



Article Type: Original Research

Page Numbers: 1-17

Received: 04 February 2023

Accepted: 11 November 2023

Published: 01 April 2024

DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.22034/cls.2024.62849>

Author Details:

1. MA in English Literature
Faculty of Letters and Human
Sciences Shahid Beheshti
University, Tehran, Iran.

m.amirshabani@mail.sbu.ac.ir

2. Assistant Professor of Modern
Irish and English Literature
Faculty of Letters and Human
Sciences Shahid Beheshti
University, Tehran, Iran.
(Corresponding Author)

s_mansouri@sbu.ac.ir

Framed Memory in Northern Ireland: Unearthing Postmemory Through Pictures in Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past*

Maryam Amirsha'bani¹; Shahriyar Mansouri^{2*}

Abstract: This article investigates Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past* through the lens of Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, focusing on the role of photographs in bridging gaps between generations and constructing narratives about traumatic events. Despite a societal inclination towards anti-nostalgia and a desire to forget past concerns in favor of newfound prosperity, the main characters deal with a past that intrudes into the present in a quasi-traumatic form. To assay such fractured identity formation in characters, characteristic of post Celtic Tiger Ireland, this article explores memories as one's inseparable source of identity. As such, Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory will be used to understand the connection between traumatic memory-formation and identity formation shared among the survivors of catastrophic events. Such an abstract connection invites an examination of photography as a means to transfer meaning, memory, and identity from one generation to another, meditating the relationship between the past and the present. This article concludes by paying special attention to how postmemory works as a healthy means of grappling with unresolved traumas, leading the characters towards an ethical form of remembering the past.

Keywords: Postmemory; Northern Irish Troubles; Anti-nostalgia; Family Frames; Deirdre Madden; *Time Present and Time Past*.

Citation: Maryam Amirsha'bani; Shahriyar Mansouri. "Framed Memory in Northern Ireland: Unearthing Postmemory Through Pictures in Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past*". *Critical Literary Studies*, 6, 2, 2024, -. doi: 10.22034/cls.2024.62849

1. Introduction

Northern Ireland “never resembled a place at peace with itself”, according to David McKittrick and David McVea (1). The Northern Irish Troubles, a period of sectarian conflict which erupted in the late 1960s, were not isolated events but rather had deep historical roots going back many decades, testifying to deep and dangerous fault lines in the community. These roots were closely intertwined with the partition of Ireland in 1921, which was primarily driven by religious and political differences between the predominantly Protestant unionists, namely, those who wanted to remain part of the United Kingdom, and the mainly Catholic nationalists who sought independence. The Troubles can be seen as a direct consequence of this partition, as tensions between the two communities escalated into a protracted conflict marked by numerous bombings, mass shootings, and widespread civil unrest (McKittrick and McVea 1).

For individuals affected by the Northern Irish Troubles, and especially for those who have been physically separated from the troubled region, memory serves as both a way to remember the past and a means to grieve the painful consequences of that time. This grieving process often involves feelings of anger, rage, and despair. The children of those involved in the conflict are even further removed in time and space from the devastated world their parents experienced. However, they still inherit a sense of memory and mourning due to the profound impact of the Troubles on their parents’ lives. Marianne Hirsch refers to this type of secondary memory as ‘postmemory¹.’ Postmemory’s connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation (*Generation of Postmemory* 5). Postmemory characterizes the experience of individuals whose upbringing was influenced by narratives that belonged to their predecessors; generally, these are trauma narratives shaped by tragic events from the past that can be visualized and imagined, yet not fully recreated. By examining Madden’s visualization of the Troubles in the North through the lens of Hirsch’s postmemory, this essay argues the continuity of traumas between different generations, highlighting the role and impact of photographs as the mediators between past and present, and the links between memory and postmemory. Although Hirsch developed the concept of postmemory to account for the children of Holocaust survivors and their traumatizing memoryscape, she believes this concept could fit into other historical contexts, and usefully describe other postmemories as well (*Family Frames* 22). As such, this study will put Hirsch’s theory of postmemory into the context of traumatic events in the history of Northern Ireland, widely known as the Troubles.

¹ Throughout this article, the term ‘postmemory’ appears as it was first developed by Marianne Hirsch in her seminal work, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012).

2. Memories in Pictures: Madden's Novelistic Trope

Deirdre Madden's *Time Present and Time Past* (2013), as Éilís Ní Dhuibhne observed in her review of the novel, "doesn't so much tell a story as provide a snapshot of the extended Buckley family at an interesting juncture in Ireland's history, the final year of the boom" (Ní Dhuibhne 2013). Whereas initially, the narrative may not appear as concerned with the Troubles in Northern Ireland as Madden's other novels, through occasional memory flashbacks to characters' childhood, it establishes a connection to the decades of conflict in the North. Madden consciously confirms the presence of such memoryscape in her narratives by acknowledging that "the Troubles are almost always present in [my work] in some way, at some level" (Patterson 2013).

The study of Northern Irish memory and analyses of the culture of memorialization relating to the recent Troubles, as part of the bigger tide of Irish memory studies, has been gathering pace in recent years (Corporaal et al. 3), and the representation of Ireland's traumatic past has become a prominent and pervasive aspect (Pine 5). "Haunted by trauma" (ibid), the obsessive fixation on revisiting and communicating a painful past characterizes much of the literary production of Ireland in recent years. Madden's works "have long been saturated with ideas of memory's relationship to time" (Dunmore 2013), consistently analyzing the effects of trauma on individuals and communities. *Time Present and Time Past*, as noted by Stefanie Lehner, delves into the interplay between time, memory, nostalgia, and trauma through its exploration of estranged family ties (49). Elke D'hoker also examines the novel's portrayal of the trauma of exile from an original homeplace (237). However, while trauma serves as a significant interpretive marker for the study of Ireland's recent history, it can occasionally cause problems as well. Ignoring the differences between individual psychological and collective cultural trauma may lead to uncritically appropriating a largely Freudian language of individual trauma, focused on psychological repression and "working through" (Corporaal et al. 8). To avoid the pitfall of psychologization, to and maintain a focus on the impact of the Troubles on the broader context of Northern Irish society, this study does not apply theories from trauma studies that primarily focus on the experience of individuals – such as Maria Root's concept of insidious trauma (1992), which introduces trauma as a temporally extensive phenomenon that disfigures the psyche slowly. Instead, this paper utilizes Marianne Hirsch's theory of postmemory, which develops a mediated relationship with traumatic events, and offers a space for reflection, reinterpretation, and breaking free from repetitive patterns associated with individual trauma.

The novel chronicles Fintan Buckley, a legal adviser in his late 40s, who leads a peaceful life with his wife, Colette, and their three children. Set in 2006 and at the height of the Celtic Tiger's economic success, namely, a rapid economic growth between 1995-2007 wherein the Irish witnessed an instantaneous 229 percent boost in the country's Growth Domestic Per capita (GDP),² the narrative explores the delusions of financial euphoria that consumed Dubliners like the BUCKLEYS. However, there is a constant underlying suggestion that their world is about to be completely transformed. Originally from County Armagh in Northern Ireland, Fintan and his sister Martina have experienced broken childhood bonds with their father's family from Northern Ireland. Fintan blames his mother for this situation, but it becomes evident that the Troubles have seeped into and altered their family dynamics. The changing and estranged connections between the members of the Buckley family become symbolic of the altered political realities in society at large. Soon, it becomes evident that a crisis is unfolding, one that not only affects individual lives but also reflects broader societal issues.

At the heart of this novel is Fintan's developing interest in old autochrome photographs, which serve as powerful conduits for transmitting memories from an unsettling past. These photographs play a significant role in unraveling the narrative and shedding light on hidden truths. As Hirsch claims, photography is the nucleus of theorization of postmemory (*Generation of Postmemory* 6). In "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory" (1993), Hirsch begins by describing her encounters with various photographs that hold significance in her personal story (4). These images come from different contexts and depict both survivors and those who did not make it. However, they all point to an impenetrable past. She explains that photography is "precisely the medium connecting memory and post-memory" ("Family Pictures" 9). Highlighting the "contradictory and ultimately unassimilable dimension of photography—its hovering between life and death," Hirsch states that photographs are valuable tools for grasping the horrors of events that are too difficult to understand or comprehend fully ("Family Pictures" 9). This connects with Roland Barthes' conception of photography, wherein photograph appears as a "sentiment as certain as remembrance", allowing one to distinguish between narrativized actual truth and fictional narratives (Barthes 70). In the following pages, we will examine the role of old photographs as memorial artifacts and their impact on characters, investigating the ways in which they inform the characters' social and personal identity development; not unlike memories, we argue, photographs emerge as polymorphous strands of a bygone past that haunts characters while restructuring their present.

² On the Celtic Tiger GDP Boost see Dermot McAleese "The Celtic Tiger: Origins and Prospects", in *Policy Option/Options Politiques*, 2000, 46-50.

3. Lost in Time, Found in Photos

Marianne Hirsch introduced the concept of postmemory to explore “the relationship the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before” (*Generation of Postmemory* 5). In “Family Pictures,” Hirsch sketches postmemory as the purview “of the child of the survivor whose life is dominated by memories of what preceded his/her birth” (“Family Pictures” 8). For Hirsch, postmemory characterizes the experiences of a ‘postgeneration,’ as described by Eva Hoffman (*After Such Knowledge* 187), who has been exposed to the overwhelming visualized memories of past events, so deeply and affectively that they internalize those memories as their own. Hirsch also emphasizes the interconnectedness between the survivor memory and the postmemory of the second generation, highlighting their equal construction and mediation through “processes of narration and imagination” (“Family Pictures” 9).

In the introduction to her book, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (2012), Hirsch claims that it was Tony Morrison’s *Beloved* that helped her see that “latency need not mean forgetting or oblivion” (11). For Hirsch, as for Morrison, a careful nurturing of imagination, or powerful mediation within the historical context can help to maintain potent and evocative associations between the past and the present. It is what might help us feel more proximate to a distant past we think we already know. Postmemory, as Hirsch claims, is embedded in the context of the family. Stemming from this “deep personal connection,” postmemory is “a powerful and very particular form of memory,” because this connection is mediated “through an imaginative investment and creation” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22). As she writes, postmemory is “not identical to memory: it is ‘post’; but, at the same time . . . it approximates memory in its affective force and its psychic effects” (*Generation of Postmemory* 31). It is a structure that ethically binds us to, and stems from “the fragments of a history we cannot take in” (Hirsch, “Family Pictures” 27).

Hirsch underscores the importance of photographs and explains that they are “particular instruments of remembrance” (*Family Frames* 22). “[P]erched at the edge between memory and postmemory, and also, though differently, between memory and forgetting” (Hirsch, *Family Frames* 22), photographs emerge as antinomic artifacts, representing both presence and absence, symbolizing, in Barthes’ terms, the “anterior future of which death is the stake” (96). In developing the concept of postmemory, Hirsch seems primarily inspired by Roland Barthes’ analysis of the medium of photography as explicated in *Camera Lucida* (1981). Drawing heavily from Barthes’ idea of “punctum”

(*Camera Lucida* 27), Hirsch claims that images are ‘points of memory,’ and describes them as “points of intersection between past and present, memory and postmemory, personal remembrance and cultural recall,” that “puncture through layers of oblivion, interpellating those who seek to know about the past” (*Generation of Postmemory* 61). The term ‘point’ also highlights the connection between spatiality and temporality in the workings of personal and cultural memory. The power of the photographs that are frequently incorporated in the works of postmemory, whether included in a family album or official records, comes from the fact that they are “fragmentary remnants that shape the cultural work of postmemory” (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 37).

Throughout her discussion of the concept of postmemory, Hirsch clearly moves beyond Barthes’ initial text and discusses the role of contemporary viewers in reshaping the content of photographs - especially family photographs - and eventually masking the unbearable visual landscape (*Generation of Postmemory* 51). Hirsch explains that postmemorial generations in bridging the past with the present, seek to “rebuild and re-embody a connection that is disappearing” (*Generation of Postmemory* 48). As such, photographs and “photographers” work as the “mediator of a truth” (Barthes 70), connecting the past to the present within an ocular context in the memoryscape of the narrator in this novel.

In her novel, Madden too entertains a similar understanding of memory as a photographically visual plane by engaging characters with various photographs. From the very first moment that Fintan sees a series of old photographs hung on the wall of a café, he is transposed in time. In a scene that artfully mirrors Proust’s famous ‘madeleine moment,’ while Fintan indulges in a slice of carrot cake, the photos take him to a past that he has never lived before. Taken back by the strangeness of the city portrayed in those photos, where he has lived all his life, Fintan feels a sense of alienation from time: “There is a dislocation between the familiarity of the locations and the strangeness of what is shown” (Madden 7). While the photographs are supposed to convey an accurate, trustworthy account of the past, Fintan “finds it difficult to believe in the reality of these scenes” (8). Attesting to the ruptures that have complicated the line of memory transfer from past to present, these photographs become the starting point for Fintan’s developing interest in the medium of photography and henceforth, the past itself.

Fintan’s postmemorial status is evident in his constant longing for a place and a time that he can barely remember from his childhood. In all his musings on the past, Fintan believes that the word ‘home’ can only be associated with his Granny Buckley’s house

back in the North, a place he used to occasionally visit before the Troubles flared up in the late 1960s. The photographs that Fintan obsesses with become tools that connect him to a past that still feels ongoing, providing some relief for his feeling of displacement. These photographs make Fintan feel “vertiginous,” offering him “a weird portal back into the past, into another world” (Madden 71). As Fintan slips into the world of imagination triggered by these photographs, he struggles to maintain control over his present reality. While “[t]o a casual observer, Fintan’s life throughout that spring would appear to be progressing in its habitual, unremarkable fashion,” his life is overtaken by “another reality” (70). He starts to notice the arbitrary nature of words and letters, such as those used to describe “Carrot Cake,” realizing they do not provide any link to the object they describe: “They might as well be written not just in a foreign language but in a different alphabet, might as well say *БИСКВИТ* or *ΠαυΤΣΟΤάπι*” (6). As Fintan tries to hold onto reality, repeatedly signing his own name becomes a soothing activity for him: “The black ink is wet as he loops the letters. ... *Fintan Buckley, Fintan Buckley*. That is me” (45). This slippery hold on time and reality is also showcased in another form for Fintan; in his acts of overeating and losing control of his body that accounts for his psychic well-being as well.

Individuals who are descendants of survivors from traumatic events, as Liat Steir-Livny suggests, may experience a sense of missing link, which creates a gap in their identity and existence as a result of the destruction and erasure of places, people, communities, and memorabilia (151). The feeling of a shattered past is accompanied by a sense of isolation, giving rise to a “memory obsession,” with its unceasing influence on the present. This ceaseless pursuit of the missing link affects the very foundations of identity, as exemplified by the character of Fintan.

As Fintan looks through the pages of the photography book he borrowed from his son, Niall, he comes across an autochrome of “a red apple sitting on a mirror” (Madden 74). This image reminds Fintan of “his childhood in the North, where his granny had a little orchard” (5). In the interesting section that follows, Fintan suddenly transports back in time, to his granny’s house in the North, where he becomes a witness to a traumatic event. Suddenly the apple trees in Granny Buckley’s orchard start to move towards Fintan, transmuting into soldiers on foot patrol “in camouflage fatigues” (75). The intensity of this event is indicated by the use of the present tense: “They are moving closer, still somehow fitting in with the trees, in harmony with them, and yet also distinct now, as soldiers, as people. They are advancing inexorably towards the house. ... Fintan is afraid” (75).

Triggered by the image of the red apple, what comes to Fintan's mind is a distinct kind of memory image that blurs the boundaries between memory and imagination, leaving us as readers uncertain whether we are witnessing a genuine memory flashback or an intricate creation of Fintan's imagination. While critics like Stephanie Lehner believe this part to be a "literal flashback" (49), we would like to argue that this scene is the very actualization of the phenomenon of postmemory. Madden's deliberate ambiguity in this scene could hint at the fact that Fintan is actively imagining a past that he never experienced first-handedly, attesting to the knowledge of how quickly and arbitrarily lives could be ended or blighted during the Troubles. As Hirsch argues, postmemory is one's relationship to the memory of others which one has taken upon oneself (*Generation of Postmemory* 5). She emphasizes the imaginative processes required for later generations to reconstruct the past from fragmentary stories, images, and objects, and to establish its personal meaning (*Generation of Postmemory* 5).

In *Time Present and Time Past*, the memory images brought about by the apple autochrome are related to another photograph, which plays a key role in the novel's plot development. As Fintan searches through old family photos with his sister, Martina, he finds a black-and-white photograph of his father's family in the North which "shows a farmyard with stables. ... There is a group of people gathered around ... Everyone in the picture is laughing, laughing wholeheartedly" (Madden 58). This image denotes the trauma of the Troubles, which severed family relations. After losing their father at a very young age, Fintan and Martina lost all their connection, not only to their father's family in the North but also to the memories of the past. Left with the silence of their predecessors about the past, members of the postgeneration, like Fintan and Martina, must come up with their own versions of history to reconstruct the past.

Fintan demonstrates the power of photography through his emotional investment in the past captured in this photo; he sees a younger version of himself close to the members of the first generation in the image. The significance of this image is further reinforced with the recounting of an incident from Fintan's childhood, where he and his Granny Buckley were stopped by a British soldier in the streets of Armagh. Remembering this shocking incident changes Fintan's perception of the official and public commemoration practices of The Troubles: "It's very strange when I look at newsreels from the Troubles," he says, "because it does look familiar to me, and yet it also looks quaint: all the boxy little cars, the women in headscarves. But it wasn't quaint at all, it was bloody awful. I knew that, even when I was little" (Madden 73). As 'points of memory,' suggested by Hirsch, highlighting a present confirmation of Barthes' notion of "punctum" (*Camera*

Lucida 27), photographs capture the dialectic between presence and absence, and “affirm the past’s existence and, in their flat two-dimensionality, they signal its unbridgeable distance” (*Family Frames* 23).

Fintan’s presence in the photo makes clearly visible his connection to the daily trauma of the Troubles. Using Hirsch’s terminology, he has absorbed the previous generation’s traumatic memories as his own. This photo, taken from the Buckley family album, may serve as a substitute for “other historical photos that might be too difficult to look at” (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 51). It highlights the role of the family as a trope of postmemory, which may act as a “protective shield of trauma” (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 48). Hirsch acknowledges that the familial trope of postmemory “may be screen memories” that mask aspects of the past that would be psychologically disruptive (*Generation of Postmemory* 42). Familial photos, thus, function as screens that “absorb the shock, filter and defuse the impact of trauma, [and] diminish harm” (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 48).

While going through the same pile of family photos, Fintan discovers another photograph:

He pulls from the pile a postcard-sized sepia photograph which is pasted onto a heavy cardboard mount, a studio portrait of a young woman from the early years of the twentieth century or the end of the nineteenth. ... what gives Fintan pause is that she looks exactly like Martina, so much so that one might almost persuade oneself that it actually is Martina, tricked out in the clothes and accoutrements of another era. (Madden 35)

Martina’s “uncanny” double discloses two functions: on the one hand, it hints toward the possibility of reviving and strengthening the severed family ties, on the other hand, its uncanniness reveals photography’s self-reflexivity in considering the relationship between the past and the present, as Susan Sontag recognizes when she declares “All photographs are *memento mori*” (*On Photography* 14). This photo also forces Martina to revisit the painful memory of sexual assault in London, which caused her to return to Dublin to seek refuge in the house of Christy and Beth.

The significance of this image is also emphasized as the omniscient narrator of the novel uses it to move the narrative towards the future. According to Hirsch, photographs are “privileged link[s] between memory and postmemory” (*Generation of Postmemory* 90), standing as memorials against the act of forgetting and serving to reconcile the past with the present and future. As a reminder of the past and an emblem of the future, this particular photo becomes representative of the integral link that all photographs provide

for the second generation who are tasked with following the traces of what has been there and no longer is, “conscious always that the past, like the future, also shimmers behind the veil of imagination” (Madden 132).

Hirsch categorizes responses to family photographs as either “familial” or “affiliative” (*Generation of Postmemory* 21-23). Those who have a personal connection to traumatic events respond familially, while those who feel a connection to the affected people or events but do not have a direct personal connection respond affiliatively. This distinction allows Hirsch to differentiate between a literal postgeneration and a figurative one, and also incorporates family photographs into the broader narratives of collective trauma. In the context of this novel, the characters have a familial connection to the trauma of the Troubles but the act of writing the novel can be seen as a way of creating postmemory for those who are not directly affected by the traumatic events of the Troubles. Elizabeth Chase explores the ways the period of the Troubles is remembered in Madden’s novels and believes that her novels, by emphasizing the importance of the ethical ties between individuals, bear witness to and reconsider how we commemorate the Troubles (72). According to Chase, these novels seek to “in effect *transform history* by bearing literary witness” (Felman and Laub 95; emphasis in original, qtd. in Chase 72). Therefore, much of the writing on postmemory is about resisting forgetfulness or denial, as the impact of trauma still lingers. The next section will explore the way Madden’s novel, through its particular setting of the Celtic Tiger era, exemplifies the workings of postmemory towards ethical remembering.

4. Against Forgetting: Harnessing the Past to Shape the Future

The fact that Madden so deliberately brings the readers’ attention to the setting of the story of the novel during the Celtic Tiger period and the time just before the banking crisis is significant: “It is Ireland in the spring of 2006 and failure, once an integral part of the national psyche, is an unpopular concept these days” (Madden 1). As Stephanie Lehner observes, the context of this novel is employed to attest to the progress narrative of the Republic’s economic boom as it has been credited with “re-inventing” the republic of Ireland, changing it from an economic casualty to “a shining light and beacon to the world” (MacSharry and White 360, qtd. in Lehner 37). As Lehner states, in *Time Present and Time Past*, Madden employs memory images to challenge the progress narrative of the Celtic Tiger era in Ireland (38).

Set against the backdrop of a rapidly modernizing society, Madden highlights the human cost of progress, exploring themes of loss, displacement, and disconnection.

Through vivid recollections and introspective musings, she delves into the characters' past experiences, revealing the complexities and contradictions that lie beneath the surface of progress. Amidst this brave new world of swift success, Fintan Buckley finds himself overwhelmed by a feeling of "fascinated horror" (Madden 42) as he gazes at the clock in his big office. While the distance from the past brings an apparent sense of safety and security, Madden's characters are unable to escape the past as it intrudes upon the present scene of their lives through memory-oriented analepsis, bound by various visual triggers such as random objects and locations. For instance, the old-fashioned house of Christy, the deceased husband of Fintan's Aunt Beth, becomes a sanctuary for the memories of the past, retaining in it a distinct "quality of time itself" (65). Colette is struck by the peculiar aura of this house when she first encounters it, feeling as though she is "going back in time, like stumbling into the pages of a story book" (62). Along with autochromes and family photographs, such physical remnants from the past serve as powerful tools that halt time itself, generating memory images that give the characters a sense of refuge from the "unholy wind" of rushing time (49). In this way, these remnants can be linked to Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* [sites of memory] that are characterized by "a will to remember" (Nora 14). Through her use of such memory images, Madden invites readers to question and reevaluate their understanding of progress in contemporary Ireland by reconsidering historically obdurate narrativized memories, and imagining a broader socio-cultural horizon. This resonates with Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* in which a combination of texts and memories appears as a historical testament to a nation's socio-cultural and political origins.

Madden also utilizes the private memories of the Buckley family to mirror the collective memories of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. The characters' attempt at forgetting reflects society's desire to move forward and leave behind the painful memories of violence and division. Martina, for instance, encapsulates this sentiment as she reflects on past events, storing each unsettling memory in a closed "room in her mind," buried in silence (Madden 116). While the force of forgetting seems to have the upper hand most of the time, there are instances, such as when Martina prepares to open her boutique each morning, where she must maintain an unbroken façade and battle against memories resurfacing unexpectedly. Similarly, while the Buckley family seems to be untouched by the troubled past, Fintan cannot help but feel threatened by disruptions in their family history that connect them to the larger group of people affected by the Troubles. Throughout the novel, photography is always present at such moments of disruption, as it is "one of the things that makes the biggest difference" (72).

In her book *The Politics of Irish Memory* (2010), Emilie Pine claims that anti-nostalgia is now “the dominant form of Irish remembrance culture” (8). Contrary to nostalgia, which creates a longing for a past that is absent in the fast-paced and unstable present, anti-nostalgia portrays the past as inherently unstable and traumatic (Pine 8). *Time Present and Time Past* exemplifies this theme of anti-nostalgia that is dominant in the society that hosts the Buckleys. Particularly evident in Fintan’s conversations with his son Niall, Anti-nostalgia allows the audience to maintain a cultural identity rooted in the past but transform their relationship with it so that the present, or perhaps more accurately, the future, becomes an idealized space (Pine 8). Niall comments in his conversation with his father about the past and photographs: “[W]e tend to think that the past was more interesting than it really was, and my point is that it was more banal than we give it credit for, but also more complicated” (Madden 73).

However, Pine suggests that anti-nostalgia, as a form of forgetting, hampers the working of ethical memory, a moral duty that we should exercise (Pine 14). Fintan Buckley, as a member of postgeneration, depicts the way the anti-nostalgic outlook, fails to recognize the fact that the trauma of the Troubles is still fresh in the mind of survivors; how the violence has made quite an impact on the collective consciousness of both Northern Irish and Irish people. In anti-nostalgia, the audiences are encouraged to empathize with victims of past trauma, but not to translate them into the present; “if the past is a foreign country, then its victims are, by extension, foreigners to the present” (14). The major failure of anti-nostalgic remembrance culture, as Pine observes, is that it “consigns trauma to the past and thereby symbolically forgets the victims of both the past and the present” (14).

In the novel, such anti-nostalgia becomes evident through characters who remember their past experiences as painful and actively avoid dwelling on them. This prioritization of the present, creates a kind of dislocation between past and present which as Pine claims, contributes to the anti-nostalgia of contemporary Irish remembrance culture (Pine 55). While the force of anti-nostalgia constantly urges forgetting in the community, Fintan senses “a pain in the pit of his stomach that he knows comes from no physical cause, and he feels a kind of free-floating guilt about everything and nothing” (Madden 48). He is haunted by a feeling of guilt that later in the novel manifests itself as the burden of the past. Hirsch suggests that postmemory, mediated through symbolic and emotionally powerful images, takes shape in the “space between thought and the deepest emotional impulses” (Georges Didi- Huberman, “Artistic Survival”, qtd. In *Generation of Postmemory* 39). As postmemory brings the past back to emotional life by reigniting

preconscious desires, Fintan's feeling of guilt comes from the anxieties of not participating in a traumatic past. His efforts at remembering are acts of vitality that oppose the reduction and nullification that anti-nostalgia enforces, and, in turn, facilitate the processing of trauma. As Pine relates this process to the concept of ethical remembering, she observes that remembering both the victors and victims of the history makes memory future-oriented: "Thus, the goal of remembrance of past traumas goes beyond 'a deep concern for the past' to the necessity of preventing the recurrence of that trauma in the future" (Pine 14).

Postmemory in Madden's novel works against this very wave of anti-nostalgic forgetting, accounting for the fact that the emotional intensity of a traumatic past has not been diminished for subsequent generations even as their knowledge about it becomes increasingly mediated. The structure of postmemory, as Hirsch explains, clarifies how the multiple ruptures and radical breaks introduced by trauma and catastrophe inflect inter/trans-generational memory inheritance (*Generation of Postmemory* 33). The connection between individuals, their families, social groups, and institutionalized historical archives can become complicated due to traumatic experiences that may impair both embodied communicative memory and institutionalized cultural memory of Jan Assmann's theorization which was greatly influenced by the ideas of Maurice Halbwachs and Pierre Nora in introducing the theoretical differentiations on the concept of 'collective memory.' As Aleida Assmann explains, the family is a privileged site of memorial transmission. In her efforts to expand on the two-part memory classification of 'cultural' and 'communicative,' she introduces four memory 'formats': her 'individual memory' and 'social memory' correspond to 'communicative memory' of Jan Assmann's theorization while 'political memory' and 'cultural memory' are part of the 'cultural memory' of his classification ("Re-framing memory" 40-45). The 'social memory' in her schema is based on the familial transfer of embodied experience to the next generation and is intergenerational. 'Political' and 'cultural' memory, in contrast, is not inter- but transgenerational; it is no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems (41).

In *Time Present and Time Past*, Madden depicts the way trauma remains in the structures of inter/trans-generational memory transfer and disrupts the stability of the present times for characters like Fintan and Martina who have been affected by the traces of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Postmemorial works, as Hirsch claims, can counteract this disruption by reactivating more distant political and cultural memorial structures through resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic

expression (*Generation of Postmemory* 33). This allows less directly affected participants to engage in the postmemory that can persist even after all participants and their descendants are gone (Hirsch, *Generation of Postmemory* 33). This is not to suggest postmemorial works always remain in the traumatic structures of the past. Postmemory is an act of mourning that encompasses both a feeling of loss and a desire to “re-member, to rebuild . . . to replace and repair” (*Family Frames* 243). In contrast to anti-nostalgia which encourages forgetting, postmemory is perhaps better understood as coming to terms with memory, and all that memory bears with it.

The novel ends with an arbitrary tone, suggesting that the story may end in a pub between Dublin and Armagh, as “[i]t seems to be as good a place as any to conclude” (Madden 143). The arbitrariness of this closing, as Derek Hand reads it, suggests that “there is no true ‘end ’to narratives, stories, and novels, and that all endings are a form of pragmatic compromise” (274). Similar to this closing, memories of trauma are also never-ending. As the notion of postmemory derives from the recognition of the belated nature of traumatic memory itself, then it is not surprising that it is continuous and is transmitted across generations.

This ending without proper closure also reveals the diasporic dimension of the postmemory as it includes individuals who are physically and temporally apart from the original events of trauma but are impacted by its traces. Coming to terms with the memory of what came before is also about finding a home in movement, as postmemory works toward bridging here and there, now and then, and the present and the past.

5. Conclusion

Although the second generation did not live through the traumas of the Troubles, its members still bear the lasting effects of it. Through a transformation and reconstruction of past events, the postgeneration is able to digest their parents’ inconceivable traumas and turn the traumatic memories into thinkable data. That is what Hirsch refers to as postmemorial work. The novel explores the concept of postmemory through a series of ongoing hallucinations that begins when Fintan becomes involved with some old photographs. These photos bring to the foreground his relationship to his familial roots in Northern Ireland and the traumatic memories of the Troubles. As external stimuli, the photographs trigger an encounter with someone else’s memory and become a testimony to a life lived before one’s time. Through a process of imaginative investment, postgeneration adopts the memories of those who came before as their own, engaging themselves in a complex search for meaning. While grappling with absence and loss,

members of postgeneration, like Fintan, are also engaged with the present and the future, both on a personal and communal level. They embody the sensitivity inherent in the dimension of postmemory, as they investigate the ethical lines that connect individuals in a community.

Time Present and Time Past investigates the lingering impacts of trauma on individuals and families, emphasizing that even when the Troubles in Northern Ireland fade from public consciousness, a great many people will still bear the consequences of it. In her novel, Madden depicts the enduring nature of grief and its transmission across generations through postmemories. As it was argued throughout this essay, postmemory works against the force of anti-nostalgic forgetting which Madden portrays as what consumes Dubliners at the height of the Celtic Tiger era, and as Emilie Pine observes, is the dominant form of Irish remembrance culture at the time of writing the novel (8). In contrast to anti-nostalgia, postmemory strives against the dangers of nullification and erasure that are typical of official records of collective trauma. Recognizing postmemory in this novel also reveals the ways in which literature as a discourse both contributes to and questions the social power of recollection, anti-nostalgia, and family narrative, as the novel itself attests to the lingering effects of trauma on the generations after the traumatic events. As represented in characters' act of return to the North, a coming to terms with memory, trauma, and identity, does not end in denouement but rather contributes to an ongoing negotiation. As we witnessed in this essay, the varied forms of postmemorial remembering following a catastrophic event such as the Troubles, help the characters in re-integrating the legacy of that event into their lives as a positive force, enabling them to bridge the gap between the past and the present, while allowing them to move forward into the future.

Funding:

No funding has been received for conducting this research.

Conflict of Interests:

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.

References

- Assmann, Aleida. "Re-framing memory: Between individual and collective forms of constructing the past." *Performing the Past: Memory, History, and Identity in Modern Europe*, Edited by Karin Tilmans, Frank van Vree and Jay M. Winter, Amsterdam University Press, 2010, pp. 35-50, doi: [10.1515/9789048512027-004](https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048512027-004).
- Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Macmillan, 1981.
- Chase, Elisabeth. "The horror of little details: remembering the Troubles in *Hidden Symptoms* and *One by One in the Darkness*." *Deirdre Madden: New Critical Perspectives*, Edited by Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón, Manchester University Press, 2022, pp. 54-73.
- Corporaal, Marguerite, et al. *Irish Studies and the Dynamics of Memory*. Peter Lang Verlag, 2017.
- D'hoker, Elke. "Imaginariness of Home in Deirdre Madden's Fiction." *Deirdre Madden: New Critical Perspectives*, Edited by Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón, Manchester University Press, 2022, pp. 218-239.
- Dunmore, Helen. "Time Present and Time Past by Deirdre Madden – Review." Review of Time Present and Time Past, by Deirdre Madden. *The Guardian*, 21 June 2013, www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/21/time-present-past-madden-review
- Hand, Derek. "Living lives: Deirdre Madden's *Authenticity*, *Molly Fox's Birthday*, *Time Present and Time Past* and the Irish Celtic Tiger novel." *Deirdre Madden: New Critical Perspectives*, Edited by Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón, Manchester University Press, 2022, pp. 258-275.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory*. Harvard University Press, 1997.
- . "Family Pictures: Maus, Mourning, and Post-Memory." *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture*, vol. 15, no. 2. Wayne State University Press, Jan. 1993, pp. 3–29, doi: www.jstor.org/stable/41389264.
- . *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012.
- Hoffman, Eva. *After Such Knowledge: A Meditation on the Aftermath of the Holocaust*. Secker and Warburg, 2004.

- Lehner, Stephanie. “Images...at the absolute edge of memory’: memory and temporality in *Hidden Symptoms, One by One in the Darkness, and Time Present and Time Past.*” *Deirdre Madden: New Critical Perspectives*, Edited by Anne Fogarty and Marisol Morales-Ladrón, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2022, pp. 36-53.
- Madden, Deirdre. *Time Present and Time Past*. Faber and Faber, 2013.
- McKittrick, David, and David A. McVea. *Making Sense of the Troubles: The Story of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*. 2nd ed., The Blackstaff Press Limited, 2002.
- Ní Dhuibhne, Éilís. “Time Present and Time Past, by Deirdre Madden.” Review of Time Present and Time Past, by Deirdre Madden. *The Irish Times*, 22 June 2013, www.irishtimes.com/culture/books/time-present-and-time-past-by-deirdre-madden-1.1435448.
- Nora, Pierre. *Realms of Memory: Conflicts and Divisions*. Translated by Arthur Goldhammer, Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Patterson, Christina. “Deirdre Madden: ‘The Troubles Are Almost Always in My Work at Some Level.’” Review of Time Present and Time Past, by Deirdre Madden. *The Guardian*, 14 June 2013, www.theguardian.com/books/2013/jun/14/deirdre-madden-troubles-work.
- Pine, Emilie. *The Politics of Irish Memory: Performing Remembrance in Contemporary Irish Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Root, Maria. “Reconstructing the impact of trauma on personality.” *Personality and psychopathology: Feminist reappraisals*, Edited by Laura S. Brown and Mary Ballou, The Guilford Press, 1992.
- Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977.
- Steir-Livny, Liat. “‘I Was a Child of Holocaust Survivors’: Second Generation Postmemory in Animated Documentary.” *Psychoanalytic and Cultural Aspects of Trauma and the Holocaust*, Edited by Rony Alfandary and Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, Routledge, 2023, pp. 146-156.