



RESEARCH PAPER

Rooted in Loss: Exploring Generational Trauma through a Postcolonial Lens in *The Island of Missing Trees*

¹Saima Bashir* and ²Muzamil Ishaq

1. Lecturer, Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Research Scholar, Department of English Literature, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan

Corresponding Author

saima.bashir@iub.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The article explores Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* under the Deleuzian notion of generational trauma. Ada, Kostas, and Defne try to figure out who they are while dealing with unfinished trauma and repressed memories. In their attempts to cope, forget, and move on from their traumatic experiences, they encounter collective trauma. The Deleuzian perspective is used to investigate how trauma affects people's lives and is passed down from generation to generation. The study incorporates the idea of intergenerational transmission of memories to interpret how families with traumatic and violent historical events, in this case, the families who suffered during the intercommunal violence that destroyed Cyprus in 1974, pass their traumatic experiences from one generation to the other. However, generational pain can not only change the way one sees the world and oneself, but can also make new opportunities possible, thus making suffering lead to new ideas and creativity.

Keywords: Generational Trauma, Gilles Deleuze, Migration, Postcolonial Theory

Introduction

The Island of Missing Trees (2021) is a novel written by the well-known Turkish author Elif Shafak. It is a tale about the 1974 Cyprus war which is at the center of the story. At a bar under a fig tree, two people named Kostas and Defne meet. They feel drawn towards each other. They are Muslim and Christian, which means they follow different religions, but love has no limits in space or on earth. The book jumps around in time and space between its three main plots. We meet Ada first, the daughter of Kostas and Defne. She lives in London and is sixteen years old. Her mother has died, and her father is a gardener. Ada does not know about her family's past in Cyprus because her parents took care to keep it from her.

Back in 1974 in Cyprus things had got tough for Defne and Kostas as lovers. It was at the Happy Fig, a tavern owned by some kind people that the pair met. The story of *The Island* is not merely told through the perspective of humans only. A fig tree and a bird named Chico also take part. They both serve as a loudspeaker for Cypriot history, showing how flawed and dishonest people can be. After that, the readers watch the sad father and daughter. It turns out that Aunt Meryem got there and met Kostas and Ada. Through Aunt Meryem, the readers find out who Ada's real parents are. And Aunt Meryem and Ada both reflect the flaws of each other.

The French revolutionary author and philosopher Gilles Deleuze is known as a major figure in Postmodernism. In *Deleuze and the Postcolonial* (2024), Bignall and Patton make clear how Deleuze's idea about the postcolonial part of generational trauma works in practice. Generational pain can not only change the way one sees the world and oneself, but also make new opportunities possible. In Deleuzian perspective suffering could lead to new ideas and creativity. The characters give a vivid picture of Deleuze's idea that trauma can be passed down and kept alive through family and societal structures. Ada, Kostas, and Defne

all must figure out who they are while dealing with unfinished trauma and repressed memories. This paper is about how trauma affects people's lives and is passed down from one generation to the next.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory is different from other theories because it is against colonialism and acknowledges the difficulties of people who were natives and had to move from their homeland while colonialism was in power. Postcolonial theory, also known as postcolonialism, is seen as a continuation of colonialism. Countries that were once colonies now have their own governments but still must deal with different kinds of abuse and marginalization. Herman said that trauma is a state of grief and helplessness caused by a person's experiences with and exposure to natural disasters or crimes (1992, p. 33). It was said by O'Neill et al. that stress from "war, homeschools, racism and injustice, natural catastrophes, and other calamities" (2016, pp. 173-80). It is generally agreed upon by Caruth that trauma is "an overpowering experience of sudden or terrible events, where the response to the event manifests as dreams and other disturbing phenomena that happen over and over again, sometimes without warning and without supervision" (1994, p. 181). Levine says that trauma is "the opposite of empowerment" (2021, p. 4). Herman, on the other hand, connects trauma with fear and calls psychological trauma "an illness of the powerless" (1992, p. 33) that makes people lose control, connection, and meaning. People who have been through trauma often feel extreme anxiety, powerlessness, loss of control, and annihilation threat. People's bodies and minds can respond to the danger of annihilation in different ways. For example, their arousal, attention, perception, cognition, memory and emotions can change. Though the person may not remember the event clearly or feel in danger right now, these symptoms can still show up. So, the person might feel a steady state of being alert and irritable. In the long run, it can lead to conflict of attachment as well as coping strategies.

Cathy Caruth says that history, like trauma, is never just one's own when talking about how trauma is historical and social (1996, p. 192). Collective pain is mostly stored in three places: the cultural, the communal, and the familial. Psychotherapists have said that stress can spread to other people. It is possible for trauma to be passed down from one family to the next. This is called generational trauma. The effects of this stress can be seen in both the mind and the body. When someone goes through trauma, their self-esteem and good beliefs about themselves are shattered. This makes them lose confidence and trust in other people. Trauma can close us down existentially, neuropsychologically, psychologically, socially, culturally, and during growth. Using real-life examples, this study focuses that violence leads to trauma, and trauma leads to more violence, creating a terrible circle of violence. Harris says that the children of survivors subconsciously absorb painful trauma that then influence their individuation process. Ada is the daughter of Kostas and Defne, who lived through the Cyprus Wars of 1974. There are several ways in which her parents' pain and loss affect her in novel. Gilles Deleuze's ideas of deterritorialization and reterritorialization show how new links can be formed and linkages, becomings, and assemblages can change.

Deterritorialization is a term that is often used, especially in connection with globalization, to describe how people's interactions with space are becoming less limited by territorial or spatial boundaries. In this sense, some people used the term at the start of the 1990s to even say that the nation-state or geography would end and that a borderless or aterritorial world would appear, causing a huge split between the spatial and the social, where geography or the spatial would no longer have any meaning. For Deleuze, the word deterritorialization does not have to be spatial; it can also mean freeing oneself of a certain fixation and order and nomadically moving toward different (territorial) reconfigurations. It also means making new De-territorializing desires by putting together new reterritorializations. These processes of deterritorialization can sometimes test the rules

and limits that society already has. Similarly, genetic trauma affects diasporic people and their children when they leave their home country and move to another one. As in *The Island*, Ada digs deeper into the mysteries surrounding her parents' marriage and finds layers of long-buried generational trauma. These deep discoveries challenge her ideas about who she is and her heritage. In general, postcolonial theory helps us understand how colonial histories still affect our lives today, such as how pain and trauma is passed down from one generation to the next and how people fight for healing, justice, and decolonization.

Literature Review

The previous researches on Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* show that the text has been studied and analysed by various writers through multiple diverse approaches. Every author has put his/her own lens on it to interpret it. Various theories were applied to understand the complexity of the characters and their actions. Following are some seminal research works on the novel and the theory by different writers to peel down the layers to have a clear understanding of the topic.

Sabbah and Ayuningtyas' paper "The Issues of Diaspora and Displacement in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*" talks about how Shafak's novel deals with the ideas of diaspora and displacement. The story takes place in Cyprus and is about two families, one Greek and the other Turkish. Tragedies and history bring them together. Through their battles, the book shows how hard it is to live in a divided society where the past still affects the present. Shafak uses detailed and vivid language to show the reader the emotional and physical scenery of Cyprus. She also uses traditional Cypriot folktales and mythology to create a world that is very real and draws the reader in. In this article, it is talked about how the novel portrays migration as changing people's lives and causing a deep sense of loss and separation. But the search also shows how strong and brave those people are who must deal with the difficult and often hostile conditions of migration (62-68).

The article by Ramzan et al., called "Human-Nature Relationship in Shafak's *The Island of the Missing Trees: An Ecocritical Approach*," looks at how Shafak's novel *The Island of the Missing Trees* shows the relationship between people and nature. From an ecocritical point of view, the study looks at how the book shows the complicated relationships between people and nature. The study says that Shafak's narrative looks at the complicated connections between people and nature, focusing on how people's decisions and actions affect the environment. The author looks at the characters' interactions with nature, how they see it, and the effects of their decisions on the ecosystem through the lens of ecoterrorism. The writers write about environmental damage, cutting down trees, and caring about the environment. The study looks at how the characters' relationships with nature show larger concerns about the environment, sustainability, and protecting natural resources (473-83).

In "Memory Shot Through Holes" Sharma and Jha take a stand about post-memory. The idea of post-memory takes place in Cyprus, a country that is split in two by a border and has been destroyed by years of violence and killing between different ethnic groups. Shafak also looks at how families with a painful past pass on pain, trauma, loss, and silence to future generations. This is in addition to the idea of inherited pain and trauma. The researcher investigates intergenerational memories through the character of Ada, who is the daughter of Kostas and Defne. They also try to understand the different ideas behind post-memory by analyzing *The Island* (1-8).

In "Biculturalism Leading to Third Space Identity: A Postcolonial Analysis of Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*", Iqbal et al. want to show how immigrants' biculturalism can lead to Third Space Identity in the countries that take them in. By looking at the idea of hybridization in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021), the study investigates how the main character, Ada Kazantzakis builds her third-space identity. Homi K. Bhabha came up

with the ideas of third space and hybridity, which are needed to drive current studies. Bhabha was a leader in postcolonial theory, which led to the study of the famous book *The Location of Culture*. In *The Island*, she writes about the conceptual imperatives and political continuity of postcolonial Cyprus in 1974. The study's goal is to find out how immigrants' biculturalism changes their third-space identities and how that changes the lives of the main characters in the book (73–80).

The present study tries to figure out how the ghostly memories of past traumas affect the children and grandchildren of the first generation to survive the horrible events. As a familial or cultural duty, the text not only shows how to free the victims from the chains of their trauma, but it also tells us about the dangers of too much nostalgia and lamentation. The text also uses the idea of generational transmission of memories to look at how families who have been through traumatic and violent events in the past, like the families who lived through the violence between the different groups that destroyed Cyprus in 1974, pass on their painful memories to the next generation. The literary analysis looks at the different ways that trauma shows up in the lives of the post-generation and how the shadows of the past change the way they remember and understand their culture and history. Trees can live for hundreds or even thousands of years, and as they age, they keep learning new things. But people only live for a short time. The trauma they go through adds to the trauma they receive. Hence, the study shows how important it is to fix the holes and breaks in the lives of second-generation immigrants who are dealing with family traumas.

Material and Methods

In this research paper, this researcher has used qualitative method. In order to accomplish the desired study objectives, the researcher has used every fact and detail that was available as well as analysis of chosen text. Researcher has employed close reading as a tool to enhance their understanding of primary literary text. Both primary and secondary resources are used in this research. The novel *The Island of Missing Trees* have been analyzed through the lens of Postcolonial theory because this researcher have observed all the elements of these theories in the novel.

Results and Discussion

Through its varied investigation of historical legacies, cultural linkages, and individual experiences, *The Island* delicately portrays postcolonial narratives and traumas. Elif Shafak uses a complex story that creates a rich debate topic by acting as a microcosm of postcolonial complications. The story takes place in Cyprus, a historically colonized country with a diverse range of cultural influences. Shafak deftly incorporates historical occurrences into the story to show how the colonial past of the island continues to influence the protagonists' current circumstances. Postcolonial narratives are analyzed through the prism of the generational trauma. The characters represent the complex dance between the colonizer and the colonized, navigating the intersections of the British, the Turkish, and the Cypriot influences. This investigation becomes a crucial part of the novel's postcolonial theme. The novel's societal structure reflects the power relations that were created during colonial authority. Shafak adeptly illustrates the marginalization of specific communities, reiterating postcolonial notions regarding the maintenance of hierarchies. A careful examination of how these relationships appear and continue in the lives of the characters is encouraged by this thematic investigation.

As she tried to encourage her interviewees to open up, Defne was careful not to demand more than they were ready to provide. She was, however, troubled to observe deep rifts between family members of different ages. Way too often, the first generation of survivors, the ones who had suffered the most, kept their pain close to the surface, memories like splinters lodged under their skin, some protruding, others completely invisible to the eye. (Shafak, 2021, p. 250)

Defne's gentle approach to her interviewees shows how complicated it can be for families to deal with trauma that spans generations. Family members of different ages have deep rifts with each other that show how war and forced migration have changed their memories. Because they lived through it, the first generation carries painful memories with them, like splinters stuck under their skin, which represent the mental wounds that haven't healed from their past. The second generation, on the other hand decides to forget about the past, maybe to deal with the terrible things that happened to their parents. She asks at another scenario in the novel while discussing the function of DNA in passing on genetic information like "survival, growth, reproduction, the color of your hair, the shape of your nose," from parents to child, she wonders:

"Was it also possible to inherit something as intangible and immeasurable as sorrow?" (Shafak, 2021, p. 18).

Shafak, through her character demonstrates that these second-generation survivors unconsciously become the recipients of their parents' pain and grief as they are often transpositioned into their parents' past and end up becoming the surrogates of their parents' traumatic experiences and sufferings. It illustrates how second-generation immigrants living in forceful exiles are trapped in a room with the ghostly post memories of their past that continuously disorient and paralyze them.

Kostas and Defne, who are Greek and Turkish Cypriots from distinct communities, are impacted by the history of colonization, bloodshed, and displacement. They fall in love during the turbulent 1970s. Their partnership serves as a metaphor for both the difficulties and perils of stepping over historical and political boundaries, as well as the potential for coexistence, trauma and reconciliation. The novel also demonstrates how the characters use different storytelling techniques to deal with the trauma from the past and the difficulties they face today. For instance, Ada records a podcast about her family history, Defne maintains a journal of her experiences and Kostas writes letters to his brother who is missing. They can analyze their feelings, establish a connection to their heritage and express their viewpoints to others with the use of these narratives. Shafak invites a critical analysis of postcolonial subjectivities through painstaking storytelling and thematic depth, leaving readers with a deep awareness for the complex ways in which people deal with the remnants of colonialism. We are reminded as we go through the settings of this literary work that the complex stories of postcolonial living nevertheless carry the resonance of the past.

Defne's character presents a different approach to dealing with the negative consequences of war, separation, and relocation. Defne is first shown in the novel as a free-spirited guy drawn to freedom and change. Kostas left her behind, and she had to go through the agonizing conflict in her own country. Defne had to hide her pregnancy, subsequently gave up her baby for adoption, and then found out her son passed away during the conflict. Later, she moves to London and appears to have a better life, but this character progressively demonstrates psychiatric degeneration since she cannot manage to move past her painful past and recollection. She is shown as a devoted wife and mother, but she also developed alcoholics, sank into melancholy, and finally passed away. The recollection of the war causes her trauma, "Because the past is a dark distorted mirror. You look at it, you only see your own pain" (Shafak, 2021, p. 112).

Defne's failure to overcome her terrible past inadvertently puts her in a challenging position in negotiating past and present. She seems to be a free-spirited individual who did not have to consider much when offered to relocate to England with Kostas. She says,

"It doesn't go away, Kostas. Once it's inside your head, whether it's your own memory or your parents' or your grandparents,' this fucking pain becomes part of your flesh. It messes up your psychology and shapes how you think of yourself and others." (Shafak, 2021, p. 317).

Ada is a typical character in a multicultural story. She seems to fit in very well with the new society, unlike the generation that came before her. Even though she didn't go through her parents' pain, this story shows how she still felt the effects of it through Ada. The generation that comes after must deal with the effects of the clashing past and displacement in a roundabout way. Defne and Kostas try to keep their child from feeling pain by cutting Ada off from anything that has to do with their home country. "If we want our child to have a good future, we have to cut her off from our past" (Shafak, 2021, p. 317).

What Shafak does here is show that suffering can be passed down from one generation to the next. No matter how hard Kostas and Defne try to avoid it, Ada will feel the pain they feel. In her quest to find truth about her parent:

Way too often, the first generation of survivors, the ones who had suffered the most, kept their pain close to the surface, memories like splinters lodged under their skin, some protruding, others completely invisible to the eye. Meanwhile, the second generation chose to suppress the past, both what they knew and did not know of it. In contrast, the third generation were the eager to dig away and unearth silences. How strange that in a family scarred by wars, forced displacement and act of brutality, it was the youngest who seemed to have the oldest memory. (Shafak, 2021, p. 315)

This quotation amply illustrates how Ada is still impacted by all the violence of the past even though she is not the one who personally encountered it. She must "unearth silences" to completely comprehend her place in the world (sense of self) and get over her uncertainty. Kostas and Defne carried the fig tree with them as they travelled to London, and it carried memories from their native Cyprus. "The voice of our motherlands never stop echoing in our minds. We carry them with us everywhere we go" (Shafak, 2021, p. 327).

When Kostas and Defne first began dating in Cyprus in 1974, the fig tree was there. Kostas travelled to London with the burned tree in two some years later, trying to salvage it. Kostas carried symbolic meaning in carrying the tree with him. It implies that he wishes to carry a piece of his native Cyprus with him even if he lives far away. Common in the Mediterranean region, the fig tree suffers to survive when transferred to England with its cooler temperature. Still, Kostas insists on having the tree in his backyard flourish. Being a botanist, he discovers ways to keep the tree alive, including how to bury it through the hard winter. He says: "Because that is what migrations and relocations do to us: when you leave your home for unknown shores, you don't simply carry on as before; a part of you dies inside so that another part can start all over again" (Shafak, 2021, p. 59).

Kostas also brought up the Kazantzakis family and the problems they have from one generation to the next when he said that you can figure out someone's personality by looking at what they do in a tree. He said that the first thing he sees about a tree is the trunk, which suggests that he values order and safety. This suggests that Kostas is the type of person who avoids arguments. Defne, on the other hand, is part of the second group, which is made up of people who see the trees first. This means that they want freedom. People like Meryem are in the third group, which is made up of people who value the roots, or customs. Kostas says: "You spot a tree and you want to connect the trunk and the branches and the roots. You want to hold them in your vision ..." (Shafak, 2021, p. 314). Kostas uses a tree to show how Ada, as the second generation, wants to connect the past and the present, as well as the values of the new land and the customs of the home country.

Conclusion

Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* disentangles how the phantomlike postulations of past traumas impact the descendants of the first-generation survivors of the historical atrocities. In their attempts to cope, forget, and move on from their traumatic experiences, Kostas and Defne both experience collective trauma. Moreover, the text incorporates the

idea of post memory and intergenerational transmission of memories to understand how families with traumatic and violent historical events, in this case, the families who suffered during the intercommunal violence that destroyed Cyprus in 1974, pass their traumatic experiences from one generation to the other. Shafak's oeuvre, therefore, emphasizes that it is crucial to fill the gaps and ruptures surrounding the lives of second-generation immigrants suffering from traumatic past memories.

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