

# **Under the Gaze of Power: Gender, Violence, and Resistance in Nona Fernandez's *Space Invaders* and Diamela Eltit's *Custody of the Eyes***

POORNIMA R

MUHAMMEDALI P

*KAHM Unity Women's College*

This paper is an integrated analysis of Diamela Eltit's *Custody of the Eyes* and Nona Fernandez's *Space Invaders* through the combined theoretical perspectives of Michel Foucault, Hannah Arendt, and Nelly Richard. It explores how these novels engage with collective memory and gendered experience during and in the aftermath of the Pinochet regime's state violence, which had a profoundly dehumanizing effect on both individual psyches and the collective consciousness of the Chilean population. The study reveals how these novels' Foucauldian power mechanisms and the Arendtian erosion of the public sphere converge to depict lives controlled by totalitarian regimes. These theoretical perspectives expose how individuals are stripped of their agency, alienated from one another, and reduced to mere survival under the panoptic gaze of the system, which operates through state surveillance, societal complicity, and institutional control. Yet, these narratives act as testaments to the indomitable human capacity for resistance, even in the most oppressive circumstances. The study explores how these Chilean women writers question the hegemonic narratives by providing an alternative voice from the marginalized, asserting storytelling as a political resistance.

**Keywords:** Cultural residue, Disciplinary power, Public realm, Docile bodies, Political resistance.

---

In 1973, when Pinochet overthrew Salvador Allende's democratically elected government through a coup, Chile witnessed a period of systemic violence, surveillance, and repression, scarring the psyche of the nation. Under Pinochet's dictatorship (1973- 1990), thousands of Chileans were detained and tortured, many were killed, and many disappeared. The violence that the dictatorship unleashed instilled fear within the citizens, and it remains a cultural memory of the nation, a memory that is shared even by the present generation. Apart from the authoritarian violence, the period was also characterized by neoliberal policies that aggravated inequality for women, who were doubly marginalized by both state violence and patriarchal norms. Though the transition to democracy in the early 1990s brought in new rays of hope for justice, the condition of women as secondary citizens persisted even after the dictatorial period. The patriarchal violence that marked the Pinochet years extended to the democratic era, molding the lived experiences of women, children, and other marginalized groups.

The concept of “structures of feeling” (Raymond Williams) is best articulated in literature, which effectively captures the lived experiences of a community that have not been formalized within institutionalized discourses or ideologies (Tierney-Tello, 1996). Post-dictatorship literature by women writers has emerged as a space for interrogating these legacies and for sharing the trauma and violence that Chilean citizens in general, and women in particular, underwent during the dictatorship period. Besides, these literary works serve as resistance to the post-Pinochet period that aimed at neutralizing the dissenting voices under the guise of national unity under a democratic government. The Chilean National Truth and Reconciliation Commission received brutal criticism from women’s groups and political organizations for the silence it maintained about the Chilean women’s experience. In response to this, as a corrective measure, the Rettig (1991) and Valech Reports (2004) were published, which documented the human rights violations and aimed to lay a foundation for transitional justice. Nevertheless, these efforts ignored the gendered dimensions of trauma and the patriarchal oppression faced by women during and after the Pinochet period. These reports were based on traditional and conservative gender norms and failed to represent the complexity of their experience in the real sense. They were reduced to the “status of victims of sexualized violence” while the atrocities were committed by female agents as well. The reports also focused on the “symbolic nature of violent atrocities aimed at maternalism” (Carjaval, 2021, p.44). Testimonies of women who defied conventional norms were strategically silenced. So, the reports were criticized for reifying the conservative roles and identity of women in the nation-building process.

The study analyses the works of two Chilean women writers, Diamela Eltit and Nona Fernandez, who have explored the collective memory and gendered experience during and in the aftermath of state violence. “Traditionally, what is most marginalized by culture has been conceptually or symbolically relegated to the realm of the feminine” (Tierney-Tello, 1996, p.81). It is this marginalized, feminine experience that these women writers have explored, and the narratives, at once, acquire the status of a national tragedy. Along with portraying the psychological and social repercussions of authoritarian rule, these works foreground women’s experiences of surveillance, violence, and memory. The paper uses the theories of Nelly Richard, Michel Foucault, and Hannah Arendt to analyse the intersections of gender, violence, and power in the post-Pinochet Chilean works. Foucault’s insights into surveillance and control will be used to explore how the state uses these mechanisms to maintain control over the bodies and psyches of its citizens, the most vulnerable being women and children. Arendt’s theory discusses how totalitarian regimes erode the public sphere and deprive people of their agency, and how they shape the gendered experience and the social structures. By applying Nelly Richard’s feminist critique, the paper analyzes how the narrative structures of these novels question the hegemonic narratives by providing an alternative voice from marginalized positions.

### **Narrative Technique as a Tool for Political Resistance**

The official versions of the Chilean transition have sought to neutralize the conflictive density of the past by appealing to a consensual narrative that flattens out differences and contradictions under the sign of a reconciled national unity. Against this smoothing-over operation, critical memory operates in the fissures of that consensus, in the cracks and crevices where

the homogenizing script of reconciliation fails to fully cohere. It refuses the closure of a reconciled past and keeps alive the wound of history, insisting on the traces of what has been suppressed or marginalized by the dominant discourse of progress and modernization. (Richard, 2004, p. 23).

Nelly Richard explains how the transition period sought to erase the differences and the traumatic past through a consensual narrative. Critical memory, according to her, is resistance against this imposed consensus, which is essential in preserving the trauma and dissent that the official documents and histories suppress. These historical wounds are kept fresh and alive by the Chilean avant-garde art and literature and act as a dynamic force of political and social resistance. Through experimental forms, they challenge authoritarian narratives and preserve marginalized experiences. Here, what is being challenged is the singularity of history, the so-called 'sanitised version' of historical narratives. Avant-garde literature operated as a tool of feminist resistance and political /social critique after the Pinochet period and was pivotal in shaping the nation's cultural landscape. As women writers, Diamela Eltit and Nona Fernandez raise their voices from the marginalized positions against this silencing of the cultural past and the homogenisation of the experience.

Both *Custody of Eyes* and *Space Invaders* employ fragmented and disjointed narrative techniques to register the complexity of the female experience in an authoritarian period. *Space Invaders* is modelled upon the popular game of the 1980s, Space Invaders, where the players control a spaceship tasked with shooting down descending alien invaders, a relentless battle with no definitive victory beyond a high score. The narrative unfolds through dream sequences (First Life, Second Life, Third Life, and Game Over ) of children who are classmates of the central figure, Estrella Gonzalez. Estrella lives through the memories of her friends rather than as a physical presence in the novel. "...we dream about her. The dreams are all different. Different as our minds, different as our memories, different as we are and as we have become. Amid all our oneiric differences, we agree that we see her as we each remember her, in our way" (Fernandez, 2013, p.7). The narrative is polyphonic and has a shifting perspective, from guilt to fear to nostalgia, the structure of which is a resistance to the regime's attempt to impose order and closure on the past and a reflection of the collective chaotic memory.

Hannah Arendt, too, views memory as essential to political life, preserving the past and enabling collective meaning-making. In "Truth and Politics," she emphasises storytelling as a means of resisting oblivion, a process disrupted by regimes that manipulate history.

Memory is a battleground in *Space Invaders*, reflecting Arendt's belief in its role in sustaining political life. The regime sought to erase its crimes, but Fernandez's characters cling to disjointed images: Fuenzalida's dream of a prosthetic hand, a classmate's disappearance, the sound of helicopters, etc. These fragments defy oblivion, echoing Arendt's assertion that "the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world" (1958, p. 50). The act of narration becomes a reclaiming of the public realm, a space where the past can be witnessed and judged.

The children in this political allegory become the victims of a political game where their lives are constantly under the threat of being attacked. They also express their

confusion about whether all these are their dreams or memories. They call it “a memory creeping into their dreams” and which “lurks in everyone’s dirty sheets”(p.31). History is never allowed to be forgotten, and a cohesive, state-approved version of history is denied. Richard terms this a ‘cultural residue’, the residue of trauma and dissent that the official records attempt to erase. The non-linear game-like structure disturbs the disciplined narrative of order while the “we” reclaims agency against docility in Fernandez’s novel.

The epistolary form in *Custody of the Eyes* and the disjointed letters of the mother and the son are written in the cracks of the narrative of order and control. The son’s rambling, coupled with the mother’s paranoia, represents the suppressed lives under constant surveillance, exposing the illusion of stability and unity in the post-dictatorial regime.

“Where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault, 1978, p.95). The fragmentary narratives align with Foucault’s statement here. The mother in Eltit’s novel defies the transparency demanded by the panoptic gaze and the subversive voice against disciplinary erasure is preserved through the epistolary form of the narrative and the disjointed voice. Though not as explicit as in *Space Invaders*, memory in *Custody of the Eyes* also serves as a form of resistance, and the mother’s letters preserve her perspective, resisting the regime’s attempt to silence dissent. Though her letters remain unanswered, their existence preserves an alternative narrative, challenging the dictatorship’s monopoly on truth. Her writing becomes a quiet act of defiance, ensuring her voice endures beyond the immediate context of repression.

The gendered dimension of avant-garde literature is emphasised by Richard, giving examples of how women writers like Diamela Eltit have used it to critique patriarchal culture and the gendered violence of the dictatorial regime. According to her, women’s bodies serve as archives of resistance and memory, “a text where the unsaid of history is inscribed”(2004, p.102). It underscores the feminist potential of avant-garde literature to contest gender-based oppression and political violence. In *Space Invaders*, Estrella’s body is recollected in fragments, and her sudden disappearance under the Pinochet regime is resisted through her spectral presence in the dreams of the narrators, thereby transforming her body into a site of cultural memory. In *Custody of the Eyes*, the mother’s body, under surveillance by the authoritarian father figure, becomes a site of political resistance since it (the body) preserves gendered oppression, represented through the deteriorating physical state. The cultural memory is archived where the experience is not individual but collective.

### **Disciplinary Power and Docile Bodies**

Benigno Trigo’s (2013) caution against universalizing Foucault’s ideas serves as a reminder to approach Latin American contexts with an awareness of their unique historical and cultural specificities. Yet, Trigo underscores the relevance of Foucault’s insights into power dynamics, particularly in postcolonial and authoritarian settings. He argues that Foucault’s focus on the body and institutional power resonates deeply in Latin American narratives, where bodies often become sites of political struggle and subjugation. In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault argues that disciplinary power transforms individuals into obedient, docile bodies. Modern disciplinary institutions like schools, armies, and families control bodies subtly, enhancing their utility while making them obedient. Prisons are also an integral part of implementing discipline.

The historical moment of the disciplines was the moment when an art of the human body was born, which was directed not only at the growth of its skills, nor only at the intensification of its subjection, but at the formation of a relation that in the mechanism itself makes it more obedient as it becomes more useful, and conversely... Discipline increases the forces of the body (in economic terms of utility) and diminishes these same forces (in political terms of obedience). In short, it dissociates power from the body; on the one hand, it turns it into an 'aptitude', a 'capacity', which it seeks to increase; on the other hand, it reverses the course of the energy, the power that might result from it, and turns it into a relation of strict subjection. (1995, p. 137–138)

In *Space Invaders*, the regimented life imposed upon the children is evident when their experiences are shared as dream sequences. Here, the children's bodies are disciplined to perform nationalistic obedience, their energy redirected into the regime's machinery of power. "They have arranged us in a long single file line down the middle of the schoolyard. Next to us is another line, and then another, and another...We are pieces in a game" (p.9). The schoolyard has been described as a perfect square, and it is a kind of game board, alluding to the constant surveillance under which the children live. This setting in the novel evokes Foucault's panopticon, where the possibility of being watched leads to self-regulation. The children stand in rows, dressed in a single pattern, with clean fingernails, ringless hands, and hair brushed into submission, singing the national anthem every Monday morning while they are trapped in the gaze of the authorities. This training and surveillance aim at normalizing the children, aligning their bodies and minds with the regime's discourse of loyalty and discipline. They are made to think alike and with pure submission. Estrella's father, a carabinero with a prosthetic hand, embodies the disciplinary arm of the Pinochet regime. His presence instills an empirical knowledge of order in the lives of the children (Green, 120).

As in *Custody of the Eyes*, where Eltit critiques the neo-liberalism of the post-Pinochet regime, during which the authoritarian figure changes but the surveillance and oppression persist, the children in *Space Invaders* remain unable to escape the blind adherence to the regimented lives imposed upon them. In one scene, the children file out of the school in a pack, forming a long line as they move into the street. Suddenly, they heard someone clap to an unfamiliar beat, and then a few others started clapping, and later, the children joined them in the process. When somebody started shouting something, they repeated it without knowing the meaning of it. Their line breaks apart, but they form a part of another line, which gets longer and longer; the lines form a perfect square. "We are the most important piece in a game, but we still don't know what game it is" (p.42). The scene captures the loss of personal agency, as the children's unquestioning participation in an unfamiliar rhythm reveals how invisible forces manipulate their actions, making them key yet powerless players in systems they barely comprehend. The people in power may change, but the mechanisms of power remain constant, perpetuating blind obedience among those it governs. The video game is also a metaphor where the children keep shooting continuously, suggestive of the internalisation of violence as a repetitive and docile act, aligning with the dictatorship's politicicide.

Estrella's fate underscores the gendered dimension of this regimentation. Her sudden disappearance due to her father's position in the Pinochet government is an

act of breaking her bond with her classmates who are under the surveillance of the government, demonstrating how totalitarian regimes sever personal bonds to enforce control. Though Estrella does not share any animosity with her classmates, but friendship, her father does. Her father's role in the government marks her as a target. This act of removal, orchestrated by officials like Gonzalez and Claudio, exemplifies the regime's arbitrary power and its ability to percolate to the most innocent of relationships. As a young girl, she is not a political actor herself but falls victim to the totalitarian system due to her relationship with Gonzalez. In a totalitarian system, it is often women and children who are targeted as a means of punishing or controlling male relatives. Though Estrella's family relocated her to another country for safety amid escalating opposition to Pinochet's regime and not as a punishment to her father, her removal from the schoolyard, a space of camaraderie, further emphasises how the regime extends its control into the intimate, feminine space, too.

Historical accounts document how families of perceived dissidents faced harassment, detention, and disappearance as a form of collective punishment. The metaphor of the Space Invaders game, where the invaders' presence could be felt everywhere, has been used to show how the state extends its control to every sphere of life. Foucault's concept of the panopticon, a system where constant visibility ensures obedience, illuminates this dynamic. Foucault says, "The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen" (Foucault, 1995, p. 200). Two school dropouts, students who were eighteen and twenty years old, were shot to death under suspicion of being agitators and pamphleteers. The national police kidnapped communist militants and their bodies would be found in the morning with their throats slit. It was after these violent incidents that Estrella stopped coming to school (Fernandez, 2013).

Maldonado dreams of the word, *degollados* which means 'whose throat has been slit'. All the newspaper headlines contained this word. "No one is exactly sure when it happened, but we all remember that coffins and funerals and wreaths were suddenly everywhere and there was no escaping from them because it had all become something like a bad dream" (p.49). In the novel, Zuniga, one of Estralla's friends, is suspended from school because of his political involvement. His brother and parents were members of a resistance group. One day, when he came back from a funeral, his family was arrested. Though he and his brother were released the next day, his parents were transferred to some secret location. Donoso's house was raided by the national police agents. Everybody lived under the threat of being arrested at any moment. Most of Estrella's friends' families had to undergo harassment, detention, or disappearance. Political power intrudes into the private bonds of friendship, creating terror among the children. Through subtle details, Fernandez depicts this: "We whispered her name in the hallways, afraid of who might hear" (p.20). The dehumanizing treatment of the detainees reflects the biopolitical strategies employed by the Pinochet regime.

Hannah Arendt contends that totalitarianism obliterates the public realm, reducing individuals to isolated, atomised subjects. By public realm, she means a space/place common to everyone, a place where individuals appear to one another through speech and action. This is opposite to the private realm of necessity, labour, and the household. She argues that modernity has blurred these boundaries, allowing

the social (economic and administrative concerns) to invade the public sphere, undermining political freedom. Under Pinochet, Chile's public sphere was systematically dismantled through curfews, disappearances, and censorship. Fernandez captures this erasure through the children's fragmented recollections, which are confined to the private sphere of memory and dreams. The school, a potential site of public interaction, becomes a space of surveillance and fear. Arendt writes, "The public realm... is the common world that gathers us together and yet prevents our falling over each other" (Arendt, 1958, p.52). In *Space Invaders*, this common world is absent; the characters are isolated, their interactions mediated by a past they cannot fully articulate.

The surveillance of the totalitarian regime operates differently in Diamela Eltit's novel. The neo-liberal society of the post-Pinochet period, portrayed by Eltit through the microcosmic world of the mother and the son, has still not escaped from the clutches of totalitarianism and its internalised ideology. The mother and son become objects of scrutiny, and they are under the relentless gaze of their neighbours: "The real conflict we face rests with the neighbours and their conglomeration of intolerances" (Eltit, 2005, p.31). The neighbourhood operates as a microcosm of the Panopticon, with community members functioning as agents of surveillance, reinforcing the regime's authority. The mother writes to the father of her son, who is absent, but at the same time present throughout as a dictatorial figure, "You know I feel threatened by own neighbours and require the greatest tranquillity to withstand their sudden attacks now that they have managed to turn surveillance into a work of art" (p.26). This diffuse network of observation reflects Foucault's view that power is not solely wielded by a central authority but is enacted through social relations. In a way, this is a destruction of the public sphere, where individuals should appear to each other through communication. The novel's setting, with censorship and surveillance, imposes silence and isolation, thereby eradicating this space, merging Foucauldian discipline with Arendt's loss of plurality and public freedom. The invasion of the private sphere by the neighbours disrupts intimacy and necessity, which blurs the distinction with the public meant for political engagement.

The idea of "biopower" (Foucault), where the state manages biological life itself, is represented through the harsh weather in the novel: bitter cold and unrelenting storms. The characters are stripped of their autonomy over their physical environment. The physical struggles of the mother and the son through hunger, climatic conditions, and exhaustion make their bodies a target of power subjected to disciplinary techniques. The mother and son are reduced to bodies under surveillance, their lives shaped by external forces. Foucault views the body as a primary target of power, disciplined to produce conformity. In the novel, the 'disabled' son's body exemplifies this dynamic. His physical symptoms, twitching, drooling, and laughter, are interpreted by the neighbourhood as signs of abnormality, marking him as a deviant subject in need of correction. This reflects Foucault's concept of "docile bodies," where power seeks to mold individuals into predictable, manageable forms.

Despite the child's father not providing them with adequate financial support for a decent living, the mother's awareness of being watched compels her to justify her behaviour, through her letters, to avoid further scrutiny. Apart from the neighbours' surveillance, the child's father's mother visits them occasionally as her son's emissary,

the intrusion of whom becomes intolerable to the mother and the son. Adding Hannah Arendt's perspective, it could be said that the dictatorship, represented through the father figure, invades the private realm and transforms it into a regulated space. The mother and son cannot escape the scrutinising eyes of the neighbours, the father's mother, and the father himself, underscoring how the regime disciplines not just political activity but everyday existence: food access, movement, and communication.

We are being consumed on account of you. I no longer can tell if I'm living or merely surviving as a solitary exercise. But even so, you have accused me, giving my name to the neighbours...Could it be that you don't understand that by now you've given great power to the neighbours? A procession of self-satisfied citizens has come by demanding all kinds of definitions from me. Each one hastened to say his repugnant words, to express a repugnant anger, to exhibit his repugnant opinions to me...You have turned my neighbors into your allies so as to achieve what you cannot bring about yourself. The neighbors have been transformed into hunters of prey, terrified by everything that threatens their spaces. (pp.74-75).

The psychological damage caused by the surveillance prevents the mother from distinguishing between living and surviving. Her movement is restricted by the neighbours, so she is unable to go out even for basic needs. The father accuses her of her "genital conduct" (p.68) and assumes that his son's future will be affected. The 'nights damage her brain with dreams' that take her to another world where she doesn't belong. The mother and the son are isolated, echoing Arendt's perspective of how totalitarianism isolates individuals and enforces uniformity. The communal bond is being replaced by suspicion and control. The neighbours' procession, demanding all kinds of definitions, reduces plurality to a singular narrative of blame.

### **Writing as an Act of Resistance**

Hannah Arendt posits the concept of action, which is an expression of freedom that occurs in the public realm. However, the mother in the novel exists in an oppressive environment where her freedom is curtailed. Resistance, then, takes on a different form, not in the form of open defiance but through subtle and symbolic acts. The mother's persistent caretaking of her son resists the reduction of her existence into a mere body, asserting a fragile agency within a disciplinary framework. Her acts of care towards her son, touching and tending to his body, reclaim it from the regime's grasp, positioning the body as a site of both subjection and defiance. Similarly, her son's uncontrolled actions, laughing hysterically, drooling, and writhing, signal a refusal or inability to conform and defy normalisation, disrupting the normalising gaze. His behaviour complicates the Panoptic model, suggesting both the limits of surveillance and the potential for resistance. Despite the warnings from the father and the neighbours, the home also becomes a shelter for many refugees, which is again an act of defiance, emphasising the capacity for resistance even under extreme control. "I can't recall how many homeless I took in. I don't want to retell the history of those days" (p.82). I opened my house to the homeless as soon as they knocked at my door. I disobeyed orders, as you see, without the slightest hesitation"(p.95).

Though confined to the private realm, her letters reach outward, addressing "you"

and documenting the neighbours' exertion of power, an attempt to reclaim the world lost to alienation. When the neighbours come "demanding all kinds of definitions" from her, she replies, "I have the reputation I deserve and I lead the life I lead". She admits, "I told them that awful lie because it was necessary to halt the venomous flow of their words. This is a strategic act, silencing the neighbours' 'repugnant anger' and gaining 'a certain advantage'" (p.74). Arendt's belief that action can pierce totalitarian darkness, restoring a fragile space of appearance (1951) holds here.

Similarly, the son's resistance and his "struggle to defend us" (himself and his mother) complement her action, embodying a physical defiance that echoes Arendt's plurality. "I look at your son and convince myself that nothing could separate us since we were constructing our freedom when we distanced ourselves from your orders and mocked your cutting cruelty". The narrator's assertion, "Only your son and I are real. Only us" (p.112), rejects the neighbours' and addressee's dehumanizing power, reasserting their unique 'who-ness' against uniformity. The narrator also vows to kill the addressee (the authoritarian father figure) who has systematically reduced her to silence and subjugation. "I will kill you one day for...tyrannizing over me in this city to make sense of your life, at the expense of my breaking down, my being silent, and my being obedient, which you have secured by means of your inimitable threats" (p.37).

In the novel, writing becomes a tool for reclaiming agency, resisting erasure and affirming one's moral and existential presence, which the mother expresses through her letters to the authoritarian father figure.

Only writing can endure, since voices and their sounds, inevitably, empty into silence and can be easily stilled, misinterpreted, omitted, forgotten. I write to you now solely to forestall the shame that someday could lead me into shielding myself with silence. I know that although the outcome of this trial may condemn me, I am not really going to die. I want to assure you that I understand that I'm not risking physical extinction but, rather, that my loathing arises from the imminence of a moral death. Oh, think of it: remaining still alive and not feeling anything (p.111).

While Arendt envisions action as taking place in a vibrant political sphere, Eltit's novel shows how resistance can emerge in constrained, institutionalized spaces. This narrative reasserts the human capacity for action through speech, writing, memory, and bodily resistance in the most oppressive situations. Though unanswered, the narrator's letters gesture toward a future witness, embodying Arendt's hope that action can begin anew, even amid alienation. Writing becomes the protagonist's last refuge to ensure she remains unforgotten and unyielding.

### **The Inescapability of Power Dynamics**

However, the endings of both these novels are bleak and underscore the inescapability of power dynamics, suggesting that authoritarian regimes infiltrate even the private realms. In *Space Invaders*, Estrella's murder by her husband, who is a national police lieutenant, is a reflection of patriarchal and authoritarian complicity. Unable to accept their separation, this obsessive behaviour of her partner mirrors the panoptic gaze, where individuals internalize societal norms and hierarchies that justify domination. A victim of both patriarchal and systemic oppression, Estrella's death symbolizes the broader erasure of agency and the collapse

of relational bonds into atomized violence. "Like a little Martian she flies apart into coloured lights. On-screen the score on the board goes up one hundred points" (p.65). The reference to the video game is a critique of the gamification of violence, highlighting how authoritarian regimes turn lives into mere statistics and targets.

When *Custody of the Eyes* concludes, the power dynamics are reversed as the son takes control of both the narration and his mother, who now laughs uncontrollably and imitates the erratic bodily movements once associated with his disability. "Now, I'm close to controlling this story, of dominating it with my head of a DUM-DUM-DUM" (p.123). The mother is exhausted and is wandering in the streets with her son, who thinks that it's "her fault we wander night and day" (p.121). The son's controlling voice, on the one hand, hints at a glimmer of agency that emerges from the claustrophobic atmosphere of dictatorship, while on the other, it suggests the irreparable damage caused by authoritarian regimes. This becomes a metaphor to show how marginalized voices, while resisting erasure, can inadvertently reproduce the very structure they seek to dismantle. It ultimately reinforces cycles of oppression and violence instead of restoring a space of appearance or what is termed as the 'public realm'. Nevertheless, they escape the "sarcastic surveillance" into the "starry brightness in order to remain in this last, last, refuge...like dogs howling at the moon" (p.132).

## Conclusion

Both the novels taken for the study reveal the devastating impacts of dictatorship on individual psyches and collective consciousness. While Arendt's theories elucidate how political freedom is lost due to the diffusion of power into both the public and private realms of life, Foucault's concepts expose the institutional mechanisms sustaining power. These narratives portray the potential of disciplinary mechanisms in stripping the dignity of individuals and reducing them to mere survival. Yet, they also affirm the enduring capacity of narratives to resist oppression and envision new possibilities for agency and connection. Eltit and Fernández, through their fragmented and experimental narrative styles, demonstrate the power of storytelling in confronting injustice and breaking the silence, a way to reclaim agency in a world where power seeks to render individuals invisible.

## References

- Arendt, H. (1951). *The Origins of Totalitarianism*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Arendt, H. (1958). *The Human Condition*. University of Chicago Press.
- Arendt, H. (1977). Truth and Politics. In *Between Past and Future*. Yale University. [https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://german.yale.edu/sites/default/files/and\\_h\\_and\\_politics\\_in\\_past\\_and\\_future.pdf&rlz=C1C1MAVgMCHQ\\_KLUQFmCBQ&ug=AOvcm7\\_XQXETWCKGp27264](https://www.google.co.in/url?sa=t&source=web&rct=j&opi=89978449&url=https://german.yale.edu/sites/default/files/and_h_and_politics_in_past_and_future.pdf&rlz=C1C1MAVgMCHQ_KLUQFmCBQ&ug=AOvcm7_XQXETWCKGp27264).
- Carvajal, G. (2021). *Women, Memory and Dictatorship in Recent Chilean Fiction: Palabra de Mujer*. United Kingdom: University of Wales Press.
- Dianna, T. (Ed.). (2011). *Michael Foucault: Key concepts*. Acumen Publishing.
- Eltit, D. (2005). *Custody of the Eyes*. Sternberg Press.
- Entréves, M. P. D. (1994). *The political philosophy of Hannah Arendt*. Routledge.
- Fernandez, N. (2013). *Space Invaders*. Graywolf Press.

- 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* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pantheon Books.
- Green, M. (2007). *Diamela Eltit*. Tamesis.
- Hansen, P. (2006). Hannah Arendt: *Politics, History, and Citizenship*. Polity Press.
- Lopez-Calvo, I. (2019). *Written in Exile: Chilean Fiction From 1973-Present*. United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis.
- Munoz, H. (2008). *The Dictator's Shadow: Life Under Augusto Pinochet*. Basic Books.
- Richard, N. (2004). *Cultural Residues: Chile in Transition* (D. Palermo & A. Paoli, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Richard, N. (2018). *Eruptions of Memory: The Critique of Memory in Chile, 1990-2015*. Polity Press.
- Spooner, M.H. (2012). *The General's Slow Retreat: Chile after Pinochet*. University of California.
- Swanson, P. (2003). *The Companion to Latin American Studies* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203774069>
- Tierney-Tello, M. B. (1996). *Allegories of Transgression and Transformation: Experimental Fiction by Women Writing Under Dictatorship*. State University of New York Press.
- Trigo, B. (2013). *Foucault and Latin America: Appropriations and Deployments of Discursive Analysis*. Taylor & Francis.
- Williams, R. (1977). *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford UP.

