

Citizens' Resistance and Power Struggle in Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* Trilogy

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Abstract: The *Delirium* trilogy is a dystopian literary work in the young adult genre. It describes a society built on the premise that love is a dangerous disease, called *amor deliria nervosa*, threatening the safety and stability of the society. This study explores the power struggle between the totalitarian government in the trilogy and the citizens' resistance, and their political subjectivity and emancipation, analyzed by Jacques Rancière's concept of "the distribution of the sensible". This research utilizes a descriptive qualitative research design where the main analytical tool is the use of qualitative content analysis. Such a technique allows for a more detailed analysis of how Rancière's theories help interpret the social and political phenomena presented in the trilogy. The main source of the data includes the conversations and descriptions in the trilogy written by Lauren Oliver known as the *Delirium* trilogy. Literary documentation serves as the means of collecting the data that are later analyzed through qualitative content analysis. This study's data analysis finds that the power struggle between the government and the citizens in the *Delirium* trilogy exists because the citizens resist living in a rigid social hierarchy that the government, as the police order, enforces. The society is built upon the premise that love is a pathological disease that endangers their safety and stability, resulting in the government's total control over the society. The citizens' resistance is their effort to claim their political subjectivity and emancipate themselves from the system by dismantling it, subverting the dominant narrative as the tool of oppression.

Keywords: citizens' resistance, *Delirium* trilogy, power struggle.

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INTRODUCTION

Power has been an integral part of human relations, which influences the dynamics among the parties involved. Barbalet (1985, p. 531) explains that power relations include both the acceptance of those subject to power and their resistance to its legitimacy. Furthermore, accepting power over social actors does not necessarily mean they dismiss efforts "to moderate its effects," to impose "limit on power." It is widely believed that power is related to politics, as Dowse and Hughes (1972, p. 5) state, "politics occurs when there are differential in power." Furthermore, Haralambos and Holborn (1995, p. 588) explain: "Any social relationship that involves power differentials is political. Political relationships would extend from parents assigning domestic chores to their children to teachers enforcing discipline in the classroom, from a manager organizing a workforce to a general ordering troop into battle." Thus, Modebadze (2010) states that politics is essentially power, which is the ability to gain the desired outcomes using whatever means possible: by threat, sanctions, or manipulations.

Rancière, however, rejects the notion that politics is the exercise of power by proposing that "politics ought to be defined in its own terms as a specific mode of action that is enacted by a specific subject and that has its own proper rationality. It is the political relationship that makes it possible to conceive of the subject of politics, not the other way round" (2010, p. 27). Accordingly, any policy aimed at governing society or maintaining the status quo by the rulers is not considered politics since only one party is partaking in voicing its interests.

Rulers represent what Rancière (2001, p. 8) terms 'the police', whose essence is the partition of the sensible. This system is "the dividing-up of the world (*de monde*) and of people (*du monde*), the *nemeîn* upon which the *nomoi* of the community are founded." Dikeç (2005, p. 174) explains that Rancière's understanding of 'the police' refers to "an established social order of governance with everyone in their 'proper' place in the seemingly natural order of things. It is based on a partitioned spatial organization." Therefore, Swyngedouw (2009, p. 972) concludes that Rancière considers 'the police' as a body that decides "what is visible and sayable, what is noise and what is voice." Hence, those not granted the right to voice their concerns cannot express themselves.

As Rancière (1999, p. 11) states that politics occurs when "the natural order of domination is interrupted by the institution of a part of those who have no part"; it reflects a power struggle between the current order and disregarded groups that try to affirm their equality by deconstructing the standings of perception and partaking in society. Rancière (2010, p. 38) terms the disruption of the distribution of the sensible (*partage du sensible*) as dissensus, where the system that classifies who can see, say, and do things based on socio-political order is questioned and challenged. Brumlik (2017, pp. 18-19) defines the act of resisting to obey the aforementioned order as resistance, "a virtue particularly worthy of esteem."

Besides regarding political resistance as part of dissensus, where the distribution of the sensible is disrupted (Rancière, 1992, 1999), Rancière also discusses resistance existing in the realms of aesthetics and education (1991, 2004, 2009). Dissensus does not simply act as resistance in the traditional concept, which opposes or reacts to power, but it disrupts the status quo by highlighting differences and inspiring various outlooks. In the late 1800s, racial inequality and discrimination against Indians in South Africa led Mahatma Gandhi (Gandhi, 1957; Roberts, 2018) to start his peaceful protest movement against the oppression of the authority, which he brought to his homeland, India. His movement spread across India, influencing India's struggle for independence until India declared independence in 1947.

Aesthetics as resistance refers to the concept that art, culture, and artistic expressions can disrupt oppressive systems, challenge ruling ideologies, and contest societal norms. In his article *Rebels Without a Pause: Hip-hop and Resistance in the City*, Lamotte (2014) discusses hip-hop as a culture that rose from a place of exclusion and the struggle for space in the city. Furthermore, Lamotte (2014, p. 687) states that the hip-hop culture emerged after the decline of the civil rights movement in the 1970s, when the black ghettos became gradually separated due to the parting of the black middle class, and street gangs grew (Wilson, 1987). The early hip-hop movement was ingrained in the fight for public space and entitlement for street existence, as the gangs hosted block parties in some South Bronx neighborhoods (Rose, 1994). Morant (2011, p. 72) suggests that hip-hop acted as a counter-protest movement, an artistic method of communication that employs daily life occasions as a foundation to construct a new social critique based on the civil rights movement.

In his book *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991), Rancière criticizes the traditionally ranked education structure, which assumes teachers are the ones who are informed and thus must transfer their knowledge to students. This presumption positions students as the passive receivers of knowledge who rely on teachers' proficiency, which creates a power imbalance between teachers and students. Rancière encourages an education model where students are considered equal to teachers because he believes students can learn independently, notwithstanding their social status and background. Resistance exists in discarding the postulation that students need guidance from authoritative figures in the learning process. Instead, students should be inspired to pursue knowledge and contest conventional education's hierarchical patterns.

In the United States, school segregation, which separated education based on students' race and ethnicity, had been implemented between 1896 and 1954 until the Supreme Court considered it inhuman and unconstitutional, when it ruled that segregated public schools were against the Constitution in May 1954 (Lymar & Ahieieva, 2021, p. 11). The ruling was the result of the *Brown v. Board of Education* case, initially filed in 1951 when Oliver Brown, an African American father, along with twelve other parents, challenged the law that required their children to enter the segregated elementary schools in the city of Topeka, Kansas (Pitts, 1999, p. 38).

Power struggle, oppression, and resistance occur not only in the real world, but they are also depicted in the fictional world. As a result, there is always a close relationship between literature and the real world, as emphasized by Keerthika (2018, p. 417), who states that literature impacts society, and society is denoted in literature. Thus, we frequently discover reflections of power struggle, oppression, and resistance that have existed since the beginning of human history in many literary works in all ages, including dystopian literature. According to Chauhan (2018, p. 249), dystopian literature is enlisted to forewarn possible social, political, and technical threats to society. It illustrates an immensely despondent and despicable society, where disparity and injustice triumph (Baccolini & Moylan, 2003; Gottlieb, 2001; Zhurkova & Khomutnikova, 2019).

Young (2011) explains that even though dystopian literary works are not new, since "they belong to a literary tradition which, including also the closely related satiric utopias, stretches from at least as far back as the eighteenth century" (Hillegas, 1961, p. 242), they have reclaimed their former glory with a new target audience, young adults. The fame is initiated by the globally successful trilogy, *The Hunger Games*, by Suzanne Collins (2008, 2009, 2010), with the first book published in 2008. Since *The Hunger Games*, other dystopian books with young adult characters and targeted young adult readers have flooded the global market with stories of brave young people rising against the oppressive power of the

authority, such as the Divergent trilogy by Veronica Roth (2011, 2012, 2013) and The Maze Runner series by James Dashner (2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2016).

Those aforementioned books present young adults, males and females, as main characters who rise to fight the oppression and inequality that make their lives despondent. The characters start their journey of a seemingly impossible task to challenge their rulers' authority, simply because they are forced to survive, not to seek power. Katniss Everdeen, the main character in *The Hunger Games* (Collins, 2008), initiated her resistance by taking her little sister's place, as the female tribute competing in *The Hunger Games*, because she knew that gentle twelve-year-old Primrose would never survive the game. She also resisted authority when she suggested that she and the male tribute from her district ate poisonous berries because she did not want to kill him, which was against the rule that only one tribute might survive. By suggesting that they ate the berries and consequently forcing the ruler to change the rule, she employed the same method that the ruler used to control the citizens: controlling food (Peksoy, 2014).

In *The Maze Runner* (Dashner, 2009), the main protagonist, Thomas, and his friends acted on their resistance by trying to find a way out of the glade despite losing their memory before being deposited there, defying their captors' intention to use them as human lab rats (Alkhafaji & Yaroub, 2019). The characters rejected the roles assigned to them by learning to figure out their place of captivity and try to escape it; thus, they challenged the distribution of the senses enforced by their captors. Tris, the main character in *Divergent* (Roth, 2011), and her love interest, Four, led the fight against the oppression of the Erudite and the leaders of Dauntless. It started when those leaders programmed Dauntless members to slaughter the people of Abnegation, the selfless faction that rules their community. They did this to seize power and seek to rule the community as a totalitarian regime (Mathichiparampil, 2016).

Following those successful dystopian novel series, the *Delirium* trilogy by Lauren Oliver: *Delirium* (2011), *Pandemonium* (2012), and *Requiem* (2013) also captivate the readers with the bleak reality of a dystopian world and the struggle of its citizens under the tyranny of their authoritarian rulers, some of which are. This trilogy depicts a society that denies love and declares it a deadly disease, which requires a procedure "to cure" them when citizens reach the age of eighteen. Seventeen-year-old Lena, the female protagonist, lives in a heavily guarded society in a city surrounded by electric fences separating the city and "the Wilds". The government enforces tight control over the citizens by forcing them to undergo a process to remove any sensitive emotions and prevent them from falling in love. The *Delirium* trilogy portrays Lena's journey from being a docile and obedient citizen living in a society trained to mistrust emotions and fear the consequences of falling in love, to questioning the society's system, leading to her discovery that they are the means to control the society.

One of the issues highlighted in the trilogy, written and set in the United States of America, is the government's extensive surveillance to control the citizens. A similar occurrence has happened in the US, where the US government established COINTELPRO, a government surveillance program targeting the Muslim community. According to The Center for Constitutional Rights (CCR), a non-profit legal and educational organization based in New York City, COINTELPRO is against the Constitution, which protects individual privacy. The unconstitutional program is also operated "to disrupt and entrap social movements, activists, and members of vulnerable communities" (Government Surveillance, n.d.). Other issues, such as censorship of books and the arts portrayed in the trilogy, commonly enforced by authoritarian regimes, also occur in the US. The government

in the *Delirium* trilogy bans books and arts containing materials that may invoke feelings for fear of losing its tight control over the citizens. In the US, PEN America has traced over 10,000 book bans in public schools throughout the 2023-2024 school year, driven by the conservatives' backlash against topics of "race, LGBTQ+ issues, and diversity teaching in public schools" (Dunbar, 2025). Furthermore, the National Coalition Against Censorship (NCAC) reported that Indiana University cancelled a painting exhibition featuring a prominent Palestinian-American abstract painter, Samia Halaby, alluding to "security concerns" stemming from the artist's support for the Palestinian plight, which she announced in her Instagram post in January 2024 (A Selective Timeline of Art Censorship from 1989 to the Present, 2025).

Based on the background, the researcher would like to highlight this study's niche compared to the previous ones. This study analyzes a society built upon a propaganda that love is a threat. Rancière's theory is applied to identify the resistance of the citizens, especially the main character. Resistance as a part of the power struggle reflects political subjectivity and the redistribution of the sensible. Political subjectivity conveys how groups or individuals identify as agents of change that challenge the oppressive authority by questioning the social order established by the sensible distribution. In this trilogy, the resistance takes form in how people refuse to undergo the procedure to eliminate love, in secretly listening to an illegal radio station, and in sneaking out after curfew to attend parties with the invalids. Those actions show how people disrupt social order and assert their agency.

Furthermore, this study analyzes how the citizens' resistance affects the power struggle in the trilogy. Resistance results in equality and the subversion of the dominant narrative, which are related to emancipation and the task of aesthetics in political struggle. Rancière perceives equality as an intrinsic condition that needs to be recognized. Emancipation occurs when the oppressed and the marginalized realize their inherent rights and reject their assigned roles. In the *Delirium* trilogy, the government's rigid restriction to deny the citizens' right to experience feelings means they are deprived of experiencing emotion, which makes us human. The government establishes the dominant narrative to shape how the citizens perceive reality or aesthetics. Subversion of the dominant narrative occurs when the citizens refute the government's perception of the danger of emotions.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to analyze the power struggle between the government and the citizens in Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* trilogy. This approach enables a deeper understanding of how citizens enact resistance against the power struggle and how their resistance impacts the power struggle. The research design, data material, data collection procedure, and data analysis will be described to achieve the study's objectives.

Research Design

To answer the research questions, this study uses qualitative content analysis to interpret data obtained from the three novels in the *Delirium* trilogy, focusing on how the citizens enact resistance against the power struggle and how their resistance affects it.

Data Source

The data for this study consist of the written texts of Lauren Oliver's *Delirium* trilogy (*Delirium*, 2011; *Pandemonium*, 2012; and *Requiem*, 2013). As this is a text-based literary study,

the trilogy itself, rather than human participants, serves as the primary data source. The three novels were purposively selected because they explicitly depict a totalitarian government and citizens' resistance, making them appropriate objects for analysis through Rancière's concept of the distribution of the sensible.

Research Setting

As this study analyses a literary work rather than a physical or institutional setting, the "setting" of the research is the fictional dystopian society constructed within the *Delirium* trilogy, in which love is classified as a disease and citizens are subjected to strict government control. This narrative setting is directly relevant to the research problem because it provides the socio-political context within which the power struggle and citizens' resistance examined in this study take place.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a coding framework developed based on the concepts of resistance and power struggle. This framework guided the identification, classification, and interpretation of textual data from the three novels in the *Delirium* trilogy.

Data Collection

To collect the data, the researcher closely read each novel in the *Delirium* trilogy. The researcher identified passages, dialogues, character actions, and narrative events that related to the research focus on the citizens' resistance and power struggle. Relevant excerpts were selected, recorded, and categorized according to the framework used in the study.

Data Analysis

The documents were analysed systematically by reading the novels several times first to have a full understanding of the story and its context. Second, relevant text excerpts for the research questions were identified and extracted. Third, the excerpts were coded and classified according to concepts of resistance and power struggle. Finally, the categorized data were interpreted using qualitative content analysis to explain how citizens enact resistance and how their resistance impacts the power struggle in the novels.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Results

In this section, the result of the analysis of the *Delirium* trilogy by Lauren Oliver is presented. Based on qualitative content analysis, different types of citizens' resistance against the authority have been recognized and analysed in the context of how the resistance actions affected the power dynamic throughout the entire trilogy. The findings are organized into two main themes corresponding to the research questions: (1) how citizens enact resistance against the power struggle and (2) how their resistance impacts the power struggle.

1. The Citizens' Resistance against the Power Struggle

The *Delirium* trilogy tells the story of a society under a totalitarian regime that fights for equal existence. For six decades, the citizens have lived in a system where their reality is developed around the premise that love is dangerous, a disease that destroys their society by making the citizens insane and unstable. Alongside the system that determines which

voice is heard, which action is seen, and whose existence is acknowledged, resistance fights for those who remain unheard, unseen, and unacknowledged. As an *Uncured*, Lena represents those cast as objects of power, with no rights and autonomy. The *Uncured* must follow a strict guideline, "... segregation, principles of avoidance, the Protective Three: Distance, Detachment, Dispassion" (Oliver, 2012, p. 133). It is illegal for "uncured" girls to get along with "uncured" boys, since it will make them easily get infected with the disease. She then transforms into an individual who resists the system, a rigid structure responsible for her pain and unhappiness.

Ranci re (1999) states that resistance disrupts power. In the Delirium trilogy, resistance manifests through groups' and individuals' actions to voice their objection to power, thus creating a power struggle to accomplish their goals. Citizens' resistance is established in several aspects: the citizens' claim on their political subjectivity, redistribution of the sensible as an act of resistance, and claiming spaces as Acts of Resistance.

1.1. The Citizens' Claim on Their Political Subjectivity

The citizens in the Delirium trilogy are either political subjects or objects of politics, depending on whether they are cured of the disease. However, some challenge the system that makes them submit to its version of reality by claiming their right to feel and connect based on their feelings. Ranci re (Heynen, 2010; Pirsoul, 2017; Shaw, 2020) terms the resistance as politics, where those who are invisible, unheard, and unacknowledged disrupt the system that excludes them.

The Invalids were political subjects when they rejected the government's resolution to declare love a disease and regulate social and political structure accordingly. Nevertheless, the government decimated them by bombing them into oblivion in operations called the blitz (Oliver, 2011, p. 42). The survivors ran across the borders to live in the Wilds, unregulated areas without any life support, and their existence is forcefully ignored by the government, reducing them to mere ghosts of the past. Nevertheless, the Invalids never entirely give up on their cause, living a life of free choice and without emotional restriction. Together with sympathizers living among the citizens, the Invalids stealthily oppose the government. They stage their resistance by disrupting the government's regulations and sending the Invalids supplies such as food and medication.

Lena's mother is a sympathizer. Even after undergoing the procedure three times, she still retains her ability to feel. Thus, she can raise her two daughters lovingly: comforting them when they are hurt and entertaining them by singing and dancing (pp. 114-119). In its Parenting section, *The Book of Shhh* instructs mothers how to care for their children (p. 114). By loving her daughters and emotionally connecting with them, Lena's mother exercises resistance against a system whose aim is to incapacitate individuals' capacity to feel, making her a political subject. She also still loves her husband deeply, showing that the procedure cannot restrict her emotions. She keeps on mourning the death of her husband, which is an impossibility since *the Cure* eliminates all strong emotions

All over the country, not just in Portland, *sympathizers* and *the Invalids* fight the system that denies their freedom to experience life without being emotionally restrained. Lena directly witnesses *sympathizers'* and *the Invalids'* action for the first time during her evaluation. They manage to breach the security and send a herd of cows destined for the slaughterhouse to disrupt the evaluation process (pp. 36-38). The cows' flanks bear the words "NOT CURE. DEATH," representing the protestors' opinion about the people being evaluated, merely animals without their agency. This is when she meets Alex, a boy born to two "uncured" parents: his mother runs away with him to *the Wilds*, and his father is thrown

to *the Crypts* until his passing. Alex acts out his resistance by living inside the bordered city of Portland, although he does not undergo *the Cure*.

Lena's journey through the trilogy starts with her being an object of power as an Uncured, forced to follow rules applied by the system and constantly monitored until she becomes a political subject. The reality, based on the premise that love is a disease, built and enforced by the government, makes her an individual who internalizes those norms as the only way of life. She is always afraid that her life will be miserable if she lets the disease infect her, making her weird like her mother (p. 115), who still retains her feelings even after she has undergone the procedure to cure the disease three times. Her experience of having family members infected with the disease and of witnessing other people's experiences suffering from it causes her to feel dirty because she has not been cured yet. She thinks that her life will be free of the pain and misery that the disease caused her. Losing her mother at a very young age, watching her sister suffer from the disease before her procedure, and being mocked as the daughter of a sympathizer, a stigma that punishes her for a crime she did not commit. Her feelings of loneliness and shame are ignored, and so is her need to bond with her family, just like her mother provided her with. Her aunt, who takes her in after her mother's supposed suicide, is affected by the procedure, making her composed and distant. Thus, Lena internalized the system by trying her best to be obedient and restrained, as the government expects from an Uncured like her.

Her journey to become a political subject begins when she meets Alex, her love interest, after an accidental encounter during the break-in on her evaluation day. Alex, who was already attracted to her before they met, asks her to meet him one evening. Against the consensus that dictates all Uncured must not go out after the curfew, Lena goes out to meet him to sate her curiosity (pp. 67–86). She fails to meet Alex, but the feeling of longing remains. The next time they meet, Alex tells Lena that he is an Invalid posing as a Cured, shocking Lena, who believes that the Invalids can infect people (pp. 150–172). Nevertheless, her "illegal" closeness with Alex makes her question the norms, the consensus, starting from when Alex saves her during a raid at an illegal music party that Lena goes to, with the intention of warning Hana, Lena's best friend. She witnesses how vicious those raiders are when they break down the party, causing her to realize that the authority does not hesitate to hurt people to uphold the law. Safety is when the citizens follow the order, a system created by the government to keep them docile and obedient.

1.2. Redistribution of the Sensible as an Act of Resistance

Distribution of the sensible in the *Delirium* trilogy is enforced in how the government controls education, language, and media to build a society that perceives love as a threat (Oliver, 2011, 2012, 2013). Students learn in segregated schools for boys and girls, ensuring they never socialize with each other to avoid mutual attraction. It is even illegal for "uncured" people to talk to and touch people of the opposite sex. That makes her nervous about talking to Alex and being close to him. Lena disrupts the order by forming a romantic relationship with Alex, developing feelings that constantly grow against the detached existence of the Cured. She lives an alternative life, where love is not a threat to the stability and safety of society; instead, it is a fundamental human experience that enriches their life journey.

Schools can only use government-approved materials that prepare them for their societal roles. Students learn subjects to achieve specific scores in the board exams that will determine their further education and occupation. The compulsory materials include *The Book of Shhh* as the source of propaganda to stigmatize love, and altered biblical stories and

literary works that highlight the danger of love. At the end of the high school year, an examination conducted by evaluators will decide whom the students will marry, although they are given the illusion that they can choose. Ultimately, the evaluators decide who will become their spouse after being “cured”. Despite the propaganda taught in schools to ensure their obedience, some people refuse the Cure, choosing to run across the border and become the Invalids. They deny the societal and legal demand to eliminate their feelings to uphold the so-called stability and safety, electing to live in the Wilds that offer them sanctuary.

At only fourteen years old, Raven–Lena’s sort of mentor in the Wilds–runs away into the Wilds after she finds a deliria baby, the result of an unmatched girl and an unmatched boy, discarded in a shoe box (2012, pp. 225–227). Societal norms will demand that the baby be killed and then burned, as they are deemed as contagious. Those babies will not get a proper burial for fear of spreading the disease, and their remains will be packed up with the waste. Raven defies the system that condemns innocent babies as disease carriers by saving Blue–the name she gives the baby. Raven, whose father has a failed procedure that sometimes turns him violent toward his family, leaves her home and brings Blue with her. She stands against the diabolical norms that educate society to be obedient and docile, and restructures her life by choosing the freedom the Wilds offered.

The resisters inside the bordered areas fight the system by becoming sympathizers: helping the Invalids get their supplies and supporting their campaigns. Sympathizers consist of the “uncured” and the Cured that somehow retain their feelings after undergoing their procedure, causing them to be compassionate about the Invalids’ cause. Positioned as regulators, police officers, government officials, and scientists (2011, p. 270), they defy the government’s narrative that the Invalids do not exist by helping them create disturbances that prove their presence (p. 37).

Another way the government builds the distribution of the sensible is by censoring words deemed dangerous through various media. In Alex’s place in the Wilds, Lena listens to Alex reading poetry, a forbidden literary work inside the bordered areas, for the first time (pp. 295–297). The love poems invoke feelings inside Lena, trepidation from listening to words banned by the government, and the warmth she senses from those words. Lena and Alex embrace love as part of their nature, contradicting societal norms that order them to reject it. They create their perception of reality, where anything related to love is beautiful and moving, instead of poisonous and threatening.

1.3. Claiming Spaces as Acts of Resistance

Spatial distribution is enforced to control people based on their roles in society, not necessarily a physical space, but a system that arranges who is visible and heard, including where they belong (Rancière, 1999, 2001, 2004). It segregates what is considered normal and what is not. The government manifests spatial distribution by constructing bordered areas as living places for citizens with rigid rules and restrictions, rendering them objects of power or passive subjects at best. The Invalids, which are abominations according to the government, are reduced to merely a myth, supposedly eliminated during the blitz decades ago. They claim the Wilds as their domain, where they live without societal restrictions designed to subdue the citizens.

Besides performing covert actions, the resisters reclaim their subjectivity by protesting on the streets to refute the societal norms, showing that people who do not conform to them exist. Julian’s older brother joins a resistance demonstration when his father’s organization, the DFA, is having a rally in a city hall (Oliver, 2012, pp. 233–234). The resisters disrupt the

police order by transforming the streets, a neutral place, into political ones where they voice their aspirations, which the government silences. Julian's brother, the son of the DFA's founder, removes his mask to reveal his political stance in front of his father, supporting the resistance in a place designed to voice the police order. Although he eventually dies because of the injury he suffered from the confrontation with a guard and his father's refusal to treat his wound as a means to discipline him, Julian's brother successfully displays the existence of an alternative reality: people who refuse the idea that love is dangerous.

Several months after Lena crosses the border, the resisters organize what she describes as their "first major, violent, visible strikes" intending to disrupt the social order that enforces stability to silence the dissenting voice and eliminate their existence (pp. 47-48). The actions called the "Incidents" are executed in a few cities. Exploding municipal buildings represents the resistance's aim to dismantle institutional spaces whose purpose is to oppress them. The Crypts, serving as a prison and mental institution, confines those that the system deems as criminals, although most of their crimes are related to retaining their voice about love. The resistance broadcasts a political message to society that some people reject the norms. The prisoners who escape regain their visibility and freedom after being oppressed inside the Crypts, dealt with inhumane treatment as a result of the government propaganda that the Invalids may spread the disease, and sympathizers are just as bad.

2. The Impact of the Citizens' Resistance in the Power Struggle

The society in the *Delirium* trilogy is built upon the premise of inequality, with the government strictly deciding the reality that the citizens must follow without question. The citizens are objects of politics that do not have the right to question the norms, under the threat of severe punishment or the death penalty. Political struggle happens when the citizens reclaim their subjectivity by challenging the societal norms based on a hierarchy of emotions, segregating those who accept the norms as rational, law-abiding citizens, while the ones who do not are seen as irrational and dangerous.

2.1. The Citizens' Fight for Equality

Rancière (1991, 1999) perceives equality as an inherent condition, a birthright that belongs to everyone due to their capacity to speak and think. The citizens in the *Delirium* trilogy are denied equality since they are not allowed to voice their choices. The police order, in this matter, the government enforces a manufactured reality based on the foundation that love is dangerous. There are many attempts to pursue an alternative reality; one does not stem from the government's order of perceiving. The censorship and ban of art, books, and media, the constant surveillance, and the restriction on choosing display the inequality of roles assigned to society's members. The government is in charge of imposing the rules; however, citizens cannot freely access artworks and media content for fear of evoking uncontrolled feelings or being infected by the disease. Thus, they will want to impose their free will, instigating disobedience to the government's control.

Lena's grasps of her inequality starts when she attends her first illegal music concert. Discovering an alternative reality makes Lena question the societal norms she has lived her whole life. The citizens in the *Delirium* trilogy are not allowed to explore their taste in art and books. They are permitted to access artworks and books approved by government agencies, which limits their rights to choose what to listen to and what to read. On the other hand, the government allows certain individuals, like Julian's father, to possess banned books due to his connection with the country's important people (Oliver, 2012, pp. 172-173). Lena claims her equality when she listens to Alex reading her love poetry. Although still

uncomfortable, Lena understands she has the right to decide what literary works to relish. She emancipates herself from the order when she continues listening to the poetic words that incite her affection for Alex, despite the government's long-standing propaganda that has shaped her beliefs.

When Lena joins the resistance with Raven and Tack in New York, they live in an apartment with a basement where Tack hoards forbidden books. Lena is aware that books carry messages: the old and banned ones represent the freedom the citizens had before the restrictions. The right to perceive reality based on their choice is eliminated when the government creates a system that supports its narrative. Previously, people may have interpreted love from different perspectives; however, the police order demands that they perceive love as a threat that endangers their stability. Lena and the resistance recognize that they need to stand up for their rights against the government's control.

2.2. Political Acts to Subvert the Dominant Narrative

The dominant narrative in the *Delirium* trilogy stems from the government's resolve that love threatens society. There are two aspects of the dominant narratives that the citizens subvert. First, they refuse to undergo the Cure since it will affect their ability to feel. According to the government's perspective, love, or amor deliria nervosa, is a pathological disease that will bring the downfall of society since it affects people's ability to think clearly. The government's decreed solution to prevent the disease's transmission is by imposing the Cure on all citizens, a high-risk procedure that eliminates people's ability to feel. Previous people who refused the procedure and relocation to the approved and bordered places were annihilated during the blitz, which was recorded and broadcast to instill fear of resisting the government (Oliver, 2012, p. 41). Nevertheless, some survived the slaughter and ran away to the Wilds, a haven for those who later rejected the procedure.

Second, the Invalids, considered a ghost of the past by the government, regularly launch actions that refute the government's claim with the help of sympathizers. Their actions are harmless, intending to prove they still exist as an alternative way of life, against the narrative that the government successfully eliminated them. However, after their first major attack on several cities in the United States, the government retaliates by attacking them in the Wilds. It is intended to eliminate them permanently because the government finally sees that they pose a major threat to the stability that it has built. The Uncured that realize another reality besides what the government instills will revolt, disrupting the docile and obedient society it creates.

2.3. Gaining Emancipation through Political-Aesthetics Acts

Foucault (1976) explains that the type of control the government possesses over the citizens in the *Delirium* trilogy is biopower, where the state manages and regulates life processes, birth, death, health, reproduction, sexuality, hygiene, and other aspects of bodily and social existence, at the individual and population levels. The government in the upholds rigid control over the citizens' social, political, and intellectual lives, with minuscule freedom to maintain the illusion that the system works for the good of society. The distribution of the sensible constructs reality based on what can be seen, heard, and thought of, simultaneously marginalizing those not worthy of being perceived.

The government dictates what materials should be taught at schools to shape young people's perspectives. They can only read approved books that are selected to instill fear of love. Education aims to create docile and obedient individuals who serve their purpose in

society. Hana is frustrated with the system restricting her freedom to perceive the world based on her choices. Thus, she listens to forbidden music that offers her a different perspective from what the government allows, a reality that love is not a threat.

Since young people are not “cured” yet, precautions must be taken to prevent the infection. Segregation of schools based on sex minimizes the contacts between the Uncured, and is furthermore supported by law that prohibits interactions among them. Lena’s emancipation from the hierarchy of control happens when she accepts proximity to a boy and lets her feelings grow. Her first instinct is to recoil from that relationship, the one that harms her mother and her sister, and the government declares illegal. Accepting it as natural, she breaks the internal barriers she surrounds herself with as a result of lifelong education and propaganda.

Escaping to the Wilds instead of undergoing the forced procedure represents her reclaiming political subjectivity, making her disrupt all the restrictions the government creates to control society. Rejecting the procedure means she retains her ability to feel, which enables her to perceive reality according to her agency, not the dull and detached reality on account of the government’s selective version of what the citizens can see, hear, and think of. She no longer thinks love is a disease, contrary to what the government declares, leading to building a system that treats it as one. It is not merely an authorized elimination of the citizens’ control over their feelings; it also reaches far into how they proceed with their lives. The fear of love instilled since childhood affects their ability to develop affectionate relationships with others, including their family. Added to harsh rules that forbid displays of affection, even between married couples, the citizens internalize having relationships as a duty, which they must endure according to the law. It leads to the rise of a society living a bleak, meaningless life.

Discussion

In this section, the ways through which the mentioned types of resistance by the citizens are representative of the power dynamics of the power struggle in the *Delirium* trilogy by Lauren Oliver will be explored. The explanation of this will draw from the theory of Jacques Rancière and the ideas of distribution of the sensible, dissensus, political subjectivity, equality, and emancipation. There will be two main parts that relate to the two main research questions; one will explore the way the citizens resist governmental power and another will look at the impact of their resistance on the power dynamics of the power struggle.

1. The Citizens’ Forms of Resistance

Resistance is meant to reject the oppressive system. Foucault (2009) explains that resistance against governmentality is called counter-conduct, which occurs when people refuse the government’s control. Lena, as an object of power, experiences a journey to reclaim her political subjectivity by resisting the government’s rigid rules that make it impossible for citizens to protest. The manufactured reality built from the distribution of the sensible that declares love is a disease, enforced by the government with procedures, surveillance, and propaganda, shapes her to become an obedient individual who accepts her role in society. Lena disrupts the consensus that condemns love and anything that represents feelings and emotions, and discovers an alternative reality where love is celebrated and affections are embraced.

Lena fights to regain her right to choose how she wants to live. Leaving her stable, dull, and restrictive world behind, Lena chooses the Wilds, a sanctuary that offers her the chance to be with the boy she loves, disrupting the propaganda that a marriage is about order and stability (Oliver, 2011, p. 11). The pain of losing Alex does not stop her from living her life; instead, she exercises her anger to join the resistance to dismantle the repressive regime. Lena also asserts her subjectivity when she refuses to leave Julian behind to be executed, against Raven's order that tries to control her voice. She detests the way the resistance sacrifices Julian and decides to save him regardless of her safety. She challenges the system that abandons the "enemy" that wishes no harm against her and the resistance.

When the resistance moves to destroy the wall separating Portland and the Wilds, Lena insists on joining the action despite her mother's objection. She wants to take part in literally destroying the segregation that divides the free world and the restricted society, and symbolically dismantling the system that takes citizens' free will. Upon entering Portland, she is captured by Hana's bodyguards and taken to Hana's new husband's house. When Hana releases her, Lena's lingering love for Hana causes her to warn Hana that bombs are planted in the house. Lena contests the instinct urging her to take revenge against Hana, who betrays her and Alex. Lena's love for Grace, her little cousin, makes her seek Grace instead of performing her role as a part of the resistance.

2. The Resistance's Impacts on Society

Inequality is one of the cores of totalitarianism. It becomes the ground of a power struggle, where the oppressor and the oppressed wage a war to support their narrative. Rancière's works are related to a power struggle because politics is performed to reclaim equality denied by the distribution of the sensible.

Equality as a starting point means everyone is inherently equal. However, the distribution of the system orders that certain people do not deserve to be seen, heard, and thought of. It controls the narratives based on societal and political hierarchy, excluding alternative perspectives in perceiving the world. Lena reclaims her equality by breaking the instilled education she is given from school and society. She subverts the dominant narrative by falling in love and learning about love from a boy who reads her love poetry and becomes her anchor in a lonely world where people cannot form affectionate bonds even with their family. Consequently, she emancipates herself from the educational hierarchy that demands her complete obedience. Hana emancipates herself from the system that forbids emotionally engaging music by listening to illegal content on the intranet and attending underground music concerts. She also helps Lena escape her bodyguards' custody despite the changes she experiences due to the procedure, which is almost impossible, subverting the idea that the Cured are emotionless and obedient.

Subverting the dominant narrative is the principle of dissensus, disrupting a system that includes and excludes people based on their worth. Rancière's aim to subvert the dominant narrative is not limited to including the marginalized, but he also intends to reformulate the perspective shaped by the distribution of the sensible (Lane, 2021; Marques & Prado, 2022; Rancière, 1999).

The resistance's actions to disrupt the distribution of the sensible aim to reconstruct the system that decides what to see, hear, and think. Their trivial actions remind society they exist, an alternative reality that challenges the system. They emancipate themselves from the societal hierarchy that values control over freedom. Their decision to reject the Cure is the ground of more complex resistance. It stands as the base of their resistance to a system that denies equality to its members, making them unable to change roles once the system

dictates it. Emancipation means exercising their political subjectivity from a system that oppresses them, reclaiming their inherent equality.

CONCLUSION

The analysis reveals how resistance represents the citizens' political subjectivity, where they disrupt the order to reclaim their equality to be seen, heard, and acknowledged. Lena resists *the Cure* to retain her right to fall in love and develop a relationship with someone she loves. She breaks the barrier surrounding her, preventing her from accepting that there is an alternative reality in which people are free. Joining the resistance enhances her willingness to dismantle the society that oppresses its citizens.

Lena's mother, Annabel, performs her resistance by preserving her feelings for her husband and daughters even after her procedure. This makes Annabel an anomaly, which marginalizes her from the system. For *the Cured*, life is a dull and emotionless existence that deters them from creating affectionate relationships with other people. Thus, Annabel is considered a threat and detained in *the Crypts* as a political prisoner, a method to subdue the citizens who dare to rebel. Annabel's resistance transcends time and space, keeping her sanity inside a prison that treats her inhumanely. She can escape through a hole in a wall she has carved with her husband's memento, a metaphor of her love that sets her free.

The second analysis suggests that the *Delirium* trilogy depicts equality and subversion of the dominant narrative as related to emancipation and the task of aesthetics in political struggle. The citizens in the *Delirium* trilogy mostly live dreamlike lives where they are detached from any connections and emotions. However, certain people seem immune to the procedure and keep their feelings intact. They, along with *Uncured* and *the Invalids*, can still perceive the world differently and feel restless with the government's restrictions. They feel marginalized and move to emancipate themselves from the system by creating disturbance to the order that dictates what they can see, hear, and think of.

The Invalids who reject the procedure run to *the Wilds*, choosing to emancipate themselves from restriction. There, they build a life free from the government's manufactured reality, and reconstruct the system that includes some and excludes the rest. Lena learns to dismantle her lifelong education and upbringing to adapt to her new world, where everyone is equal. Her anger for witnessing the government's oppression leads her to a passionate mission to subvert the dominant narrative that figuratively imprisons the citizens' free will and renders them obedient and emotionless.

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Data Availability Statement

The data supporting this study are the published novels of Lauren Oliver's Delirium trilogy (Delirium, 2011; Pandemonium, 2012; Requiem, 2013), which are publicly available through commercial and library sources. The coded excerpts generated during the analysis are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

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