

The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*

By

Jahin Kaiissar  
20363003

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Master of Arts in English

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## **Declaration**

It is hereby declared that

1. The thesis submitted is my own original work while completing degree at Brac University.
2. The thesis does not contain material previously published or written by a third party, except where this is appropriately cited through full and accurate referencing.
3. The thesis does not contain material which has been accepted, or submitted, for any other degree or diploma at a university or other institution.
4. I have acknowledged all main sources of help.

**Student's Full Name & Signature:**

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**Jahin Kaiissar**  
20363003

## Approval

The thesis titled “The Struggle of Memory against Forgetting in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*, Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*” submitted by Jahin Kaiissar (20363003) of Summer, 2021 has been accepted as satisfactory in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of MA in English on September 23, 2021.

### Examining Committee:

Supervisor:

---

Professor Firdous Azim  
Department of English and Humanities  
Brac University

External Expert Examiner:

---

Professor Syed Manzoorul Islam  
Department of English and Humanities  
University of Liberal Arts Bangladesh (ULAB)

Departmental Head:

---

Professor Firdous Azim  
Department of English and Humanities  
Brac University

## Abstract

Since memory studies is a continuously expanding and contentious interdisciplinary field, scholarly interest in it has grown considerably in recent times, especially within the humanities. Situated in memory studies, this dissertation examines the interplay between memory and power, between forgetting and individual/collective memory, and between remembering and resistance in three selected novels: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*. Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann's theories on collective memory, Paul Connerton and Aleida Assmann's concept of repressive erasure/forgetting, and Michel Foucault's ideas on power and resistance form a vital background for this dissertation. Each of the novels under discussion unforgettably portrays fictive worlds where memory, or rather its almost total eradication, is used as a means of controlling and manipulating citizens. In their memory-deprived worlds, the major characters within each novel strive to remember their past against the collective, repressive forgetting imposed on them by people in power. By tracing the essential themes through a critical analysis of the novels, this dissertation aims to provide a focused insight into the questions of how collective forgetting is imposed, how imposed forgetting affects individual and collective memories, and how remembering is a way of resisting those in power.

**Keywords:** memory studies; power; individual memory; collective memory; remembering; resistance; forgetting

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

The extremely devastating events that have taken place in the course of history – colonialism, slavery, the horrific World Wars, and other transnational and international conflicts – have understandably inspired diverse and passionate attempts by writers to explore the concept of memory. The roots and branches of the memory discourse spread into a wide range of academic disciplines, making it the focus of attention in exhaustive interdisciplinary research. Since memory is inextricably linked to the issues of identity, history, representation, and narratives, the work in philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories of memory is coterminous with the investigation of the concept of memory in literary studies. Therefore, despite the elusive nature of the subject, the growing body of scholarship on memory studies offers a burgeoning of fresh perspectives and provides useful insights into reading literature.

Memory eschews stasis; it is a process that includes both remembering certain past experiences and forgetting others. Remembering and forgetting are opposing yet complementing acts that are contingent on one another. According to the Freudian approach to memory, remembering and forgetting are intertwined: memories cross traumatically between the conscious and the unconscious. As a result, remembering the past – just like forgetting it – is always contingent. While forgetting is essentially a destructive activity that eradicates the traces of past experience either temporarily or permanently, remembering is a reconstructive activity that allows one to make resonant connections to past events. Although the themes of memory, remembering, and forgetting abound in literature of all eras, it is especially prevalent in the literature of the last few decades. In contemporary literature, preoccupation with remembering and forgetting exists to an unprecedented degree. W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz* (2001), Cormac McCarthy's *The Road* (2006), Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007), and many other recent novels have prompted various questions, discussions, and



theories about how memory functions. Thus, inquiries into memory have started to take on more complex challenges.

In fact, recent theorizing on the concept of memory specifically focuses on the desire to erase from memory what has already happened (Lampropoulos and Markidou 1). Such theorizing suggests that people have a compulsive fascination with the idea of a clean slate. Individually and collectively, people may engage in processes of selective editing of the past, discarding or retaining particular memories to deal with traumas and unresolved dilemmas. Forgetting, in this sense, is regarded as something positive, desirable, and even necessary. Yet, forgetting can also be considered as something negative and undesirable. When a person's memory begins to fail, it is often considered a terrible loss – at least in cases of diseases of the aging brain such as Alzheimer's or dementia – by the individual in question. In fiction, pathological forgetting (in the form of real, diagnosable amnesia) is an extremely common occurrence, almost ubiquitous in mystery and psychological novels. This is because forgetting, in literature, serves as a useful and dramatic device for the author to tackle various themes such as identity, trauma, guilt, etc. However, more recently, memory – and by extension forgetting – is being considered as a structure or discourse of power while remembering is seen as an act of resistance. It is, therefore, pertinent to acknowledge that the forgetting of the past could be the result of active efforts by actors with interests. What this means is that in addition to their natural tendency to gradually fade with the passing of time, memories can be manipulated in multiple ways and can even be eradicated by state endorsed-mechanisms. Manipulation of memory and imposed forgetting are important themes in novels such as George Orwell's *1984* (1949), Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), Milan Kundera's *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (1979), and Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). These texts, most of which are dystopian novels, convey the message that memory is susceptible to oppression.

As Milan Kundera writes in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” (3). This dissertation echoes this oft-quoted line, exploring how those who wield power have the ability to leverage memory for their personal or political aims. They have the power to choose what is remembered and what is forgotten. However, as Michel Foucault famously asserts, “Where there is power, there is resistance” (Foucault, *The History* 95). This dissertation draws on various scholars’ theories on memory, forgetting, power, and resistance. To be more specific, Maurice Halbwachs and Jan Assmann’s theories on collective memory, Paul Connerton and Aleida Assmann’s concept of repressive erasure/forgetting, and Michel Foucault’s ideas on power and resistance form a vital background for this dissertation. By relying on their ideas, this dissertation examines the causes of imposed forgetting, the repercussions of imposed forgetting on individual and/or collective memories, and the process of remembering as an act of resistance in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver* (1993), Yoko Ogawa’s *The Memory Police* (1994), and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant* (2015). The texts with which this thesis engage have been selected because they are centrally concerned with the abuse of memory, the consequences of forgetting, and the process of remembering. Although many other existing novels (such as those listed in the previous paragraph) also focus on similar issues and themes, the primary texts under discussion are more recent and thus require more critical commentary compared to the previously mentioned novels. Moreover, the selected novels offer the most probing and rousing account of collective memory erasure.

The main characters in Lowry’s *The Giver*, Ogawa’s *The Memory Police*, and Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant* share a topical common denominator – they attempt to retain and protect individual and/or collective memory in the face of substantive collective forgetting. What makes these novels the subjects of interest is the fact that the characters’ memories are not lost through a natural process over time, but are stripped away by powerful external

forces. Rather than focusing solely on individual forgetting, the novels draw into the larger narrative of what happens when a large group of people is forced to forget things. The novels also converge on three groups of characters: the enforcers of forgetting, the victims of forgetting, and the custodians of memory. This dissertation investigates the personal or political objectives of the enforcers, the effects of forgetting on the victims' individual and collective memories, and the act of resistance by the victims and/or the custodians. These characters and their actions contribute to the peculiar, unsettling, and disconcerting atmosphere in the novels. Furthermore, this dissertation briefly explores the relationship between memory and history since nationalist forces impose their own version of history in the same way that they manipulate memory.

In light of the above, this dissertation poses the following questions: How do individual and collective memory work? How do the twin forces of remembering and forgetting work? Do we remember what we want to forget and forget what we want to remember? Do we control our own memory? If not, who controls our memory and how do they control it? Is it possible to resist imposed forgetting? If so, how? These questions contain the very themes that will be explored in this dissertation.

## 1.1 Overview of Selected Novels

The three novels analyzed in this dissertation have been selected both for their intrinsic importance and to form part of an argument concerning the politicization of memory; the effects of forgetting on individual and collective memory; the role of memory in the formation and negotiation of individual and communal identities; and the relationship between remembering and resistance. Before moving on to the discussion of the theoretical frameworks of this dissertation and the in-depth analysis of the texts, a general overview of the chosen novels is given below.

Published in 1993, Lois Lowry's *The Giver* is a young adult dystopian novel that tells the story of Jonas, an 11-year-old boy who lives in a seemingly utopian society that is ruled by the Committee of Elders.<sup>1</sup> During the Ceremony of Twelve, Jonas and other children of his age are assigned permanent roles in their community. Jonas is given the honored and mysterious title of a Receiver of Memory. It is eventually revealed that his job as a Receiver is to inherit the collective memories of the past from The Giver (the previous Receiver), the keeper of memories, and to use those memories to give advice to the Committee of Elders. Gradually, Jonas learns from The Giver that his current society exists because music, colors, free will, true feelings, and memories have been eradicated in order to create an ideal state of "Sameness." Faced with this startling reality, he comes to resent the way in which his community functions. Thus, together, he and The Giver devise a plan for him to escape to Elsewhere, the land outside of their community.

Originally published in 1994 and translated into English in 2019 by Stephen Snyder, Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police* is a dystopian tale about an unnamed female narrator-novelist who lives on an island where objects as well as the memories and emotions attached to those objects disappear, both physically and cognitively. Individuals who cling to their memories and hide disappeared objects are hunted down by the eponymous Memory Police and are vanished without a trace. When R, the narrator's editor, is in danger of being taken away by the Memory Police for not forgetting about the disappeared objects, the narrator desperately concocts a plan to save him with the help of her former nurse's husband, an unnamed old man. Moreover, interspersed throughout the novel are excerpts from the narrator's latest manuscript which tells the story of a young typist who gradually loses her voice and can only communicate via a typewriter. Her typing teacher eventually imprisons

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<sup>1</sup> Lowry's *The Giver* is part of a quartet consisting of three other novels: *Gathering Blue* (2000), *Messenger* (2004), and *Son* (2012). This dissertation examines *The Giver* as a stand-alone novel.

her in a locked room, stripping her off from her individuality and controlling every aspect of her life. She ends up becoming completely reliant on him, lacking the will to escape even when given the opportunity.

Published in 2015, *The Buried Giant* by Kazuo Ishiguro is a fantasy novel set in post-Arthurian Britain.<sup>2</sup> It tells the story of an elderly Briton couple, Axl and Beatrice, who travels across a bleak and treacherous landscape populated by ogres and pixies to find their long-lost son. Since the mysterious mist plaguing the land forces people into a condition of forgetfulness, the couple also tries to recover their lost memories during their quest. Their journey brings a series of strange and unexpected encounters. They find themselves accompanied by Wistan, a highly competent Saxon warrior, and Edwin, Wistan's young protégé who has been bitten by a dragon. Along the way, the group also encounters Sir Gawain, a rumbunctious elderly knight, who has supposedly been tasked by the late King Arthur to slay Querig, an enchanted she-dragon whose magical breath is the cause of the collective forgetting. As these five characters travel across the mountain for different purposes, they end up being separated and reunited at various stages of their eventful journey.

## 1.2 Chapter Outline

This thesis contains a total of six chapters that meaningfully engage with each other. The present chapter, Chapter 1, provides an indication of the aim of this thesis, establishes the intellectual background of this thesis, and provides an overview of the primary texts. Chapter 2 addresses the theoretical approaches and concepts that are employed throughout this thesis. It refers to the works of various scholars such as Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricoeur, Jan

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<sup>2</sup> Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* has generated an intense debate about whether the novel can be classified as fantasy or not. Even Ishiguro himself seems tentative about calling his book a fantasy novel. In an interview with *The New York Times*, Ishiguro asks: "Will readers follow me into this? Will they understand what I'm trying to do, or will they be prejudiced against the surface elements? Are they going to say this is fantasy?" (qtd. in Alter). Fantasy or not, the theme of memory is at the heart of the novel.

Assmann, Pierre Nora, Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Michel Foucault, Paul Connerton, and Aleida Assmann. Chapters 3, 4, and 5 are dedicated to the comprehensive analysis of Lowry's *The Giver*, Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, and Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*, respectively. Each of these three chapters consists of three sections. The first section focuses on the roles of the enforcers of forgetting and tries to answer the questions of how and why forgetting is enforced. The second section explores how individual and/or collective memory has been curtailed due to imposed forgetting. The final section examines the subversive role of remembering and how it is employed to resist the ruling system or figure. Finally, Chapter 6 is the conclusion that summarizes the previous chapters and discusses how this thesis can contribute to the field of memory studies.

## Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Despite the abundant literature available in the field of memory studies, memory remains an infinitely complex concept. Due to its volatile, evanescent, and unreliable nature, memory exists in multiple forms. It can be recurrent, unwelcome, fading, hidden, forgotten, etc. Endel Tulving even offers a list of 256 different kinds of memory, emphasizing the fact that “memory has split into numerous fragments” and thus can be divided and subdivided ad infinitum (Tulving 42). However, this dissertation mainly focuses on two types of memory: individual and collective. In order to understand the relationship between memory and its concomitant ideas, this chapter draws on the works of a number of scholars in various areas of study like history, sociology, and literature. First, it explores the works of Maurice Halbwachs, Paul Ricoeur, Jan Assmann, and Pierre Nora to define, describe, and differentiate terms such as individual memory, collective memory, and history. Then, it addresses the relationship between memory, power, and resistance by examining the works of thinkers such as Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, and Michel Foucault. Finally, it looks at the taxonomies of forgetting put forth by Paul Connerton and Aleida Assmann.

### 2.1 Individual Memory, Collective Memory, and History

To trace the history of the discourse of memory throughout the past few centuries or to define memory through the perspective of various disciplines is a Herculean task beyond the scope of this dissertation. In order to understand how memory works, it is necessary to first recognize that memory has an individual and collective side. In the past, memory has been thought of as an individual process. Earlier thinkers such as Henri Bergson and Sigmund Freud focused on the individualist paradigm of memory (Erl1 304). They considered memory as an internal phenomenon, intensely personal and entirely exclusive to each individual’s being and un/conscious mind. In order to emphasize the fundamental role

memory plays in the formation of the self and consciousness, Descartes famous dictum “I think, therefore I am” can be modified to read “I remember, therefore I am” (Beike et al. 2). Thus, memory is often seen as belonging to the inner life of the individual, forming the individual’s identity, and helping to distinguish that individual from others. This understanding of memory, which has been posited much earlier by thinkers like Augustine, Locke, and Husserl, has been referred to by Paul Ricoeur as the “tradition of inwardness” (Ricoeur 97). According to Ricoeur, “the entire tradition of inwardness is constructed as an impasse in the direction of collective memory” (Ricoeur 97). Therefore, in order to understand the concept of memory, it is important to not just look inwards but to also look outwards, to look outside of an individual’s inner life and into the social contexts of memory. This means that the phrase “I remember, therefore I am” must be further modified to read “We remember, therefore we are.”

It is impossible to start a discussion on the socially constructed nature of memory without acknowledging Maurice Halbwachs’ seminal contribution to the field in *The Social Frameworks of Memory*. As the first sociologist to broaden the meaning of the term memory to account for its social context, Halbwachs paved the way towards the so-called “memory boom” of the late twentieth century.<sup>3</sup> He identified autobiographical, personal, or individual memory as something that the individual experiences directly. And most significantly, he introduced the concept of collective memory, a concept which he sometimes refers to as cultural or social memory. Collective memory is a notoriously multifarious and difficult concept to define. In his book *On Collective Memory*, Halbwachs states that “It is, of course individuals who remember, not groups or institutions, but these individuals, being located in a specific group context, draw on that context to remember or recreate the past” (22). In short,

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<sup>3</sup> In “The Generation of Memory: Reflections on the ‘Memory Boom’ in Contemporary Historical Studies,” historian Jay Winter provides a detailed discussion on the origins and implications of the memory boom, emphasizing its “multifaceted and eclectic nature” (Winter 76).



collective memory can be understood as a common denominator of individual memories, all of which belong to the same group. Just as individual memory is a person's selective process of remembering the past, shaped by present needs and interests, collective memory is a social group's process of remembering the past based on their needs and contexts. It must be noted that within the social sphere, individual memory can be shaped by mutually acquiescent or even conflicting memory of others. Moreover, according to Halbwachs, "it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories" (Halbwachs 38). Thus, memory, no matter how personal, is a collective phenomenon that is mediated and structured by society. It confers a sense of personal and collective identity by mediating between individual experiences and social context. Not only is memory collectively shared and revised, but it is also immersed in social relationships and interactions. Halbwachs specifically discusses the social frameworks of family, religious community, and social class, showing how each activates collective memory (Erl 306).

More recently, in his extensive work *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur posits that the interplay between individual and collective memory can be imagined as a kind of intermediate space between two opposite poles wherein "concrete exchanges operate between the living memory of individual persons and the public memory of the communities to which [they] belong" (Ricoeur 131). The connection between the individual and his or her community can elucidate the meaning of collective memory. Echoing Halbwachs, Ricoeur contends that memory belongs to individuals, but it is significantly shaped by a relationship with others. He also points out: "And yet the difference is strongly marked: between individual memory and collective memory the connection is intimate, immanent, the two types of memory interpenetrate one another" (Ricoeur 393).

In his essay “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” Egyptologist Jan Assmann categorizes three levels of memory – individual, communicative, and cultural – that play an important role in the construction of identity. Through this categorization, he builds on Halbwachs’ concept of collective memory by distinguishing between two types of collective memory: communicative and cultural. According to J. Assmann, the former pertains to the transmission of memory in “everyday interaction and communication,” and it “has only a limited time depth which normally reaches no farther back than eighty years” (J. Assmann 111). On the other hand, the latter refers to “a kind of institution. It is exteriorized, objectified, and stored away in symbolic forms that, unlike the sounds of words or the sight of gestures, are stable and situation-transcendent (J. Assmann 110-111). Furthermore, he states that groups that “do not ‘have’ a memory tend to ‘make’ themselves one by means of things meant as reminders such as monuments, museums, libraries, archives, and other mnemonic institutions” (J. Assmann 111). These reminders also serve as forms of cultural memory. Thus, cultural memory is based on a system of signs, symbols, traditions, practices, and sites.

It must be noted that history has a strong relation to collective memory. Both history and collective memory are complementary and necessary concepts to understand the past of a community. Therefore, it is no surprise that collective memory is often conflated with history. However, in his posthumous work, *The Collective Memory*, Halbwachs argues that history and collective memory are two different phenomena. Treating history and collective memory as antithetical, he “makes a distinction between knowing a list of dates, which he would call history or abstract knowledge of the past, and reconstruction of past lived experience, which he would call memory” (Russell 797). According to him, history deals with the objective truth while memory deals with the subjective truth. Similarly, historian Pierre Nora touches on issues of history in relation to collective memory and argues that memory and history are

far from being synonymous. He asserts that “Memory is life, borne by living societies founded on its name. It remains in permanent evolution...History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer” (Nora 8). Thus, for Nora, memory forms from the interaction of the individuals within a group and is independent from history which lacks such interaction.

## 2.2 The Nexus between Memory, Power, and Resistance

Memory plays an important role in the organization of power. In his canonical novel *1984*, George Orwell argues that those “who control the past control the future,” and those “who control the present control the past” (Orwell 313). Various scholars over the ages have discussed, directly or indirectly, the connection between memory and power. For instance, in his book *Prison Notebooks*, Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci introduces the concept of hegemony to describe how power works in a more complicated way than the mere use of physical force and coercion. He focuses specifically on the consensual submission of people who are dominated. According to him, force and consent “balance each other so that force does not overwhelm consent” (Gramsci 156). Moreover, French philosopher Louis Althusser coined the term ideology to describe the wide range of social, cultural, and institutional practices that give rise to the repository of the ideas of the dominant class. In *For Marx*, he claims that ideology “is indispensable in any society if men are to be formed, transformed and equipped to respond to the demands of their conditions of existence” (Althusser 235). Hence, Gramsci and Althusser’s views on power indirectly suggest that it is through memory that dominant ideologies and hegemonies are disseminated.

In addition, Michel Foucault spoke of discourses that produce and strengthen knowledge and power. Foucault interpreted memory as a discourse, arguing that memory is an unwitting component of power, that memory is constructed rather than naturally occurring,

and that truth is made rather than given. In his discussion of power, he developed his theory of panopticism and also focused on the idea of resistance. According to him, a panopticon is a kind of internal surveillance that induces “in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power” (Foucault, *Discipline* 201).

Furthermore, in his book *The History of Sexuality*, he claims that “Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere” (Foucault, *The History* 93). He also expounds a well-known argument that “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” (Foucault, *The History* 95). This means that if there are multiple sources of power, then the existence of multiple sources of resistance is inevitable. Thus, the notion of memory as a site of constant struggle against power and forgetting is in consonance with Foucault’s ideas on power and resistance.

### 2.3 The Politics of Forgetting

In the twenty-first century, a range of scholars in the field of memory studies has explored the politics of memory – and by extension the politics of forgetting. They have specifically focused on the roles of memory and history as pawns or tools for controlled forgetting. There are various angles from which to view the notion of forgetting: voluntary and involuntary forgetting, individual and collective forgetting, pathological forgetting (amnesia), etc. This dissertation focuses mainly on involuntary, collective forgetting. In *Memory, History, Forgetting*, Paul Ricoeur refers to a form of collective forgetting that concerns a national imperative to ignore crimes committed in the past. More specifically, he discusses the abuses of collective memory when governing powers impose ‘official’ versions of history upon their subjects (Ricoeur 448). Thus, power is used to manipulate the past and impose a new meaning. Anthropologist Paul Connerton, in his article “Seven Types of Forgetting,” discusses a type of forgetting known as “repressive erasure.” According to him,

repressive erasure has been “precipitated by an act of state” and has been seen in totalitarian regimes throughout history (Connerton, “Seven Types” 61). Moreover, Connerton, in his book *How Societies Remember* claims: “The more total the aspirations of a new regime, the more imperiously will it seek to introduce an era of forced forgetting...All totalitarianisms behave in this way: the mental enslavement of the subjects of a totalitarian regime begins when their memories are taken away” (Connerton, *How Societies* 12-14). Therefore, according to him, controlling a society’s collective memory can be considered as a means of attaining power and authority.

Like Connerton, literary scholar Aleida Assmann suggests that forgetting is not just a one-dimensional or unitary phenomenon: it comes in various forms, including those associated with trauma, amnesties, and repressive state apparatuses. In her work *Forms of Forgetting*, A. Assmann proposes seven different forms of collective forgetting, categorizing these forms as neutral, positive, or negative. She refers to one of the negative forms of forgetting as repressive forgetting, a concept that is almost identical to Connerton’s notion of repressive erasure. Repressive forgetting “supports and maintains power” (A. Assmann). It is essentially “memoricide,” or the killing of the memory of an individual or a group. This means that forgetting fulfills a repressive function since history or collective memory is manipulated by those in power. Often precipitated by dictatorships and totalitarian regimes, this form of forgetting is used to gain total control of the subjects.<sup>4</sup> In addition, this kind of forgetting ultimately forces the responsibility of remembering to rest on the subjects.

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<sup>4</sup> In their works, both Connerton and A. Assmann mainly focus on the ability of totalitarian regimes or dictators to control memory and impose forgetting. However, it must be noted that the grip on memory is not a specialty of totalitarian regimes and dictators alone; it is the specialty of all those who seek to maintain or strengthen their power.

## Chapter 3: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

As a prolific author of a number of books for children and adults, Lois Lowry often tackles profound subjects such as racism, personal loss, grief, memory, etc. Her most ambitious and influential young adult novel *The Giver*, the first in a quartet of novels, is a haunting tale about a community that lacks communal memories. Of all of Lowry's works, *The Giver* has perhaps been read most often with respect to the complexities of memory, their philosophical and psychological contexts, and their significance for the protagonist and his community at large. The first section of this chapter ruminates on the role of the Committee of Elders, the governing body of the novel's fictional community. It attempts to answer the question of why the Committee imposes what Connerton and A. Assmann call repressive erasure/forgetting. It also uses Gramsci's idea of hegemony to argue that the truly effective engine of repression may not be the Committee but the willing public acquiescence. The second section uses Halbwachs and J. Assmann's theories to examine the loss of the community's capacity for collective memory. Finally, the last section relies on Foucault's approach to power and resistance to investigate the subversive role of memory in resisting the ruling system. It also discusses the role of memory as a potential catalyst for transformative change for the future.

### 3.1: The Role of the Committee of Elders

In Lowry's *The Giver*, it is the governing ideology of "Sameness" that represents the oppressively homogenous community. In order to actualize their utopian ideal of "Sameness," the Committee of Elders, a governing body with totalitarian political tendencies, erases almost all memories of the community's collective past and takes draconian measures to limit individual thought. The Committee's ultimate goal is to eradicate differences in order to achieve a stable and peaceful society, a society where people can live a "life where nothing

was ever unexpected. Or inconvenient. Or unusual” and a “life without color, pain, or past” (Lowry 210). In the regimented antiseptic community, all of the citizens are expected to follow extensive rules, regulations, and rituals. They are expected to look, speak, and act in the same way in order to avoid any conflicts. Thus, the Elders are concerned with the obliteration of individuality and of the merging of the individual into the collective. People who demonstrate any discrepancies are warned, punished, and in the worst case “released” or euthanized.

The Elders see the memories of the past as a potential threat to their peaceful community. If citizens are able to remember their communal past, they will realize that the world they inhabit used to be – and therefore can be – different. Thus, the Elders think that the erasure of memory is necessary for the community to maintain its stability and peace and for the status quo to remain unquestioned. The Chief Elder tells Jonas, the protagonist, that the past contains “pain of a magnitude that none of us here can comprehend” (Lowry 63). As this quote demonstrates, the Elders believe that the past brings discomfort and pain. Although their intention to create a society without differences and pain may seem innocuous, their heavy-handed determination to control the past demonstrates their repressive powers. The Committee of Elders may lack the irrational cruelty that most repressive regimes or states practice, but they still restrict people’s freedom and control the way people think and act. In this sense, Lowry’s novel offers a clear example of Connerton and A. Assmann’s notion of repressive erasure/forgetting. The Committee controls the community in various ways. Every day, adults, whose biologically unrelated family units have been selected for them, go to their assigned jobs before returning to their homes to eat a prepared meal at a specific time with their family. All family members are expected to participate in obligatory and idiosyncratic rituals such as the “sharing of dreams” during breakfast and the “telling of feelings” during the evening meal. These rituals are meant to help the citizens deal with their psychological

and emotional issues. Moreover, each citizen's actions and words are closely monitored for rule violations. The constant surveillance is reminiscent of Foucauldian panopticism, discouraging inquisitiveness and preventing citizens from dissenting. Lowry, thus, highlights the perverted logic of the Elders founded on the utopia of conformity and equality. Although they hide behind a benevolent mask, the council of Elders represents a repressive regime, forcing the citizens to conform to their dictates and to censor themselves. Gramsci's idea of hegemony is especially relevant in discussing the power that the Elders have over the citizens. Instead of simply being forced or coerced into accepting the rules and regulations of the Elders, it seems that the citizens consent to their own domination. They live their lives completely unaware of the collective past they have been deprived of because they forgot the fact that they have forgotten the past. They are complicit in their own forgetting, working with the rules and restrictions of the Elders rather than against them. Thus, the novel suggests that the interplay of memory and power is suffused with hegemonic intention.

### 3.2 The Effects of Forgetting on Collective Memory

The absolute control that the Committee of Elders has over the citizenry destabilizes the functioning of the social frameworks of memory and hinders the construction of collective, communicative memory. As Halbwachs states, collective memory tends to operate on systems of family, religious groups, social classes, etc. However, in the novel, these systems either do not exist or do not fulfill the function that they are meant to fulfill. For example, families in the community are structured in a way that prevents the sharing of memories past one generation. In her essay "*The Giver: Memory Erased, Death Marginalized, Freedom Forgotten*," Katarzyna Baran states:

As there is almost no possibility of family contact once children leave their units, people are unaware of what happens to their parents and never come to know their



grandparents. In this way, family genealogy is broken up and the few memories are limited to one generation only. Thus, memories shared by any generation become insulated. (287)

As the above quote demonstrates, family relations and bonds are not durable in the community since intergenerational contact is rare. This means that the formation of communicative memory is extremely difficult. Additionally, contact with nearby communities is extremely limited, and information about the larger world is essentially unknown. Although there are cargo planes that deliver supplies, none of the citizens know the planes' point of origin. Hence, the lack of interaction that the community members have with each other and with the outside world distorts the concept of being a group or society since the unifying element, a sense of belongingness, is absent. Due to this lack of belongingness, the communicative memory of the community becomes limited. Even when individuals interact, their interactions are usually a part of rituals or mandatory activities that are often monitored, and thus they are unable to orally transmit a past in a genuine manner. For instance, during the annual ceremonies, the citizens talk about earlier ceremonies. However, at no point do such ceremonies make references to the community's past. No founding Elders are commemorated and no historical events are ritually celebrated or re-enacted. The citizens themselves seem disinterested in finding out how their society was founded in the first place or what conflicts might have taken place to bring about their present state. Since they are content with their one-generation memories, they perceive little need for change and happily refrain from digging up the past. They do not feel the need to savor, share, and exchange their memories. Thus, the communicative memories formed during such ceremonies are myopic and devoid of any deep meaning.

Moreover, it is nearly impossible for collective, cultural memories to be produced, mediated, and disseminated in Lowry's fictional community. The past, arguably, has no

objective existence, meaning that it only exists in written records, in cultural/historical artifacts, and in human memories. Thus, the past can be defined as whatever such records, artifacts, and memories agree upon. In *The Giver*, access to books and history is limited. The regulation of collective, cultural memory is what enables the Elders to control the populace. Even in their homes, citizens have no newspapers, telephones, computers, televisions, or other media devices. Each household contains only what is deemed necessary: “a dictionary, and the thick community volume which contained descriptions of every office, factory, building, and committee. And the Book of Rules, of course” (Lowry 94). Furthermore, the community has utilitarian buildings named for their function – Birthing Center, Nurturing Center, Childcare Center, Recreation Area, Rehabilitation Center, House of the Old, etc. However, it has no libraries, museums, memorials, monuments, or other mnemonic sites. The only site that may be described as mnemonic is the Hall of Open Records, a building that serves as a public archive that supposedly stores all the information about the citizens. However, there does not seem to be any information about past generations. Most of the available information is regarding minor details like the age of the citizens or the names of the citizens’ birth parents and grandparents. Since the Elders are in full control of all records and are equally in full control of the minds and actions of the citizens, the past is whatever the Elders choose to make it. As J. Assmann states, “external objects” serve as “carriers of memory” (J. Assmann 111). However, such objects are lacking in Lowry’s fictional community. Thus, the community lacks ideological apparatuses that can consolidate a sense of authenticity of the cultural memory. In Lowry’s fictional community, cultural memory is only preserved within the mind of Jonas and The Giver.

### 3.3 Memory as an Agent of Change

As stated in the previous section, collective memory in the community is curtailed. However, this does not mean that collective memory is completely absent. In the novel, the

collective memories of the community are relegated to a single person – the Receiver of Memory – who essentially takes the places of archives. The Receiver becomes the living record of all the collective memory of the community. The Elders rely on the Receiver for counsel and advice whenever they are faced with situations that they have never experienced before. Since the Receiver possesses the memory of past policies, the Elders believe that his wisdom and historical knowledge can be useful. Hence, the Receiver is the most honored position in the fictional world. Presumably, then, the community highly values memory, which is what Jonas, the protagonist who has been selected to serve as the Receiver of Memory, is trained to receive and preserve. He is expected to bear the weight of the past with the help of The Giver (the previous Receiver). When The Giver first tries to explain the scope of the memories Jonas is to receive, the latter replies: “I’m sorry sir... I don’t know what you mean when you say ‘the whole world’ or ‘generations before him.’ I thought there was only us. I thought there was only now” (Lowry 98). This shows that Jonas is not even aware of the fact he has forgotten the past. However, as the plot of the novel progresses, Jonas begins to recollect the past that he never knew.

The collective memories that The Giver transmit to Jonas through tactile transference become a part of the latter’s individual memory. Jonas’s individual memory (the memory of the life he has known in this community so far) and the collective memory that The Giver transmits to him interact, allowing his individual memory to flourish. Critic Carter F. Hanson, in his article “The Utopian Function of Memory in Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*,” writes: “By receiving memories through a wakeful dream state as lived experience, as opposed to a more passive method, Jonas takes full possession of them. They become distinctly his memories and his past, not just a generalized historical past” (52). With The Giver’s transference of memories, Lowry suggests that the sharing of memories establishes intimacy and warmth. However, the magnitude of the collective memory and knowledge of the past is too

burdensome for a single person to bear. Since Jonas has been forbidden to share the memories he receives from The Giver with other members of the community, he is forced to delve into the past by himself.

Lowry, through the character of The Giver, suggests that memory must be collectively shared rather than individually felt. The Giver tells Jonas: “The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It’s the loneliness of it” (Lowry 196). Memories – painful, traumatic, or otherwise – need to be shared because pain and suffering are part of human nature. In order to construct a better world, memories are needed so that people can avoid repeating past mistakes. By recovering his community’s collective memories and attaining some connection with the past, Jonas recognizes his situation for what it really is. Not only does he attain pleasant memories such as those of snow, sunshine, and rainbows, he also gains crushingly painful memories of wars, illness, and even death. Thanks to the memories he receives from The Giver, Jonas becomes aware of the importance of difference and free will. He eventually realizes that his community has sacrificed memory and freedom for control and order. As the only members of the community with any knowledge and memory of what has been sacrificed, Jonas and The Giver take it upon themselves to bring about change in their community. In order to resist the collective forgetting and to help the rest of the community members remember, they concoct a plan. The Giver tells Jonas that when a Receiver of Memory dies or leaves the community, all of his memories will be passed back to the general community. After hearing this, Jonas decides to release the collective memories back into the population by fleeing with Gabriel, his foster brother, to Elsewhere, a place outside of the community “that held their future and their past,” a place “where families created and keep memories, where they celebrated love” (Lowry 228). Ironically, the system that the Committee of Elders implemented is challenged from within, with the use of memory that they tried to control. Thus, Lowry suggests that power is memory and memory is power.

This suggestion is reminiscent of Foucault's belief that "Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (Foucault, *The History* 93). In *The Giver*, power and resistance both come from memory. Since the Elders themselves do not remember what resistance means, they cannot even imagine the possibility of any form of dissent. The Elders underestimated the power that they invested in both Jonas and The Giver. By leaving his community, Jonas resists the institutional structures and hegemonic ideologies of his community and enables collective memory to be rescued and made known. Hence, resistance becomes a form of power and memory serves as an agent of change. As Hanson contends in his reading of Lowry's novel, "Memory, historical awareness and hope can be harnessed to bring about resistance and significant change" (Hanson 46).

To recapitulate, the Committee of Elders exerts utmost control over the citizens by enforcing forgetting and ensuring uniformity. As a result, citizens are expected to follow a specific set of rules and regulations which result in a limited number of social frameworks of memory and therefore a limited amount of collective, communicative memory. Furthermore, since the Elders make sure that only the records of the past that comply with their ideology of "Sameness" are preserved, there is limited access to collective, cultural memory. However, as the Receiver of Memory, Jonas himself becomes the retainer of collective memory, allowing his individual memory to develop. In addition, memory and the act of remembering are shown as possible sites of resistance in the novel. By remembering the past, Jonas and The Giver figure out how to resist the ruling system and its ideology. Ultimately, Lowry seems to suggest that memory is liberating since the novel shows how the resistance against the dominant power is drawn from memories of the past.

## Chapter 4: Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*

In many of her works, Yoko Ogawa often separates her protagonists from the rest of the world and even from their own past. By doing so, she explores the malleability of memory and depicts the various ways in which memory shapes our identity. For instance, published in 2003 and translated into English in 2009 by Stephen Snyder, one of Ogawa's most critically acclaimed novels is *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, a story of a Japanese housekeeper and a mathematics professor whose long-term memory stops in 1975 and whose short-term memory is limited to 80 minutes. Similarly, *The Memory Police*, another one of her renowned novels and the focus of this chapter, deals with the erasure of memory. However, as opposed to her later work like *The Housekeeper and the Professor*, Ogawa's *The Memory Police* focuses on how individuals deal with collective forgetting. The first section of this chapter examines the novel by relying on Connerton and A. Assmann's concept of repressive erasure/forgetting. It tries to answer the question of who wants whom to forget what and for what purpose. The second section uses J. Assmann's theories of communicative and cultural memory to examine how forgetting affects individual and collective memories. Finally, the last section discusses how individual remembering is a subversive act that forms a part of the struggle against those in command.

### 4.1 The Role of the Memory Police

Ogawa's *The Memory Police* ruminates on the precarious nature of memory, individual and collective, which is constantly under the threat of erasure by the Memory Police, a quasi-military force and the only manifestation of authority in the novel. The characters in the novel are immersed in a world where imposed forgetting and constant surveillance are a doleful and persistent reality. The presence of the eponymous enforcers is heavy since they are a frightening symbol of potential brutality. In an island where the

tentacles of the Memory Police are “lurking everywhere” and infiltrating all aspects of public and private life, the politicization of memory is evident (Ogawa 25). Orwellian and Kafkaesque in manner, the Memory Police operate through an organized process of forgetting in order to establish control and supremacy. Identified by their “dark green uniforms, with heavy belts and black boots,” the omnipresent Memory Police possess the authority to enter any dwelling without warning or justification and to apprehend anyone who shows signs of being able to retain their memory (Ogawa 12). The officers operate “efficiently, thoroughly, systematically, and without any trace of emotion” for their sole mission to enforce systematic erasure of objects as well as the memories and emotions attached to those objects (Ogawa 150). At first, the Memory Police raid people’s homes only at night, eliminating contrabands and carting off people who act in a way that can be conceived as dissident in any way. However, as the novel continues, they start ransacking homes brazenly during the day. This ruthless transgression of privacy demonstrates the sinister nature and repressive power of the state. The narrator even thinks about how “[She had] been told it was best not to talk about such sensitive matters in public. There was no telling whether plainclothes police might be nearby” (Ogawa 23). Here, the “plainclothes police” refers to spies who serve as the eyes and ears of the Memory Police. This highlights the terrors of state surveillance. The inhabitants on the island are forced to conduct themselves as though they are being watched, even if nobody is watching. The feeling of being constantly watched becomes the new normal. Drawing on Foucault’s idea of the panopticon, it is evident that the Memory Police and the “plainclothes police” are like the guards watching from the panoptic prison tower. Furthermore, the fact that spies are essentially ubiquitous generates distrust among the citizens, curbing their readiness to speak freely to each other and preventing them from forming communicative memories. It must be noted that unlike Lowry’s *The Giver*, Ogawa’s novel does not specify the governing ideology

of the people who hold power. Although little is revealed about the Memory Police and their ulterior motive, it is evident that they serve as a clear-cut metaphor for a totalitarian surveillance state that wishes to consolidate power. Since the Memory Police could be linked to any particular place or body of government, the novel can be read as a political allegory.

The Memory Police assert power and control over the populace not only through surveillance but also through force. When the unnamed old man, a friend of the narrator, was taken and detained by the Memory Police, the narrator believes that “[The Memory Police] could have tortured him. There’s no knowing what they’re capable of” (Ogawa 99). This implies that the Memory Police are most likely capable of carrying out violent and brutal acts of oppression. When the narrator visits the headquarters of the Memory Police in order to find the old man, a member of the Memory Police tells her:

Our primary function here is to assure that there are no delays in the process and that useless memories disappear quickly and easily. I’m sure you’d agree that there’s no point in holding on to them. If your big toe becomes infected with gangrene, you cut it off as soon as you can. If you do nothing, you end up losing the whole leg. The principle is the same. The only difference is that you can’t touch or see memories, or get inside the hearts they’re kept in. Each one of us hides them away in secret. So, since our adversary is invisible, we are forced to use our intuition. It is extremely delicate work. In order to unmask these invisible secrets, to analyze and sort and dispose of them, we must work in secret, to protect ourselves. (Ogawa 106)

The above quote demonstrates the calculating and callous nature of the Memory Police. With the extraordinary amount of power that they hold, the Memory Police exercise mass control over the islanders. For them, “anything that fails to vanish when they say it should is inconceivable. So they force it to disappear with their own hands” (Ogawa 25). They do



everything they can to impose forgetting and eliminate any resistance that goes against their goals. Hence, the novel perfectly captures Connerton's concept of repressive erasure and A. Assmann's concept of repressive forgetting, both of which posit that ruling parties, states, or governments have the power to enforce forgetting to strengthen their position.

The novel shows how compliance is essentially enforced through the fear engendered by a loaded gun. Not only do the Memory Police rely on force to maintain their power, but they also focus on establishing consent among the general public. One of the most insidious aspects of the collective erasure of memory is the ease and obsequiousness with which most of the inhabitants handle each disappearance. The encroaching presence of the Memory Police incites widespread fear amongst the inhabitants who believe that all conversations and activities are being monitored. Thus, motivated by fear, they reluctantly but passively and dutifully accommodate the disappearances "with as little fuss as possible and make do with what's left," treating the gradual loss of memory and the erosion of self with equanimity (Ogawa 251). Gramsci's idea of hegemony is useful here in understanding the power dynamics within the island. To ensure their survival, most of the inhabitants willingly give up what hurts most to lose. Hence, they become complicit in their own demise.

#### 4.2 The Effects of Forgetting on Individual and Collective Memory

The cognitive and physical disappearances of objects engender the curtailment of individual and collective memories. The significance of objects is found in the memories people attribute to them. However, if the memories of objects vanish, the objects themselves become meaningless. Thus, forgetting objects and memories related to those objects take a psychological toll on everyone. Every day, the islanders wake to a presentiment of loss and change, as the memory of something fades. One of the most profound moments in the novel takes place one morning when the narrator realizes that her memories of photographs have

vanished. While staring at a group of photographs, including one of her late mother, the narrator desperately tries to remember the story behind each image. However, she finds “no memories, no response” (Ogawa 95). The photographs elude her and become “nothing more than pieces of paper” (Ogawa 95). Before the Memory Police begin hunting down all the “disappeared” objects on the island, she burns all of the photographs she owns until all that is left to remember of her deceased parents is a pile of ash. It is at this point in the novel that the pernicious effects of forgetting on individual memory become evident.

Although objects physically disappear and the memories of objects cognitively disappear, the inhabitants remain partially conscious about the fact that they have forgotten something. In order to minimize the feelings of discomfort that emerge from such partial consciousness, they repress their feelings. However, by the end of the novel, the islanders face the gradual disappearance of themselves. First, the sensation in their left legs disappears, forcing people to hold onto walls or rely on crutches. Then, their right arm disappears, remaining attached to the body but completely lifeless. After the narrator’s body disappears, all that remains is her disembodied voice which also ceases to exist after some time. The narrator’s experience of “death” or her loss of memory and self is similar to the experience that the main character in her novel goes through. At one point, the main character, a typewriter that loses her voice, states: “I’ve begun to feel my body growing more distant from my soul...I am reduced to pieces in no time at all” (Ogawa 166). Thus, Ogawa emphasizes that in the end, without memory, people literally become nothing. Their identities become compromised. This brings memory in relation to the postmodernist concept of the decentered self. Hence, Ogawa suggests that the loss of individual memory is tantamount to the loss of identity.

As mentioned in the first section of this chapter, surveillance makes it difficult for the islanders to communicate freely. As a result, “everyday interaction and communication,” the

foundation for communicative memory, is limited (J. Assmann 111). Cultural memory also becomes limited. While various objects immediately lose their meaning to the island's inhabitants, they must still be discarded or destroyed. The inhabitants are forced to immediately incinerate such objects in their possession in a funeral-like ritual that symbolizes collective memory erasure. When perfumes vanish, the inhabitants pour each vial of scent into the river. When roses disappear, they scatter all of the rose petals into the sea. When books disappear, they gather up their books to burn them in giant bonfires. Even the only library on the island becomes engulfed in flames. Here, the burning of books and the destruction of the library poignantly emphasize the loss of recorded histories and cultural memories. Ogawa shows how everything can be torn from the pages of history and eradicated from collective memory. Thus, the novel explores the control that the Memory Police has on collective memory. Due to the obliteration of items like books, the community on the island has lost its capacity for collective, cultural memory. The Memory Police prevent cultural memory from being mediated and from being a part of local or global exchange of images and story fragments. As J. Assmann posits, cultural memories are linked to various materials of recollection, including objects and images. Thus, without objects and images, the construction of cultural memory on the island is difficult.

### 4.3 Remembering as Resistance

While the first section of this chapter illustrated the abuse of memory in the hands of power, this section foregrounds memory as a site of resistance in *The Memory Police*. The novel demonstrates the crucial role memory plays in resisting oppression. As mentioned in the first section, most of the islanders do not resist the Memory Police and the imposed forgetting. They placidly accept their situation. However, the novel depicts various ways in which the main characters resist or try to resist. According to Foucault, in the power network, there are multiple points of resistance. There are resistances that are inevitable, possible,

improbable; others that are passive, active, solitary, or concerted; and still others that are quick to succeed or fail. In *The Memory Police*, Ogawa focuses mainly on passive resistance by individuals.

Although none of the characters take up arms to fight the Memory Police, many of them still participate in passive resistance. For instance, there are some citizens whose genetic makeup allows them to retain their memories. R and the narrator's mother are among them. Their ability to retain their memory can be regarded as a form of passive resistance against the Memory Police. For them, objects are like talismans that must be hidden and protected. For instance, many years earlier, in her attempt to preserve the past, the narrator's mother, a sculptor, hides objects inside small sculptures. However, she eventually receives a summons from the Memory Police who came to take her away on a limousine, and "her body came back to [her family] a week later, along with her death certificate" (Ogawa 33). Similarly, R, who also acts as a custodian of memory, hides objects from the past for safekeeping. Eventually, the secret annex he lives in to avoid the police becomes a space of resistance and a repository of forbidden but nostalgic memorabilia: ferry ticket, harmonica, ramune candy, etc. R also tries desperately to remind the narrator and the old man about the past and encourages them to hold on to their thoughts when objects disappear. For example, he gives a music box to the old man on the latter's birthday, hoping it will at least offer fleeting flashes of recall. However, the melody that the music box produces is otherworldly to the old man. Seeing objects that have "disappeared" fails to stir any memories and elicit emotional response. Normally, objects do not have a memory of their own, but they may trigger people's memory because they carry memories that people have invested in them. However, in the novel, objects do not hold such memory for the victims of repressive forgetting. Nonetheless, R articulates the scope of resistance against forgetting by stating:

“No matter how many memories these men take away, they’ll never reduce it to nothing” (Ogawa 158).

Moreover, the fact that there are even people who go out of their ways to help the threatened inhabitants of the island proves that not everyone is fully accepting of the Memory Police’s ways. R states “I’ve heard that there’s a fairly large underground network that creates these safe houses and then keeps them running” (Ogawa 23). This attests to the fact that there are many people who are secretly resisting the Memory Police by helping the people who have the ability to remember. Among such people, the narrator defies the Memory Police by hiding R in a secret room of her house. However, unlike her mother and R, she cannot keep her memories. When R asks the narrator if she wants to remember her lost memories, the latter replies: “I don’t even know what it is I should be remembering. What’s gone is gone completely” (Ogawa 82). Thus, for the narrator, remembering is a daunting and exhausting task that demands a great deal of effort. Yet, she shows small acts of resistance by clinging resolutely to the objects that she has forgotten in order to maintain her very being. In an attempt to access her memories, she also continues to write her novel that she has been struggling to finish. Even after forgetting what a novel is, she continues to write one in order to remember. For the narrator, the process of trying to remember simultaneously illuminates her memory and unsettles her. Thus, remembering becomes a subversive act and writing serves as a medium of expression that, though unable to counteract the loss of memory, nevertheless allows the narrator to feel a ghostly presence of the past. It is pertinent to point out that totalitarian regimes are classically threatened by artists and writers. They fear human imagination and creativity because it could lead to defiance and revolution. By depicting how the narrator tries to retain her memory by writing, Ogawa seems to be reflecting upon the notion of remembering as a form of resistance.

In conclusion, like Lowry's *The Giver*, Ishiguro's *The Memory Police* highlights the issue of control, surveillance, and centralized power. Like The Committee of Elders in *The Giver*, the Memory Police uses their repressive powers to impose forgetting. Once the citizens begin to forget objects and past memories, it becomes difficult for them to produce new individual and collective memories. However, with the help of R who is immune to forgetting, characters like the narrator and the old man attempt to preserve their memories in the hopes of resisting oppressive power and forgetting. In the end, most of the citizens fail to remember what they have forgotten, but memory does not completely disappear thanks to people like R who can remember.

## Chapter 5: Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant*

Kazuo Ishiguro's name belongs to that pantheon of writers who have used their oeuvres to highlight the ways in which the past pours into the present. Since his novels frequently bear a sustained interest in the theme of memory, there is a proclivity in academic circles to analyze his work using various theories in the field of memory studies. In his earlier novels such as *A Pale View of Hills* (1982), *The Remains of the Day* (1989), *The Unconsoled* (1995), and *Never Let Me Go* (2005), Ishiguro foregrounds the disjointed, fragmented, and unreliable nature of memory by depicting deeply flawed individuals who are tormented by their past and their personal baggage of loss, trauma, or guilt. As a novel that focuses more on the collective dimension of the past, *The Buried Giant* is arguably Ishiguro's best meditation on the machinations of memory and forgetting and of war and peace. In the novel, Ishiguro presents a fragile, post-Arthurian Britain where a memory-dulling mist hangs over the land, causing everything to be balanced on the knife-edge: marriage, solidarity, peace, the thin veneer of civilization, etc. This chapter first explores how and why collective forgetting has been imposed in the world of the novel. It then proceeds to analyze the absence or the lack of collective memory in the novel's fictional world by relying on J. Assmann's theories of communicative and cultural memory. Finally, this chapter concludes by discussing whether the need and/or desire for remembering overpowers the need and/or desire for forgetting and vice versa. The idea of remembering as a way to attain justice is also explored in the very end.

### 5.1 The Role of King Arthur

Like the previously discussed novels in earlier chapters, Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* shows that memory can be subjected to manipulation and totalization of meaning and history by oppressive figures of authority. In the novel, King Arthur, the king of Britons, creates a

treaty known as the Law of the Innocents, forbidding both Britons and Saxons from entering the other's village to slaughter innocent non-combatants when the men are away for battles. However, in order to deplete the Saxon population and prevent future wars, King Arthur breaks the treaty and orders his men to kill an entire village full of Saxon civilians. Knowing that he had crossed a line, he orders the supreme wizard Merlin to cast a spell on the she-dragon Querig in order to prevent the Saxons from remembering the fact that the Britons broke the treaty and slaughtered innocent people. Ordered by Arthur, Merlin erases the atrocity from the collective consciousness. Merlin's spell allows the dragon's breath to keep people's memories hidden, establishing political stability and peace as long as the dragon is alive. Thus, long after King Arthur dies, thanks to the dragon's breath, the magical mist of forgetfulness remains.

In the novel, memory and history can be considered as political instruments that are used by King Arthur to manipulate past events, specifically the massacre of the innocent Saxons. Memories are erased in order to avoid reprisals and to legitimize a version of a certain history over and above others. The mist has symbolic importance since it serves as proof of King Arthur's greatness. By controlling the past and enforcing forgetting, King Arthur preserves and even strengthens the image of himself as an honorable and fair king and as a savior who won a "great peace" across the land (Ishiguro 141). Yet, the breaking of the treaty is at odds with this image. Hence, he wants people to forget his foolish decision to betray the Saxons and also wants to protect his Briton subjects so that they would not suffer from the consequences of his mistake. King Arthur's ability to establish himself plausibly as a savior of his people can be regarded as a duplicitous talent and the source of his enormous power. By abusing his power in a rampant manner, King Arthur forcibly severs people from their past. Thus, Ishiguro foregrounds the political salience of memory by depicting King Arthur as an enforcer of forgetting. Unlike Lowry and Ogawa, Ishiguro only depicts a single



person instead of a regime as the cause of imposed forgetting. In fact, in an interview with *Guernica*, Ishiguro mentions that King Arthur in his novel is a “quasi-historical Arthur” (qtd. Rukeyser). He proceeds to explain that “You could even call him a dictator...He’s imposed some kind of peace, but it’s not good peace” (qtd. Rukeyser). Since forgetting has been precipitated by a dictator to deceive the populace, Connerton and A. Assmann’s notion of repressive erasure/forgetting can be applied to Ishiguro’s novel.

## 5.2 The Effects of Forgetting on Collective Memory

Due to the mist, the process of collective memory-making is in stasis. J. Assmann’s framework is applicable to *The Buried Giant* since communicative and cultural memories are curtailed in the novel’s world. Normally, various versions of the same event exist in people’s minds, and these versions could be the result of personal experience, group-shared experiences, community commemorative practices, etc. However, this is not the case in Ishiguro’s fictional post-Arthurian Britain. The protagonists, Axl and Beatrice, live on the outer fringes of a sprawling warren-like settlement. In this settlement, memory is not shared or exchanged between the villagers. Moreover, the fact that Axl and Beatrice are excluded from and treated with hostility by the rest of the villagers embodies the past that they have buried and forgotten. Thus, at the beginning of the novel, the reader is faced with the question of whether the couple wishes to forget the past. Although Axl seems to be able to recollect the past more than the other villagers, he does not discuss the resurfaced memories with the villagers. The omniscient narrator states:

You may wonder why Axl did not turn to his fellow villagers for assistance in recalling the past, but this was not as easy as you might suppose. For in this community the past was rarely discussed...I do not mean that it was taboo. I mean that it had somehow faded into a mist as dense as that which hung over the marshes. It

simply did not occur to these villagers to think about the past – even the recent one.

(Ishiguro 7-8).

Thus, most of the villagers in Axl's community are not troubled by the state of forgetfulness and do not feel the need to speak about the past. Their lack of interest in the past hinders the construction of collective, communicative memory. Moreover, it must be noted that not only do the villagers rarely discuss the distant past because no one fully remembers it, they also have difficulty recalling more recent events. Even if they try to talk about the past, the conversations that they exchange would be difficult or even impossible to remember. This means that communicative memory cannot be formed as long as the memory-shrouding mist exists in the world of Ishiguro's novel.

Moreover, Ishiguro's novel seems to dismiss the existence of cultural memories. It seems that since the memory is continually fading due to the mist, there are almost no material symbols, texts, images, sites, and rituals that allow for the formation of cultural memory in the novel's setting. Even if there are symbols, texts, images, and sites, they would serve no purpose since people would not be able to remember what they signify or represent. Perhaps the closest thing to a cultural memory in the novel is the giant's cairn. The narrator states: "it is always possible the giant's cairn was erected to mark the site of some such tragedy long ago when young innocents were slaughtered in war" (Ishiguro 305). The giant's cairn can be considered as a monument that has most likely been erected to mark the site where the bodies of innocent people who were slaughtered in the war have been buried. Although monuments normally feed into the construction of cultural memory, the mist prevents the cairn from serving as a reminder of the tragic past. Thus, the cairn fails to serve as tangible proof of the slaughter.

### 5.3 To Remember or to Forget?

As repeatedly mentioned throughout this dissertation, the role of memory has implications for both the individual and the collective. Without memory, people would not have a sense of who they are as individuals, and without the provision of shared memory, a group of individuals would not have a sense of solidarity and collective identity. Thus, there seems to be a consensus that people need to remember and resist forgetting. However, what if the virtues of forgetting outweigh the vices of remembering? *The Buried Giant* depicts the vices of remembering instead of the virtues of remembering. In the novel, remembering the past means to bring about personal pain and political strife. In the wake of the disappearance of collective memory, individuals like Axl and Beatrice take it upon themselves the duty to remember their own past. Throughout the novel, they are trapped between the ambivalent demands of memory – remembering and forgetting. At first, Axl and Beatrice attempt to piece together stray memories to make sense of their past. However, as time goes on, they find reasons to become uneasy and even frightened about remembering what they have forgotten. As they travel, memories of their shared past begin to return in blurry glimpses. It soon becomes clear that only the memories which keep them together are, in fact, welcome. For instance, when Beatrice recalls how Axl left her alone in the darkness of their abode to meet another woman, she quarrels with him and treats him coldly. This causes Axl to fear that the resurfaced memories might threaten their relationship. Therefore, when Beatrice forgets about the earlier quarrel, Axl chooses not to remind her and tells her: “If you’ve no memory of it, princess, then let it stay forgotten” (Ishiguro 284). This demonstrates how the main risk of remembering for Axl and Beatrice is the strain the memory puts on their relationship. By forgetting their past together as a couple, they are able to unintentionally overlook the problems in their conjugal life, of which – it becomes clear as the novel goes on – there are many. However, their fears of uncovering what happened in the past do not stop

them from ultimately remembering. At the end of the novel, the couple ends up remembering Beatrice's infidelity and the fact that their son had actually died of the plague much earlier. Thus, remembering prevents them from rekindling old flames. In the final chapter of the novel, not long before Axl and Beatrice part, the former asks the latter: "Could it be our love would never have grown so strong down the years had the mist not robbed us the way it did? Perhaps it allowed old wounds to heal" (Ishiguro 361). In the end, Axl believes, as he has done throughout most of the novel, that it is best to leave the mist of forgetfulness in place. On the other hand, Beatrice insists from the beginning that it is better to remember the past. In the end, Ishiguro invites the reader to ponder the question of whether it is better to remember or to forget individual memories.

The dilemma of whether it is better to remember or forget is also reflected in the portrayal of Wistan and Sir Gawain. As the novel progresses, it becomes evident that the characters' individual memory and remembering are linked to historical consciousness. The imposition of forgetting from above (mainly from King Arthur) can only be challenged by the reaffirmation, individual and collective, of the Britons and Saxons' commitment to live in truth even if the truth is brutal. In the novel, Wistan, a Saxon warrior who is inexplicably immune to the memory-defying mist, remembers all the turbulent and brutal past. As a person who lived among Britons in his childhood, Wistan is stuck in an ambivalent position. He has love as well as hatred for the Britons. For Wistan, historical consciousness interrupts and overrides individual memories of kindness. Wistan tells Edwin:

There are those Britons who tempt our respect, even our love, I know this only too well...So promise me this. Should I fall before I pass to you my skills, promise me you'll tend well this hatred in your heart. And should it ever flicker or threaten to die, shield it with care till the flame takes hold again. (Ishiguro 276-277)

Here, Wistan entrusts Edwin, his Saxon protégé, with the task of taking over the Saxons' vengeance against the Britons. In thinking about the past slaughter of Saxons by the Britons, Wistan laments that he has "seen dark hatred as bottomless as the sea on the faces of old women and tender children, and some days felt such hatred myself" (Ishiguro 162). Wistan is determined not to let the sufferings of the Saxons be consigned to oblivion. Since he remembers the past and believes that everyone has the right to know the truth about the past, he is willing to slay the dragon. Thus, he becomes the custodian of memory. For him, remembering is necessary even if it leads to bloodshed. It is not just an act of resistance against forgetting and against the already deceased King Arthur, but an act of fighting for justice.

Unlike Wistan who is on an errand to kill Querig, Sir Gawain, the nephew of King Arthur, is the protector of Querig. In his last attempt to convince Wistan not to slay the dragon, Sir Gawain states: "Without this she-dragon's breath, would peace ever have come? Look how we live now, sir! Old foes as cousins, village by village...Think, sir, once that breath should cease, what might be awoken across this land even after these years!" (326). For the sake of political expedience and peace, Sir Gawain seems to believe that it is better to let bygones be bygones. However, it is later revealed that he feels guilty about his own participation in the massacre of the innocent Saxons. Thus, he wants to forget the past not just for the sake of peace but for the sake of avoiding his feeling of guilt. Sir Gawain becomes an embodiment of the desire to forget the burden of one's individual memory and the desire to forget the nightmare of a collective past. After seeing the pitiful state of the dragon, Gawain realizes that she would only last another season or two. However, he clings to the hope that she may last "long enough for old wounds to heal forever, and an eternal peace to hold among us" (Ishiguro 327). Ishiguro seems to imply that it is pointless to wish that the past can be forgotten or that the pain of the past can be fully healed by time.

The risks of remembering are not limited to the personal. In *The Buried Giant*, individual forgetting is correlated to the erasure of collective memory which the nation is guilty of, thereby establishing a link between the personal and the political. Since memory is double-edged, it can serve as a medium for conflict resolution and peaceful coexistence or for stirring up past antagonisms and perpetuating old hatred. *The Buried Giant* centers on the following question: do past injustices necessitate mass forgetting when forgiveness is not an option? By exploring the answer to this question, Ishiguro forces both the characters and the readers to face extremely difficult ethical conundrums. At the outset, it might seem obvious that Querig must be slain since imposing collective forgetting is undoubtedly unjust. However, it is important to remember that the she-dragon's wicked presence comes with a peacekeeping service. Her breath helps to maintain the uneasy relationship between the Saxons and the Britons and even between individuals like Axl and Beatrice. In the novel, a monk raises a poignant question that seems to be at the heart of the book: "Is it not better some things remain hidden from our minds?" (Ishiguro 179). Once the mist is lifted and the communally shared past is revealed, the renewed hatred between the Saxons and the Britons will bring yet more bloodshed. Thus, forgetting means that terrible injustices go unpunished while remembering means that society could fall into a never-ending cycle of tension, hatred, and revenge. Rebecca Suter states in her reading of the novel that "Forgetting, the sovereign thought, was essential in order to avoid resentment and revengefulness among the survivors; it was the only way to enable former enemies to become friendly neighbors" (Suter 74). Although it may seem preferable to consolidate the peace of a nation by forgetting, the novel suggests that there is an ethical imperative to remember the past and that remembering is inevitable – even if remembering leads to retroactively seeking a retributive justice that could compromise peace. In the end, the reader is caught in the crosshairs of memory, questioning if the mist of forgetfulness was a curse or a gift, heaven or hell. The novel's denouement

emphasizes the inevitability of remembering. The inevitability of remembering is succinctly epitomized in the following line of the novel: “the giant, once well buried, now stirs” (Ishiguro 340). The giant is a metaphor for memory itself and perhaps the collective memory of horror.

To conclude this section, *The Buried Giant* depicts how forgetting has been imposed by the order of the dictatorial King Arthur. The novel can be considered as an example of Connerton and A. Assmann’s notion of repressive erasure/forgetting since King Arthur exercises power without interference by others and abuses that power. Additionally, Ishiguro shows that collective memory in the novel is nearly non-existent. Communicative memory cannot be formed since people are constantly forgetting even the most recent events, interactions, and conversations. On the other hand, objects and sites that are meant to serve as cultural memory may exist, but they do not fulfill their function since people cannot remember them. Moreover, *The Buried Giant*, compared to the novels of previous chapters, emphasizes more on the ethics of memory and the necessity for justice. Instead of emphasizing the notion of remembering as an act of resistance, Ishiguro’s novel focuses more on the notion of remembering as a step toward justice. And what stands out the most in the novel is how Ishiguro forces his characters and readers to decide which of the two extremes is better: forget everything and live in ignorance or remember everything and live in agony.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, Yoko Ogawa's *The Memory Police*, and Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* are labyrinthine explorations of a constellation of themes. The novels lend themselves particularly well to an analysis of the concept of memory. As stated in the introduction, they can all be read as allegorical illustrations of Milan Kundera's oft-cited maxim: "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting" (3). These novels situate memory in personal-social-political praxis that emphasizes the nexus between memory and power, between forgetting and individual/collective memory, and between remembering and resistance. Thus, the authors' perspectives are complementary, and their insights about memory are remarkably similar. Each author essentially advances the argument, albeit in different ways, that power is memory and memory is power. By analyzing the experiences of various characters in the world of imposed forgetting, it becomes easy to conclude that memory is politicized and that individual memory and collective memory (as a synthesis of communicative and cultural memory) are fragile and intimately connected to one's senses, feelings, identity, and community.

All of the novels under discussion in this dissertation have demonstrated the ideological significance of memory for political action. They depict people's susceptibility to the rhetoric of elites who wield the power to manipulate and disseminate ideas and even completely eradicate the past. The figure or institution of authority increases its power and influence by controlling and manipulating people's memory. The Committee of Elders in *The Giver*, the titular enforcers in *The Memory Police*, and King Arthur in *The Buried Giant* are reflective of the leaders and figures of authority in places like Mao's China, Nazi Germany, and other repressive societies in history. This is especially true for *The Giver* and *The Memory Police* since both novels maintain an air of unknowability and anonymity by not specifying the names of the locations and the figures of authority. By doing so, the novels



create an archetype of all the totalitarian regimes and dictators the world has ever seen and hence universalizes such regimes and dictators. The utter erasure of the human ability to remember has happened in history before. Various regimes and rulers have accredited certain parts of the past while omitting other parts in order to consolidate their power. However, there have always been people who consider it their mission to rescue the past from the clutches of those in power. Thus, it comes as no surprise that writers like Lowry, Ogawa, and Ishiguro explore the power of memory, the effects of forgetting, and the act of resistance in their novels, all of which are set in a fictional world where memories can be controlled and obliterated through different means.

As dystopian novels, *The Giver* and *The Memory Police* both portray highly repressive environments with people stripped of their individual and/or collective memories by the totalitarian government body. Although *The Buried Giant* is not a dystopia, one could argue that it is a temporally displaced dystopia. Like the other two novels, *The Buried Giant* is set in a politically stultifying environment and shows what happens when a dictator forcibly takes away the individual and collective memories of his people. Each novel shows that memory and power are entangled – with each other and with forgetting, remembering, and resistance. In the world of each novel, most of the general populace placidly accepts the fact that they cannot remember. However, the main characters do everything they can to remember the past and resist repression and forgetting. In the end, the novels depict an extraordinary feat of successful remembering. Memory manages to survive. In *The Giver*, Jonas is able to receive the collective memories of the past and release them back into his community. In *The Memory Police*, R and other characters who are immune to forgetting continue to live on as the bearers of individual and collective memory. In *The Buried Giant*, the mist of forgetfulness dissipates, allowing for all of the characters to remember their

individual and collective past. Thus, memory ultimately wins in the struggle against forgetting.

Since no comparative study of these important works of literature currently exists, this dissertation can serve as a guide for writers who wish to engage in further explication and analysis of the novels or for those who wish to contribute to the scholarly development within memory studies. Additionally, other fields of study could also contribute to the understanding of the power of memory and the act of forgetting: postcolonialism, nationalism, cultural studies, diaspora studies, etc. This thesis has only scratched the surface of the potential use of the theoretical framework that has been explored here. Since memory is a capacious and perpetually evolving term, it remains worthy of closer analysis in literary circles and beyond.

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