

Enthymema XXXII 2023



Post-Apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

Younes Poorghorban¹ and Bakhtiar Sadjadi²

Victoria University of Wellington¹

University of Kurdistan²

Abstract – The present inquiry endeavors to scrutinize the process of identity formation with regard to the Culture/Nature dichotomy within the milieu of Lois Lowry's post-apocalyptic dystopian narrative, *The Giver*. The antipodal forces of Culture and Nature are instrumental in shaping the social subjectivities of individuals. Lowry's post-apocalyptic dystopia portrays a society in which these antitheses are comprehensively epitomized. Our objective is to explicate the genesis of post-apocalyptic identities and to elucidate the representation of Nature/Culture within the social context of the aforementioned literary work. Furthermore, the polarity between power and resistance, which is of notable import to cultural studies, is nonexistent within this post-apocalyptic dystopia. Consequently, the establishment of identities transpires not at the site of contention between power and resistance, but exclusively through the ascendancy of the imperializing power. As a corollary, the elimination of the recollections of those individuals who are unable to oppose the imperializing power is integral to the construction of homogeneous identities.

Keywords – Post-apocalyptic Identity; Culture/Nature Duality; Imperialising Power; Cultural Studies; Docile Bodies.

Poorghorban, Younes, and Bakhtiar Sadjadi. "Post-Apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*." *Enthymema*, n. XXXII, 2023, pp. 104-116.

<https://doi.org/10.54103/2037-2426/18620>

<https://riviste.unimi.it/index.php/enthymema>

ISSN 2037-2426



Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

Victoria University of Wellington
University of Kurdistan

1. Introduction

Dystopias usually come into existence through utopian attempts to perfect everything, politically, through egalitarian lenses. It appears that many struggles of humans to achieve a perfect society always end disastrously. As Jameson states, a dystopia is “any Utopian effort to create a new society, or even . . . any fantasy of doing so” (54). A dystopia is by definition “the blackest representation of an existing or possible society where most desirable qualities of life are absent” (Papastephanou 91). Dystopias come into existence as a result of “climactic, financial, and political events” (Walezak 2); they portray “major crises that haunt the contemporary world” (D’Souza 519). The hopeful man of the Enlightenment became disillusioned by the upheavals of the twentieth century leading to a reconsideration of utopian perspective. Most modern dystopian fiction “strive to warn about the authoritarian doctrinaire attitudes that lie at the core of utopian schemes” (Herrero 217). Whether these dystopias are real or “exist only in theory” (Burnett and Rollin 88) can be a subject of investigation; however, most of these works of fiction have one thing in common; that is the “loss of identity” (Feuer 84). As Marlina points out, “in a dystopian universe, the identity becomes a concept that no longer finds its subject” (3). A significant question in relation to identity is then: do dystopic identities come into existence similar to identities in our contemporary societies? Or in particular, how do these identities come into existence within Lois Lowry’s *The Giver*?

Modern critics have created a paradigm in which the issue of identity is central. Many of these critics (Foucault, Hall, and Fiske) have largely contributed to this paradigm in the past few decades. Hall’s works, for instance, “often focused on representation and the creation of new functional identities” (Harman 7). The turning point in the studies of these critics is related to the construction of culture which leads to the construction of identity. Stuart Hall states: “Cultures, conceived not as separate ‘ways of life’ but as ‘ways of struggle’ constantly intersect: the pertinent cultural struggles arise at the points of intersection” (325). This assumption promotes the idea that in the process of cultural productions lies opposing forces of power and resistance which are constantly at work to subvert one another and take absolute control over the cultural productions and identity constructions. Foucauldian paradigm posits resistance as “the compatriot of power” (Foucault, *Power/Knowledge* 142); it is a duality of power/resistance which sustains and promises a social stability. A significant question, then, is if post-apocalyptic dystopian identities are constructed similar to societies that Foucault and Hall studied? And if they diverge, what major elements contribute to these modifications?

Another remarkable question that we seek to probe is the semantic conflicts in representations of culture and nature in the context of Lowry’s *The Giver*. In the context of dystopian fiction, there appears “an outer environment in which characters usually see features opposed to those of the city” (Rodriguez 85); by *city* Rodriguez means culture since cities are the core physical sites of cultural representations. In the semantic realm of meaning, culture is always opposing nature for the semantic meanings they represent since the “opposition [is] between

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

freedom and control, between the signifier and the signified” (Fiske, *Reading* 64). Contemporary societies seek to naturalise culture and denaturalise nature in the terrain of meaning. The post-apocalyptic dystopian works have depicted this opposition in detail which allows us to investigate the relationship between these opposing forces. The purpose of this study is to discover a pattern in the context of post-apocalyptic totalitarian texts in constructing identities and treatment of nature as opposed to the dominant ideological culture. Furthermore, representations of nature and culture take an active part in the construction of identities which will be investigated in this study.

Lowry's *The Giver* which is a young adult fiction illustrates a dominant governing system which is actively circulating in the context of these societies. Similar to many twentieth century dystopian fiction, Lowry's *The Giver* is indeed a “political fiction” (Horan 6) in which egalitarianism, in its most radical form, is reconsidered. The narrative traces the experiences of a pre-adolescent male protagonist, Jonas, who inhabits a seemingly utopian civilization, where the government exerts pervasive control and regulation over all aspects of societal functioning. Nevertheless, upon being selected as the successor to the Receiver of Memory, Jonas acquires knowledge of the concealed truths that underpin his society's professed flawlessness, which entail the curtailment of individuality and emotional expression, the administration of euthanasia, and the adoption of “release” as a euphemistic expression for the termination of non-conformists. It is a society which has attempted to create an absolute unity as the only way of acquiring happiness. On the surface, *The Giver* is a perfectly ordered society; however, as Han and Lee argue “despite the accomplishments by the community of safety from crimes, gender equality, and the abundance of food supply, critics view the community as dystopian” (338). *The Giver* is a dystopia since it abolishes Western understanding of liberty and freedom. While Stewart contends that “the political and ideological nature of dystopias (or utopias) creates a ripe site for power struggles and rebellion” (32), we propose a different perspective of dystopian fiction in which power struggles are entirely absent. Relying on Fiske's notion of relevance which suggests that resistance becomes meaningful only when they appear to be relevant to “social conditions of the people” (*Understanding* 6), it can be observed that no systematic resistance is present in the context of Lowry's dystopia. Consequently, any sporadic attempt to resist the dominant homogenous ideology is nothing but a personal confrontation with the representations of power.

We identify resistance in terms of systematic relevant discourses which take part in constructing oppositional and resisting meanings. The problematic issue is, then, how flexible the dominant dystopic power is in relation to the opposing systematic resistances. The nature of power is quite similar both in contemporary societies and in post-apocalyptic social contexts. The dominant power seeks to “maintain its control through the ideology that has been regarded as the society's values” (Zen and Hetami 66). Control is always sought through homogeneity. We seek to demonstrate that, through investigating *The Giver*, it could be argued that systematic resistances are absent in these social contexts. Furthermore, we intend to illustrate how the dominant power has managed to fully eradicate systematic resistances and gain absolute power and control over its subjects. The more significant issue is thus the way the subjects are constructed where resistance seems to be absent. Does this assumption nullify the Foucauldian paradigm which is centred in the British branch of cultural studies?

In the next section, we will demonstrate Fiske's conception of Power, Identity, Nature, and Culture. The concepts of Nature and Culture largely contribute to the mechanism of identity construction. Positing these issues in the post-apocalyptic social contexts is the ultimate purpose of the present paper. Lowry's *The Giver* is a model for post-apocalyptic totalitarian dystopias which circle around the socio-political issues in which resistance and power are centred.

2. Imperialising and Localising Power: The Quest for Identity

John Fiske's understanding of power and the construction of identity is quite similar to the Foucauldian paradigm; however, Fiske investigated these issues in more detail. Power in Foucauldian terms exists everywhere, not because it is being practised everywhere but because it potentially exists and is ready to be manifested. It is "this dual articulation allows for accounts of power relations that show the ubiquitous presence of power as well as its inescapability" (Hardy 411). This potentiality of power can be identified in a panoptic system where "inspection functions ceaselessly" (Foucault, *Discipline* 195). The nature of Foucauldian power resembles Fiske's imperialising power. Power in this sense is not only seen through physical violence, it is being regularly practised in certain discourses. It is born through "constellation of discursive structures, (scientific) knowledge and practices... which create a set of rules and standards" (Manokha 430). In this sense, constructing knowledge for the benefit of the imperialising power becomes critical in creating hegemony. By constructing truth and knowledge through countless discourses in a social system, the subjects are easily manipulated and directed towards the path which power determines.

Power determines almost every aspect of our social life, it is the main factor in the formation of subjectivity. Primarily, it is "a systematic set of operations upon people which works to ensure the maintenance of the social order" (Fiske, *Power Plays* 11). The justification of its existence is to maintain social order, however, its function overshadows many other aspects of social and individual lives. Power is "in the interests of those who benefit most from this social order to co-operate with this power system and to lubricates its mechanisms" (11). Accordingly, the dominant power seeks to serve those who are at its service the most, it's a mutual relationship in which the stability of power must be preserved by the intelligible identities. As a result, "people do not have access to the system of power and cannot, in general, turn it to their own advantage" (11). The turning point in Fiske's analysis is that he does not anticipate only one sort of power. "[people] have access to their own forms of power which, though socially weaker, are far from ineffective" (11). The power of the people and the power of the dominant are binary oppositions though they function differently.

Fiske divides these two forms of power into two categories, "The 'weak' powers available to the people are so different from the power to which the power-bloc enjoys privileged access as to require different names. We propose to call strong, top-down power 'imperializing' and weak, bottom-up power 'localizing'" (*Power Plays* 11). The main role and purpose of these sorts of power differ largely from one another. "The aim of imperializing power is to extend its reach as far as possible – over physical reality, over human societies, over history, over consciousness" (11). This certain form of power seeks dominance over everything either semantically or physically. It seeks to control and subordinate since it is absolute control and dominance which guarantees its existence and stability. On the contrary, the localising power is "not concerned with constantly expanding its terrain but interested in strengthening its control over the immediate conditions of everyday life" (11-12). This sort of power aims to create space where individuals can practise their individual and social practises which are not dominated by the imperialising power. Accordingly, the semiotic struggles take place within the conflicts that the imperialising power and the localising power create.

Identity, in Fiske's theory, comes into existence in the duality of the imperialising and the localising power. These two forces seek to subvert one another through creating opposing meanings in the realm of culture, that "is the constant process of producing meanings" (Fiske, *Reading* 1), which are constantly circulating in many social layers and take an active part in constructing identities. Numerous assets contribute to the stability and dominance of both the imperialising and the localising power. The opposition of nature and culture is one of the most intense oppositions in the semantic realm of power struggles. The representations of culture

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

aim at producing meanings which serve the interests of the imperialising power while the representations of nature, seek to preserve space for the localising power to escape the dominance of the imperialising power. As Fiske asserts, “escaping the control of culture is a risky enterprise, and if culture means security, then nature means risk” (*Reading* 66). The main purpose of the imperialising power is to gain control over the subjects while the localising power seeks to liberate the subjects from that control.

Control and freedom are highly tangible in the representations of culture and nature. culture represents control, civilisation, dominance while nature is represented as “untamed, uncivilised, raw” (Fiske, *Reading* 45). The main purpose of the imperialising power is to gain control and dominance over the subjects whereas the major end of the localising power is to liberate the subjects. consequently, the representations of culture are physically and semantically restraining and dominating while the representations of nature are physically and semantically liberating. Furthermore, the imperialising power demands unity and homogeneity to facilitate its control over the subjects whereas the localising power seeks to create heterogeneity and plurality to escape the control of the imperialising power. Nature, therefore, encourages chaotic plurality while culture promotes restraining unity. The representations of culture and nature are vastly depicted in the context of Lowry’s novel.

3. Post-apocalyptic Nature/Culture Duality: The Battle of Meaning

Lowry’s post-apocalyptic world represents a society in which all the differences have been eliminated and as the narrator suggests, the society is in the state of ‘Sameness’, meaning that all the attempts have been made to create homogeneity. The justification for homogeneity is that “Sameness alleviates anxiety” (Walker 147). The society does not envisage a world in which every individual is able to choose his or her career. This society consists of two binary forces, the subordinate and the subordinated, “it consists of two classes, namely the Committee of Elders as the dominant class and the Citizens as the subordinate class” (Zen and Hetami 67). In this study, we do not intend to categorise these two forces based on class distinction; rather, the categorisation is based on “top-down power” (Fiske, *Power Plays* 11), and “bottom-up power” (Fiske, *Power Plays* 11). In this sense, the committee of Elders is regularly practising top-down power and the subordinated citizens practise bottom-up power.

This post-apocalyptic work depicts a world in which the opposition of nature and culture is utterly radical. At the beginning of the novel, Lily, Jonas’s younger sister is describing her feelings to her family unit. She is apparently angry for the inappropriate behaviour of some of her peers mainly because they did not obey the rules. Her mother inquires about the reason they did not obey the rules and she answers: “I don’t know. They acted like... like...” (Lowry 5), then Jonas suggests: “Animals?” (5). The explanation of the narrator becomes critical at this point; “neither child knew what the word meant, exactly, but it was often used to describe someone uneducated or clumsy, someone who didn’t fit in” (5). The animal’s concept is not tangible to these characters suggesting that they have never been exposed to animals. This, consequently, suggests that this society has taken a radical stance towards nature. Animals represent nature and nature represents freedom and opposes control. In another example, Lily, the seven-year-old girl of this family unit wants to go to her bed and she asks for her “comfort object” (17). Apparently, in this society, newly born children are given a comfort object until they are eight. As she asks for her comfort object, her mother objects and states: “you’re very close to being an Eight, and when you’re an Eight, your comfort object will be taken away. It will be recycled to the younger children” (17). It appears that the representation of these animals exists in this society, however, since they are inert stuffed animals, they can create no threat to the dominant culture. The threat becomes tangible when these stuffed animals represent the untamed nature of an animal’s existence. In this sense, these stuffed animals do not

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

represent untamed nature since through culture, they are naturalised. In this sense, they are empty signifiers; “many of comfort objects. Like Lily’s, were soft, stuffed, imaginary creatures. Jonas’s had been called a bear” (17). The social indoctrination has been so powerful that the subjects believe that these comfort objects in the shapes of stuffed animals are symbols of imaginary creatures and have nothing to do with the real world. In a sense, these stuffed animals become hyperreal; entities with empty signifiers which do not represent anything in the real world and function merely as comforting objects for children.

The definition of nature helps to understand the imposed stress of this society upon limiting and eradicating all the elements of nature. Fiske asserts that “Nature is precultural reality. It is that external world before any cultural perception or sense-making process has been applied to it” (*Reading* 44). Nature is the raw, uncontrollable entity which escapes the dominance of ideologies and cultures. The core ideology of this society is based on limitation and eradication of differences. This issue was vehemently indoctrinated in Lowry’s social system. Nature strives for liberty and freedom while culture seeks to control and dominate. Animals are eradicated from this society merely because they represent nature. The stuffed animals which are empty signifiers do not count as a threat to the dominant social ideology and hegemony since they do not represent an independent entity which represents nature, rather, these stuffed animals are the cultured forms of nature which carry the meaning of civilisation, control, and subordination and are used for comforting purposes.

It is not only animals which represent a free, liberating nature. the bodies of subjects are the representation of nature since it is raw and not cultured. For the same reason, the bodies of subjects must be always clothed in this society and “it was against the rules for children or adults to look at another’s nakedness, but the rule did not apply to new children or the Old” (Lowry 29). The reason why new-born children and old people are exempt from this rule is because similar to stuffed animals, they propose no threat for the imperialising power. This issue is further related to the sexual practise of members of this society. Lowry does not directly refer to sexual practises; however, it is implicated that sexual practises are forbidden. They are neither known nor allowed in the society. People are not allowed to see one another naked, not even a husband and wife (if these concepts even exist in the society) in a family unit, they exist only because they provide emotional support for the coming generations, also, they act as the guardians of the dominant ideology and through practising rules and codes of the society, they impose them upon their family units.

The suppressed sexuality begins exactly when nocturnal emissions occur to the subjects at early ages. For Jonas, it is the age of twelve when he experiences a sexual dream and shares his dream with his family unit because it is another rule in this society. Accordingly, “dream-telling began with Threes” (Lowry 34), and the function of dream telling is social monitoring, a form of panoptic control. Jonas shares his sexual dream with his family unit, he further asks his mother, “do I have to report it?” (35), and the mother replies, “You did, in the dream-telling. That’s enough” (35). Now that the subject is under control by the mother who represents the dominant social rules, he inquires about this issue to know if there is something he should do. As Foucault points out, “sexual dreams foretell the dreamer’s destiny in social life” (*History of Sexuality* 27). The moment a subject experiences a sexual dream, social circumstances appear to dominate his/her life. The mother states: “No, no... it’s just the pills. You’re ready for the pills, that’s all. That’s the treatment for stirrings” (Lowry 35). The word treatment is critical in this context. Merriam Webster Dictionary defines treatment as “the action or way of treating a patient or a condition medically or surgically: management and care to prevent, cure, ameliorate, or slow progression of a medical condition” (First Entry). Using the word treatment connotes that sexual practise is a disease and needs to be cured.

Subjects are obliged to take a pill every day to reduce the symptoms and suppress the existence of any sort of sexual desire. Sexual desires are part of nature; however, in the context

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

of Lowry's society, these desires are not natural but abnormal. This rule of taking pills which are engineered to eradicate any form of sexual desire is dominant in every family unit. The subjects do not know about these desires because when they are exposed to these nocturnal emissions, they are immediately forced to take pills which suppress these desires. Eventually, they consent to taking these pills because they assume that it is a disease they are facing and the cure is the pills. When Jonas asks her mother how long he should take these pills, she asserts, "until you enter the House of the Old... all of your adult life" (Lowry 36). But, what is the reason that the governing system is so strongly in opposition to sexual practises? Why do the subjects are not allowed to practise sexual intercourse when they are a couple? To answer these questions, we must consider sexual practise as a social practise which is tainted by the essence of nature.

Nature is an existential threat to the dominant culture since it represents a functioning universe which is not dominated by the dominant episteme and culture. The opposition to sexual activities is not solely for the struggles of nature and culture, rather, the issue of pleasure becomes a significant issue in this context. There are two forms of pleasure in a social context. The first form of pleasure is defined in the dominant culture and ideology in accordance with the benefit of the dominant power. A sort of pleasure that one gets from obeying the rules and codes. This is a "hegemonic pleasure" (Fiske, *Understanding* 40). This form of pleasure is "a pleasure in exerting power over oneself. The pleasures of conformity by which power and its disciplinary thrust are internalised are real pleasures and are widely experienced" (40). These forms of pleasures are indoctrinated into the lives of every subject and it is further, socially constructed which proposes its importance in everyday life. The dominant imperialising power seeks to promote these forms of pleasures because they eventually lead to more stability and dominance for the imperialising power.

On the contrary, there is another form of pleasure which contradicts the previous form; that is what Fiske calls "Popular Pleasure" (*Understanding* 40). This kind of pleasure "arises from the social allegiances formed by subordinated people, they are bottom-up and thus must exist in some relationship of opposition to power... that attempts to discipline and control them" (40). Unlike the first sort of pleasure which is constantly being promoted, the popular pleasures are condemned by the dominant power. This is because those popular pleasures seek to subvert the imperialising power; through them, subjects can escape the control and the discipline of the imperialising power. In this post-apocalyptic work which has attempted to destroy and eradicate any sign of nature, sexual pleasure becomes a popular pleasure which serves the interest of the subordinated. "orgasm, is the pleasure of the body that occurs at the moment of the breakdown of culture into nature" (41). It is thus, forbidden since any existential threat to this imperialising power in Lowry's world is doomed to destruction.

The opposing forces of nature and culture are constantly seeking subversion and eradication of one another. As the members of this dystopia are closer to the geographical and physical core of the dominant power, they are cultured and as they are distant from this core, a threat appears to exist for the subversion of culture. Lowry's society is constructed in a way that no encounters with nature take place. This is while this society has its limitations, and beyond these limitations lies nature and its representations. The dominant imperialising power has successfully eradicated every tinge of nature in its society; however, it has failed to eradicate the representations of nature beyond its borders. At the end of the novel when Jonas attempts to escape, he encountered several representations of nature. "Trees became more numerous, and the forests beside the road were dark and thick with mystery. They saw streams more frequently now and stopped often to drink... They saw their first waterfall, and for the first time wildlife" (163). These representations which meticulously propose signs of nature become more frequent as Jonas runs away from culture and moves into nature. Fiske asserts that "power works strategically to secure its boundaries and thus to exclude that which lies beyond

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

its control” (*Power Plays* 63). The dominant imperialising power has managed well to exclude all the elements of nature from its social context while it has failed to eradicate them beyond its borders. Nature is always a threat to the dominant culture, hence, it must be limited or wholly eradicated.

4. Docile Bodies: Post-Apocalyptic Identity Construction in Lowry’s *The Giver*

The imperialising power in Lowry’s world has created a panoptic society in which the subjects are constantly under surveillance. This is because “the stability of any highly disciplined society with rigidly defined roles depends on a careful monitoring of all individuals” (Latham 138). There appear to be cameras everywhere which constantly observe the subjects and whenever a subject disobeys a rule, he/she would be instantly notified; “during the past year he had been aware of the increasing level of observation. In school, at recreation time, and during volunteer hours, he had noticed elders watching him” (Lowry 14). The observations that regularly occurs in this society is not limited to cameras and the committee of elders, but they occur in many social layers of this dystopia. Furthermore, these observations are a means to exercise power since “looking is an exercise of power, and to be looked at is therefore to become the object of power” (Fiske, *Power Plays* 45). Monitoring begins at the most fundamental and private, personal level and that is the family.

Family members are constantly monitoring one another because of the social structure which is engineered for the subjects of this society. This social structure forbids a subject from freely starting a family. It is not even called a family but a family unit and its only purpose is to serve the imperialising power. One of the most significant ways in which monitoring occurs inside a family unit is through dream telling; “usually, at the morning ritual... the family members told their dreams” (Lowry 32). Dream telling is aligned with the rule that members are not allowed to lie. In this sense, the most personal thoughts and feelings which might appear in a form of a dream are also monitored. The exercise of power according to Fiske, “must occur at the most micro level, that of the body” (*Power Plays* 55). If the dominant imperialising power wins over the bodies, the subjects become total products of the imperialising power. The imperialising power gains control over the subject at the earliest age possible for “dream-telling begins with threes” (Lowry 33), at an age that these children are struggling with Lacanian symbolic stage in which children enter the realm of language.

The family unit monitoring ensures the dominance of power over the subjects. The locale which provides the subjects with space to shelter them from absolute dominance of the imperialising power fails to come into existence for the dominant imperialising power has gained control over the most private issues related to the subjects. Fiske and Foucault argued that identities come into existence through the struggles between power and resistance. The struggle between imperialising power and the localising power. The localising power seems to be completely absent in the context of this dystopia. Monitoring and looking is only one exercise of power. In a social system where the imperialising power has successfully eradicated all the pillars of the localising power, there lies a more significant problem compared to the threats of the localising power. The problem is that the representations of the dominant imperialising power tend to fade away for it has no rival to compete with, since the localising power is entirely absent. This is the reason why Foucault and Fiske argued that the presence of imperialising power necessitates the existence of the localising power.

Lowry’s world depicts several instances in which punishments are regulated. There are two reasons why the imperialising power punishes its disobedient subjects. The first reason is to ensure that these subjects become docile bodies and they become completely obedient and the

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality
Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

second reason is because power, as we stated earlier, seeks to reproduce itself. Imperialising power is always rigid and inflexible. In Lowry's dystopia, these forms of punishments begin at early ages to repress and subjugate the subjects. Lowry points out that "the punishment for the small children was a regulated system of smacks with the discipline wand: a thin, flexible weapon that stung painfully when it was wielded" (51). Apparently, even the children are not exempt from the dominance of the imperialising power. There is no account of physical punishment in the elderly's in this dystopia since the subjects become completely subjugated in their childhood. However, even in the most intense practises of the imperialising power, some subjects manage to escape and avoid this subjugation. A significant point in these physical punishments is that they are highly normalised; "a quick smack across the hands for a bit of minor misbehaviour; three sharper smacks on the bare legs for a second offense" (51). Physical punishments are regulated which makes it an accepted norm inside this dystopic social system.

We now intend to illuminate some of the reactions of the imperialising power when it encounters obedience and disobedience. Jonas's female friend, Larissa who works at the 'House of the Old' tells Jonas about some of the elder residents. Larissa informs Jonas about one of the elders in particular who was recently released. She states, "but Edna, my goodness. She was a birthmother, and then she worked in Food Production for years, until she came here. She never even had a family unit" (30). Inside this dystopia, everyone is assigned a job for the rest of their lives. These jobs are being chosen by the committee of elders who decide for everything that takes place in this society. These jobs are assigned to these subjects based on their performance in the first twelve years of their lives. Their talents, their likes, and dislikes are constantly evaluated in this system for twelve years. One of the jobs that is assigned to some people is becoming a birthmother. At the beginning of the novel, the readers are primarily exposed to this job through Lily who states that she likes to be a Birthmother. The reaction of her mother is significant since it presents how the adults in the society evaluate this job; "Lily! Don't say that. There's very little honour in that assignment" (20). Apparently, the engineers and the scientists have acquired a way in which there would be no need for male counterparts to involve in the process of recreation. Family units are not related to one another and it is the imperialising power which decides who can have a family unit. Lily keeps arguing about this job which has interested her. The mother vehemently answers, "Three births, and that's all. After that they are Labourers for the rest of their adult lives, until the day they enter the House of the Old. Is that what you want, Lily?" (21). Bewildered and disappointed, Lily replies, "Well, no, I guess not" (21). Becoming a birthmother in this post-apocalyptic society is a punishment for not strictly following the rules. Also, a proportion of the population is considered indolent or disordered in their daily activities. Although they follow the rules, they are unable to meet the expectations proposed by the imperialising power.

Birthmothers are not usually assigned to a family unit. As a consequence, they are obliged to lead a lonely life solely because the dominant power did not find them worthy of a family unit. This is a utilitarian governing system in which the threat to the bigger picture of society is instantly eradicated at all costs. The physical punishments, as we proposed earlier, were merely for the children who were not subject to social relations. When members of this society entered the realm of meaning and social construction, the forms of punishments altered which included humiliation, disgrace, loneliness, and frustration. The significant issue concerning these forms of punishments which have been practical is their relations to the punished subjects. Unlike children who perform no social roles in the context of this dystopia, adults are more afraid of such forms of punishments. Similar to children, Old people encounter the same situation in which, they do not participate in social relations anymore for they have been imprisoned and taken care of in the House of the Old.

Old people do not participate in social relations because they are always in the House of the Old and do not perform any social actions. As a result, the same sort of punishment which

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

the imperialising power attempted to utilise for the adults is not practical for the old people. Consequently, the old people, similar to the children, are subject to physical punishment. It is in the middle of the novel that Fiona, Jonas's friend describes to him about the tasks she takes in the House of the Old; "there's administration work, and the dietary rules, and punishment for disobedience – did you know that they use a discipline wand on the Old, the same as for small children?" (86). Once more, the bodies of the subjects become the major site of struggles "for the body is the primary site of social experiences" (Fiske, *Power Plays* 55). The ruthless process that the imperialising power acquires concerning the feeble, old people is an act to reaffirm its dominance. Certainly, the old people who spend the rest of their lives in the House of the Old cannot be considered a major threat to the existence of the imperialising power.

Little flexibility can be seen on the side of the imperialising power in the context of Lowry's dystopia. Rules are very strict and the consequences of disobedience can never be forgotten. Similar to birthmothers who are considered as an insignificant part of the society and are not respected as other members are Childless Adults. The issue is that certain members in this dystopia do not intend to have a family unit, either by choice or force. Consequently, these members are not allowed to apply for children and are called "the Childless Adults" (97). Although the dominant imperialising power has not stipulated a law to force its members to have family units, it has created a hegemony in which being hailed as a childless adult is disgraceful. The discouragement takes place in the realm of meaning. Social meanings are what construct social identities. Subjects in a particular social system react to certain social meanings since these social meanings contribute to their reality. Members who do not apply for a family unit are not socially contributing to the life and existence of the society. Having a family unit with children is not about love or personal relationships, on the contrary, it is mostly a social duty which leads to procreation. It is not only through punishments that the imperialising power induces its subjects to act and behave in certain ways. All that the imperialising power seeks is to discipline the subjects either through rewarding them or punishing them for "discipline is the means by which people's consciousness and behaviour are adapted to the requirements of power as it is applied in a specific social organisation" (Fiske, *Power Plays* 56). Disciplined bodies are those who conform to the dominant rules and codes. Jonas's mother and father are perfect representations of docile bodies. As a result of their obedience, they are assigned to very respectful careers and possess high social statuses. In this regard, "a disciplined person is one who submits him- or herself to the power of a particular way of knowing/behaving in order to participate in that power" (Fiske, *Power Plays* 62). In a sense, the relation to power becomes contradictory. One needs to obey if one seeks to reign.

The success of the imperialising power in the subordination of the subjects is largely in debt to the knowledge and truth that the imperialising power seeks to represent. The subjects have no perception of any other sort of reality which contradicts the dominant one. This issue becomes more tangible when Jonas is exposed to the concept of the whole world denoting a world beyond his community. "The whole world?... I don't understand. Do you mean not just us? Not just the community? Do you mean Elsewhere too?" (Lowry 74). The subjects have been manipulated into believing that the only place of existence is their community, they have been deceived that there is no life beyond the life of the community, therefore, they cannot grasp any other sort of reality or any other style of living. In this society in which the members do not perceive any other sort of reality except for the one which is imposed by the dominant imperialising power, the memory becomes the opposing force and an existential threat to the centrality of this reality.

The reason why the people of this community are engineered to have no memory of the past is because history can represent contradictory forces, contradictory realities, and contradictory truths and as Cengiz points out, "memories are vital for [the] changing perception of real life" (Cengiz 19). Before having the memories from the Receiver, Jonas was clueless about

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

any other way of living. History is an existential threat to the imperialising power for it exposes the subjects to different realities which promises them a different ways of living. It is thus, forbidden and limited only to one person in the community, the Receiver. When Jonas is shocked at the idea that the subjects are murdering the unfit ones the Receiver states: “Oh, your instructors are well trained. They know their scientific facts. Everyone is well trained for his job” (Lowry 101). Because the subjects are not familiar with the past events which usually determine the present and the future of subjects through collective memory, they are unaware of the objective circumstances of their actions. Their actions are harmless as long as they comply with the imperialising power. Toma illustrates that “under the guidance of the Receiver, Jonas begins to understand the terrible loss that people endure by renouncing their memories and by embracing the society of sameness that the Community Elders engineered” (233). Jonas and the Receiver are the only ones who preserve the memories.

Upon receiving the memories from the past through the Receiver, Jonas is exposed to different realities and thus, is able to comprehend the contradictions between the past state and the present state of affairs; “the memories Jonas receives during his training to become the new Receiver of Memory gradually cause him to reject the founding principles of his society” (Hanson 52). The resisting forces within him appear soon after he is aware of different sorts of reality; “the next morning, for the first time, Jonas did not take his pill. Something within him, something that had grown there through the memories, told him to throw the pill away” (Lowry 123). The Pills that were once used to subdue the subject’s sexual desires which were represented as an illness have now become the obvious representations of the imperialising power. Previously, we proposed that the presence of the imperialising power must be overshadowed so that the subjects remain unaware of its existence. Through the memories, Jonas identifies this force and seeks to resist it.

This was the first time that Jonas as the one who has been given a large proportion of the past memories resists the dominant power; “he had not taken the pills now, for four weeks” (Lowry 124). This is also the first time that he had continued resisting a very significant rule; “the Stirrings had returned, and he felt a little guilty and embarrassed about the pleasurable dreams that came to him as he slept” (124). The presence of guilt in his actions is the symbol of hegemony, in another sense, the subject has been so affected by the imperialising power that he now feels guilty to act as opposed to it. After being exposed to different sorts of reality Jonas “knew he couldn’t go back to the world of no feelings that he had lived so long” (124). Now that he knows a different truth, now that he knows that life can exist beyond the limitations of the imperialising power, he vehemently acts in opposition to the dominant power. This sort of resistance cannot be classified as the representation of the localising power; for the presence of localising power is only achievable if it takes place and circulates inside a society by at least, certain members of the society who could share a locale.

5. Conclusion

Analysing Lowry’s *The Giver*, we propose that the nature of culture and society in the realm of a post-apocalyptic world is much more different from the contemporary societies that we live in. The opposition of this post-apocalyptic culture with nature is much stronger than our real societies. The collective memories that we all share as social subjects have been completely eradicated and the subjects are clueless in relation to countless issues that are circulating in their society. As a result, the subjects tend to show more submissive behaviour and resistance takes place only sporadically which cannot be deemed as effective. As opposed to Foucault and Fiske who argued that power cannot exist without resistance, we encounter a form of society which has eradicated all sorts of social resistance. Moreover, the resistance that has been eradicated is not limited to the physical reality of the subjects and their bodies but also

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality

Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

the realm of meaning. This totalitarian governing regime has gained control over the subjects and the construction of their identities is indebted to the imperialising power. The construction of identities takes place only on behalf of the imperialising power and the localising power does not even exist to contribute to this identity construction. It appears that post-apocalyptic societies are more cautious in limiting the modes of resistance in the society. This, of course, cannot be validated by analysing one post-apocalyptic work of literature. Lastly, the influence of nature in constructing resisting discourses is relatively absent. This is due to culture's restrictive discourses and actions towards nature which in result, absorbs the subject's curiosity. Furthermore, since any sort of social resistance is wanting, the subjects seek resistance in the representations of nature which carry the semantic burden of resistance and liberty.

References

- Burnett, G. Wesley, and Lucy Rollin. "Anti-Leisure in Dystopian Fiction: The Literature of Leisure in the Worst of All Possible Worlds." *Leisure Studies*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2000, pp. 77–90.
- Cengiz, Oznur. "Inhuman Human Nature: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*." *Eurasian Journal of Social Sciences*, vol. 5, no. 2, 2017, pp. 18-24.
- D'Souza, Radha. "Review Essay Justice and Governance in Dystopia." *Journal of Critical Realism*, vol. 12, no. 4, 2013, pp. 518-537.
- Feuer, Lois. "The Calculus of Love and Nightmare: the Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 2, 1997, pp. 83–95.
- Fiske, John. *Power Plays Power Works*. Routledge Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.
- . *Reading the Popular*. Routledge, 1989.
- . *Understanding Popular Culture*. Routledge, 2010.
- Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Vintage, 2009.
- . *History of Sexuality*. Volume 3. Pantheon Books. 1978.
- . *Power/Knowledge*. Adfo Books, 1980.
- Hall, Stuart. "Notes on Deconstructing the Popular". *People's History and Socialist Theory*, edited by Raphael Samuel. 1981. Routledge, 2018, pp. 314-328.
- Hanson, Carter. "The Utopian Function of Memory in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*." *Extrapolation* vol. 50, no. 1, 2009, pp. 45-60.
- Harman, Sam. "Stuart Hall: Re-Reading Cultural Identity, Diaspora, and Film." *Howard Journal of Communications*, vol. 27, no. 2, 2016, pp. 112–129.
- Han, Kyoung-Min, and Yonghwa Lee. "The Philosophical and Ethical Significance of Color in Lois Lowry's *The Giver*." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 42, no. 3, 2018, pp. 338-58.
- Hardy, Nick. "The Contingencies of Power: Reformulating Foucault." *Journal of Political Power*, vol. 8, no. 3, 2015, pp. 411–429.
- Herrero, Dolores. "Populism and Precarity in Contemporary Indian Dystopian Fiction: Nanyantara Sahgal's *When the Moon Shines by Day* and Prayaag Akbar's *Leila*." *Atlantis. Journal of the Spanish Association for Anglo-American Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2020, pp. 214-32.

Post-apocalyptic Subjectivity and Nature/Culture Duality
Younes Poorghorban and Bakhtiar Sadjadi

- Horan, Thomas. *Desire and Empathy in Twentieth-Century Dystopian Fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Jameson, Fredric. *The Seeds of Time*. Columbia UP, 1996.
- Latham, Don. "Discipline and Its Discontents: A Foucauldian Reading of *The Giver*." *Children's Literature*, vol. 32, no. 1, 2004, pp. 134-51.
- Lowry, Lois. *The giver*. Houghton Mifflin, 1993.
- Manokha, Ivan. 2009. "Foucault's Concept of Power and the Global Discourse of Human Rights." *Global Society*, vol. 23, no. 4, 2009, pp. 429-52.
- Marlina, Mary. "Resistance on Lois Lowry's *The Giver* Quartet: Psychological Perspective." Master's diss., Universitas Muhammadiyah Surakarta, 2018.
- Papastephanou, Marianna. 2008. "Hesiod the Cosmopolitan: Utopian and Dystopian Discourse and Ethico-Political Education." *Ethics and Education*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2008, pp. 89-105.
- Rodriguez, Galdon. "Urban and Natural Spaces in Dystopian Literature Depicted as Opposed Scenarios." *Angulo Recto*, vol. 6, no. 2, 2014, pp. 85-100.
- Stewart, Susan. "A Return to Normal: Lois Lowry's *The Giver*." *The Lion and the Unicorn*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2007, pp. 21-35.
- Toma, Monica Alina. "Dystopian Community in Lois Lowry's Novel *The Giver*". *Caietele Echinox*, no. 32, 2017, pp. 227-235.
- "Treatment." *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/treatment>.
- Walezak, Emilie. "Landscape and Identity: Utopian/Dystopian Cumbria in Sarah Hall's *The Carhullan Army*." *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, vol. 60, no. 1, 2018, pp. 67-74.
- Wend-Walker, Graeme. "On the Possibility of Elsewhere: A Postsecular Reading of Lois Lowry's *Giver* Trilogy." *Children's Literature Association Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2013, pp. 137-158.
- Zen, Umi Nisbatul Fauziah, and Fatma Hetami. "'Sameness' as A Form of Hegemony to Create Utopian Society in Lois Lowry's 'The Giver'". *Rainbow: Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, vol. 8, no.1, 2019, pp. 65-72.