

## ANALYZING ISABEL ALLENDE'S *THE HOUSE OF SPIRIT*: A DISCIPLINARY POWER

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### ABSTRACT

*This study discusses Isabel Allende's The House of Spirit in relation to the notion of disciplinary power. The House of the Spirit explores the amalgamation of diverse social groupings and their collective pursuit of dominance. The novel's actions and motifs are influenced by a class system that is characterized by a division into two distinct groups. One group consists of the white, educated elite of European descent who hold positions of power in politics, business, and administration. This qualitative research employs Foucault's notion of disciplinary power refers to a specific form of power used by those in positions of authority over their subordinates, with the aim of influencing and regulating their behavior according to their own desires. The study concludes that power moves from different institutions to daily life and affects with routine and pattern of life on large scales. It has also discovered that power is common issue and debate of daily life Latin America. There are number of events and incidents in Latin American society portrayed in the selected novel which are changed, molded and regularized on the basis of power.*

**Keywords:** disciplinary power, dominance, elites, authority.

### INTRODUCTION

The concept of power is multifaceted and subject to ongoing debate within the global context. The phenomenon under consideration does not consistently manifest itself in an overt and superficial manner; rather, it occasionally operates imperceptibly and adheres to a structured approach. This study examines the dynamics of disciplinary authority and its interconnections within different societal institutions in Latin America, as depicted in Isabel Allende's novel, *The House of the Spirit*. The researcher's attention lies on the examination of power dynamics within various societal organizations, which are exerted through diverse institutions that are administered by elite, powerful, and dominant groups. The concept of disciplinary power refers to a specific form of power used by those in positions of authority over their subordinates, with the aim of influencing and regulating their behavior according to their own desires. Subordinates conform to the actions and directives of those in authority due to a perceived sense of surveillance and scrutiny, driven by a desire to evade potential penalties for noncompliance with established regulations.

This paper aims to further examine the interconnections between power structures within society, specifically focusing on their control and governance over various institutions. These power structures are found to perpetuate systems that marginalize and oppress minority groups and individuals in subordinate positions. Latin America exhibits significant parallels in power dynamics. Isabel Allende portrays the

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dynamics of power in her literary work, "The House of the Spirit." The novel explores the dynamics of socioeconomic, political, and familial conflicts. The novel's actions and motifs are influenced by a class system that is characterized by a division into two distinct groups. One group consists of the white, educated elite of European descent who hold positions of power in politics, business, and administration. This course also exerts significant influence over individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, particularly those who have limited opportunities for engagement in economic and political spheres.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

All over the world in general, and in the Third World countries in particular, politician, institutions and individuals have been using every tactic to gain power and then exercise this power upon others in order to achieve their respective interests and goals. This real phenomenon has not only been discussed by the social scientist /critics but also has been finding its way, in some way or other, in the fictional world of literature (Echevarria. *Modern Latin American Literature: an Introduction*: 67). Whereas writers have incorporated power related ideas in their writings, many social thinkers from Machiavelli (*The Prince*), to John Gaventa (*Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*) have also dealt with the theme of power and set theories and concepts. One of such thinkers is Michel Foucault who believes that "a society without power relations can only be an abstraction" (Foucault; *The Subject and Power*: 208). Foucault reflects that there are explicit social structures and hierarchies in this world through which exercise of power<sup>1</sup> is channeled (Elisheva. *Empowerment and Community Planning: Theory and Practice of People-Focused Social Solutions*: 54).

Robert Dahl defines power as "the ability to make somebody do something that otherwise he or she would not have done". (Sadan; *Empowerment and Community Planning: Theories of Power*: 36). But power is such a phenomenon of many features and aspects, which can't be comprehended only through definitions. Antonio Gramsci discusses power as *hegemony* (emphasis added) present in everyday life and believes like Foucault that we live in societies of power structures. (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*: 506). He also stresses the role of media and economy in keeping the power alive as well (393). The role about which senator Treuba and the Information Minister are both well aware of in *The House of the Spirit*. Gramsci also believes in intellectual power and asserts that intellectual power must precede political power. He is concerned with the role of intellectuals (like one played by the Miguel's professor Sebastian Gomez) both in revolutionary movements and in society in general, who offer the ideologies which work as a driving force for resisting the conflicting powers. (131-140).

Power system, Gramsci believes, cannot be maintained by force alone, people accept things willingly and happily and such behavior helps the powerful remain in power (285). Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall express a similar notion when they say that despite the general concept of power restricted to the production of particular kinds of effects, it also includes social relations of joint action through *mutual agreement* and interactions in which one actor is able to convince another actor to alter voluntarily and freely its beliefs, interests, or action i.e. *Persuasion*. (*Power in International Politics*: 42)

Steven Luke discusses in his book *Power: A Radical View*, the three dimensions of power i.e. overt dimension, Covert dimension and the Third dimension deals with the relation between political preferences and *real interests* (88). Power relations in both the *works* clearly second this notion as there exists a clear difference between the preferences and real interests of the characters.

John Gaventa, in his theory of power talked about the One Dimensional, Two dimensional and Three Dimensional approaches to power, mechanism of power and the model of power and powerlessness, (*Power and Powerlessness: Quiescence and Rebellion in an Appalachian Valley*: 44), whereas, Weber saw the organizational powers like that of bureaucracy a source of the mechanization and reutilization of human life and therefore a threat to the freedom of the human spirit.

It is a fact that in both the *works* the characters who resisted to power have been locked in the dark dungeons, dog houses and filthy lavatories and have to suffer from terrible physical and mental tortures like ironing of head (of Obaid in *ACEM*) and mutilation of hands (Miguel's in *The House of the Spirit s*).

Raymond Leslie Williams says that in the writing of *Dictator Novel*<sup>1</sup>. The most widely recognized and celebrated women writer from 1968 to 1990 was Isabel Allende. . . *The House of the Spirit s* and *Of*

*Love and Shadows* brings back the horrible dictatorship period in Chile. Stories about those who become obsessed with power. (Williams; *The Twentieth Century Spanish American Novel*: 177).

Foucault contends that power is omnipresent in all societal domains. The pervasiveness and multifaceted nature of the phenomenon under consideration is not solely attributable to its comprehensive coverage and corrupting influence, but rather stems from its origins and the various perspectives from which it can be examined. According to his perspective, every phenomenon possesses its own power structure. It may exhibit varying levels of proficiency. The presence of power, albeit in little and fleeting occurrences, is undeniably evident despite its diverse manifestations. The author elaborates on the interconnectedness between power and knowledge. One entity generates the other and corrects it. Powers can be understood as a composite of forces, exerting influence across several domains. Foucault's approach extends beyond the examination of power just as a product of many forces or norms. The power that is present inside groups adheres to specific principles of governance.

The phenomenon of institutional power has been observed across many regions of the globe, whereby it is utilized to control diverse objectives of power. The individual in question is not directing their attention towards the concept of power, which has been a topic of extensive discussion and analysis throughout the years. According to the author's perspective, power is a distinct and pervasive phenomenon that exists in its own unique and consistent form. According to the author's perspective, power operates ubiquitously and manifests itself even in the most inconspicuous entities. The implementation of this concept is facilitated by individuals setting their own specific short-term goals and objectives. The phenomenon is not exclusively limited to those of high or low social status. The concept of power dynamics extends beyond the relationship between rulers and the ruled, encompassing various objects and individuals, albeit in varied forms and degrees. In the aforementioned perspectives, the author seeks to substantiate the notion that society is comprised of several power structures, which collectively contribute to the formation of overarching power systems. The phenomenon under discussion is not characterized by brevity or limitations; rather, it entails the convergence of various influential forces that collaborate to exert control over diverse institutions. The term he employs is disciplinary power. The exercise of disciplinary power is ubiquitous. Collaboration is a synergistic process that involves the convergence of many forces to integrate disparate components and establish a cohesive framework aimed at attaining predetermined objectives. The aforementioned concept serves as the central theme of this research endeavor. Isabel Allende portrays a convergence of several social structures that want to exert dominance over society and establish their own set of rules in order to oppress the masses.

### **Foucault's Proposition of Power**

The individual has the viewpoint that power inherently encounters resistance. The author elucidates the concept that resistance is an inherent component in any power dynamic. The statement posits that resistance is inherently intertwined with power, rather than existing as an external force. This perspective is derived from the study of French history and philosophy spanning the years 1926 to 1984. According to his view, power inherently encounters resistance. There is a lack of external events that can serve as a counterforce to power. The allocation of power is a fundamental characteristic of all objects. There is no discernible external correlation that can be indicative of power. The concept of power inherently possesses its own source and encounters opposition that is inherent to its existence. The *House of the Spirit* novel explores the amalgamation of diverse social groupings and their collective pursuit of dominance. Ultimately, they mutually influence one another and strive to get the approval of the most influential entity. In order to facilitate the implementation of their agenda, individuals can readily put it into effect. In this context, the exertion of power and the opposition to it stem from internal sources of power.

This aspect is elaborated upon in subsequent chapters of the research in order to bolster the central argument of the study. Foucault provides further elucidation on power relations, asserting that power is perpetually exercised through several nodes. There is a lack of comprehensive oversight in this matter. Various components and collectives has the capacity to exert influence, as they strategically shape their interactions within society to further their respective agendas. There exists a singular, definitive factor that is widely acknowledged as the source of exercising power. The author emphasizes that even smaller and less influential numbers or organizations possess power that they actively employ to impede the eventual

outcome and exhibit a form of resistance. According to Foucault, there exists an inherent presence of power relations throughout various other forms of relations (net). He posits that power is interconnected with other power structures. It strategically establishes pathways to attain supreme authority. It is a pervasive characteristic within all relationships. All relationships are governed by power and are further reinforced by the exercise of power. Additionally, these relationships have the ability to easily access other relationships in order to exert power through collaboration. Foucault's conceptualization of power does not adhere to a binary opposition framework within power dynamics.

The concept of power does not adhere to a dichotomy between stronger and weaker sides; rather, power can emanate from the weaker side and serve to challenge and subvert systems of hegemony and occupation. Resistance is demonstrated by individuals or groups who possess less power, and this resistance is commonly referred to as a form of power. In the context of power dynamics, it is not necessarily vital to have a formidable and extensive opposition in order to exercise authority. Even the less influential segments of society hold power and employ it strategically to assert their existence. This power does not possess any external connections. Groups and objects are inherent components inside the realm of power. The absence of a system of power division is evident. Discourse perpetually serves as a tool of power and is employed as a means of demonstrating it. The phenomenon has the potential to weaken and challenge authority. Discourse is occasionally employed as a means to generate power. Power is an ever-present force that may be generated and resisted through the utilization of power discourse.

Discourse serves as a means to both demonstrate and contest power dynamics. This instrument possesses a greater strength than the absence of sound. This sort of power, however brief and reduced in magnitude, cannot be disregarded within the broader realm of power. As mentioned in preceding paragraphs, power is derived from small and marginalized groups. Considering this perspective, discourse holds significant relevance and cannot be disregarded in this context. In addition to discourse, there exist alternative systems of governing and ruling that are recognized as mechanisms of power and authority. These factors have the potential to exist on either end of a spectrum, ranging from weaker to stronger, yet consistently ensuring the presence of strength. Various forms of power and resistance are integral components of the broader framework of power structuration. This particular structure has the potential to function in conjunction with other systems, and it consistently exhibits interdependence and interrelation, which can be referred to as disciplinary power.

The exercise of disciplinary power has the potential to transcend societal and governmental boundaries, operating without constraint. This type of relationship and system of governance is prevalent in Latin America. Throughout the course of the year, there has been a notable presence of both military and civilian power exerted in Latin America. At times, tyrants have found it expedient to ascend to power, while on other occasions, civilians have managed to overthrow the ruling regime. It is commonly seen that in many instances, both military and civilian entities collaborate to form a governing coalition, with the shared objective of ruling the nation. However, it is important to note that these entities engage in concerted efforts and exert considerable influence in order to attain and subsequently exercise power, so establishing control over the country. Throughout history, power dynamics have often resembled a game of seesaw, with various factions actively strategizing and forming diverse coalitions in order to gain dominance.

## ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Isabel Allende is a Latin American writer who endeavors to elucidate the enigma of power in Latin America that has been established over the course of centuries. Latin America has been influenced by many power groups throughout a wide range of domains. These power structures encompass several organizations, such as those associated with governmental authority. Through the utilization of this particular form of authority, individuals are able to acquire knowledge pertaining to the historical development of governance and other societal structures, manifested in various institutional frameworks. These institutions held authority and were actively functioning within the societal framework.

All of these institutions engaged in collaborative efforts with one another. These institutions encompass educational establishments such as schools, colleges, and universities, as well as business organizations, police departments, and other military institutions. The details in question have been

expounded upon by the researcher in the second part of this study. All of these institutions have a commonality and collaborate in order to collectively fulfill their objectives. This chapter aims to address the inquiry of the dynamics of power within various groups depicted in Isabel Allende's novel, "The House of the Spirits." To attain this objective, the researcher directs their attention towards various facets of power theory and selects relevant material from the novel to address the research inquiry. Michel Foucault contends that power cannot be regarded as an isolated phenomenon, but rather as a force that aligns itself with other power structures, operating in tandem and pursuing shared agendas and objectives. The phenomenon remains consistently active inside the societal framework, exhibiting perpetual functionality. The novel "The House of the Spirits" portrays the presence of power throughout society, manifesting itself in various forms and collaborating with other institutional frameworks.

The individuals in the narrative diligently pursue their own objectives, driven by personal motivations encompassing themes of love, magic, land ownership, property acquisition, sexual desire, and spiritual empowerment. Emotions and feelings do not operate in isolation, but rather exhibit shared characteristics and collaborate towards certain objectives. The researcher endeavors to elucidate these objectives and endeavor to reveal the power dynamics associated with human emotions. This query pertains to the second research question in the present study. Isabel Allende effectively portrays the interplay between various institutions and power dynamics in her novel, "The House of the Spirits." In this chapter, the novel is examined using a theoretical framework derived from power theory, particularly through the lens of Michel Foucault's concept of power. This analysis aims to address the research questions at hand. In her novel, Isabel Allende portrays a variety of organizations, including political, religious, economic, spiritual, and social institutions, which exhibit shared agendas and collaborate in pursuit of their objectives. These institutions were also closely connected to human emotions and individuals possess particular characteristics that enable them to pursue their objectives inside these institutions. These institutions are managed by human beings, and the individuals portrayed in the novels oversee these institutions according to their own unique framework.

As a consequence, several societal problems arise, including concerns related to class, government, social dynamics, politics, and spirituality, causing significant turmoil within the community. They collaborate in order to consolidate and reinforce the existing power structures, while also seeking to perpetuate the marginalization of vulnerable segments within society. Individuals who possess wealth exhibit specific characteristics, whereas those who are less privileged merely endure their vulnerability, awaiting their demise at the hands of dominant power systems. Michel Foucault has coined the term "disciplinary power," and the researcher has constructed a theoretical framework based on power theory. This framework is utilized to analyze the chosen novel and address the proposed inquiries. The story explores a conflict of power dynamics, pitting socialists against capitalists, revolutionaries against conservatives, political power against military power, police against civilians, and the dichotomy between sex and love, as well as the interplay between emotions and ignorance. All of these systems exhibit a consistent pattern and agenda, displaying shared characteristics. These institutions are utilized by human actors to attain personal success and prioritize self-interest. The two entities are interconnected and function in a manner that reinforces the authority of the privileged while surpassing the less advantaged. This chapter centers on the examination of the interconnections between these institutions and investigates the dynamics of disciplinary power, a concept aptly coined in this study. The researcher employs the power theory framework proposed by Michel Foucault and other influential scholars in the field to delve into the subject of power.

### **Intellectual and Moral Forces of Power**

Antonio Gramsci posits that power is not solely confined to societal structures, media, and other power-oriented institutions, but also permeates intellectual and moral processes. Additionally, the author asserts that power is inherent inside our cognitive capacities. Power, in his perspective, is also present in religious institutions and, notably, in religious and intellectual beliefs. This category encompasses various elements, including our attitudes, magical practices, and other values such as prediction and astronomy. The author further elucidates that our capacity for understanding and perception can also be classified within the same domain. The novel "The House of Spirits" also depicts this type of power. In the narrative, the character of

the priest exhibits a similar level of authority. The novel introduces several forms and categories of power to the reader. The majority of the novel's contents depict the exercise of power. The priest character also possesses the ability to discern the identities of thieves and other individuals involved in illegal activities. The individual in question exercises influence on the human psyche and consistently makes decisions guided by their religious beliefs and predictive capabilities.

The protagonist is shown as a revered individual within the community, characterized by his physical attributes such as long, accusatory fingers that he employs to publicly identify sinners, as well as his adeptness in evoking emotional responses through his eloquent speech (Allende, 1982, p. 2). The individual in question is portrayed as a figure of authority, actively exerting and exercising influence within the societal framework. He embodies the ideals and charisma of Allende, serving as a symbol of personal and motivating influence among Latin American society. The author's portrayal demonstrates a clear manifestation of his cognitive ability to identify and expose individuals involved in theft and other illicit activities inside the community. Allende's endorsement of individuals of this nature is rooted in her characters' alignment with her critique of such society. There are two prominent aspects that significantly contribute to his categorization in terms of power themes. Firstly, he possesses a multitude of abilities and capabilities.

He possesses a wealth of knowledge and exerts significant influence inside the societal framework. He possesses exceptional powers and skills. The protagonist possesses a multitude of formidable capabilities. He possesses authority over a wide range of social activities. Furthermore, he demonstrates a remarkable level of proficiency and self-assurance in executing these skills. He possesses considerable authority and eloquence that has been extensively cultivated, however he also employs this authority with great intensity. He possesses a multitude of talents and abilities, which he adeptly employs with great skill and an overwhelming demeanor. The work effectively portrays his intellectual prowess in a manner that aligns with the principles of Gramsci. The Priest publicly and explicitly exercises his authority in opposition to the heavenly power. He has been entrusted with religious and other obligations, yet he consistently fails to fulfill them with sincerity, instead acting in opposition to the divine authority. He initiates a rebellion against the authority of the divine by leveraging his own earthly power.

This phenomenon is also observed in the context of power dynamics and attitudes. The individual intentionally disregards the divine mandate and actively opposes the intended plan of God. This is exemplified by the priest's concerted efforts to prevent excessive disruption of the guidance provided by his ecclesiastical authorities (2). This can be interpreted as an act of rebellion against the authority and structure of the divine. He embodies the divine authority on earth, yet he consistently disregards the principles of divine governance, opting instead to exercise unrestrained autonomy. The primary focus of this work pertains to the concept of disciplinary power. The power operates inside a strict framework of discipline. The individual acquires a system of authority from a divine entity, which is thereafter preserved and utilized as a means of exerting control over the members of society. The individual in question consistently disregards the principles set forth by religious doctrine, instead exerting their personal authority over others. This portrayal also illustrates the process of creation and subsequent human ignorance towards the system and laws established by a higher force, as individuals attempt to exert their own authority. The same principle is also implemented by another character known as Nivea. She is moreover a formidable and highly influential female character within the tale. Nivea assumes a prominent and authoritative role within the Del Vell family, displaying a high level of responsibility.

She exhibits a strong inclination towards exerting control and authority. Additionally, she employs authority and disregards the established norms inside familial structures. Initially, she exhibits a defiance of divine principles, and afterwards, she disregards familial traditions and customs, contravening the desires and perspectives of her spouse. The individual in question possesses awareness of her spouse's significant role within the parliamentary body, and she actively exploits this position to her advantage. Furthermore, she openly dismisses the concept of an afterlife, disregarding the notions of heaven and hell, and instead focuses on leveraging her husband's status and worldly position to pursue her personal objectives and agenda. The author asserts that the woman's behavior is characterized by a domineering demeanor, as seen by her display of legislative ambitions to her husband, with the expectation that his successful election to

Congress would ultimately lead to the attainment of women's suffrage (3). This phenomenon can be classified as a manifestation of intellectual prowess, as she leverages the mechanisms of governance and other societal processes in order to attain her objectives. In the novel, "The House of the Spirits," the power is manifested in several forms. The discussion revolves around the structure and exercise of power, specifically focusing on the intellectual and perceptual dimensions as conceptualized by Gramsci. These dimensions are considered to be crucial components of the overall power concept within the chosen novel.

Clara possesses an additional manifestation of cognitive prowess. She possesses a certain perception of various aspects. The individual in question has been shown as possessing the capacity to make predictions and the ability to anticipate future occurrences. Gramsci also refers to it as the power of intellect and spiritual prowess, which he describes as the ability to predict earthquakes, a phenomenon particularly relevant in a country prone to such catastrophes (9). The occurrence of a seismic event of significant magnitude, commonly referred to as an earthquake, possesses immense destructive potential, resulting in widespread devastation over the affected region. Clara had anticipated this event in advance. She possesses a formidable spiritual prowess and exhibits a proactive ability to manipulate events. Clara accurately predicts and witnesses the manifestation of more powers. Clara has access to a wide range of opportunities and resources. Additionally, she accurately foretells the occurrences of her sister's demise and nuptials, both of which subsequently materialize.

The individual in question accurately foresees her untimely demise as well as accurately anticipates the subsequent occurrences pertaining to her sister's matrimonial union. The intellectual prowess of Clara is appropriately acknowledged, with Antonio Gramsci also endorsing this form of authority, which is effectively explored and depicted by Isabel Allende in her novel. The narrative regularly demonstrates the exercise and manifestation of this cognitive capacity. Another instance of power is demonstrated by a priest who perceives himself as superior to all the inhabitants and utilizes this dominance over the remaining members of the community. Within the Del Vel family, an extraordinary birth of a child takes place, prompting the arrival of a priest. Engaging in an investigation, the priest commences his inquiries beyond the confines of the household, with the intention of informing the surrounding neighbors of his findings (10). This type of power inherently facilitates individuals in performing tasks. According to Robert Dahl, power within society compels individuals to engage in tasks that they would otherwise not undertake. The priest held a belief in his own superiority over the entire community and consistently engaged in intrusive behavior by involving himself in matters without seeking the agreement of other community members. This refers to his perceived religious superiority in comparison to others.

## CONCLUSION

The study has found out that Latin American society is governed through use of power and power is openly practiced in the society. Power is very much in attendance in the society in one way or the other. Power moves from different institutions to daily life and affects with routine and pattern of life on large scales. It has also discovered that power is common issue and debate of daily life Latin America. There are number of events and incidents in Latin American society portrayed in the selected novel which are changed, molded and regularized on the basis of power. It has further discovered that power is present in the society in all its forms and shapes. All most all the kinds of power present in Latin American society portrayed by Isabel Allende. Latin America has been under the spell of dictators and the most powerful politicians who have been constantly practicing power in the society. They have accepting and rejecting members and institution on their own choices in their personal favors. They had strong power and hold over the country and under this power they have been deciding the future of their nation. Military course in Latin America has been found in practicing power. They have been found enjoying unmatched power in the society.

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