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Listen Up: Collective Armenian Genocide Postmemory in Micheline Aharonian Marcom's *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*

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In 2001, Micheline Aharonian Marcom published her novel *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* to imagine the Armenian genocide her family survived. Marcom's novel could aptly be described as a work of 'postmemory,' per Marianne Hirsch's coinage. And yet, reading Marcom's novel as a work of postmemory poses many problems, since the novel does not fit neatly into Hirsch's theory which scholars have criticized as being too individualistic. By close reading *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* and Marcom's use of storytelling as an ethical mediator between memory and postmemory, I arrive at a modified theorization of Hirsch's theory. I identify the potential of a *collective* postmemory that invigorates the productive anger of both writer and reader.



Between 1997 and 2001, Micheline Aharonian Marcom's life had drastically changed. In 1997, the Armenian American novelist sat at her desk in Berkeley, California to begin the manuscript that would become her first book about the Armenian genocide of 1915–1923 in the Ottoman Empire. The novel would be rich with characters, including one based on her maternal grandmother who had survived. By 1999, she had submitted this polyphonic manuscript, titled *The Myth of Genocide*, as her master's thesis for an MFA in Creative Writing from Oakland's Mills College. Two years later, in 2001, her thoroughly revised thesis—with the addition of many more voices, fantastical scenes, and the personified character of Rumor—was published as *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* by Riverhead Books, a division of Penguin. That year, *Three Apples* landed on end-of-year best books lists at the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Washington Post*, and the *New York Times*, earning accolades from fellow novelists Cristina García, Junot Díaz, and Maxine Hong Kingston. Marcom's career as a writer had launched, but in the five years between draft and publication, she had also changed her beliefs about memory, identity, ethics, and storytelling, inadvertently contributing to scholarly conversations about Marianne Hirsch's theoretical concept of postmemory. By tracking Marcom's development as a writer and close reading a short section of Marcom's novel, I redefine postmemory. While reading Marcom's novel as 'postmemory' makes sense given its motivation and the author's positionality, reading Marcom's novel as such poses many problems, since it does not fit neatly into a theory which scholars have criticized as being too individualistic. Analyzing Marcom's use of story, and not photography, as an ethical mediator between memory and postmemory in a key chapter in the novel, I arrive at a modified theorization of Hirsch's theory. I identify the potential of a *collective* postmemory that invigorates the productive anger of both writer and reader.

Situating Marcom's Writing Process in the Postmemory Conversation

Marcom's imaginative retelling in *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* of the Armenian genocide her family survived could aptly be described as a work of 'postmemory.' As coined by Marianne Hirsch in 1992 in her seminal article, 'Family Pictures: *Maus*, Mourning, and Post-Memory,' the 'post-' in 'postmemory' refers to the active role of the generation born after a traumatic event in transforming the memories that they inherit. The work that Marcom does in her novel can be described as such because she revives, through narrative, the inherited stories of the Armenian genocide that her family survived. Hirsch's postmemory theorizes those who—as a result of feeling the emotions of frustration or emptiness that are generated when the 'archive in the case of traumatic interruption, exile, and diaspora, has lost its direct link to the past'—feel the need to 'reactivate and re-embody more distant political and cultural

memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression' (Hirsch 2012: 33; Hirsch 2012: 33, emphasis in original). In this sense, postmemory builds on cultural memory—as articulated by theorists like Maurice Halbwachs and Jan and Aleida Assmann—in its intensely personal and individual desire to vivify the proximal past inherited by both family histories and a larger cultural history. In Marcom's case, this description of postmemory also rings true. The memorial structures here are what might be called 'history,' and Marcom turned to them—the fact-based narratives found in books and inscribed on monuments—to fill in the gaps left by the sentences she inherited from her mother about her grandmother's experience of surviving a genocide. Since the last time that Marcom saw her grandmother alive was when she was five, Marcom did not have her grandmother's guiding narrative to help her tell the story (Marcom 2013). In her grandmother's stead, Marcom turned to published works, including one she had been given by her grandfather about Ambassador Henry Morgenthau's eyewitness account, to learn about the place her grandmother lived in Central Anatolia before the Armenian genocide (Marcom 2001a: 51).

Hirsch suggests that those who create postmemory feel discontented by what is available to them through history. Again, Marcom and her work fit in here as well, for, after reading survivor memoirs, consular reports, and histories of the Armenian genocide, after 'poring through it all, she decided to write a novel' (Krikorian 2001). Marcom would find that 'Fiction allows us to have an affiliation or relationship to the figures of history, to feel something, to be there, to bring us close up. The story also doesn't just work with the intellect, but allows one to experience history perhaps as it was more closely experienced—an internal experience (of emotion, say) and an external one (of the physical)' (Marcom, as quoted in Merjian 2002: 8). This insight—that fiction might allow her to access emotional and physical truths of the experience of her ancestors and others who lived and died at the time of the Armenian genocide—reflects her understanding of just how inadequate historical source material is for accessing the kinds of intimate knowledge she desired of her ancestral trauma.

In fact, although Marcom describes how she 'did a tremendous amount of research to write the book, and wrote scenes that were often directly inspired by my research,' as the novel emerged, Marcom's writing experience shifted: 'While writing the book, I also, inexplicably to me at the time, wrote pieces which were more in the mythical/fantastic realm. Basically, I wrote where I felt inspired and/or obsessed' (Marcom, as quoted in Davis-Van Atta 2012: 142; Marcom, as quoted in Davis-Van Atta 2012: 142). Marcom's description of the process of writing *Three Apples* reveals her own surprise at how the novel turned out. She admits that, 'although I thought, when I first began, that

I would only write about my grandmother, I realized very quickly that novels take on a life of their own. So while I began with the character Anaguil, based on my grandmother, soon other characters in the town showed up, inspired by what I read, by the memoirs, and historical accounts, and photographs, even, as if they too wanted to be written. I learned to let their voices be heard' (Marcom 2013).

Marcom's manuscript would include points of view of a diverse cast of characters: a spunky teenage girl named Anaguil, who is modeled loosely on Marcom's grandmother; a deceased baby named Dickran, who offers his unnamed listener three possible scenarios for what happened to him after he was left under a tree in the Deir al-Zor Desert during a death march; a girl named Rachel, who never admits that she committed the crime of suicide but lists all the reasons why she did anyhow; a young scholar named Sargis, who slowly goes mad in an attic hiding from the Ottoman gendarmes; a man named Leslie Davis, the American Consul who haphazardly documents the atrocities committed against the Armenians; a young woman named Lucine, who attempts to use her unwanted affair with the American consul to save her family; and a Muslim woman named Maritsa, who turns to prostitution to support her family during the war while her husband fights at the front.

In many ways, Marcom's work and process do align with Hirsch's articulation of postmemory as an imaginative response to feeling discontented with the source material available about an ancestral trauma and turning to imaginative retellings that invigorate the past that available source material failed to vivify.

And yet, reading Marcom's novel as a work of postmemory is problematic, since the novel cannot be described perfectly by Hirsch's theory. Where things do not neatly align are the concerns of the present article—the methods and the outcomes of postmemory. As described by Hirsch, because the motivating emotional state of postmemory is discontent, it does its work of reactivating and reembodying inherited memories by imaginatively transforming source materials via a mediating medium, such as photographs. According to Hirsch:

It is this presence of embodied experience in the process of transmission that is best described by the notion of memory as opposed to history and best mediated by photographic images. [...] Through the indexical link that joins the photograph to its subject [, ...] photography, as I will show in more detail below, can appear to solidify the tenuous bonds that are shaped by need, desire, and narrative projection. (Hirsch 2008: 111)

In Hirsch's theory, the photograph forges a connection with the memories of the past that the imagination then works to bring to life. For Hirsch, 'More than oral or written

narratives, photographic images that survive massive devastation and outlive their subjects and owners function as ghostly revenants from an irretrievably lost past world. They enable us, in the present, not only to see and to touch that past but also to try to reanimate it by undoing the finality of the photographic “take” (Hirsch 2008: 115). Hirsch’s reading of Art Spiegelman’s graphic memoir *Maus*, as well as other creative work inspired by the Holocaust, helped her arrive at the following relationship: there is memory and there is postmemory, and between them is photography. In Hirsch’s work, photography is the privileged connecting medium between the source material of the memory of a traumatic past as experienced by a traumatized victim and the postmemory of a descendant of that traumatized victim.

However, the particular variety of postmemory that manifests in Marcom’s novel does not align with Hirsch’s theorization of the mediating medium of photography. For reasons particular to the Armenian genocide and its historical context, photographs and image-making that may have helped mediate between memory and our imagined versions of the past are limited, compromised, suspect, and problematic. Scholars have shown that photographic evidence from the Armenian genocide was systematically destroyed, prohibited, and fabricated to support the propagandistic claim that the victims of a genocide (‘if one even occurred’ per Turkish doxa) were Turkish, not Armenian.¹ Further, any family photos that may have been produced at the time were themselves infected by a painful history of migrant labor practices, forced family separation, and the closures of many Armenian photography studios in the Central Anatolian provinces

¹ For more information on Turkey’s official stance on the Armenian genocide, see Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2021.

At the time of the genocide, the still-nascent technology of photography was not easily available to capture atrocities, and, as Tessa Hofmann and Gerayer Koutcharian have discovered in their research, photographs that were taken to document the genocide were destroyed or not allowed to leave the Ottoman Empire. As Hofmann and Koutcharian summarize, German engineers and officials were forced by the Turkish military commissar Nizami to turn in all photographs and prints they’d made in 1915 while working on the Baghdad railroad which made them privy to the mass deportation of Armenians. Their research led them to a startling fact: ‘Ahmed Jemal Pasha, commander of the Fourth Ottoman Army in Syria—the primary deportation area for Armenians—imposed a strict ban on the photographing of deportees’ (Hofmann and Koutcharian 1992: 54). Further, the photographs themselves were hard to take in the first place, as ‘For technical reasons too the number of visual documents directly related to the genocide of 1915 are relatively few: automatic cameras were still not available during World War I. At that time photography meant still photography and involved the arduous, time consuming adjustment of photographic plates’ (Hofmann and Koutcharian 1992: 54). Further, even as the genocide was committed, false photographs were *created* to cover up the slaughter of Armenians. Historian Susan K. Blair found evidence of the staging of a photograph of Turkish women mourning the murder of ‘their’ men at the hands of ‘revolutionary Armenians’ in a book published in 1917 by the Turkish Government entitled *Aspirations and Revolutionary Activities of Armenian Committees before and after the Proclamation of the Ottoman Constitution*. Reading the testimony of a German eyewitness, Blair discovered that the men were Armenian, and the women mourning in the photograph were Turkish women brought from a nearby village who were paid for feigning sadness (Blair 1989: 22).

in the years preceding the Armenian genocide.² Given these problematic issues with photographs from the time, I found that, when analyzing Marcom's novel, instead of the mediating medium of photography, *story* functioned as both the main mediating medium and the imaginative product of postmemory.

Story as Medium and Product of Postmemory

Attending to *story*—as both the mediating medium and product of postmemory—is encouraged by Marcom's own writerly journey. In this section, I track Marcom's self-aware writerly journey from *myth* to *storytelling* and argue that it encapsulates the main concerns of the present article—the shifts that must occur if postmemory as a theoretical and creative framework is to be useful for scholars of the theory and the imaginative productions we deem to be produced under its auspices. Those invested in rethinking postmemory *now*, thirty years after its initial coinage, stand to learn from Marcom's decision to engage with the ethical problematics of postmemory by developing a collective postmemory that pivots to a self-aware polyphonic storytelling which encourages collective ethical action.

As described above, Marcom reworked her master's thesis into *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*. In the revision process, Marcom honed her method and goals. As Marcom describes her writing experience and the novel she published:

By the end of 1999 I had a full draft of the novel, a novel written in small vignettes that moves back and forth in time between 1915 and 1917. [...] A novel which also includes fables: in fact[,] it is from these fables that the book's title is drawn. Armenian fables traditionally end with: *And three apples fell from heaven, one for the storyteller, one for*

² Recent efforts to collect these images show a desire and a need by many today who want to know what the prelapsarian past before the genocide was like—projects like Houshamadyan attempt to reconstruct the Armenian provinces using archival documents and photographs, while Project SAVE tries to do so with photography for the many places that Armenians have lived in the diaspora. Despite these efforts, what I'd like to suggest in my article is that these images are somewhat *infected* by the problematic history of images and image-making the Armenian genocide context. They carry with them that uncomfortable legacy. In anthropologist Nefissa Naguib's work on the family albums of a particular Armenian immigrant in Cairo, she suggests that the 'photos do more than stimulate remembrance: they also absorb the intractable complexity of disruptive historical moments and wrestling with personal evocations of loss' (Naguib 2008: 238). Further, as art historian David Low explains, though the connection photography forged for scattered Armenian families, 'It is interesting to observe how dealing with family separations was part of the business of photographic studios, often themselves very much family enterprises that demanded domestic cohesion and cooperation for their running. However, photographers were not immune from those forces that took their toll on Armenian lives. In a small scale prefigurement of the near total destruction of the industry that would occur in later years, a number of Ottoman Armenian studios were either destroyed during the 1890s massacres or closed down in the aftermath as their occupants moved elsewhere' (Low 2015: 50).

the listener, and one for the eavesdropper. As the novel evolved, the fable emerged as the form with which its symbols seek the truth. (Marcom 2001a: 52)

The emergence of the ‘fable’ as a structure and a method in Marcom’s novel marks a shift in her writing. This shift is highlighted when comparing the two titles for Marcom’s early works set during the Armenian genocide—1999’s *The Myth of Genocide* and 2001’s *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*. Unlike her thesis manuscript, Marcom’s published book references the Anatolian storytelling convention used to end three different chapters in the novel: ‘And three apples fell from heaven: one for the storyteller, one for the listener, and one for the eavesdropper.’ In the change of titles, in the move from a focus on *myth* to a focus on the three apples of *storytelling*, Marcom created new narrative possibilities.

The possibilities for Marcom’s novel were expanded in ways that addressed her own writerly concerns about the ethics of creative work based on the traumatic experiences of others. In a sense, Marcom both identified and addressed the ethical gray areas of postmemory, of imagining and writing about someone else’s traumatic past. Throughout her research and writing process, Marcom mused about her work’s viability, not just as a writing project, but as an *ethical* one. In an article she published about her writing process to arrive at *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*, Marcom explains:

Always on my mind was how to represent this story, my grandmother’s story, the story of these other people, the story of genocide. Was I the right person to be writing this story? A half-Armenian American who could not speak Armenian? In addition, how to write this story when it is a story denied, refuted: to this day, the Turkish government denies that a genocide occurred—they insist [...] that it was a ‘civil war.’ I came to understand how the Armenian genocide had been relegated to the realm of myth—myth because of the Turkish government’s denial that a genocide had occurred. (Marcom 2001a: 52)

While writing *The Myth of Genocide*, Marcom worried that she might not have been the right person to write about the lives of those who lived almost a century before she began writing, in a different place with a different language than the one she knew. But confronting the present-day denial of the Armenian genocide was an ethical issue as well. International silence about the painful past of her ancestors caused Marcom pain, but it also forced her to consider how best to depict the denied past she did not experience but which continued to influence her present. As one of the unnamed storytellers in *Three Apples* asks: ‘how can you end a story which never is told?’ (Marcom 2001b: 206). In Marcom’s work, a self-aware musing about *how* to tell the story reflects two ethical

issues of representation: how to write about the experiences of others, and how to do so in a way that also addresses the needs of the present to assert the truthfulness and utility of the past without appropriating it.

Marcom's concerns have been variously discussed in the scholarly conversation about postmemory and its ethical issues. Some scholars take issue with calling the ethical outcome of imagining the experiences of others 'postmemory.' For Ernst van Alphen, postmemory is ethically confused 'wishful thinking' fundamentally because it emerges out of a 'dis-connection, hence dis-continuity: disconnection not in an emotional, personal sense but in terms of intelligibility' (van Alphen 2006: 488). Those that are born in the aftermath of a traumatic experience that continues to resonate in their lives are removed temporally and physically from the past event that affects their present, but they *desire* a connection to that past that they create through their imaginative retelling of their ancestors' pasts. Van Alphen argues that these retellings are *not* memory because, 'If indexicality defines memory by the relation between memory and its object, one can speak of the memories children have of their parents *telling* about their Holocaust experiences' (van Alphen 2006: 487, emphasis mine). This last point is key: for critics like van Alphen, postmemory is ethically problematic because, by calling the phenomenon 'postmemory,' Hirsch risks eliding the difference between the original memory of the survivor and its imaginative retelling and reconstruction by those who did not experience the event in question. It stands to reason that, in van Alphen's view, the difference between the two must be maintained if a production of postmemory is to be ethically acceptable. Marcom's self-aware musings above show that she is keenly aware of the problems of coopting the past and claiming it as her own memory. Furthermore, as my close reading will show, she incorporates this ethical sensitivity through a self-aware shift to polyphonic storytelling that calls attention to its constructed nature. This reflects her understanding of how to address the ethical problem of presenting the experience of others as part of her own makeup—memory and imaginative retelling are not conflated in Marcom's depiction.

Along with the ethical problems of eliding the difference between memory and its imaginative retelling in the present, postmemory presents scholars with another ethical problem: whether its possible ethical positionality is a *precondition* or an *outcome* of its imaginative retelling of the traumatic experiences of others. In a sustained critique of Hirsch's theory, J.J. Long argues that postmemory is 'a radically overdetermined concept,' which 'emerges, variously, as a subject-position, a structure of transgenerational transmission, an ethics of identification and remembering, a theory of familial ideology, a therapeutic aesthetic strategy, and a mode of cultural memory' (Long 2006: 151). Long's criticism of the theory centers around its all-encompassing

nature—it's everything, from identity position, to structure, to outcome. For Long, being everything to everyone is postmemory's weakness. As he posits, the 'relationship between the ethics of identification and the structure of memory needs to be theorized in a far more differentiated fashion, rather than the two terms being accommodated—or even conflated—under the banner of postmemory' (Long 2006: 161). Long questions postmemory's neat claim of an ethical outcome after imagining the inherited memories of others. He ultimately judges postmemory because it does not necessarily *emerge* from a place of ethical alignment with the traumatized other *from the very beginning*, but *creates* that alignment as a result of imagining the past anew. For Long, who borrows from art historian Kaja Silverman, postmemory fails in its articulation of the ethical stance as the *outcome*—and not the *precondition*—of creating imaginative renditions of an unexperienced traumatic past. Long's critique 'exposes the gap between postmemory as a structure of transmission and postmemory as an ethics of remembering' (Long 2006: 160). Interestingly, though, as Marcom narrates her process of arriving at her first novel, this precondition is present—Marcom already feels the ethical imperative to remember and imagine the past of her grandmother because of the present denial of the Armenian genocide her ancestors survived. And yet, in writing a novel which includes chapters written in the perspective of sympathetic Muslim characters, Marcom's ethical alignment expanded by imagining the experiences of others.

I argue that, to achieve the ethical outcome that scholars have found so problematic in Hirsch's theory, Marcom developed *story* as mediating medium and product. In other words, while scholars have issues with Hirsch's mediating medium and the ethics of imagining someone else's experience, these issues are explored and addressed in Marcom's novel through another mediating medium of *story* because it preserves a polyphony that encourages collective ethical outcomes. And, as I argue in my close reading below, Marcom expands the ethical outcome to include not just herself, but her readers as well.

If Marcom's writing process addresses the ethical concerns of scholars about postmemory, the rest of my article describes and analyzes the unique type of collective postmemory that Marcom creates in her novel, a type that calls attention to itself in its inspirational and ethical polyphonic storytelling. More importantly, a close reading of a model chapter allows me to develop a modified theory of postmemory that offers a different mediating medium—that of *story*—as a strategy that can engage and reenergize a collective, *ethical* anger for a denied genocide from the past. By focusing on the ways in which creative productions of postmemory, such as Marcom's novel, address the ethical gray areas of postmemory, I modify Hirsch's theory, making room for ethical outcomes. Furthermore, by shifting attention from photography to

storytelling as the mediating medium, my re-theorizing focuses on the way the story is told *via* the storytelling framework such that the reader *feels* an ethically inflected, energizing anger.

Marcom's Polyphonic Storytelling as Collective Ethics: A Close Reading of 'The History of Bozmashen as Iterated by the Local Dogs'

A trio of chapters in Marcom's *Three Apples Fell from Heaven* ends with the Anatolian storytelling convention that inspired the novel's title. One of Marcom's three storytelling chapters shows a postmemory that positions the mediating medium of storytelling and its attendant polyphony as the ethical potential of postmemory. In the chapter, 'The History of Bozmashen as Iterated by the Local Dogs,' an Armenian shepherd boy named Isquhee talks with his two dogs about his ideal wife, spends a night discussing stories with his mother, awakens as a transformed dog, survives the destruction of his town of Bozmashen, and laps up his cousin Kurken's blood after Kurken is murdered by a sickle-wielding policeman. At the end of this convoluted story curiously inspired by eyewitness testimony, readers reencounter the Anatolian storytelling convention used in two other chapters. In its traditional use to end fables and fairy tales, the 'three apples' ending is a formulaic way to signal a departure from the imaginative world. In its use in 'Bozmashen,' the ending morphs from words that close a remembered story of the past into an invocation to feel an energizing narrative anger.

Much of the plot of 'Bozmashen' is likely inspired by stories Marcom read in the testimonies she cites in her 'Acknowledgements.' Knowing Marcom's main source for the story she imagines in this chapter sheds light on how she transforms the inherited memory in the following way: by juxtaposing the inherited memories with the storytelling conventions that mediate her retelling in the present. One of the sources Marcom lists in her 'Acknowledgements' section is Consul Leslie Davis's accounts of the genocide in Central Anatolia. In Consul Davis's testimony, he recounts a time when he and an Armenian acquaintance, Krikor Maghakian, rode to Krikor's native village of Bozmashen and 'found it in ruins' with 'a man digging near a spring under a clump of trees just off the road' outside the town (Davis 1989: 78). Consul Davis explains that the man was 'a gendarme digging two shallow graves in the sand' for the two corpses lying at his feet (Davis 1989: 78). With a quick mention that he had 'frequently rode past this spot since and seen the skulls of these women lying on the sand,' Consul Davis moves on to describe the ruined houses and a 'few hungry looking cats [that] were prowling around' in what was left of the town completely depleted of its Armenian residents (Davis 1989: 78).

Marcom reimagines Consul Davis's destroyed town in the perspective of her fantastical Isquhee who lives through Bozmashen's destruction. She redeploys both the style and plot of traditional Armenian folktales to mediate between the past and her present encounter with it. These folkloric features often include fantastic plot inconsistencies, and Marcom maintains this tradition. For example, in Marcom's chapter, it is not obvious that Isquhee turned into a dog overnight, only that, in the morning when Isquhee wakes up, there are three dogs instead of the two that were described as Isquhee's companions. And in the last two pages of the chapter, Isquhee's name is omitted until the very end, when he is described as drinking his cousin Kurken's blood along with the other dogs. These kinds of inconsistencies are typical of tales of transformation—Isquhee's transformation into a dog bears strong similarities to Armenian transformation tales. According to philologist and folklorist Alvard Jivanyan, as with many Greek and Roman myths of persecuted heroines, Armenian folktales have many instances of human-to-animal shapeshifting. Jivanyan explains that Armenian tales of female children '[w]earing habits made of animal furs, skins or plants' can be interpreted as the character 'renouncing also one's own kind and even hints at a partial shape-shifting' (Jivanyan 2007: 94). In these tales, the 'heroine chooses to show herself as a beast, a non-human' because '[w]here a human is under threat coming from his likes, an animal or a plant can survive' (Jivanyan 2007: 94). Isquhee's transformation makes sense by Jivanyan's explanation when considering the setting of the chapter, the time of the Armenian genocide. With a particularly Armenian name that means 'truthful,' Isquhee is marked as an Armenian during a time when it was increasingly dangerous to be one. He's also oddly marked with a female name—signaled by the '-ուհի' ('-oo-hee') suffix—though he is described as a 'shepherd boy' by Marcom from the beginning of the chapter.³ It is the oddness of Isquhee's female Armenian name that suggests that Isquhee's transformation is inspired in part by Armenian folktales. As mentioned in my summary of Jivanyan's position above, shapeshifters in Armenian folktales were often young females who avoided violence by transforming into or hiding under the guise of an animal. Though Isquhee is not described as a female in the chapter, his name marks him as such. And though readers do not see Isquhee directly threatened by any aggressors in the chapter, they do see what happens to Armenian men when Kurken meets a 'Turkish or Kurdish farmer who was or was not a policeman' as he searches for his destroyed town of Bozmashen: 'the

³ In Armenian, the name Isquhee (Իսկուհի) is a female name because it ends with the suffix 'ուհի' ('oo-hee') that turns male names into female ones. It comes from the Armenian word 'իսկական' ('ees-ga-gan'), which means 'true' or 'real.' See the entry for 'իսկուհի' in Hratchyah Ajarian's *Armenian Names Dictionary* (Հրաչյեայ Աճառեան, «Հայոց Անձնանունների Բառարան»).

policeman in farmer's clothing swiped Kurken's head cleanly off' (Marcom 2001b: 145, 145). The threat of violence is real, and Isquhee's transformation into a dog allows him to escape murder. As a dog, Isquhee hides out in plain sight; his name is not mentioned until the very end of the chapter when it is safe again. If readers interpret Isquhee's transformation in this way, they would be reminded of shape-shifting's positive potential to preserve and protect, just as it did in the Armenian folktales. And yet, by already upending our readerly expectation that Isquhee be a female character, we see that things are not so simple.

Though Marcom deploys the Armenian folktale's narrative of shapeshifting to mediate between the inherited memory of a destroyed town and her present understanding of it, her chapter further undermines the view of Isquhee's transformation as a successful evasion by virtue of its canine connotations. In Consul Davis's account, there are hungry *cats* roaming throughout the city. By choosing to replace the cats of the archival source with dogs in her fiction, Marcom makes productive use of her readers' cultural knowledge. Throughout survivor memoirs and eyewitness accounts of the genocide, dogs are consistently depicted as voracious consumers of human flesh. The scene of dogs eating corpses has become so commonplace in Armenian genocide testimony that Swedish filmmakers Peå Holmquist and Suzanne Khardalian simply titled their 2005 documentary *I Hate Dogs!* to encapsulate the story of an elderly Armenian genocide survivor living in France. In the context of Marcom's story, though Isquhee escapes genocidal violence by turning into an animal, he turns into the symbol of genocidal destruction frequently employed by Armenians today.

Isquhee's transformation into a dog becomes even more sinister when seen in the context of the dehumanizing rhetoric used by the Ottoman perpetrators against their Armenian victims. Armenians were 'dogs' and 'gâvurs' ('infidels' in Turkish) to their Turkish oppressors. Numerous survivor memoirs, such as Bishop Grigoris Balakian's, document scenes of Armenians dehumanized with the label of 'dog' (Balakian 2010: 131). The Armenian Museum of America in Watertown, Massachusetts even has 'a "dog collar" that was worn by a victim of the Armenian Genocide in 1915' among its collections of Armenian cultural artifacts ('AMA Museum Collections'). It is as if Isquhee becomes what the Ottomans envisioned as his degraded destiny.

So what are we to make of the irony that the dehumanization that defined and justified violence ends by saving Isquhee *from* that violence? Put in terms of postmemory: what productive, ethical outcome is achieved for Marcom or for her readers by reembodying the past by way of a story that saves a potential victim of genocide only to make him into what he was thought to be by his would-be murderers?

Given my articulation of postmemory above, I argue that Marcom writes Isquhee's conflicted story of transformation using the mediation of inherited ancient stories to offer her readers an affective understanding of the despair of the victim. In this new story, Isquhee is saved by turning into a dog, but what is saved is his biological life and not his *lived* life. In other words, although Isquhee is 'saved' from being killed, he is not saved for his primary concern. At the beginning of the chapter, Isquhee is introduced just as he is discussing his 'future wife' (Marcom 2001b: 143). He dreams about her 'extra sweet' breath and her 'breasts and thighs' (Marcom 2001b: 141, 143). The singular goal he discusses in the chapter is marriage. By turning into a dog and escaping his murder, Isquhee is no longer able to realize his goal of marrying because his physical salvation ruins his chances of finding domestic bliss. If Isquhee's desire to marry the ideal woman is forever denied, he assumes he might be given a magical capability in consolation. He assumes he could 'lick at the fountain of [his cousin Kurken's] blood rushing from his neck' just like the magical, dog-shaped creatures called *արալեզ* or *հարալեզ* ('aralez' or 'haralez') from Armenian folktales who could lick the dead back to life (Marcom 2001b: 145).⁴ But Kurken cannot be resurrected. By becoming a dog, Isquhee is denied this magical ability to revive the dead as he is denied the marriage he wanted. He should, justifiably, feel disappointment, and even anger, for being denied the life he wanted.

Isquhee's disappointment and anger are, in the revised version of *Three Apples Fell from Heaven*, extended to the readers of his story. In the manuscript version of the novel that Marcom submitted in partial fulfillment for her MFA, the chapter titled 'The History of Bozmashen as Told by the Local Dogs' does not end with the 'three apples' storytelling convention which ends it in the novel. The frame around Isquhee's story of disappointment shifted between thesis and novel. Marcom's addition of the convention marks a new investment in storytelling that transforms the effects of the chapter on both the writer and her readers—the entire chapter becomes a self-aware story that an unnamed storyteller is telling their unmarked listener. In the novel's version of the chapter, the way the story is told is itself a part of what a reader encounters—it is memory, with a clearly marked difference.

⁴ The pronunciations of *արալեզ* and *հարալեզ* are 'ah-rah-lehz' and 'hah-rah-lehz.' In the story of Ara the Fair, a Babylonian queen, Shamiram, heard of Ara's beauty and longed for him to be her lover. When Ara resisted her advances, Shamiram sent her troops to battle Ara's and capture him for her purposes. Ara is fatally wounded, but Shamiram sends mythical hounds to lick him back to life. The majority of tales about Ara recount the success of this rejuvenating licking. For more information about 'aralez' or 'haralez,' see the epic of 'Ara the Fair and Shamiram' in Agop Jack Hacikyan, Gabriel Basmajian, Edward S. Franchuk, and Nourhan Ouzounian's *The Heritage of Armenian Literature: From the Oral Tradition to the Golden Age* (pages 37–38, specifically).

Because unlike the manuscript version, this chapter from the novel ends with the storytelling convention that places us as readers into the role of eavesdropper, we must ask: what, then, can be productively expressed in the aftermath of eavesdropping on Isquhee's despair? An answer may be found by noticing the extent to which the eavesdropper's storytelling expectations are violated and how these violations create a narrative anger that connects the eavesdropper to the anger of the denied victim. Eavesdroppers of Isquhee's story feel anger when they hear the storytelling convention at the end of the vignette without the marriage they were led to expect at the beginning of it. Their narrative expectations are further denied because Isquhee as an ostensibly magical dog cannot save his cousin Kurken by licking his blood, like the magical dogs of folktales. Marcom's chapter playfully describes a horrifying scene of slaughter, further angering and disorienting readers. In both Isquhee and the eavesdropper, anger at the violation of unfulfilled expectations becomes anger at violation in general. Juxtaposing folktale and consular report produces despair and anger, but in sequence wherein resigned despair turns into implacable anger about stories not told so that false stories can be uttered in their place. Admittedly, most forms of sustained anger are self-defeating. The persistent anger at genocide-denying stories, however, affirms the self and historical consciousness—in the Armenian diaspora, the living perpetrator is the denier, with whom there can be no willingness 'to agree to disagree.'

At its core, Marcom's revised chapter generates a new story—one that juxtaposes a consul's trivializing documentation of mass murder with the folktales that mediate how it is inherited in the present—to reveal the emotion of despair and then to transform it into a multigenerational anger that energizes contestation. In this way, Marcom achieves a collective ethical outcome for herself and for her readers who are reenergized with an emotional connection to the past in their quest to fight genocide denial in their present moment over a hundred years after the events that Marcom imagines anew. The story of the Armenian genocide is reinvigorated in Marcom's retelling. As a product of postmemory, Marcom's novel about a denied genocide combats denial by prioritizing the imagined, *felt* experience after seeing scenes from the genocide anew through the mediation of storytelling. But, in the context of denial, this postmemory is *not* merely personal—the feelings are a *collective* reinvigoration that includes the novel's readers.

Returning to Hirsch's articulation of the theory highlights how looking at the Armenian context urges a rearticulation of postmemory's ethical outcomes. In her conception of the theory, Hirsch distinguishes between *familial* and *affiliative* postmemory. The former is about the chain of transmission of traumatic memories through a direct family connection, while the latter is the phenomenon when there is no family link and the person creating the postmemory uses the stuff of history to reactivate and reembody the past that the rememberer does not have a connection to

but feels an attachment to nonetheless. Yet, in both situations, Hirsch's practitioner of postmemory is a single individual and the product he or she creates is for personal benefit. It is this *individual* outcome that I think is at the heart of the theory's critiques of its ethical gray areas by van Alphen and Long. When we look at postmemory through the lens of the Armenian context, we are better able to see the potential for *collective* feelings—what we might call a 'public feeling,' per Ann Cvetkovich—that I find is latent and unexamined in Hirsch's articulation of and scholars' critiques of postmemory.

Conclusion: Collective Postmemory

My analysis of Marcom's writerly journey and novel in the context of postmemory led me to see that if the theory is to be a useful literary analysis framework, it must be modified and extended in ways that address the valid concerns of scholars like van Alphen and Long. Scholars working in postmemory *now* must contend with the problems of ethical outcomes if the theory is going to continue to be useful to a new generation of scholars. This attention to the issues of postmemory is even more important as survivors of the Holocaust—the traumatic inheritance that was the focus of Hirsch's original coinage—age and pass away. Interestingly, though, the problems that those who inherited the Holocaust have just now begun to encounter have already been worked through by those who inherited an older traumatic past that is denied: the Armenian genocide.

Thus, after considering the Armenian context, I am able to read *differently* writer Eva Hoffman's description of herself as a member of the 'hinge generation' between the past and the present of the Holocaust. I can now see this *collective* aspect of the most positive ethical outcome of postmemory:

The story of the second generation is, above all, a strong example of an internalized past, of the way in which atrocity literally reverberates through the minds and lives of subsequent generations. That is the way the story is usually told: as personal, affective, intricately psychological. But the Holocaust past, aside from being a profound personal legacy, is also a task. It demands something from us, an understanding that is larger than just ourselves, that moves beyond the private vicissitudes of the inner life. [...] How we interpret the implications of our primary narrative, how we translate psychic information into information about the world, *matters for more than ourselves*. (Hoffman 2004: 103, emphasis mine)

Hoffman's assertion that the personal work of coming to a felt understanding of an ancestral trauma 'matters for more than ourselves' hints at a collective aspect of postmemory. It is clear that, in the Armenian context I describe above and at its best,

postmemory is much more than a personal project. It is much more than a single person's reinvestment and reimagining of the past for their own personal purposes. Now thirty years after the coinage of the term *postmemory*, we can view the postmemory of the Holocaust and other historical ancestral traumas through the lens of the Armenian context to see that the collective is a possibility, too. In this sense, we must think beyond the individual ethical outcomes of *familial* and *affiliative* postmemory to see that a greater potential outcome exists: a *collective* ethics. As scholars are in the 'second generation' of postmemory, we can view postmemory's potential collective ethical stance as responding to historical injustice with creativity, storytelling, and polyphony so that the heterogeneous, silenced voices of the past can be heard through the dulling din of the present.

Competing Interests

The author has no competing interests to declare.

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