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Yazar: Şeyma AŞAR*

Ursula Le Guin'in Hayaller Şehri Romanında Bir Direniş Alanı Olarak Bellek

Özet: Toplumsal bellek ve karşı-bellek kavramları, bireyin geçmişiyle olan bağınu kuran ve kimliğini inşa etmesinde önem taşıyan iki terimdir. Bu çalışma, Foucault'cu bir bakış açısıyla toplumsal belleği şekillendiren güçleri inceler ve bu güçlere karşı bir direniş mekanizması olarak karşı-belleğin görevini sorgular. Bunu yaparken Ursula Le Guin'in distopik romanı Hayaller Şehri'nde belleğin çalışmasına dair örnekler ele alınmıştır. Ana karakterin hafızasını kaybetmiş, dünyaya ait olmayan bir yabancı olarak tasvir edildiği bu romanda Le Guin, insana dayatılan ve değişmez gerçek olarak sunulan toplumsal hafızaya karşı gelebilmenin en etkili yolunun bireyin kültürel ve tarihsel gerçeklerinden kopmaması olduğunu gösterir. Kişinin bireysel hafızasındaki bilgiler, toplumsal hafızada dikte edilenle örtüşmediği zamanlarda karşı-bellek önem kazanır ve bireyin direniş göstermesini sağlar. Romandaki baskın topluluk olan Shing'in toplumsal hafızayı kendi çıkarları doğrultusunda yeniden şekillendirmesi ve her türlü karşı-belleği yok etmek için başvurduğu yollar karşısında ana karakter karşı-belleğini kullanarak baskılara boyun eğmekten kurtulabilmiştir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı Foucault düşüncesindeki karşı-bellek kavramını Hayaller Şehri romanına uyarlayarak, belleğin bir direniş mekanizması olarak kullanımını araştırmaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Toplumsal Bellek, Karşı-Bellek, Direniş Araçları, Michel Foucault, Ursula Le Guin, Hayaller Şehri.

Memory as a Site of Resistance in Ursula Le Guin's City of Illusions

Abstract: The concepts of collective memory and counter-memory are two significant terms to establish a person's bond with his/her past and to build his/her identity. This study examines the forces shaping collective memory through a Foucauldian lens and looks into the function of counter-memory as a resistance mechanism against these forces. In doing so, Ursula Le Guin's dystopian novel City of Illusions is analyzed as an example in terms of the workings of the memory. The novel, whose protagonist is depicted as an alien without memory, displays that the only way to resist against the collective memory which is presented as the absolute truth is possible by maintaining the bond with one's historical and cultural facts. The counter-memory comes into picture when an individual's own memory or knowledge contradicts with the indoctrinated knowledge given to him/her by the collective memory. The protagonist of the novel can only resist against the Shing, the dominant group in power, by using his counter-memory when the Shing attempts to destroy any trace of undesired knowledge and thus reshape collective memory. In this regard, this paper aims to apply Foucault's concept of counter-memory into Le Guin's novel and investigate how the memory can be employed as a form of resistance.

Key Words: Collective Memory, Counter-Memory, Means of Resistance, Michel Foucault, Ursula Le Guin, City of Illusions.

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Introduction

Collective memory, as a concept, serves the function of passing down information from one generation to the next in a society. It is constructed by a certain community's shared experiences that are filtered through the community's own account of events. In order for a society to have a stable connection with its own history, memory must be maintained. Though memory as a term is quite ambiguous, it mainly corresponds to past knowledge that is consciously chosen to be remembered. Collective memory, on the other hand, accounts for the systematic teaching of events that are considered to be worthy of remembering by a society. The dominant group in a given society decides which past experiences should be included in the collective memory and which should be left out of it. For example, monuments of historic figures could be erected in city squares to constantly remind people about a glorious victory of the country, while certain defeats might be intentionally discarded from a country's educational curriculum. Therefore, collective memory refers to the knowledge of past that is mostly not experienced by individuals' personally, but learnt from the cultural or historical teachings that the community wanted to hand down to upcoming generations. In this respect, it could be deduced that the collective memory may deliberately present a one-sided account of past knowledge, thus being unfair to others who have shared the same history. In other words, a minority group's memory regarding a past event might be at odds with what is suggested in the collective memory. This is where Michel Foucault proposes his term of "counter-memory" in which he argues that the undesired or eliminated past knowledge that had been pushed out of the mainstream collective memory could be used as a means of resistance. This paper aims to apply Foucault's given argument to Ursula Le Guin's novel named *City of Illusions* and to analyze examples from the novel to demonstrate how counter-memory yields resistance. To achieve that, firstly, Foucault's concept of counter-memory will be visited and then the focus will shift to the acts of remembering throughout the novel.

Before proceeding to the theory and the novel, Ursula Le Guin should be given her due for presenting us with a novel that raised awareness in the workings of the memory. The writer, who was born in 1929 in California, became one of the most prominent figures of American Science Fiction and one of the greatest female writers of speculative fiction in the world. Her unique style in expanding the possibilities of fiction by experimenting with

alternative worlds made her stand out in the speculative fiction genre. Through the act of world-building in her novels, she demonstrated that there are always other possible alternatives to think. In futuristic settings, she invented worlds that do not resemble the one we have today. She came up with future assumptions that made people question about their behaviors and what ends they may lead. All in all, she took science fiction to a more serious level with her novels that were granted with high quality awards such as Nebula Award, Hugo Award and World Fantasy Award.

Sadly, the literature circles mourn the death of Ursula Le Guin, who passed away in earlier 2018. Thereby, this study is also to commemorate her contributions to culture with her novels that unravel the ways of oppression and resistance. *City of Illusions*, like so many of her other novels, is interwoven with references to power relations that shape people's way of life and knowledge. Written in 1967, a time when political social and cultural movements were at peak, the novel represents the groups which are silenced, passivated and abused. Le Guin is heavily influenced by the liberation movements of the late sixties and early seventies, as a result she covers the issues of resistance and ideological struggle. She focuses on individuals who strive to establish their identities without the influences of a dictated discourse. In doing so, she portrays Falk, her central character, as a man with a blank mind without an idea of who he is. Over the story of his perils, the reader observes what memory can do to withstand and fight against oppressive power.

Counter-Memory and Resistance:

As the ultimate theorist of resistance, Foucault sheds light on how power operates on individuals:

Where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power... [There is] a multiplicity of points of resistance: these play the role of adversary, target, support, or handle in power relations. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the power network. Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions, or pure law of the revolutionary. Instead there is a plurality of resistances, each of them a special case. ¹

Here, he builds a framework for the power and resistance relationship. From this framework it could be inferred that resistance does not exist

¹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*. (Pantheon Books, 1978), 95.

separately from power and it does not come from outside. It is rather intricately entangled with power and present everywhere within the power network.² Also, Foucault informs us that resistance does not have an absolute single form, such as rebellions or public demonstrations, it can also be performed individually. "Everyday resistance is not easily recognized like public and collective resistance but it is typically hidden or disguised, individual and not politically articulated".³ At this point, remembering comes up as a way of opposition that is performed by individuals without necessarily exposing their oppressors to the act of resistance.

First of all, Foucault proposes a circular relationship between power and knowledge. Considering memory as past knowledge, it could be said that the desire for nations to interfere with memory or to shape the memory is directly related to their wish to exercise power. Memory constitutes individual or society's traditions, history and heritage; therefore, identity. Without it, an individual would have to submit to the teachings of the ruling ideology as s/he does not have any memory him-/herself. Barbara Misztal explains memory's relation with power as follows: "Foucault views popular memory as actually a very important factor in struggle because if one controls people's memory, one controls their dynamics".⁴ For this reason, the foregoing discussion implies that memory can be used as a form of resisting the power. Foucault's conceptualization of memory plays a key role in memory studies that looks into the concept as a discursive practice. In his view, keeping knowledge of the past, or memory, provides an opportunity for resistance against the oppression. Power groups who are aware of this function of memory interfere with undesired memory that people might keep for resistance.

Moreover, any knowledge of past that contradicts with the common collective memory is doomed to be repressed by the ruling power. This sort of knowledge can be categorized as "counter memory". Or to give a more proper explanation, the term can be defined as memories of an oppressed group whose past knowledge does not exactly fit into the mainstream, official history. The example of a dominant group called the Shing in *City of Illusions* can provide support for this case. The official history that the Shing tries to establish does not match with what humans keep in their memory. Thus, the new discourse set by the Shing excludes human's account of their

² Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 95.

³ Stellan Vinthagen and Anna Johansson. "Everyday Resistance:..." *Resistance Studies Magazine* (2013), 2.

⁴ Barbara Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering*. (2003), 62.

history, human history is re-written for them in a way that it does not represent the bare truth. Foucault puts it bluntly: "The history of some is not the history of others".⁵ The very same event can be differently told in different discourses. Medina Jose adds that the function of the counter-memory "is to retrieve the untold history of a people which could be used as a weapon against the official history that legitimized their oppression".⁶ Thereby, counter-memory is an effective way to resist this repression by keeping a different form of knowledge.

City of Illusions:

City of Illusions provides a notable example for how such resistance takes place. Bearing most features of a speculative fiction, the novel takes place in a futuristic setting where people have already discovered life forms outside the Earth centuries ago. They met them and even formed alliances with them against hostile planets. Yet, eventually a malignant group of aliens named The Shing invades the world and turn people into their docile subjects by making them forget about their past identities. Moreover, people who can show resistance scatter all around the world to get away from the Shing's oppressive power. The Shing uses extreme methods and powers on anyone who shows resistance against them; they have a special ability that allows them to access people's minds and detect if one lies or not. In an attempt to silence humans' historical experience, the Shing disallows any other possible truth than the one they are constructing. They pathologise and abnormalize the human view so that their truth establishes itself as the official, mainstream history. In addition, their capabilities help them to manipulate the communication technologies and interfere with signals of devices. For this reason, the people who escape from the Shing avoid using any form of communication technology other than very primitive ones. The human race returns to its primeval state where they are devoid of any knowledge.

This intentional deprivation of knowledge can be said to have two functions in the Foucauldian sense: First, the people without knowledge means people without power; secondly having no knowledge of their history and no roots makes these people more unguarded. Furthermore, in the novel people live with little knowledge because if they attempt to learn more, do more or build more, they could pose threats to the ruling power. Therefore, they are kept from constructing cities, forming nations, or generating culture in any possible way. The Shing restricts them in the

⁵ Jose Medina. "Toward a Foucauldian Epistemology of Resistance ...". (2011), 14.

⁶ Ibid, 14.

nature and lets them exist as long as they do not create history. The Shing also creates a new discourse for the history of human race, in which they alter common knowledge, such as the fact that they invaded the Earth. Instead they claim that human beings destroyed nature, harmed the Earth and made devastating wars among themselves, so the Shing had to interfere and bring peace there. By portraying such power relations, Le Guin addresses to power relations in today's world where the governing systems regulate the collective memory and exclude any 'counter-memory'. The Shing, in this regard, could be looked at with this notion in mind.

In order to repress any counter-memory that is not wanted to exist, the Shing eradicates human's cultural memory by destroying any source of past knowledge including books, maps, written records and artefacts. Anything built by humans is looted, perished and becomes a thing of the past. With their books burnt, cities destroyed and homes demolished; humans in *City of Illusions* lose their touch with their past and become uprooted. They cannot even be sure of simple matters like the fact that the world is round, they only believe what the old books wrote: "The world was round, men knew, but there were no maps left".⁷ By so doing, the Shing can foster a new discourse upon people who have a distorted perception of their history and identity. The counter-memory comes into picture at such an instance. People have a duty to remember what happened and pass down what they know from generation to generation to keep their history alive. If history is lost, humanity will be lost too. Memory constitutes individual or society's traditions, history and heritage; therefore, identity. Without it, an individual would have to submit to the teachings of the ruling ideology as s/he does not have any memory her-/himself.

Human groups in *City of Illusions* resist against the Shing by remembering how the world used to be and how the Shing destroyed it. They had the knowledge of a certain historical background regarding who they were, but the Shing suppressed their knowledge and enforced a false consciousness on them. The historical knowledge that is masked behind the desired ideology of a governing group is referred to as subjugated knowledge. In this case, humans have subjugated knowledge that is hidden, masked, overshadowed and suppressed by the Shing. Foucault sheds more light on what he means by subjugated knowledge in Michael Kelly's edition of *Critique and Power-Recasting the Foucault/Habermas Debate*:

⁷ Ursula K Le Guin, *City of Illusions*. (1967), 178.

By subjugated knowledges I mean two things: on the one hand, I am referring to the historical contents that have been buried and disguised in a functionalist coherence or formal systemization. (...) Subjugated knowledges are thus those blocs of historical knowledge which were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematizing theory and which criticism – which obviously draws upon scholarship – has been able to reveal.⁸

In line with his explanation of subjugated knowledge, the blocs of historical knowledge were present in the people who were scattered around the forest in their escape from the Shing; however, their knowledge is buried and masked by a formal systematization brought along by the Shing, who falsified and subjugated their knowledge. This systematization to inhibit counter memory could be observed particularly in the case of Falk, an alien man whose memory is erased and has no prior knowledge of his identity. As he is devoid of any history or memory regarding his identity, he cannot be defined or understood by the forest people he meets. It reduces him to the position of an indefinable object who cannot be considered to have life value. Having no history, no background or experience induces him to be a powerless being. He comes to agreeing on anything that is presented to him as true. According to the Foucauldian theory, any subject who does not have access to memory is doomed to lose his / her ability to show resistance because memory operates as a weapon for those who suffer from dominant ideology and it makes the individual resist against it.

The novel also presents examples for what happens if you do not keep counter-memory and thus do not resist. Le Guin portrays a contrast between people who resist the falsified teachings of the Shing and those who yield to the distorted history presented to them and begin to serve the Shing. The first resistant group is forest people that live in hiding from the oppressive power and attempt to maintain the existing way of human life. They still speak human language, which is named as Galaktika throughout the novel, and keep a tribal family system similar to the way people used to do in the old times before the invasion of the Shing. Language is used as a bridge to their past. Their connection with language and culture enables them to resist new knowledge to be imposed. On the other hand, the only group of people who do not know Galaktika is named Basnasska, which is a savage community that does not have a human lifestyle. They have barbaric rituals including “mutilation, castration and human sacrifice”.⁹ They eat raw beef

⁸ Michael Kelly. (1994), 82.

⁹ Le Guin,. *City of Illusions*, 210.

and drink blood, act like beasts, have nothing in common with humans. The narrator describes them as: "people [who] were not going anywhere, nor did they come from anywhere, for they had cut their roots in the human past".¹⁰ So, not using language makes them forget about the past, and thus forget that they were humans. Consequently, they become savage, animal-like beings. It later turns out that they also secretly collaborate with the Shing and kill any human who rebels against them. On the basis of the given example, the Basnasska's break away with humanity could be attributed to the fact that they have stopped using language and have forgotten "old way" consequently. Therefore, it became easy for the Shing to control them or use them for their intents. Thus, this confirms the idea that memory latent in the communicative speech/language can be used as a way to resist against a dominant ideology.

Although forest people remain as the only successors of human race, they do not know much about their history either. Their memory regarding the old days of humanity is taken away from them. Zove, a leader for the forest people compares their loss of historical knowledge to Falk's amnesia:

Consider the worlds, the various men and beasts on them, the constellations of their skies, the cities they built, their songs and ways. All that is lost, lost to us, as utterly your childhood is lost to you. What do we really know about the time of our greatness? A few names.¹¹

In his view, human race and Falk have something very striking in common: their loss of memory. Humans try to hold on to a few trivial names and facts that they can remember, while Falk is totally stripped of a memory but tries to catch a glimpse of his past by a few things he remembers. Yet humans still keep a very important fact in their minds: that the Shing is their enemy and responsible for all that they have suffered. They expose Falk to their knowledge of human past as it is written in the Old Canon. Zove urges Falk to never forget about it, since he knows if he ever forgets he will be a docile subject of the Shing. The only way to resist against them is through not letting their memory to turn into a field of dominance for the Shing, which is only possible by keeping the counter-memory. The forest people try to keep their memory alive by a book they call "the Old Canon". The book is ancient and includes sayings, myths, tales that belong to the old ages. Zove views the Old Canon as a substitute for memory. The Old Canon is their only way of sustaining historical education. With the historical knowledge he gets from the forest people, Falk enters their dominion and gets under the

¹⁰ Ibid, 211.

¹¹ Ibid, 207.

influence of their way of thinking. However, it is thanks to this knowledge that he can resist the Shing when he encounters them. To endure the falsified, misleading allegations by the Shing when encountering with them, Falk also resorts to the memory that is passed down to him by people so he occasionally reminds himself about the way the world used to be as the Old Canon tells. When he eventually encounters a Shing and tells him of his own teachings from the Old Canon which Falk believes to be the truth, his knowledge is ignored, found bizarre and silenced. "By undoing established historical continuities," Medina argues "-a counter history reflects and produces discontinuous moments in a people's past, gaps that are passed over in silence, interstices in the socio-historical fabric of a community that have received no attention"¹². To resist the systematic subjugation, Falk has to remember which parts of the humans' lived experience is omitted from the Shing's discourse. And he does remember; thereby, without riots or rebellious movements in large groups, Falk and the forest people achieve resistance against the prevailing oppression and tyranny. This confirms the idea that memory can be used as a way to resist against a ruling power and its attempts to eliminate counter memory.

Conclusion:

All in all, this paper examines the notions of memory and resistance in the light of Michel Foucault's theory. Following his argument that memory can be used to resist against the falsified and distorted teachings that find place in a society's collective memory, this paper traces the acts of remembering in Ursula Le Guin's novel *City of Illusions*. The novel, which is laden with dystopian future assumptions, presents the misfortunes of human race that is ruled by an extraterrestrial group named the Shing. Considering the ongoing political issues of our day, the novel gives messages about what sort of things are undesired and considered to be dangerous in a community by an oppressive power. It is clear that the governing powers do not allow individuals to revolt against their system, and this novel portrays what methods could be employed to keep individuals from revolting. Even though the novel deals with aliens and humans, the story Le Guin tells of is relatable for any reader.

Ruling the world and constructing their own discourse regarding human history, the Shing annihilate any remnants of past human life and oppress remaining humans to forget their old ways. As a result; people forget their culture, history, identity and thus become objects of the Shing. Few groups

¹² Medina, "Toward a Foucauldian Epistemology of Resistance ...", 15.

of people who live in exile sustain their traditions and language thanks to an old book they call The Old Canon. As a result, it is concluded that the novel provides confirmatory examples to Foucault's claim that memory and cultural history can help repressed individuals to resist against the imposed ideology. The resistance could be accomplished by holding onto past knowledge that is attempted to be pushed out of the mainstream history. Foucault names this sort of past knowledge as 'counter-memory', which is a sort of memory that does not fit into the desired historical beliefs.

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