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Violence and Postmemory in Glenn Patterson's *Fat Lad*

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Abstract: Glenn Patterson's 1992 novel *Fat Lad* portrays Belfast as a city oscillating between destruction and reconstruction in the aftermath of partition and in the midst of the Troubles in Northern Ireland. While the novel centres on Drew Linden, a young Protestant man who returns to Belfast from England to confront both his familial and the communal past, the violent history of Belfast unfolds alongside the stories of three generations of the Linden family. Drawing on Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory, this study argues that *Fat Lad* enacts the transmission of historical trauma through its portrayal of intergenerational inheritance within the Linden family while simultaneously exposing the asymmetries in the representation of Protestant and Catholic experiences. The novel's multi-generational narrative structure discloses the mechanism through which violence and anxiety are inherited and reproduced across the Linden family. This study contends that the novel implicitly positions the Linden family's Protestant experience as the norm through which Belfast is represented, leaving the persistent silence surrounding the Catholic experience to be read against it. Accordingly, this study argues that in a polarized society such as Northern Ireland, postmemory does not create a shared ground of affiliation between the two communities, but instead reveals the asymmetries that continue to characterize its transmission.[1]

Keywords:

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Glenn Patterson'ın *Fat Lad* Adlı Romanında Şiddet ve Post-bellek

Öz: Glenn Patterson'ın 1992 tarihli romanı *Fat Lad*; Belfast'ı, bölünmenin Kuzey İrlanda'daki kalıcı izlerinin ve "Troubles" (Sorunlar) olarak bilinen şiddet ve çatışma döneminin ortasında yer alan, yıkım ve yeniden inşa arasında sıkışmış bir şehir olarak resmeder. İngiltere'den Belfast'a dönerek hem ailevi hem de toplumsal geçmişiyle yüzleşmek zorunda kalmış genç bir Protestan olan Drew Linden'ı merkeze alan roman, aynı zamanda şehrin şiddet dolu tarihini Linden ailesinin üç kuşağına ait hikâyelerle birlikte

Anahtar Sözcükler:

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şiddet;
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açığa çıkarır. Bu çalışma, Marianne Hirsch'in post-bellek kavramından yola çıkarak *Fat Lad*[2] romanınının, tarihsel travmanın aktarımını Linden ailesi içerisindeki kuşaklararası mirasın temsili aracılığıyla ortaya koyduğunu ve aynı zamanda Protestan ve Katolik deneyimlerinin temsilindeki asimetrileri de görünür kıldığını ileri sürmektedir. Romanın çok kuşaklı anlatı yapısı, şiddet ve kaygının Linden ailesinde kuşaklar boyunca nasıl miras alındığını ve yeniden üretildiğini açığa çıkarır. Bu çalışma, romanın Linden ailesinin Protestan deneyimini Belfast'ın temsil edildiği norm olarak örtük biçimde konumlandırdığını ve Katolik deneyiminin etrafındaki süreğen sessizliği bu temsil karşısında okunabilir hâle getirdiğini savunmaktadır. Buna göre çalışma, Kuzey İrlanda gibi kutuplaşmış bir toplumda post-belleğin iki topluluk arasında ortak bir aidiyet zemini oluşturmadığını, aksine bu aktarımı karakterize eden asimetrileri gün yüzüne çıkardığını ileri sürmektedir.

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Introduction

Belfast, with its long history of political upheaval and sectarian conflict, has begun to occupy a more visible position in the fiction of Northern Irish novelists, particularly from the 1990s onwards, following the end of a period of sectarian violence known as the Troubles. Glenn Patterson's (1961–…) *Fat Lad* (1992) stands as an exemplar of this literary inclination toward reimagining the city of Belfast. Patterson weaves the story around the return of Drew Linden, a young Protestant man, to Belfast from England, where he has lived for years. Drew's return in the early 1990s, when the city remains subject to sectarian violence, discloses not only the familial history of three generations but also the broader communal history of violence, including sectarian segregation and the Troubles. While the story of the Linden family unfolds through the perspectives of multiple characters, the eighty-year period of the city's history surfaces concurrently. Upon his return, albeit reluctantly, Drew has to confront his familial history, which leads him to realize that he has long been haunted by these mediated memories. Moreover, he finds himself implicated in the unresolved history of his native city. This double confrontation alludes to the novel's endeavour to entangle the private and the political, the experiential and the inherited. Furthermore, despite the visible changes Drew observes in Belfast, the city's violent past resurfaces, making it suspended between

[2] The title is derived from a mnemonic used to remember the six counties of Northern Ireland: Fermanagh, Antrim, Tyrone, Londonderry, Armagh, Down.

destruction and reconstruction, while simultaneously evoking the tension between remembering and forgetting and thus situating the novel in an ambivalent position towards reconciliation with its past.

That the tension between destruction and reconstruction in the city of Belfast in the 1990s is presented through the perspective of Drew Linden, who represents the novel's third generation, is of great significance considering the novel's position within the broader tradition of fiction about Belfast. Due to the violent and turbulent events in its history, Belfast emerged as a prominent setting in literary representations in the twentieth century, commonly associated with themes of violence, entrapment, and suffering. Frederick Laurence Green's (1902–1953) thriller *Odd Man Out* (1945) and Maurice Leitch's (1933–2023) *Silver's City* (1981), for instance, depict Belfast as "a place of labyrinthine darkness, betrayal and deceit" (Hughes 145). In a similar vein, Brian Moore's (1921–1999) *The Lonely Passion of Judith Hearne* (1955) explores the life of its protagonist, who lives in Belfast, through the themes of loneliness, isolation, and disillusionment. In Robert McLiam Wilson's (1964–…) 1989 novel *Ripley Bogle*, Belfast is perhaps most harshly depicted as a city in need of destruction. The narrator claims that Belfast "[t]hickens your body and your brains. Chases your soul away"; therefore, he thinks, "[the city] has to be stopped. Its time will come" (Wilson 31).

Starting with the 1990s, Northern Irish writers have started to reimagine the city since "in the nineteen nineties Belfast has gradually become a new, fertile urban location, no longer a place from which escape is necessary, but rather a laboratory for opportunities, a post-modern place depicted as the only space where it is possible to build and articulate a (post)national conscience," Laura Pelaschiar states in "Transforming Belfast: The Evolving Role of the City in Northern Irish Fiction" (117). In line with Pelaschiar's observation, George Legg in "Post-Troubles Northern Irish Fiction" points out that "[o]ne significant development is that – at the start of the 1990s – a new generation of novelists began to write about the Troubles by concomitantly disengaging from that conflict's suffocating dynamics" (3022). The attitude of the new generation of novelists has thus lent a fresh perspective to the turbulent history of Northern Ireland, particularly the period of the Troubles, opening up new narrative possibilities for the future. Robert McLiam Wilson's 1996 novel *Eureka Street*, for instance, offers a new metropolitan image of Belfast, thereby contrasting sharply with his first novel *Ripley Bogle*. Focusing on the friendship of a Catholic and Protestant man, *Eureka Street* portrays Belfast as a "metropolis" that is "Rome with more hills" with "[p]osters and billboards flap[ping] in a hundred little winds" and "proclaim[ing] concerts, religious meetings, theatres, . . . consumer goods" (*Eureka Street* 213). Yet, violence still persists through "loud and frightening" bombs and explosions, simultaneously rendering the city "a necropolis" (*Eureka Street* 15, 61).

The tension between Belfast's renewed image and the persistence of violence is also evident in Patterson's *Fat Lad*. Patterson explains his purpose in writing *Fat Lad* as

"to look at the city of Belfast . . . as somewhere that was constantly in flux, as a city that was constantly being revised" ("Writing the Troubles" 16). However, the theme of violence is not entirely abandoned in *Fat Lad* either. Violence asserts itself through familial and communal narratives and incidents. Concerning this, Pelaschiar contends that "no matter how much these writers [including Patterson] represent Northern Ireland as a normal and modern place with much in common with other European cities, they still retain an awareness of the constant possibility of violence" (127). Pelaschiar's observation hints at the fact that the city's haunted past is being buried under the veneer of normality, as epitomized by Patterson's *Fat Lad*. Although Patterson belongs to a new generation of writers who have started to reimagine Belfast, demystifying its traditionally dark and pessimistic portrayal, the past leaks through its cracks in *Fat Lad*, keeping the possibility of violence alive.

Despite the growing body of work on the representations of Belfast in contemporary novels, *Fat Lad* has received relatively little critical attention in contemporary scholarship. This study aims to address this gap by offering an examination of the novel through a theoretical perspective shaped by Marianne Hirsch's notion of postmemory. As Hirsch suggests in *Family Frames*, "[p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated" (22). While Hirsch's idea refers to the relationship later generations have to the traumatic experiences of previous generations, the distinctive feature of this relationship is that the transmission of these experiences occurs not through recollecting but through familial and cultural narratives, art, and photographs. As Hirsch points out in *The Generation of Postmemory*, these events are remembered at second hand by succeeding generations by means of "haunting reminders" such as "stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up" (239, 5). Although Holocaust studies provided the point of departure for Hirsch's notion of postmemory, the concept, as Hirsch herself has noted, has been transposed to other contexts of historical and cultural trauma apart from its initial relation to post-Holocaust contexts. In *The Generation of Postmemory*, she explicitly states that "the Holocaust can no longer serve simply as a conceptual limit case in the discussion of historical trauma, memory, and forgetting," and adds that "[her] analysis is in dialogue with numerous other contexts of traumatic transfer that can be understood as postmemory" (18). Therefore, as a popular focal point of contemporary writers working on historical tensions, postmemory has started to designate a broader approach beyond the Holocaust discourse, as Hirsch also acknowledges this potential. As for this potential, in their introduction to *(Re)Writing War in Contemporary Literature and Culture: Beyond Post-Memory*, Cristina Pividori and David Owen state that Hirsch's "openness to incorporating post-colonial perspectives into her work suggests support for comparative and interdisciplinary research," and they claim that "[t]his is evident in her comparative analysis of the Shoah and *Beloved* (*Generation of Postmemory* 81)" (5). Taking this

potential into account, this study argues that Glenn Patterson, writing within the long tradition of Irish and Northern Irish fiction that engages with traumatic socio-cultural ruptures in Irish history, inherits both familial and cultural traumas and thus creates a postmemorial work in *Fat Lad*.

However, approaching the concept of postmemory within the Northern Irish context necessitates an awareness of the need to note the experiences of both communities, Protestants and Catholics, in their own estimation. *Fat Lad* consolidates this asymmetry of experiences by granting narrative access to a Protestant family while leaving the Catholic experience largely silenced except for the haunting presence of Drew's Catholic friend, Hugh McManus, in his memories. In this regard, this study acknowledges that transposing Hirsch's postmemory framework to a Northern Irish context also necessitates attention to the specific cultural politics of silence in Northern Irish literary and cultural discourse. The contemporary Irish and Northern Irish novel has a tendency to engage with the silenced stories of the past and their reflections in the present. By engaging with the theme of silence, writers suggest that revisiting history opens up productive ways of redefining and reinterpreting the gaps in cultural memory, where historical trauma is preserved. In "Speaking of Silence: Comments from an Irish Studies Perspective," Maria Beville and Sara Dybris McQuaid examine the multifarious ways in which silence continues its presence in socio-political and literary discourse: "silence is both the unspeakable and the unspoken and so it functions as both an obvious zone of disempowerment but also as an empowering act of strategically asserting or circumventing certain discourses of authority and control" (17). This study concurs with Beville and McQuaid upon the notion that "[i]n the literature of Ireland, North and South, silence is both an opportunity for dialogue and for the sealing off of communication. . . . In the broader context of Ireland, silence 'speaks' and renders an awareness of the challenging positions of those who are silenced, or choose not to speak" (17).

This literary tendency warrants an examination of *Fat Lad* through the lens of Hirsch's conceptualization of postmemory, since all postmemorial texts, for Hirsch, occupy a "paradoxical space" in which they bear the responsibility of breaking the silence of the victimized while risking a violation of the silence the victims wish to keep (*The Generation* 90). However, this "paradoxical space" is also closely linked to other ethical questions, such as the question of identification and the extent to which members of a later generation or postmemory artists who have no familial bond with the victims can affiliate themselves with the victims. In "Hirsch, Sebald, and the Uses and Limits of Postmemory," Kathy Behrendt, for instance, criticizes Hirsch's extension of the concept of postmemory to W. G. Sebald's (1941–2001) *Austerlitz* (2001) and her characterization of the novel as a work of postmemory in *The Generation of Postmemory*, arguing that Sebald has no familial connection with the victims that the novel engages with (56). Concerning the issue of identification, Dorian Stuber questions the risk of overidentification asking "How can the second generation respond appropriately to the overwhelming trauma of others, which it has only "experienced" indirectly?" and concludes that "postmemory

enables us to evade the distinction between direct and indirect experience" (2, 3). Hirsch herself identifies this as a challenging task for postmemory artists: "The challenge for the postmemorial artist is precisely to find the balance that allows the spectator to enter the image and to imagine the disaster, but that simultaneously disallows an overly appropriative identification that would make the distances disappear and thus create too available, too easy an access to this particular past" (*The Generation* 161).

In response to objections by those who lived through historical trauma directly and may argue that later generations, whose access to that trauma is only mediated through media, art, or stories, risk appropriating experiences that are not their own, Hirsch suggests a differentiation between what she calls "familial postmemory," which signifies the direct inheritance of trauma from survivors by their descendants, and "affiliative postmemory," which refers to a collective remembrance—out of familial bonds—of these historical events and traumas indirectly through media, literature, and art. Hirsch maintains that "[i]n distinguishing between familial postmemory, on the one hand, and affiliative postmemory, on the other, [she] also would like to transcend identity and biology" (Altınay and Pető 392). As Hirsch elucidates in *The Generation of Postmemory*, familial postmemory is marked by "an intergenerational vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family" whereas affiliative postmemory is characterized by "the intergenerational horizontal identification that makes that child's position more broadly available to other contemporaries" (36). This categorization bears significance for this study not only because the novel depicts a polarized society but also because the city of Belfast sustains this affiliative mechanism by offering an ambivalent ground in which familial past intersect with a collective but divided past. Hence, drawing on Hirsch's notion of postmemory, the study contends that in the novel, Belfast operates as a postmemorial site where Patterson interlaces communal history with the familial, underscoring how inherited memories and silences continue to haunt both the present and the future. Accordingly, this study examines how violence and postmemory intersect with the Protestant-Catholic division in the novel, beginning with the Linden family's own transmission of violence and anxiety across three generations and then turning to what the Protestant family's narrative dominance leaves unspoken. Additionally, Hugh McManus's interruptive and haunting presence in Drew's memories will be examined as a limited instance of affiliative postmemory. All in all, this study argues that examining *Fat Lad* through the lens of postmemory exposes not only how violence and silence are inherited within a Protestant family, but also how such inheritance exposes the asymmetries in the transmission of memory and postmemory, thereby highlighting the limits of a postmemorial transmission within a polarized community.

The Linden Family and the Transmission of Violence

The novel's multi-generational narrative structure through a single family functions as a postmemorial strategy, delineating how violence and anxiety are transmitted across three generations of the Linden family in multifarious forms. The oldest generation, the

grandparents Ernie and Granny Linden, represents the Unionist anxiety that accompanied the partition of Ireland and the creation of the Northern Irish state. While Granny's assertion that "she had lived in two different countries without ever moving more than three doors from the house where she was born" reveals the rigid experience of partition, Ernie's belief that it is "every loyal man's duty to hold the line against the Sinn Feiners" exposes the defensive posture that he passes down to his son, Jack (*Fat Lad* 141, 153). Drew's sister Ellen, as a member of the third generation, cannot make sense of Granny's words and attempts to account for them as either magic or the trances Granny experiences. Ellen's attitude highlights the novel's ironic attitude toward the Unionist imperative to stand firm against the Sinn Feiners, as can be confirmed by Patterson's words in an interview, stating that "borders never really make sense" because people on either side are "exactly the same" (Patterson et al. 94).

Drew's father, Jack, the second generation, inherits the anxieties of his parents but in a markedly different context. While Ernie's engagement with violence is institutional, Jack's is mostly domestic. Described as the "first child [Granny] had born into peace," his adulthood nonetheless coincides with the collapse of that peace and the onset of the Troubles (*Fat Lad* 153). Jack represents the impotence of the Protestant working class in the face of sectarian escalation, an impotence that manifests as domestic violence. With the burden of the memories he inherited from his father, Jack develops a tic as he hears about the reports of bomb-blasts:

> A soldier died, then another, then another, then three more all together. His father's hands developed a tic, or rather a whole range of tics, tumbling over one another with the sudden flittering sound of a sparrow dust-bathing, one moment, scratching each other's palms the next, and, when they were doing neither of these, rotating very slowly and deliberately about the pivot of touching thumb pads, as though try to gauge the dimensions of an invisible, constantly evolving object. (*Fat Lad* 118–119)

This somatic trace of inherited trauma alludes to Hirsch's meditations on how "[f]amily life, even in its most intimate moments, is entrenched in a collective imaginary shaped by public, generational structures of fantasy and projection and by a shared archive of stories and images that inflect the broader transfer and availability of individual and familial remembrance" (*The Generation* 35). Jack's tic is not simply a psychological response to present violence. It reflects the traces of familial and cultural inheritance of violence and anxiety, compounded by his obsession with his environment's obsession with demographic numbers: "Numbers, numbers, numbers, they'd've put your head away listening to them. It was simple arithmetic, they said: if the Catholics kept breeding faster than the Protestants, then sooner or later the Protestants were bound to be outnumbered, and when they were the border would be rubbed out and they'd be lost for ever in a United Ireland" (*Fat Lad* 153). This demographic anxiety continues to haunt Jack as a mediated experience passed down from Ernie. Moreover, this inheritance manifests itself as Jack's own domestic violence toward Drew.

As for the third generation of the Linden family, represented by Drew and Ellen, the inherited memories of violence and anxiety within a polarized community become intertwined with their direct experiences of the Troubles. While Drew and Ellen, who are, in Hirsch's terms, "dominated by narratives that preceded their birth" inherit the legacies of previous generations, they are simultaneously caught within an ambivalent environment in Belfast marked by the tension between destruction and reconstruction, where the traces of violence still persist (*Family Frames* 22). This persistence is disclosed in a single-sentence paragraph that traces a sniper's bullet into a neighbour's kitchen:

> In the early hours of the morning of the second Saturday in August 1971, a sniper operating from the darkened window of a terraced house in an estate on the foothills of the Antrim Plateau discharged a rifle for the second and last time in his life, sending a single high-velocity bullet flashing down into the Lagan valley, evading the soft exposed parts of a platoon of soldiers pinned down behind a hedge a block away, evading chimney-pots, treetops, road signs, traffic lights, advertising hoardings, lampposts, church spires, flagpoles (an inordinate number of church spires and flagpoles), and all make and manner of buildings besides, till, closing in on the darkened window of another house on another estate two miles to the south-east, it drilled a perfect hot-poker hole in the glass, puncturing with ease the roll blind, the drapes, the kitchen's boast door, and the chipboard wall of the larder, where it entered and exited in turn a box of Kellogg's cornflakes, a packet of Polson's cornflour, a packet of Atora suet, a box each of Whitworth's sultanas and raisins, a tin of Campbell's cream of tomato soup; entered, finally, a full bag of Tate & Lyle sugar (annihilating the craggy sugar-cube gladiator), but, encountering solid brick on the far side, did not exit and came instead to a stunned halt deep in the granular belly of the bag. (*Fat Lad* 119–120)

While this vivid description of the bullet's path enacts the way in which political violence penetrates domestic boundaries, inscribing traumatic memories upon both victims and subsequent generations, the conflation of the communal and domestic violence is intensified by the fact that Drew is beaten by his father on the very day of the bullet incident. For Drew, the intersection of the two acts of violence collapses into a single traumatic memory, which he has to confront upon his return to his native city: "He accepted it as part of his disgrace to have to bear his punishment in silence" (*Fat Lad* 122). That Drew, as a child, blames himself for the Troubles further deepens the inextricable relationship between familial and communal violence in the narrative: "Every subsequent explosion compounded his guilt, every Friday night drinker and Saturday shopper atomised, every limb lost, every face disfigured, every soldier and policeman shot, every last body found hooded and dumped in verges and entries, playgrounds and burnt-out cars" (*Fat Lad* 122). Drew's inability to differentiate between familial and communal violence and his sense of guilt illustrate how each generation's memories and postmemories are distinct from the one before it. Drew's response to this inheritance is also significant. He attempts to distance himself from the unresolved past of violence by moving to England. Yet, his brief return to Belfast reveals that the burden of the past

cannot be so easily escaped, as memories and postmemories continue to resurface. As a result, Drew returns to Belfast after many years only to remember that "[a]t one stage he had thought that if he were to run away it would all stop. The beatings, the bombings, everything. But . . . he knew that . . . the violence would not abate, so that in the end there seemed to be nothing for it but to stay where he was" (*Fat Lad* 122). Drew's sense of persistent violence stems not only from his direct experiences but also mediated memories transmitted across three generations within his family.

In the novel, such inheritance manifests itself most vividly in the family's goldfish. As a sustained image in the novel, the goldfish functions as a postmemorial figure, encapsulating the historical paralysis of a society trapped within the cyclical violence of sectarian conflict. The novel, indeed, commences with a paradoxical statement involving the goldfish: "Goldfish? My granny had a goldfish once. It drowned" (*Fat Lad* 1). While this very paradox showcases the Linden family's entangled relationship with history and with the city of Belfast, the goldfish becomes associated with Irishness throughout the novel: "a drowning goldfish and a Northern Irish voice" (*Fat Lad* 1). As symptomatic of postmemorial entrapment, Drew returns to the memory of the goldfish even after years: "That bloody goldfish. Eight years and more after he could last remember having given it a thought, it had turned up in his dreams the previous night and was still there when he awoke this morning, going round and round in his brain as monotonously and pointlessly as it had used to in its bowl" (*Fat Lad* 2). The goldfish's circular movement, confined within its suffocating bowl, embodies the condition of the people in Belfast during the Troubles, a time when, as described by Patterson, "[Belfast] was very static city for a very long time" (Hicks 110). The goldfish thus personifies the people of Belfast, who have been confined by the borders imposed on them and been exposed to repetitive acts of violence, while the endless circling of sectarian arguments has deoxygenated the cultural atmosphere. Thus, the narrator announces: "an Irish goldfish drowned" (*Fat Lad* 126). Given these strong associations with Irishness that the goldfish carries, it recurs throughout the narrative as an image of entrapment. While its apparent drowning initially seems to be an accidental death, much later in the novel, it is revealed that it was killed by Ellen. This revelation is particularly significant because Ellen, as a representative of third generation in the Linden family, reproduces the inherited violence. Although Ellen's act of killing emerges from an impulse of compassion, with a wish to "give the goldfish a proper swim" outside its bowl so that "it would feel like a *real* fish in *real* water," Ellen's attempt suddenly turns into an act of violence (*Fat Lad* 257). When she empties the bowl into the bath, "[a] cloud of debris spread[s] beneath the water's green-clear surface," a description that evokes Drew's British girlfriend Melanie's characterization of him as "a piece of debris" (*Fat Lad* 257, 8). Frustrated by the goldfish's continuous circular movement, Ellen forces it to swim straight rather than in "a perfect circle" (*Fat Lad* 258). Ultimately, her frustration turns into violence: she "covered its gills, and broke its back" (*Fat Lad* 256). Thus, the goldfish's death reproduces the cycle of communal and familial violence that the Linden family inherits as part of Belfast's troubled past. Yet, it is significant to note that in

the novel this embodied history of transmission is given exclusively to the Protestant Linden family. It is, therefore, necessary to foreground this narrative imbalance before examining how the Catholic community's experience of violence is represented in the novel.

Catholic Silence and Belfast's Postmemory

The dominance of the perspective of a Protestant family over *Fat Lad*'s narrative voice raises significant questions about the representation of a deeply polarized society. By granting extensive narrative access to the Linden family while offering little articulation of Catholic experience, the novel risks reducing the divergent experiences of the two communities to a shared ground of violence, despite the asymmetries in their experiences of Northern Ireland's troubled past. Therefore, this study argues that the novel implicitly positions Protestant experience as a normative framework through which familial and communal life in Belfast is represented, while the Catholic experience remains largely silenced, except for the haunting presence of Drew's Catholic friend, Hugh McManus, in Drew's memories. Described as "[t]he son of Belfast's foremost Catholic solicitors," who was "shot to death last year at age twenty-nine by a gunman, or gunmen, unknown, following his successful defence of Father Fiacc," Hugh's ghostly appearance disrupts the narrative, prompting Drew to ask, "Where did Hugh come from all of a sudden?" when he looks at his reflection in an aeroplane window on his way home (*Fat Lad* 2). Hugh's spectral presence reminds Drew, all of a sudden, of the goldfish that Grandpa Linden had brought home shortly before his death: "That bloody goldfish . . . going round and round in his brain as monotonously and pointlessly as it had used to in its bowl" (*Fat Lad* 2). Drew also recalls Hugh's explanation of "how the whole of Belfast city centre was built on mudflats, exposed, centuries before, by the retreating lough: sleech, in the local idiom, or, the word Hugh preferred, slobland," an implication of Hugh's inheritance of the city's history (*Fat Lad* 18). The intersection of Hugh and the goldfish in Drew's memory evokes the turbulent history of Belfast for him.

Drew's recollections of Hugh mark an instance of what Hirsch calls affiliative postmemory, albeit a limited one. Drew does not affiliate with the Catholic experience through Hugh; rather, he reproduces his own memories and postmemories related to Belfast through his memories of his contemporary. This limit necessitates an intervention in the notion of affiliative postmemory as applied to a polarized society such as Northern Ireland. Rather than granting Drew access to Hugh's own memories, postmemories, and silences, the affiliation leads him to reflect on the inheritance of his own community, suggesting that affiliative postmemory may remain confined within the experiential boundaries of each community in polarized societies. In this respect, the moment the novel grants Hugh a postmemory of his own, most directly in his confrontation with a British soldier, bears significance. Recognizing Hugh by his "notorious" bag, the soldier says, "I hope they hang the fucker, you Paddy ponce" (*Fat Lad* 225). This insulting attitude immediately reminds Hugh of his otherness: "*Otherness*, certainly, because in that land of

excluded middles you were either one thing or the other, one of us or one of them, for or against, inside or out" (*Fat Lad* 225). Hugh reflects on this confrontation, associating it with the broader history of oppression of Irish people: "like a folk memory reactivated, on almost the exact site of the seventeenth-century rampart between the settlers and the risen Irish" (*Fat Lad* 226–227). Carrying crucial implications about Hugh's inheritance of the traumatic history of plantation and displacement, this scene emerges as an embodiment of the Catholic experience of postmemory in the novel. Both Drew's and Hugh's asymmetrical experiences of Belfast, whether direct or indirect, thus render the city a site of postmemory in its own right for each community.

In *Fat Lad*, Belfast, one of the cities most deeply affected by the political conflicts in Northern Ireland, is portrayed as a city caught between violence and urban renewal. "The battle between *des*truction and *cons*truction . . . was the oldest battle in Belfast" driven by "[t]he congenital predisposition of various of its inhabitants for periodically dismantling the city" (*Fat Lad* 204). Upon his return, Drew encounters a city entirely rebuilt:

> For how could he be said to have returned to something that wasn't there before? The Belfast he left, the Belfast the Ex-Pats forswore, was a city dying on its feet: cratered sites and hunger strikes; atrophied, self-abased. But the Belfast he had heard reports of this past while, the Belfast he had seen with his own eyes last month, was a city in the process of recasting itself entirely. The army had long since departed from the Grand Central Hotel, on whose levelled remains an even grander shopping complex was now nearing completion. Restaurants, bars and takeaways proliferated along the lately coined Golden Mile, running south from the refurbished Opera House, and new names had appeared in the shopping streets: Next, Body Shop, Tie Rack, Principles. And his own firm, of course, Bookstore. (*Fat Lad* 4)

Yet, the traces of the past are still present, causing Drew to regret his return. "[P]erhaps," he thinks, "coming back, even for a short while, was a complete mistake, and whatever befell him hereafter he would have no one to blame for it but himself" (*Fat Lad* 127). As Caroline Magennis observes, "[t]he past is visible in many prominent ways in contemporary Irish culture, North and South," a dynamic clearly reflected in Patterson's portrayal of the city and its people (349). This haunting presence of the past is powerfully manifested in the sudden intrusion of violence into an ordinary evening:

> The street filled with music. Fifties pop, acid house, a shriek of jazz trumpet from somewhere, a crash of metal from a jukebox somewhere else, Indian restaurant music from the Indian restaurant. Discrete yet oddly harmonious; a symphony for any city, summer 1990. Then a single discordant note was introduced. A distant percussion, like a heel being brought down smartly on an empty Coke can. Crumpcrack. (*Fat Lad* 207)

The persistence of Belfast's turbulent past surfaces still more powerfully during Drew's cemetery visit in the final chapter.

> As Drew was leaving the cemetery, an army foot patrol was entering and spreading out among the gravestones. The dead too needed watching here. The dead *above all* needed watching here. Containing the dead, it could be

> said, was the beginning and end of policy in Northern Ireland. Containing the dead, it could even be said, was the whole rationale for the country's existence. . . . They were every nowhere, not to be sidestepped, no matter how far to the side you tried to step. (*Fat Lad* 276–277)

This meditation on Belfast's history reveals how the city refuses a reconciliation with its past. Patterson's imagery portrays Belfast as a city overwhelmed by an omnipresent past, one in which the dead are everywhere, recalling the city's long history of violence and partition. Haunted by unresolved histories and inheritances, the city thus emerges as a postmemorial site, wherein the later generations are exposed to the exigencies of the historical traumas not only through familial narratives and practices but also through cultural forms of remembrance. Interestingly, for Drew, this haunting effect is not confined to Belfast itself. In the final chapter of the novel, Drew returns to England, where he witnesses a bomb being defused. He feels a sudden unease when he hears a helicopter, as the traumatic events of his family and culture have etched themselves onto his imagination. In her elaborations on the postgeneration, Hirsch elucidates this mechanism, stating that "[t]he bodily, psychic, and affective impact of trauma and its aftermath, the ways in which one trauma can recall, or reactivate, the effects of another, exceed the bounds of traditional historical archives and methodologies" ("The Generation of Postmemory" 104). Drew, whose cultural traumas are reactivated by the sound of the helicopter, learns that it has been buried there since the Second World War when a Bangladeshi man says: "Imagine, after all these many years, they're still digging them up" (*Fat Lad* 279). Meanwhile, a TV reporter and a cameraman attempt to film the scene, a gesture that aligns well with Hirsch's emphasis on the role of media and the power of images in forming postmemorial narratives, through which generations who have not directly experienced the traumatic event come to affiliate with it. While this scene illustrates how easily the traumas of historical events like world wars can resurface, it also reminds Drew of the historical baggage he carries with respect to his Northern Irish heritage. In the "Postscript" part, it is revealed that Drew's Belfast branch of the bookstore gets damaged in an IRA (the Irish Republican Army) bomb attack. Hence, the novel closes in a way that echoes the circular movement of the drowning goldfish that opened the novel. In this regard, *Fat Lad* does not offer resolution but rather presents a negotiation with personal and communal memories, whether experienced directly or indirectly, as disclosed through "the unpredictable and uncontrollable ways in which the ghosts of the Northern Irish past continue to haunt the Northern Irish present" (McGuire 61–62).

Conclusion

In *Fat Lad*, Patterson revisits the interstices between personal and communal history vis-à-vis his Northern Irish heritage, thereby digging in the silences in the Northern Irish history of partition and sectarian violence. To that end, he weaves the story around the troubled stories of three generations of the Linden family alongside the parallel history of Belfast, revealing how personal and communal memories remain deeply entangled within a city marked by recurring cycles of violence. The novel's opening metaphor of the

goldfish is suggestive of the constraints imposed by the familial and cultural transmission of traumatic events across generations. Although Drew encounters a city undergoing political and urban change upon his return, the novel posits an ending that defies definitive reconciliation. The damage to the bookstore by an IRA bombing in the "Postscript" implies that the structures of violence persist even when the city aspires toward renewal. This final act of violence consolidates Belfast's position as a postmemorial site in which trauma remains unresolved, continually resurfacing in manifold forms. Patterson's interweaving of familial history with the city's political upheavals ultimately reveals how the traces of traumatic events are inextricably entwined in the culture and heritage of the people of Northern Ireland, emerging as postmemories that continue to haunt subsequent generations.

This study has argued that *Fat Lad* illustrates how, in Northern Irish culture, "silence and violence are never outside discourse, but are linked to and participate in overall communicative strategies" (Beville and McQuaid 11). The novel structurally enacts this dynamic by allowing the Linden family's inherited violence to speak through the silence of the Catholic community. While the novel's multi-generational structure illustrates how violence and anxiety are transmitted within the Linden family and reworked by each generation, it leaves the Catholic experience on the periphery. Hugh McManus's encounter with the British soldier remains the novel's sole representation of the Catholic experience of postmemory. However, Drew does not necessarily affiliate himself fully with Hugh's experience since his engagement with Hugh's inherited legacy ultimately leads him to reflect on his own familial and communal memories and postmemories. Against this backdrop, this study has attempted to highlight this asymmetry as a significant consideration in relation to Hirsch's framework. In a deeply polarized society as Northern Ireland, affiliation does not necessarily transcend sectarian boundaries but remains confined within the experiential boundaries of each community.

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