Angeles International Airport by the Risk Assessment Administration, a government agency whose algorithm has calculated that she poses an imminent risk of future criminal violence. Sara has committed no crime. She is transferred to Madison Retention Center, a former elementary school converted into a detention facility by the private corporation Safe-X, and held indefinitely while her algorithmic risk score is assessed.

Set in the late 2030s, the novel constructs its world through careful extrapolation of contemporary trends: predictive policing, neural monitoring devices, the privatization of detention, and the normalization of pre-crime governance. Its narrative architecture is sophisticated and deliberately multivocal, alternating a third-person present-tense account of Sara's daily life at Madison with interpolated institutional documents, risk assessment transcripts, and italicized dream sequences that record the contents of her unconscious mind. This formal complexity mirrors the novel's thematic concerns: just as Sara's life is constituted by the intersection of her lived experience and the data profile the algorithm has constructed of her, the novel's structure juxtaposes the human narrative of her detention with the institutional documentation that governs it.

Despite this rich engagement with surveillance, the novel has not yet received systematic analysis through the lens of Foucauldian panopticism, and no existing theoretical framework fully accounts for its two most distinctive innovations: the detention of subjects for algorithmically predicted future crimes, and the extension of surveillance into the unconscious mind through neural monitoring of sleep. This article addresses both absences by introducing two original concepts, the Predictive Panopticon and Somnoptic Surveillance, that extend Foucauldian theory to account for the specific dimensions of algorithmic surveillance the novel depicts, while also examining the forms of resistance through which Sara Hussein contests the power that has imprisoned her. The article proceeds in five sections mirroring the structure of the larger study from which it derives: a review of existing scholarship on the novel and the panoptic tradition, an elaboration of the theoretical framework including the two original concepts, a close analysis of the novel across five interconnected dimensions, and a conclusion that synthesizes the findings and identifies their significance for surveillance studies and beyond.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Existing Scholarship on *The Dream Hotel*

Two scholarly studies have engaged with *The Dream Hotel* to date. Barhoun (2026) offers the most substantial analysis, drawing on Zuboff's surveillance capitalism, Mbembe's necropolitics, Haggerty and Ericson's surveillant assemblage, and Browne's racializing surveillance to argue

that the novel's central concern is the gap between Sara Hussein as a living person and her data double, the statistical profile the algorithm constructs from her aggregated behavioral data. Barhoun reads Sara's dream journal as a counter-archive through which she reclaims the interior life the algorithm treats as behavioral surplus. While this study positions the novel within sophisticated frameworks of contemporary surveillance theory, it does not address the specifically Foucauldian dimensions of the novel's apparatus, nor does it theorize the preemptive temporal logic of Sara's detention.

Loyi (2026) examines the novel through the lenses of AI policing and capital surveillance, arguing that it constructs a near-future society in which surveillance capitalism and artificial intelligence control mobility, bodies, and minds. While perceptive in identifying the significance of dream surveillance, this study remains underdeveloped, relying on only three theoretical references and offering no systematic application of a single framework. Neither Barhoun nor Loyi engages Foucauldian panopticism as a primary lens, and neither develops a conceptual account of the novel's central surveillance innovations. Both absences are addressed here.

2.2 Panopticism in Surveillance Fiction

Situating the novel within Lalami's career clarifies why her turn to speculative fiction is less a generic departure than a political escalation. Her earlier novels, from *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2005) to *The Other Americans* (2019), consistently examined how immigration status, racial identity, and class position shape different characters' relationships to institutions of law, justice, and community, and *The Moor's Account* (2015) developed the archival consciousness that Sara Hussein inherits, the understanding that official records are always selective and always in need of counter-narratives. The *Dream Hotel* intensifies this dynamic, imagining the logical endpoint of surveillance systems that already disproportionately target Muslim, Arab, and immigrant communities: a world in which algorithmic scoring converts informal, culturally embedded surveillance into formal institutional authority to detain.

The productivity of panoptic analysis for surveillance fiction is well established across a range of texts. Sharma (2023) and Baral (2022) demonstrate how Orwell's telescreen in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* functions as a disciplinary technology that shapes subjectivity through permanent potential visibility. Asl, Abdullah, and Yaapar (2020) apply Foucault's panoptic spaces to Jhumpa Lahiri's diaspora fiction, showing how cultural assimilation pressures operate as a diffuse form of surveillance that produces self-monitoring subjects. Ismael and Saleh (2023) read Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* through Foucauldian discipline and resistance, while Miceli (2019) analyzes Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last* as a literalization of the disciplinary society. These studies confirm Foucault's central insight that panopticism is a transferable diagram of power capable of operating through any institutional, technological, or cultural medium, and they establish the methodological precedent on which the present analysis builds.

2.3 Research Gap

Yet a consistent limitation emerges across this body of scholarship. None of these texts, and none of the studies analyzing them, engages with the specific temporal innovation that *The Dream Hotel* introduces: a surveillance apparatus oriented not toward the present behavior or past conduct of its subjects but toward the future crime the algorithm predicts they will commit. Orwell's telescreen monitors the present. Atwood's *Eyes* enforce compliance in the here and now. None operates through the prediction of future crimes as grounds for present detention, and none addresses the monitoring of the unconscious during sleep. This dual gap, temporal and unconscious, is the conceptual territory that the present study maps through the Predictive Panopticon and Somnoptic Surveillance. By providing the first Foucauldian reading of

the novel and proposing these two extensions, the article contributes to surveillance studies, digital humanities, and the theoretical discourse on algorithmic power.

3. Theoretical Framework

Foucault's panopticism provides the foundation for this study. Bentham's panopticon was premised on asymmetrical visibility: guards in a central tower could observe any cell without being seen, while inmates could never determine when they were being watched. Foucault (1977) transformed this design into a theory of disciplinary power, identifying its primary effect as the inducement of a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power. Because inmates cannot verify when they are watched, they assume perpetual observation and regulate their own behavior, becoming, in Foucault's formulation, the principle of their own subjection. This internalization of the gaze is the psychological mechanism at the heart of all panoptic power.

Post-Foucauldian scholars have extended this framework substantially. Lyon (2007) argues that contemporary surveillance has evolved into a distributed surveillant assemblage operating across multiple institutions and technologies simultaneously rather than from a single tower. Zuboff (2019) demonstrates how behavioral data has become raw material for a new economic logic in which corporations extract behavioral surplus and process it into prediction products that anticipate what subjects will do. Deleuze (1992) identified a shift from disciplinary societies, organized around enclosed institutions, to societies of control, in which power operates through continuous modulation. Agamben (1998) contributes the concept of the state of exception, a suspension of the juridical order that produces bare life, existence stripped of legal protection through what he terms inclusive exclusion. Together these frameworks illuminate much of the novel's surveillance apparatus. Yet all of them share two unexamined assumptions that the novel's innovations challenge.

The evolution of panoptic power into algorithmic governance deserves particular attention because it establishes the technical conditions for both original concepts developed here. Rouvroy and Berns (2013) define algorithmic governmentality as a normative rationality founded on the automated collection and analysis of big data in order to model, anticipate, and pre-emptively affect possible behaviors. This mode of governance operates by identifying correlations rather than understanding causation, classifying individuals through pattern matching rather than individual assessment. Harcourt (2007) describes the parallel transformation of criminal justice into an actuarial paradigm built on group data and probabilities rather than individual culpability, in which individuals face consequences not for their behaviors but for their statistical correlation with patterns associated with undesirable outcomes. These frameworks illuminate how the Risk Assessment Administration in the novel operates: not as a judge who weighs evidence and applies norms, but as an algorithm that identifies correlations and triggers automated responses. Sara Hussein is not judged; she is processed.

3.1 The Predictive Panopticon

The first assumption is temporal. Whether the panopticon disciplines present behavior, Lyon's assemblage aggregates past behavioral traces, or Zuboff's surveillance capitalism commodifies existing behavioral patterns, all these frameworks are present or retrospective in orientation. None theorizes a surveillance apparatus that detains subjects preemptively for crimes the algorithm calculates they will commit in the future. Zedner (2007) approaches this temporal shift through her concept of pre-crime, arguing that security increasingly operates through pre-emption, acting on future threats rather than past crimes and eroding fundamental legal protections by justifying intervention before any criminal act occurs. Amoore (2013) develops

this further through the politics of possibility; governance oriented toward preventing imagined futures rather than responding to actual events. Yet neither scholar names the specific reconfiguration of panoptic power that results, which is the contribution the present concept makes.

This study proposes the concept of the Predictive Panopticon to name this extension. The Predictive Panopticon refers to a surveillance apparatus in which the disciplinary gaze operates primarily in the future tense. Unlike Foucault's original panopticon, which disciplines subjects by making them aware they may be observed and thereby inducing present behavioral compliance, the Predictive Panopticon aggregates historical behavioral data through algorithmic analysis to forecast future deviance and justify preemptive detention. The power to punish is exercised not in response to a crime committed but in anticipation of a crime predicted. Crucially, this mechanism does not operate through the subject's internalization of the gaze at all: the subject cannot modify present behavior in response to surveillance she does not know has occurred. The Predictive Panopticon thus represents a qualitative break from Foucauldian panopticism, one that requires new theoretical tools for analysis and that finds its clearest literary instantiation in Sara Hussein's detention.

3.2 Somnoptic Surveillance

The second assumption concerns consciousness. All existing panoptic frameworks implicitly presuppose a conscious subject who can be made to internalize the gaze, because self-discipline requires awareness: the subject must know she might be observed in order to regulate her behavior. Sleep and the unconscious represent the one domain where this mechanism theoretically fails. A sleeping subject cannot self-discipline, cannot perform compliance, and cannot strategically modify her dreams. Historically, the unconscious has represented the final refuge of interiority that surveillance could not colonize.

This study proposes the concept of Somnoptic Surveillance, from the Latin *somnus* (sleep) and the Greek *optikos* (relating to sight), to name the extension of the surveillant gaze into the unconscious mind through neural monitoring of sleep and dream states. *The Dream Hotel* depicts precisely the elimination of this refuge. Sara's neural implant monitors her physiological and neurological states throughout the night, extracting behavioral data from her sleep that the algorithm aggregates into the profile justifying her detention. Somnoptic Surveillance names the condition in which the dreaming mind is converted into behavioral data subject to algorithmic analysis and institutional punishment. Together with the Predictive Panopticon, it extends the panoptic tradition into two domains, the future and the unconscious, that Foucault could not have anticipated but that contemporary neural and algorithmic technologies are rapidly rendering real.

4. Analysis and Discussion

4.1 The Algorithmic Panopticon

The Dream Hotel opens with a surveillance apparatus so thoroughly embedded in institutional life that it has become invisible through normalization. Madison Retention Center deploys a surveillance infrastructure that constitutes the first dimension of panoptic power in the text, established from the novel's opening pages:

She stands still, limbs straight, eyes fixed on a point in the middle distance; if Madison has taught her anything, it is that compliance begins in the body. From white domes on the ceiling, the cameras watch. (Lalami, 2025, p. 8)

This passage performs the panoptic logic Foucault identifies: the subject is watched, the watcher is invisible, and the watching is continuous. The white domes constitute the panopticon's central tower distributed across every ceiling. Yet Foucault's original panopticon

required a human observer, while Lalami depicts a surveillance apparatus in which the human watcher has been replaced by algorithmic systems. Cameras equipped with “Guardian emotion-tracking software” (Lalami, 2025, p. 18) do not merely observe behavior but algorithmically interpret emotional states, converting interior feeling into behavioral data. This corresponds to what Haggerty and Ericson (2000) term the surveillant assemblage, a network of data collection points, cameras, neural implants, and human informants, operating as a single integrated system.

The replacement of the human observer with algorithmic systems corresponds to what Deleuze (1992) identifies as the transition from disciplinary societies to societies of control, in which power operates through continuous automated modulation rather than fixed observation. Hinton, the attendant who conducts the morning device checks, represents only a supplementary human layer within this automated architecture; the novel reveals that his “reporting credits” earn him “vacation time” (Lalami, 2025, p. 18), demonstrating that even the human component of surveillance has been converted into an algorithmic incentive structure. Hinton is governed by the same logic of behavioral scoring that governs the detainees he monitors, a detail that captures how thoroughly the disciplinary apparatus has absorbed everyone within it.

The asymmetry Foucault identified is intensified to its logical extreme. Sara and her fellow detainees are rendered completely transparent while the algorithm that judges them remains entirely opaque. When Officer Segura tells Sara that “the algorithm flagged you as an imminent risk” (Lalami, 2025, p. 37) and can only explain that the software conducts a “holistic review” using many sources, the criteria remain inaccessible not only to Sara but apparently to the officer administering them. This is what Pasquale (2015) calls the black box problem: the system renders subjects transparent while remaining hidden, enabling discrimination while preventing accountability. As Benjamin's (2019) concept of the New Jim Code suggests, the algorithm encodes racial bias through training data, treating Sara's Moroccan-American identity and professional focus on North African history as correlated risk factors within a system that presents itself as neutral. The consequences of this opacity are felt throughout Sara's detention: she cannot identify what specific behaviors raise or lower her risk score, producing a generalized, anxious compliance without strategic direction, the precise psychological condition that opacity is designed to produce.

4.2 The Predictive Panopticon in Operation

The most theoretically distinctive dimension of the novel is not its architecture but its temporal orientation. Sara Hussein is detained not because she has committed any crime but because an algorithm has calculated that she will. The Predictive Panopticon operates through what Barhoun (2026) terms her data double, an algorithmic profile assembled from her social media activity, financial records, biometric information, and the neurological data extracted from her implant during sleep. This data double is not Sara but a statistical approximation of her, shaped by the biases embedded in the systems from which it is assembled.

The temporal logic emerges in the institutional language governing her detention. Detainees are held for “forensic observation,” a phrase that describes continuous data collection aimed at predicting future conduct. The circularity of this logic is captured in the novel's account of the risk score rules, in which “breaking a rule” raises a detainee's risk score, “and a higher score extends the retention period” (Lalami, 2025, p. 23). Sara is trapped in a temporal loop in which the future crime the algorithm predicted can never be disproven because intervention has prevented it from occurring. Her own metaphor captures the apparatus precisely: she must shield her children from “the single eye and countless tentacles of OmniCloud” (Lalami, 2025,

p. 68), one central algorithmic authority connected to a distributed network of data collection reaching into every domain of life.

This condition is legally enabled by what Agamben (1998) terms the state of exception. Madison constitutes a zone where normal protections are suspended, as the novel captures in its terminology: the attendants insist that Madison is “a retention center,” not a prison, because detainees “haven’t been convicted” and are “not serving time” (Lalami, 2025, p. 12). This terminological insistence is the legal mechanism through which the zone of exception is maintained, denying detainees the protections afforded to convicted prisoners. Sara’s designation as “Free, under observation” (Lalami, 2025, p. 26) enacts the inclusive exclusion Agamben identifies: she is nominally free yet institutionally contained, included in the juridical order solely in the form of her exclusion from its protections.

The presumption of innocence is thereby inverted. Sara is guilty until the algorithm calculates her probability of future crime has fallen, a threshold she can never verify or contest. Zedner (2007) identifies the specific legal violence of this inversion: pre-crime detention erodes the foundational requirement of proof by substituting statistical probability for evidentiary demonstration. Sara cannot know what evidence would exonerate her because the algorithm that condemned her operates through correlations rather than causes, and no single piece of evidence could disprove a statistical pattern. Her situation is logically irreducible: if she were released and committed no crime, the algorithm’s prediction would be unverifiable rather than disproven. This Kafkaesque structure, in which a subject is prosecuted by an inaccessible apparatus for an offense she cannot contest, is updated by Lalami for the algorithmic age. Where Kafka imagined bureaucratic opacity as absurdist nightmare, Lalami presents it as the rational output of mathematical processing, which is precisely what makes it more rather than less disturbing.

4.3 Normalization and the Disciplinary Routine

Beyond its temporal innovation, the novel depicts the classical mechanisms of Foucauldian discipline operating within Madison’s daily life. The morning device check, in which the attendant Hinton scans each detainee’s neural implant, enacts all three of Foucault’s disciplinary instruments simultaneously: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment, and examination. The novel describes the ritual with the precision of institutional documentation: He points the scanner at the back of her skull, and the scanner gives a beep, indicating that the neuroprosthetic on Retainee M-7493002 [username: Sara T. Hussein] hasn’t been tampered with overnight. (Lalami, 2025, p. 14)

The reduction of Sara Hussein to the number M-7493002 enacts the subjectification Foucault identifies as the panopticon’s most thoroughgoing achievement: the transformation of the individual into a classified, documented case. Her response reveals how thoroughly she has internalized the gaze while still preserving a fragment of resistance: she “doesn’t lower her head” to make the scan easier, and though “it’s a small thing, it’s what she can do to signal her resistance” (Lalami, 2025, p. 14). That the most significant act of resistance available to her is the refusal to lower her head voluntarily demonstrates the extent to which disciplinary power has penetrated her self-understanding.

The risk score functions as the primary instrument of normalizing judgment, converting every dimension of institutional behavior into numerical data. Even refusal is captured: declining a job assignment marks her as “unemployed,” and unemployment is “a negative multiplier” of risk scores (Lalami, 2025, p. 24). No neutral position is available; every choice becomes a data point advancing or retarding her progress toward release. This normalization is also economic. Detainees at Madison are required to work, and Sara reflects that someday her children too will

become “lines in OmniCloud's giant database, every facet of their behavior catalogued and quantified and sold” for purposes she can scarcely imagine (Lalami, 2025, p. 68). The behavioral data extracted from Sara and converted into institutional authority over her body is simultaneously a commodity: Safe-X profits from her detention, OmniCloud profits from her data, and her normalization is not merely disciplinary but economic. The privatization of the detention apparatus creates a structural incentive toward expansion rather than release, since the corporation's profitability depends on maintaining a population of algorithmically flagged detainees whose confinement generates both labor and data.

4.4 Somnoptic Surveillance and the Colonization of the Unconscious

The novel's most original dimension is its depiction of surveillance extending into the unconscious. Sara's neural implant, installed voluntarily to treat sleep apnea, exemplifies Zuboff's (2019) observation that surveillance capitalism claims human experience as free raw material. Sara consented to the implant for medical purposes but unknowingly consented to the continuous extraction of her neurological data during sleep, data subsequently used to justify her detention. The novel's epigraph, “you've already agreed to the terms of service” (Lalami, 2025, p. 7), is enacted most forcefully here. Because Sara is unconscious when the device collects its data, she cannot perform compliance or regulate her presentation to the observer. Self-discipline requires consciousness, and sleep eliminates it, making Somnoptic Surveillance the form of panoptic power that most completely bypasses the subject's agency.

Sara's dream journal, in which she records her dreams each morning, initially functions as a counter-archive, an assertion of interior space within the institutional environment. After dreaming of flying over Los Angeles, she reflects that “it has been a long time since she felt as free as she did in this dream, untethered from the judgment of others” (Lalami, 2025, p. 156). The critical turning point comes when Hinton confiscates the journal, and Sara discovers it filled with “a dozen neon-colored page markers” (Lalami, 2025, p. 232), evidence that her dreams have been read and annotated. Her question captures the horror of this transformation: “What will the RAA's algorithm make of these nightmares?” (Lalami, 2025, p. 218). The dreaming mind, which cannot be controlled or performed, is now subject to the same algorithmic interpretation as every other data source.

Whether the unconscious can nonetheless constitute a domain of resistance is a question the novel leaves productively open. In psychoanalytic terms, the dream represents the return of the repressed, expressing what waking life suppresses, and Sara's dreams may therefore articulate dimensions of her experience, her grief at separation from her children, her rage at the injustice of her detention, that her waking performances of compliance successfully conceal. Yet the algorithm does not interpret dreams in psychoanalytic terms; it processes physiological and neurological indicators, identifying patterns that correlate with risk profiles rather than reading symbolic meaning. This very inadequacy may constitute a residual space of resistance. As Barhoun (2026) argues, the dream journal is a counter-archive, and the present analysis extends this claim: even after confiscation, the act of having written the dreams preserves an interior standpoint that the algorithm cannot fully capture, because the gap between the data the implant extracts and the meaning the dreams contain remains a space where Sara's interiority persists beyond the reach of the surveillant gaze. When Sara later looks in a mirror and hardly recognizes herself, finding “a stranger with scared eyes and a blank face” (Lalami, 2025, p. 156), the novel dramatizes what is at stake: without the dream journal to preserve the evidence of who she is beyond the institution's construction of her, Sara risks losing the interior standpoint from which resistance becomes possible at all.

4.5 Resistance and Counter-Conduct

Despite the apparent totality of the surveillance apparatus, the novel consistently demonstrates that resistance remains possible. As Foucault (1978) argues, where there is power, there is resistance, and that resistance emerges from within power relations rather than outside them. Sara's resistance is not revolutionary but operates through small, deliberate acts that de Certeau (1984) would recognize as tactics: her refusal to lower her head during the device check, her maintenance of the dream journal, and her archival consciousness, which enables her to recognize her data double as a selection rather than a portrait. These constitute what Foucault (2007) terms counter-conduct, alternative ways of conducting oneself that challenge the dominant mode of subjectification.

Sara's professional identity as an archivist further function as a persistent counter-conduct. Her analytical consciousness enables her to recognize OmniCloud's data extraction as a continuation of colonial census practices, to understand the dream journal as an archival act, and to recognize her data double as a selection rather than a portrait. These are forms of what Foucault (2003) terms subjugated knowledge, ways of knowing that the dominant system seeks to suppress or instrumentalize but that the subject preserves as a resource for resistance. The narrative's own insistence on naming her Sara Hussein, rather than adopting the institutional designation M-7493002 as its own, constitutes a formal resistance to the subjectification the device check enacts, a refusal at the level of language to accept the reduction of a person to a data point.

Resistance also becomes collective. During a wildfire evacuation, an unknown detainee destroys the cameras on the residential floor, which Sara finds hanging limply from their cords, "their glass eyes gouged out" (Lalami, 2025, p. 226). This is the most direct assault on panoptic power imaginable, the literal elimination of the apparatus's eyes. Sara experiences the resulting absence of the gaze as "a sip of freedom" that, while "it won't quench her thirst, it'll keep her going" (Lalami, 2025, p. 226). The community of women at Madison constitutes what Scott (1990) terms a hidden transcript of resistance circulating beyond the full reach of surveillance: their shared understanding of the system, their coded communication, and their mutual support provide emotional sustenance against the isolating logic of the risk score, which governs each woman individually and has no category for the relational bonds that give her resistance its meaning. The novel refuses comfortable resolution, leaving Sara's fate uncertain and the system's power intact, insisting simultaneously that her resistance is real and meaningful and that the panopticon surrounding her is formidably powerful. This honest refusal of both despair and false hope is the novel's most mature achievement.

5. Conclusion

Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel* stands among the most theoretically sophisticated works of speculative surveillance fiction of the twenty-first century. This article has demonstrated that Foucauldian panopticism remains a vital framework for analyzing the novel, while also showing that the novel's innovations require the framework's extension in two directions. The Predictive Panopticon names the temporal transformation through which surveillance comes to operate in the future tense, detaining subjects for crimes the algorithm predicts rather than crimes committed. Where Foucault's panopticon disciplines present behavior through the possibility of observation, the Predictive Panopticon bypasses consciousness entirely, operating through retrospective data analysis to justify prospective punishment. Sara Hussein is not disciplined into compliance by the possibility of being watched; she is detained because the algorithm has already watched, already analyzed, and already decided.

Somnoptic Surveillance names the extension of the panoptic gaze into the unconscious mind. The neural implant and the confiscated dream journal together colonize the one domain that

all existing panoptic frameworks implicitly left intact, converting the contents of the sleeping mind into behavioral data subject to algorithmic interpretation and institutional punishment. Both concepts fill genuine gaps in surveillance theory, and both are urgently relevant beyond the literary text: pre-crime risk assessment tools and consumer neural monitoring devices already embody, in modified forms, the logics the novel dramatizes.

The urgency of both concepts derives from their proximity to contemporary reality. Risk assessment tools already operate in criminal sentencing, immigration enforcement, and social services, embodying the temporal logic of the Predictive Panopticon in modified forms, while brain-computer interfaces, consumer EEG headbands, and sleep-tracking neural devices are becoming increasingly sophisticated and commercially available, rendering Somnoptic Surveillance less a speculative concern than an emerging one. The theoretical vocabulary this article develops is therefore intended not only for literary analysis but for the interdisciplinary conversations in surveillance studies, technology law, and neural ethics that these developments demand. Naming a phenomenon is the first step toward contesting it, and both concepts offer conceptual tools for scholars and policymakers confronting the extension of algorithmic governance into the future and into the unconscious.

Yet the novel is not only a warning. Through Sara Hussein's refusal to lower her head, her maintenance of the dream journal, her archival consciousness, and her solidarity with fellow detainees, *The Dream Hotel* affirms that resistance persists even within totalizing systems of control. In this it takes its place within a long tradition of literature that has served as institutional memory for those whom systems of power seek to silence, from Gramsci's prison notebooks to Atwood's dystopias. This persistence is fragile, partial, and uncertain, but no less real for being so. In developing a theoretical vocabulary for forms of surveillance rapidly moving from speculative fiction to commercial reality, this article contributes to surveillance studies, digital humanities, and the emerging conversation on neural ethics, while affirming literature's enduring capacity to render visible, and thereby to help us resist, the human stakes of the systems that govern us.

References

- Agamben, G. (1998). *Homo sacer: Sovereign power and bare life*. Stanford University Press.
- Amoore, L. (2013). *The politics of possibility: Risk and security beyond probability*. Duke University Press.
- Asl, M. P., Abdullah, N. F. L., & Yaapar, M. S. (2020). Panoptic spaces and the framings of South Asian diaspora in Jhumpa Lahiri's selected short stories. *Cogent Arts and Humanities*, 7(1), 1728022.
- Baral, R. P. (2022). A panopticon revelation of the power and self-discipline in Orwell's 1984. *Janapriya Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*, 11, 67-77.
- Barhoun, B. (2026). You've already agreed to the terms of service: Surveillance capitalism, the data double, and resistance in Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel*. *Confluence: Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 2(2), 1-15. <https://doi.org/10.34874/PRSM.cjms-vol2iss2.8670>
- Benjamin, R. (2019). *Race after technology: Abolitionist tools for the new Jim code*. Polity Press.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*. University of California Press.
- Deleuze, G. (1992). Postscript on the societies of control. *October*, 59, 3-7.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (A. Sheridan, Trans.). Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality, Volume 1: An introduction*. Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (2003). *Society must be defended: Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976*. Picador.

- Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978* (G. Burchell, Trans.). Palgrave Macmillan.
- Haggerty, K. D., & Ericson, R. V. (2000). The surveillant assemblage. *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(4), 605-622.
- Harcourt, B. E. (2007). *Against prediction: Profiling, policing, and punishing in an actuarial age*. University of Chicago Press.
- Ismael, H. S., & Saleh, H. M. (2023). The discursive strategies of power and female resistance in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*: A Foucauldian reading. *Humanities Journal of University of Zakho*, 11(3), 555-561.
- Lalami, L. (2025). *The Dream Hotel*. Pantheon Books.
- Loyi, Y. (2026). Imagining the future: AI policing and capital surveillance in Laila Lalami's *The Dream Hotel*. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26jan1448>
- Lyon, D. (2007). *Surveillance studies: An overview*. Polity Press.
- Miceli, B. (2019). Margaret Atwood's *The Heart Goes Last*: Panopticism, discipline society, and ustopia. *Metacritic Journal for Comparative Studies and Theory*, 5(2), 79-90.
- Pasquale, F. (2015). *The black box society: The secret algorithms that control money and information*. Harvard University Press.
- Rouvroy, A., & Berns, T. (2013). Algorithmic governmentality and prospects of emancipation. *Rezeaux*, 177(1), 163-196.
- Scott, J. C. (1990). *Domination and the arts of resistance: Hidden transcripts*. Yale University Press.
- Sharma, P. (2023). Panoptic life in Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Journal*, 14(2), 50-61.
- Zedner, L. (2007). Pre-crime and post-criminology? *Theoretical Criminology*, 11(2), 261-281.
- Zuboff, S. (2019). *The age of surveillance capitalism: The fight for a human future at the new frontier of power*. PublicAffairs.