

Resisting Patriarchy and Challenging Dictatorship in Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits*

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Abstract: In *The House of the Spirits*, Chilean author Isabel Allende employs magic as an attempt to empower women's understanding of the hidden human reality, having the potential to transform the destructive patriarchal system. Instead of playing the traditional roles found in masculine writing, female characters in the novel form a female bond, thus a female force, which challenges patriarchal repression, social and sexual prejudices, tyranny and political repression. The female protagonists of the novel are always on the wrong side of both the political and gender lines as they fight not only for women rights but also for fair treatment of the poor and other marginalised. Allende shows how the political upheaval is seen through female clairvoyance: Clara's power of prophecy constructs a lens through which to observe the nature of Chilean coup d'état. Allende's attempt to write in a circular style undermines the conventional, linear version of history, enabling women's history to overtake men's history: Esteban's rigid, linear account is a foil to Alba's non-linear, circular narrative. By showing that magic is unachievable for men and is very much a female issue, Allende provides women an alternative mode of communication and thus attempts to rewrite (male) history in order to include female knowledge and experience. Clara's clairvoyance allows her to foresee the future, to communicate with the dead and even to visit her granddaughter after her own death, and thus enables her to transcend patriarchal constraints.

INTRODUCTION

In *The House of the Spirits*, Chilean author Isabel Allende employs magic to provide women the necessary power to change the disparaging patriarchal system. Instead of playing the traditional roles found in masculine writing, female characters in the novel form a female bond, thus a female force, which challenges patriarchal repression, social and sexual prejudices, tyranny and political repression. In parallel to the political development in Chile, the novel traces the

development of women of del Valle family in particular and Chilean women in general. The female characters in the novel fight for both female rights and fair treatment of the deprived and marginalised. Allende shows how the political upheaval is seen through female clairvoyance: Clara's power of prophecy constructs a lens through which to observe the nature of Chilean coup d'état. The move from spirits and predictions is a sensible feminist development. Allende's attempt to write in a circular style undermines the conventional, linear version of history, enabling women's history to overtake men's history: Esteban's rigid, linear account is contrasted by Alba's non-linear, circular narrative. By showing that magic is unachievable for men and is very much a female issue, Allende provides women an alternative mode of communications and attempts to rewrite (male) history in order to include female knowledge and experience. Clara's clairvoyance allows her to predict the future, to interact with the deceased as a living person and to meet her granddaughter as a dead person and therefore enables her to transcend patriarchal constraints. The use of magic from a female context attempts to enhance women's perception or knowledge of the veiled human reality and to transform the vicious patriarchal system.

For Allende, writing *The House of the Spirits* was the means to keep the memories of her family, relatives and nation alive and to remember her past: the novel thus functions as a bridge between her life in exile in Venezuela and her earlier life in Chile. While in exile, she realises that memory redeems the personal past of the individual and the collective past of Latin America. To put other way, personal memory signifies collective memory, suggesting the shared history of the nation as family. The novel is basically her collection of letters sent to her ninety-nine-year-old grandfather, living in Chile under the Pinochet regime and moving towards death, in order to keep him alive. Allende believed, "[D]eath didn't really exist. Oblivion is what exists, and if one remembers those who die—remember them well—they'll always be with him and in some way will live on, at least" (qtd. in Earle 1987, 543). The novel is thus a memoir, a family saga and a political testimony infused with magical realist elements. The novel chronicles the lives of four generations of del Valle family, each fighting with the social and gendered (patriarchal) constraints of their own generations. Rachel Hubata-Ashton (2012) states that Allende attempts to "bear witness to socio-economic class lines, women's repression, and political violence —having been motivated by her traumatic experiences from the betrayal and resulting death of her uncle, President Salvador Allende, by right-wing conspirators and their U.S. counterparts and the brutal dictatorship that ensued" (3). One can also clearly see the military coup and violent regime that tends to suppress those who it considers dissenters. Here, the reader can identify a distinct breed of magical realism which is entirely focused on women and their survival. Women are given a voice through magic so that they can rewrite the official version of history from their own perspectives; linear and established version of time and space is destabilised and a non-linear and non-chronological one is advocated, which can be compared with the cyclical aspect of nature, in order to provide a more sacred space for women.

LATIN AMERICAN POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND MAGICAL REALISM

The (hi)story of Latin America is full of disastrous miscalculations, foreign exploitations, internal corruptions, and the repetitions of the same mistakes across generations. However, this disastrous history, which was “born in blood and fire” (Chasteen 2001, 15), developed distinguished cultures and a regional history which is unique and exotic to the rest of the world. After getting independent from their European colonisers, mainly the Spanish and the Portuguese, the Latin American countries witnessed the rise of dictatorship and suffered from a cluster of Civil Wars. Political independence from European colonisers did not result in the abolition of black slavery but rather in political and economic instability, giving rise to a form of neocolonialism influenced by superpowers like Great Britain and the USA. Because of the significant political influence of the leftists by the 1970s, the right-wing authorities and the upper class of each individual country supported military coups to avoid a potential communist threat. According to Abdullah (2015), Colombia, for example, suffered highly from “long-lasting Civil War such as the ‘War of A Thousand Days’ (1899-1902) and the oppression of government known as ‘La Violencia’ (1948-1958), [and possessed] a troubled historical past, featured by violence and exploitation, triggered by colonialism, cultural and political marginalisation, and the results of industrialisation and technological development” (60). The Chilean history is notoriously marked by the Pinochet Dictatorship (1973-1990) who rose to power backed up by the USA, overthrowing a legitimate government led by Salvador Allende. The hatred and brutality with which the Pinochet regime pursued its ideological or political enemies shocked everyone. It used state terrorism to dominate and control the citizens. Chilean people were ruthlessly beaten, killed or simply vanished. However, unlike the mass arrests and killing that took place following the coup in 1973, gradually the regime initiated an era of institutionalised state terrorism with prior planning and better coordination, attempting to change nation’s mentality by eradicating Marxism and to terrorise people. Female exclusion from politics and their helpless victimisation in the form of gang-rape, poor living condition and forced exile with many other men form a significant feature of the time. However, women also showed great comradeship in overcoming the brutality of the regime.

It is the sense of anxiety caused by the dictatorial regime—families living through oppression, people living in exile, and physical and sexual torture of women—that occupies a major part in Latin American literature. Again, throughout Latin American society, women are shown as having no power of their own, particularly women from the lower strata of the society are repeatedly raped by, or forced to have sex with, their landlords or people in power. Besides, the desire to reimagine a better, peaceful, or probably utopian, Latin America highlights the notion of an alternative history or reality, which provides some sort of agency to the marginalised and shows their resistance to oppression. Gabriel García Márquez, for instance, raised his voice against Spanish invasion, North

American neocolonialism, and the Civil War that ravaged the entire Latin America, particularly Colombia. Referring to the traumatic Latin American history, authors attempt to rewrite the past events to heal the grief and distress of their loss. Chilean writer Isabel Allende, for example, wrote to recall her past and to keep the memories of their family and nation from vanishing into the passage of time. Memory thus plays a significant role for authors to recall both their personal and collective past. Allende believes that memory recovers the individual past of a person and the collective past of Latin America. Referring to the female marginalisation in Latin America, authors like Allende talk about the spiritual power of women which allowed them to form a new unity among themselves as a survival tactic in both colonial and patriarchal societies. To rewrite the nation's history, Allende includes female knowledge and experiences, and thus brings them to light. Many prominent Latin American literary figures such as Gabriel García Márquez, Carlos Fuentes, and Mario Vargas Llosa have been politically active in both their personal lives and literary productions. Partly due to the authors' involvement in politics, Latin American literature is concerned with the formation of a national identity and the reconstruction of reality itself.

Although the term magical realism was first applied to German post-expressionist painting, it was later popularised by Latin American authors. In distinguishing between European magical realist writing and Latin American magical realist writing, Cuban writer Alejo Carpentier (1995) claims that European magical realists produce 'artificial' forms of magical realism which is unrelated to their ordinary reality, but Latin Americans write magical realism which emerges from their environment and understanding (93). Márquez, who was the most famous exponent of Latin American Boom, has employed magical realism to rewrite and recreate the original history of Colombia where he combines realistic and mundane details with fairy tales, folk legends, and stories of magic. His writing has an overpowering atmosphere of nostalgia. As Bowers (2004) says, "Coming out of highly traumatized country of Colombia, his magical realist exuberance is not only a celebration of the diversity of Latin America but also a way to express the excessive violence and confusion of Colombian, and Latin American, politics" (39). Abdullah (2015) says again, through the process of defamiliarisation, Márquez's clearly "demonstrates his technique of making the fantastic seem real and the real fantastic, thus removing the obstacle between objective and imaginary realities, and creating an entirely fictional world" (58). Isabel Allende, on the contrary, highlights female experiences where magic enables them to fight both patriarchal and political oppression. Allende shows the way magical power or clairvoyance of women passes down from one generation to the other where women resort to their magical past to survive both patriarchal and political torture. Allende thus shows magic as communal. Allende's magical realism inspires the characters to write down their personal, family and collective histories, providing an alternative to the masculine traditional history. Allende's female-centric magical realism allows them to establish a unique comradeship between women to survive in a man's world. Allende's employment of 'ghost' to emphasise the death of people during the Pinochet regime clearly shows ghost as

a politicised one—ghost and politics are intertwined. Allende's circular, fragmented way of writing undermines the traditional linear version of a masculine history. Her female narrative is a way of including female knowledge and experiences. Just like Márquez, Allende also attempts to defamiliarise Chile to restructure it as a supernatural regime.

CHALLENGING DESTRUCTIVE PATRIARCHAL SYSTEM AND POLITICAL REPRESSION

From the very beginning of *The House of the Spirits*, Allende used feminised magical realism to draw the attention of the reader to a political-historical novel. The novel particularly focuses on the spiritual powers possessed by women in order to allow them to form a unity among themselves as a survival tactic in men's world. We see the way Alba resorts to the magical past of her family in order to survive the torture in prison and the way she, inspired by the spirit of her grandmother Clara, records her family story which can be considered an alternative to the traditional masculine history. Allende's story, which is based on the political account of Chile, is narrated from the viewpoint of Alba and her grandfather Esteban Trueba in which their voices are incorporated to generate an alternative narrative, merging both male and female outlooks on the past historical events. Whereas Alba's voice represents the world of women depicting female emancipation, Esteban's voice emphasises the repressive male-controlled and aristocratic society which guides and controls the social norms for women and lower-class people. Alba's story, which includes the viewpoints of her female ancestors, directly challenges Esteban's egocentric, rigid and somewhat made-up version, and thus conveys the image of the victory of female expression. By employing her power of writing, Alba attempts to resist military power and so symbolises a more empathetic way of seeing history. Based on her grandmother Clara's fifty-year-old diary and many other family documents, Alba (re)writes her family story, joining all the events rather than just recording them, shows a more structured and convincing attitude to life and history and comes up with an alternative and/or marginalised (read feminised) version of reality and history. By claiming that Clara's narrative would help her reclaim her individual and family past and to overcome her sufferings of prison life, Alba focuses on the notion of female solidarity among Latin American women:

Mi abuela escribió durante cincuenta años en sus cuadernos de anotar la vida. [...] se salvaron milagrosamente de la pira infame donde perecieron tantos otros papeles de la familia. Los tengo aquí, a mis pies, atados con cintas de colores, separados por acontecimientos y no por orden cronológico, tal como ella los dejó antes de irse.¹ (Allende 2014, 504)

¹ My grandmother wrote in her notebooks that bore witness to life for fifty years. Smuggled out by certain friendly spirits, they miraculously escaped the infamous pyre in which so many other family papers perished. I have them here at my feet, bound with colored ribbons, divided according to

Alba's narrative is distinctively different from Esteban's in the sense that her story is the compilation of female experiences where she attempts to retell her family story to give her female ancestors and herself a legacy and to be empowered. She considers herself less of a participant in her family story and more as the significant part of Trueba women's legacy. Susan Frick (2001) states "Having brought together her female ancestors' experiences and her grandfather's male perspective, Alba is finally ready to admit to being the first-person narrator of *La casa de los espíritus*" (37). Alba's feminised version of narration or history allows her to find her own identity and to move on with her own life. Frick (2001) says again that in her narrative, Alba is "tapping into collective memory to evoke and interpret the stories and voices of the past and to learn how best to proceed with her own individual life experience" (29). However, the reader should not forget the spiritual presence and guidance of Clara behind Alba's attempt to write the history of the del Valle family. Alba informs the reader that Clara's spectral presence helps her to write the family story and that in her presence, Esteban dies happily, calling her name. The fact that Esteban contributes to women's story and thus achieves redemption, albeit partially, for his past brutalities and mistakes, emphasises female victory over male. As Martinez (1991) writes, "To symbolize his [Esteban's] redemptive awareness, Allende makes him assist in the telling of the story, done by the main narrator, Alba" (290). Alba also shows the way women of del Valle family in particular and Latin America in general have the power to reinvent themselves, and describes the constant presence of her female ancestors in the house in regards to the reappearance of the ghosts or spirits:

"Si las empleadas oyen ruidos, creerán que han vuelto los fantasmas" dijo Alba y le contó del glorioso pasado de espíritus visitantes y mesas voladoras de la gran casa de la esquina. ... Los enamorados probaron uno por uno los cuartos abandonados y terminaron improvisando un nido para sus amores furtivos en las profundidades del sótano. Hacía varios años que Alba no entraba allí y llegó a olvidar su existencia, pero en el momento en que abrió la puerta y respiró el inconfundible olor, volvió a sentir la mágica atracción de antes.² (Allende 2014, 384)

However, the reader should not forget that apart from Esteban and Clara, her fellow female prisoners also play a great part in assisting Alba and carrying on female history. Although Alba desires death, it is Clara's spirit and the other female inmates who provide her renewed strength, and inspire her to tell her individual and their collective stories which otherwise would never have been

events and not in chronological order, just as she arranged them before she left. Clara wrote them so they would help me now to reclaim the past and overcome terrors of my own. (Allende 1986, 467)

² "If the servants hear noise, they'll think the ghosts are back," Alba said, and she told him of the glorious past of visiting spirits and flying tables in the big house on the corner. ... One by one the lovers tried out all the abandoned rooms, and finally chose an improvised nest in the depths of the basement. It had been years since Alba had been there, and she had almost forgotten that it existed, but the minute she opened the door and inhaled its unmistakable odor, she felt again the old magical attraction. (Allende 1986, 356)

told. Regarding the strength of female bonding, Carrie Sheffield (2002) argues that the "feminine collective [of the concentration camp] provides the support Alba needs to present the revision of history present in the novel; it is the chorus of women's voices following behind her that gives Alba the ability to write and preserve their (and her) testimonies" (37).

The House of the Spirits can well be considered evidence of female version of history overtaking the traditional male version as Peter Earle (1987) argues that "the book is the struggle between Trueba and the forces he generates, on the one hand, and the female members of his family, on the other" (550). Earle (1987) opines, Esteban Trueba "is the blind force of history" together with "its aggressive, vigorous, physical manifestations" (550). To put another way, by creating alternative histories from their own perspectives, Alba and her female family members challenge the authoritarian history created by Esteban and her political party. Esteban strongly believes that he is powerful enough to control politics and people around him, and that it is the aristocratic people who should write history, denying a voice to the marginalised. Concurring with Earle's idea of dual narration, Sheffield (2002) suggests that Esteban's account is a direct contrast to Alba's one: "Through Alba's abundant vision and memory, and Trueba's tendency toward narrow-mindedness, we catch a glimpse of two distinct worlds, and through those worlds, we are offered a re-vision of history" (34). Esteban, who attempts to subjugate all the women he has come across in his life both physically and psychologically, can thus be associated with an oppressive regime that imprisons and tortures Alba. Although Alba watches the way the military regime deletes history and destroys the entire nation, she connects this power of writing in order to do something for women by recording their own stories. Alba thus comes up with a "more imaginative, more perceptive resistance" to the patriarchal and political domination of both Esteban and the government (Earle 1987, 551). Since Alba attempts to write her family history from a female standpoint, she inserts Nivea's empathy, Clara's clairvoyance, Blanca's passion and her toughness. As Ruth Jenkins (1994) writes, "More than defying poor memory, these narratives record stories of female experience neither sufficiently nor authentically articulated by histories constructed from patriarchal perspectives" (66-67). Jenkins (1994) also considers this novel an example of "the power to script history [because] Allende asserts the value of individual female experience while weaving it into generations of female history" (66). The novel thus highlights both individual and shared features of Alba's narrative which distinguish it from Esteban's linear narrative. It is by focusing on her female ancestors and other surrounding female characters that Alba provides them and herself subversive and transgressive qualities. As Gabrielle Foreman (1992) claims that the novel "is a femino-centric novel in that the female characters here are not in the traditional roles found in masculine writing, rather they constitute [...] gynoforces that challenge patriarchal despotism, social-sexual prejudices, the dictatorship and political repression" (378). The novel thus poses a serious challenge to male narrative and patriarchal and political oppression.

Apart from having the intention of recording her own family history from a female perspective, Alba also writes to survive the torture she has received in the prison and to begin a new life. After being kidnapped, raped and tortured by Colonel García and his men, Alba is thrown into a prison with other women who also have received the same experience of torture. Alba is visited and comforted by the ghost of Clara who encourages her to establish a monument for those who have perished during the Pinochet regime. By emphasising the significance of women, the novel shows the way female agency or instinct is supported by both supernatural phenomena and political justice. The act of remembering thus functions as a reaction to trauma, retelling the past stories to structure the present and the future:

Trató de no respirar, de no moverse, y se puso a esperar la muerte con impaciencia. Así estuvo por mucho tiempo. Cuando casi había conseguido su propósito, apareció su abuela Clara, a quien había invocado tantas veces para que la ayudara a morir, con la ocurrencia de que la gracia no era morir, puesto que eso llegaba de todos modos, sino sobrevivir, que era un milagro. La vio tal como la había visto siempre en su infancia, con su bata blanca de lino [...] Clara trajo la idea salvadora de escribir con el pensamiento, sin lápiz ni papel, para mantener la mente ocupada, evadirse de la perrera y vivir. Le sugirió, además, que escribiera un testimonio [...] para que el mundo se enterara del horror [...].³ (Allende 2014, 482)

It can be inferred from the above quotation that collective memory is included in the realm of spirits and ghosts, showing Clara as a force from the past, a guide and a healer. Alba starts writing to survive; however, after getting released from the prison, she keeps writing, inspired by her resolution of living with purpose. By connecting her individual and family motives, she is able to break the bloody and brutal chain/history of patriarchy and the political regime, creating an alternative, marginalised version of events. Alba's personal struggle symbolises the collective struggle of women in Latin America who attempt to rewrite their own history, including their alternative perspectives and incorporating a strong sense of hope. Alba's decision to give birth to the child she is carrying not being sure if it is the result of her love with Miguel or the product of rape, symbolises the collapse of the recurrence of the oppressive tradition. By showing that it is the collective memory of her female ancestors that guides Alba to (re)assert her identity, Allende turns the text into a self-discovery novel—a narrative in which the protagonist discovers her self and worth by denying the male-imposed structure.

³ She tried not to breathe or move, and began eagerly to await her death. She stayed like this for a long time. When she had nearly achieved her goal, her Grandmother Clara, whom she had invoked so many times to help her die, appeared with the novel idea that the point was not to die, since death came anyway, but to survive, which would be a miracle. With her white linen dress, [...] she looked exactly as she had when Alba was a child. Clara also brought the saving idea of writing in her mind, without paper or pencil, to keep her thoughts occupied and to escape from the doghouse and live. She suggested that she write a testimony [...], so that the world would know about this horror [...]. (Allende 1986, 447)

COLLECTIVE MEMORY THROUGH MAGICAL REALISM AS A SOURCE OF FEMALE EMPOWERMENT

In the *House of the Spirits*, Allende employs magic to depict the spiritual power of Clara and shared memory of women. Memory can be defined as “affective and magical” (Nora 1989, 8); Allende portrays Clara as magical and the harbinger of change while Alba recalls the way the magical world of Clara remains alive even after her demise:

Es una delicia, para mí, leer los cuadernos de esa época, donde se describe un mundo mágico que se acabó. Clara habitaba un universo inventado para ella, protegida de las inclemencias de la vida, donde se confundían la verdad prosaica de las cosas materiales con la verdad tumultosa de los sueños, donde no siempre funcionaban las leyes de la física o la lógica.⁴ (Allende 2014, 97)

In the world of Clara, supernatural visions are intermingled with mundane objects of physical worlds. The fact that Alba will be able to interact with Clara even after her death emphasises Clara's teaching that death does not separate us but rather unites us more strongly. It sheds light on the magical realist concept of post-mortem communication (between the mortal world and the spirit world). The combined or collective voice acquired in the spiritual world beyond the visible one, which Alba believes to be crucial for societal change, is the one which nonchalantly accepts the existence of the magical in the midst of reality as something completely usual. When Alba mentions Clara's “mundo mágico”, she depicts the intergenerational tie experienced by both grandparents and grandchildren which helps them form collective memory. In the narrative of Alba, the tumultuous history of 1970's Chile is intertwined with her memory of her grandmother, Clara, and her personal realm where she is shown to represent change as she has the power to influence others with her magical world. Clara's magical world undoubtedly destabilises the rigid world of Esteban who is disturbed by the sensibility and irrationality of her feminine magical world. In fighting her oppressive husband, Clara seems to function beyond logic and rationality since she is led by female traditions passed down intergenerationally by body gesture, silence and various other means of performance. Aligning with Pierre Nora's explanation of memory, Clara conveys “The warmth of the tradition” (Nora 1989, 7), “[...] the silence of the custom” (7) and memory in “gestures” (9). The significance of memory is emphasised by Clara as she contemplates on the worth of family memory extending over many generations:

Blanca empezó a producir figuritas para el pesebre navideño [...] sin saber que estaba haciendo con barro lo mismo que su tía Rosa, a quien no conoció, hacía con hilos de bordar en su gigantesco mantel, mientras Clara especulaba

⁴ It is a delight for me to read her notebooks from those years, which describe a magic world that no longer exists. Clara lived in a universe of her own invention, protected from life's inclement weather, where the prosaic truth of material objects mingled with the tumultuous reality of dreams and the laws of physics and logic did not always apply. (Allende 1986, 92)

que si las locuras se repiten en la familia, debe ser que existe una memoria genética que impide, que se pierdan en el olvido.⁵ (Allende 2014, 202)

Although Blanca never met her Aunt Rosa, her embarking on creative and crazy activities just like Rosa's passion for creating gigantic tablecloth emphasises the connection between women from two generations through passing down of collective memory.

Concentrating on collective memory it can be said that memory is as important as history and it has the potential to stand on its own. Surmising from Pierre Nora, Gedi and Elam (1996) says that "Memory [...] is no longer a servant of history; it is, on the contrary, on a par with history" (33). Gedi and Elam (1996) infer the way Nora associates memory with magic as he strongly supports the notion that collective memory is associated with experience that is present in the tradition, in the voiceless customs that are passed down to other generations (33). Clara's magical influence on her children is connected to the experiences that are passed on to next generations where her two sons and only daughter receive the spirituality and the unspoken customs and tradition of their mother. However, Clara is a change maker also in the society. Her distinctive relationship and instinctive union of solidarity with Pedro Segundo, the man who assists Esteban in his property, enables her to defy Esteban in his establishment. By struggling against the oppressive power with the help of Pedro, Clara once again proves her as an agent of change as she dissolves class barriers. Again, Clara's intimate relationship with Férula, Esteban's sister, also forms a solidarity where she defends Férula and brings happiness in her life. Férula, the unfortunate woman who was destined to take care of her parents, has a magical relationship with Clara who senses Férula's death and declares it. The emotional relationship between Clara and Férula, which enrages Esteban who accuses Férula of witchcraft and Clara for forming a homosexual relationship, forms a defying alliance to Esteban's oppression. However, unlike Férula who silently accepts society's dominance, Clara defies societal oppression, challenges the traditional role of women and advocates female emancipation, fighting discrimination living in the world of spirits and defying Esteban with silence.

In *The House of the Spirits*, Allende attempts to defamiliarise Chile to reconstruct it as a purely magical world where the supernatural is shown to triumph over the oppressive patriarchal and political system. Doris Meyer (1990) opines that the novel is a "direct refusal to accept the patriarchal oppression historically practised by the upper classes and the military in Latin America" (360). This rewriting and reconstruction of Chile is magical and like other magical realist novels, Allende's text attempts to recover an authentic voice for those who have no options to express their specific experiences of reality: in this case, Latin American women from an unprivileged part of society. Meyer (1990) opines

⁵ Blanca began to create tiny figures for the family's Christmas manger, [...] without realizing that she was doing in clay what her Aunt Rosa, whom she never knew, had done with thread on her enormous tablecloth. Clara decided that if craziness can repeat itself in a family, then there must be a genetic memory that prevents it from being swallowed by oblivion. (Allende 1986, 189)

that women preserve the notion of "hidden" realities, which "live in dreams, embodied but still deadly silent, in silences, in voiceless rebellions" (360). Alba recovers the experiences of her grandmother and other women she has come across by breaking this silence. In the novel, the magical realist language, reconciling both patriarchal and matriarchal ways of seeing reality, conveys some sort of hope for change in the society in general.

In the *House of the Spirits*, Clara, who is the embodiment of the claim that magic is an entirely feminine realm, possesses clairvoyance to communicate with spirits and extrasensory power to move objects.

Clara clarividente conocía el significado de los sueños. Esta habilidad era natural en ella y no requería los engorrosos estudios cabalísticos que usaba el tío Marcos con más esfuerzo y menos acierto. ... Los sueños no eran lo único que Clara adivinaba. También veía el futuro y conocía la intención de la gente, virtudes que mantuvo a lo largo de su vida y acrecentó con el tiempo. Anunció la muerte de su padrino, don Salomón Valdés [...].⁶ (Allende 2014, 90-91)

As a child, Clara was preoccupied with her own world and often seems to be distracted but happy and relaxed. However, her predictions were not given any importance which confirms her suppression as a woman. Although Clara's nanny believes that her magical ability will decrease with time, it rather increases after becoming a woman with full family duties. Patricia Hart (1989) argues that Clara's magical ability fails to help her as she can only predict the future without being able to change it. However, magic might not be a practical strategy but it is undoubtedly one which helps the marginalised, here women, to survive. Contrary to Hart, Wendy B. Faris (2004) advocates the potential of magic, insisting that "magic is generally an empowering strategy if not a pragmatic one; thus, it diminishes in frequency as political activity increases but it is also a precursor of that activity because it has helped Clara to survive and pass on her strength to her granddaughter" (183).

Although Patricia Hart (1989) argues that since "clairvoyance is a metaphor for female passivity, then it is essential that this magic diminish gradually and finally be replaced by something better by Alba's generation [...] to accept the responsibility for the world in which they live" (59), magic does not really end with Clara. To put other way, Allende starts the story with magic and slowly moves to social and political spheres to establish the notion that magical realism is anchored in social and political realities. Thus, it is by grounding magic amidst social and political realities, Allende shows the way magic can give a voice to women and empower them. Alba who, unlike her grandmother, blends magic and political reality, is a political activist who in order to retrieve past uses Clara's

⁶ Clara the Clairvoyant could interpret dreams. It was an inborn talent, requiring none of the trying cabalistic study to which her Uncle Marcos had applied himself with far more effort and far less effect. ... Dreams were not the only thing that Clara read. She could also predict the future and recognize people's intentions, abilities that she maintained throughout her life and that increased with time. She announced the death of her godfather, Don Salomón Valdes [...]. (Allende 1986, 85)

manuscripts and thus joins the worlds of two different generations. As Devona Mallory (2008) writes, “Alba takes off where Clara and Don Esteban leave, connecting both worlds to move on, survive and endure, no matter what. Having collected everyone’s stories by weaving a tapestry of the political and personal history of Chile, Alba and her country earn a much-deserved hopeful future that becomes all-inclusive” (142). On the other hand, in *The House of the Spirits*, magic is unattainable for men, particularly for Esteban who equates magic with other exclusively feminine affairs like cooking and religion. Being himself an epitome of patriarchy, Esteban seems unable to understand magical abilities of women because he “with his elitist, colonialist, and fascist approach to life, signifies cold, harsh, unrelenting reality” (Mallory 2008, 125) and labels them hysterical—a label given to women who defy the mental health standards set by a patriarchal society or culture. Shoshana Felman (1997) considers hysteria “a manifestation both of cultural impotence and of political castration” (8). Although Esteban neglects magic, relegating it to purely feminine activities, magic has its affect on him—a phenomenon which shows the way women can challenge and, to some extent, defeat dominant authority or ideology by the help of magic. Although Esteban, who was six feet tall in his youth, tends to provide scientific logic behind his shrinking body, neglecting her sister Férula’s curse that “[...] se te encogerá el alma y el cuerpo y te morirás como un perro!”⁷ (Allende 2014, 155), Alba finds that Férula’s curse works on him and his body shriveled as much as his soul.

Allende’s narrative structure undermines the governing system of her culture where magical realism as a narrative structure and philosophy provides an alternative conception of time and space deviated from linear ones. The Western notion of time, which is whimsically and tyrannically constructed, is divided into the domains of past, present and future, having a linear direction. According to the Western rationalist conception, past takes place in a fixed, chronological pattern without having any other explanations of it. However, Clara knows that perceiving time as chronological hinders one from understanding the association between people and events. Interestingly, Clara mentions in her notebook that “creemos en la ficción del tiempo, en el presente, el pasado y el futuro, pero puede ser también que todo ocurre simultáneamente”⁸ (Allende 2014, 503) and that “el pasado y el futuro eran parte de la misma cosa y la realidad del presente era un caleidoscopio de espejos desordenados donde todo podía ocurrir”⁹ (Allende 2014, 97). Clara’s view on the simultaneous and non-linear conception of time refers to the cycle of nature, having the potential of birth, death and rebirth. It is also a strong blow against Western version of time. It is through recuperating the texts written by Clara and other women that Alba can connect

⁷ “[His] body and soul will shrivel up and [he’ll] die like a dog!” (Allende 1986, 145)

⁸ “[W]e believe in the fiction of the past, present, and future, but it may also be true that everything happens simultaneously.” (Allende 1986, 466-467)

⁹ “[T]he past and the future formed part of a single unit, and the reality of the present was a kaleidoscope of jumbled mirrors where everything and anything could happen.” (Allende 1986, 92)

time and realise that time is fluid and non-linear. She can also realise that the brutal shackle which has tied up her family and her fellow countrymen can be changed. In writing their narrative, both Esteban and Alba have to revisit the past, having renewed the past and in turn renewing themselves. The fact that the text finishes where it starts emphasises the cyclical pattern of time. Again, the infinite, tortuous and simultaneous perception of time, which can be considered magical realist, can be compared to the female experiences of reality, particularly the nature of multi-faceted female sensuality which contrasts the one-dimensional sensuality of men.

Another significant instance of defying the dominating ideology is seen in the association between Clara's worldviews and the magical beliefs and rituals of the native people—worldviews which are not based on Western empiricism, but rather on the spiritual and natural world they live in. Like the natives, Clara refuses to impose a non-natural schedule on Blanca and does not allow the male-designed or male-expected rules of female decorum to make her be embarrassed of feeding her child publicly. It is through their common belief in the supernatural and the spiritual world that Clara is able to form an intimate link with the peasants. Although the old Pedro García has the ability to magically cure ant plague, it is only Clara who finds the entire process totally normal. Instead of fighting Esteban directly, Clara silently defies him through her own activities, attempting to wipe out racial and gendered discrimination. The huge modifications that Clara makes to her mansion symbolises her rebellion against artificial rules imposed by dominant ideology; it also enables her to achieve victory over Esteban without going into a direct fight with him. The reader should not forget that Clara's defiance also reaches to her daughter Blanca who learns to challenge the rules imposed on her by the patriarchal regime and to follow her own rules. Just like her mother, Blanca also possesses female spirituality which helps her to develop a magical system of communication with the child (Alba) growing inside her womb. Just like Clara who defies the patriarchy through her writing, Blanca also challenges traditional perceptions of reality through her art, a skill possessed by other female members of the Trueba family, as art is considered a crucial means for women to highlight their alternative beliefs and ideologies. Blanca inherits the skill for conceiving and creating weird animals from Aunt Rosa who embroiders magical animals and plants, defying any established laws of physics and biological sciences. This female art is a crucial passage for them to express their own philosophies and perceptions of the world silenced by dominant structures of the society. By getting a voice through their artistic creations, these women find a platform to challenge dominant authorities—art is thus empowering for women.

CONCLUSION

It is through Alba that the voices of Clara and Blanca and other oppressed Chilean women in general, the voices that would otherwise have been neglected and excluded, find an expression where Alba's created story covers the lives of her family and surroundings and brings their experiences to light. Through her

magical realist and/or feminist text, Allende has attempted to create a new hope for her country which has suffered brutally due to military regime and patriarchal constraints. By providing a voice to women who have the potential to transform the devastated nation through their dynamic sense of human spirituality, Alba's powerful narrative is a model of the politicised women literature discussed by Allende (1999) in her "Writing as an Act of Hope":

Now, finally, women are breaking the rule of silence and raising a strong voice to question the world. This is a cataclysm. It is a new literature that dares to be optimistic - to speak of love in opposition to pornography, of compassion against cruelty [...] a literature that doesn't invent history or try to explain the world solely with reason, but also seeks knowledge through feelings and imagination. (54-55)

The main narrator of the novel Alba is undeniably the "strong voice" who will challenge the world by her unconventional, female narration. By subverting male-controlled writing and dominant history, Alba proves herself powerful individually and the women from different generations collectively. The political and gendered restrictions imposed on the three generations of Trueba family—Clara, Alba and Blanca—are readdressed to produce a story for the women, by the women and of the women, hoping for a better future where future generations will survive the psychological and intellectual destruction through love and human bonding.

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