



UNMASKING HYBRID IDENTITY: A POSTCOLONIAL STUDY OF DIASPORIC LIFE IN *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES* BY SHAFAK

Sidra Sadaf

Visiting Lecturer, Department of English Literature, Government College University, Faisalabad. sadafsid37@gmail.com

Iqra Iqbal

Lecturer in English, University of Education, Lahore (Faisalabad Campus) iqraiqbal@ue.edu.pk

Dr. Muhammad Nawaz

Associate Professor, English Department, Northern University, Nowshera. nawaz@northern.edu.pk

Abstract

*The issues of belonging and identity are central to the postcolonial discourse where the culture and subjectivity of the postcolonial world are still constituted by heritage of the migration, colonialism, and displacement. This paper discusses Shafak's latest published novel *The Island of Missing Trees* to unveil the issue of hybrid identity in the diasporic existence. It examines the bargaining of belonging that is influenced by displacement, cultural memory, and intergenerational trauma and shows how individual accounts are connected with the overall history of the political unrest in Cyprus. Still reaching into the diasporic space of Britain, Shafak, a novelist, has shown how fragmented identities are transformed across geographical and temporal distances. The novel's dual narrative voices, the human and the non-human one, creates a stratified imagery of the diaspora that cuts across the traditional time, place, and species barrier. Through foreshadowing the hybridity, the cultural legacy, and the continuity of the ties with ancestors, the novel portrays diaspora as a place of breaking and creation. This paper concludes that Shafak believes that identity is fluid, resilient and in the process of constant reimagination by way of memory and cultural negotiation.*

Keywords: Hybrid Identity, Diaspora, Postcolonialism, Displacement, Hybridity, Memory, Cultural inheritance.

Introduction

According to Agnew (2005), the term diaspora refers “the dispersion of a group of people from one center or two or more peripheral places, as well as to the collective memory” (p. 193). Furthermore, the concept of diaspora refers to communities that have been forcibly scattered due to factors such as slavery, genocide, armed conflict, expulsion, indentured labor, political exile, or refugee displacement (Agnew, 2005). Diaspora denotes a shared experience of trauma and displacement, characterized by living in exile while longing for one's homeland (Cohen, 2008). Diasporas are “dispersed networks of peoples who share common historical experiences of dispossession, displacement [and] adaptation” (Clifford, 1994, p. 309). “Diaspora discourses” are “experiences of displacement, of constructing homes away from home, while remaining rooted in specific, discrete histories” (Clifford, 1994, p. 302). In diaspora studies, scholars have emphasized the unsettled, ambivalent, and fragmented nature of diasporic existence.

The issues of identity, exile, and belonging are put in the center stage of the postcolonial discourse where the culture and subjectivity of the postcolonial world are still constituted by heritage of the migration, colonialism, and displacement. In this discipline, the notion of hybridity has become especially important due to the dynamic and fluid nature of identities that are established across boundaries and generations. “Postcolonial narratives in contemporary literature continue to offer rich explorations of identity formation across multiple dimensions—cultural, linguistic, psychological, gendered, diasporic, and ecological” (Mukherjee, 2025, p.

144). The subject of hybrid identity challenges the notions of selfhood because of its forging of the manner in which individuals and communities can make negotiations of belonging within jumbled histories, diasporic worlds, and transnational spaces.

The Island of Missing Trees offers a very interesting structure that can be used to analyze the relationships of identity, diaspora and memory. Basing itself on the political turmoil of Cyprus, and spilling over into the diasporic field of Britain, the novel is concerned with the intersection of the individual histories of love, loss, and displacement with the shared memories of violence and migration. Shafak (2021) describes identity as both weak and strong at the same time characterized by the trauma of exile but reconstructed with the help of cultural inheritance, intergenerational memory, and adaptation ability. The employment of a non-human narrator; the fig tree also disrupts traditional narrative borders, and supports the human, ecological and cultural survival interdependence. Bhabha's theorization of hybridity is instrumental in understanding how the novel presents characters who deal with fragmented cultures. The present paper posits that *The Island of Missing Trees* by Shafak reveals the identity of hybridity by portraying the concept of diaspora as the place of loss and and as the place of renewal. Shafak (2021) destabilizes binary notions of homeland and hostland, instead presenting diaspora as a fluid arena in which identity is continually renegotiated. By doing that, *The Island of Missing Trees* can be seen as the demonstration of how hybrid identity represents itself as a reaction to the traumatic experience as well as a way of survival, allowing people and groups to re-define themselves without being confined to the geographical, cultural, and even species boundaries.

Literature Review

Diaspora as a concept has been central to the learning experience of cultural, social, and psychological experiences of displaced communities. Traditionally based on the Greek word, 'diaspeirein' meaning to disperse, diaspora in its early meaning referred to the forced movement of people out of their native places of residence. The term has included voluntary migration, exile and transnational movements which are representative of the fluidity and hybridity present in the contemporary identities (Ang, 2005). Diaspora refers to any ethnic group or community that is compelled or persuaded to leave their native homeland and settle elsewhere in the world. (Dapke, 2022). The term 'diaspora' now includes any person living outside their ancestral homeland. What was once thought of as migratory dispersion has evolved into agglomeration. As Bhabha puts it, this includes "the gathering of exiles, compatriots" and refugees gathering at the margins of 'foreign' cultures; gathering at borders; gathering in urban ghettos or cafés... as well as the movement of indentured labor and diaspora across the diaspora (Bhabha, 1994). Diaspora also encompasses the cultural practices and traditions that communities cultivate over time while living away from their countries of origin (Dapke, 2022). This situation often creates a hyphenated identity which is connotative of the dual or multiple allegiances that the diasporic people bargain in the new sociocultural environments. Immigrants face some physical, psychological, and social problems and have to cope with the contradictions between assimilating into the local community and preserving the ties with the motherland (Qasim et al., 2024). Bhabha suggests that the identities of diasporic subjects in the contemporary world can be better understood by shifting attention away from fixed categories such as class or gender. This shift allows recognition of multiple subject positions, including race, gender, generation, institutional location, geopolitical location, and sexual orientation that shape any claim to identity today (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2). "All diasporas are unhappy, but every diaspora is unhappy in its own way" (Mishra, 2005, p. 1). Diasporic individuals struggle with the dissonance between the non-hyphenated national identities

inscribed on their passports and the layered affiliations they actually inhabit. They are drawn to “explore the meaning of the hyphen,” yet remain cautious, aware that pressing it too far may result in what Mishra terms “massive communal schizophrenia” (Mishra, 2005, p. 1).

Awan et al. (2022) explain how the concept of diasporic dislocation generates identity crises among African immigrants, discussing in particular Sepha Stephanos, the protagonist of the Ethiopian descent in the novel by Mengestu. Based on the model of diaspora provided by William Safran and the term the third space by Bhabha, this paper demonstrates that Sepha is mentally attached to Ethiopia due to the memories of the political unrest and family trauma, not to mention the loss of her own identity as she tries to adjust to the American culture and society. This conflict produces a split personality who remains neither assimilated nor completely immersed in the American culture. The analysis points at the alienation of Sepha, his desire to come back, and ambivalence of his relationships and interactions, especially the relationship with Judith, which spells out the possibility and impassability of cultural negotiation. “The African immigrants undergo the experiences of identity crisis or what they face in terms of issues related to their identity “ (Awan et al., 2022, p. 453).

Qasim et al. (2024) assert that the *American Fever* by Dur e Aziz Amna provides an interesting literary account of the immigrant life. A novel fact that the novel brings forth is the way diaspora develops fragmented identities and in most cases, people experience a deep feeling of displacement both physically and psychologically. It illuminates “diasporic experiences of the immigrants in America, portraying the complexities of cultural displacement and identity through Hira, a 16-year-old Pakistani girl navigating life in Oregon” (Qasim et al., 2024, p. 45). The story of Hira shows how a hybrid identity is formed gradually as she struggles to balance between Pakistani identity and that of the American culture.

The Island of Missing Trees, according to Unluoyun (2021), is a historical and ecological fiction because Shafak combined myth, memory and politics through the narration of the fig tree. She adds that, “Although the narrative is abundant in historical references, cultural details, and vivid local color—featuring Cypriot cuisine, Turkish sayings, and Greek expressions of affection—it “is most significant as a piece of historical recovery” (Ünlüönen, 2021, para. 3). She praises the ambition of Shafak in connecting the civil war in the island of Cyprus with the trauma of the generations and the displacement of the diasporas but she criticizes that the novel makes the characters symbolic as opposed to actual. *The Island of Missing Trees* is the lyrical narrative about the themes of love, loss, and ecological memory. The fig tree which is central to the novel is represented as the witness and the bridge between generations that connects the divided past of Cyprus and the life of Ada in London. Although the review focuses on resilience, belonging and the connection between nature, it is more celebratory than critical. The novel offers a vivid and evocative exploration of belonging and identity, interwoven with themes of love and trauma “memory and amnesia, human-induced destruction of nature, and, finally, renewal” (Reese’s Book Club, 2021, para. 4). According to the Resting Willow (2022), *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak depicts the themes of love, trauma, and displacement throughout Cyprus and in London. The fig tree which serves as narrator of the story is central to the story as it implies the role played by the natural world to bring together the fragmented past and present generations. “Shafak writes in the most lyrical, sensory and evocative prose, and” this novel distinguishes itself among contemporary works for possessing not only a remarkably striking opening but also an equally powerful concluding passage (Resting Willow, 2022, para. 6). *The Island of Missing Trees* is described as a novel that explores themes of family, ancestry, war, and the consciousness of trees (Hicks, 2023). Hicks (2023) admires the lyrical writing of Shafak and her combination of the past and the personal

family stories. Goel (2025) considers *The Island of Missing Trees* as a lyrical story about memory, trauma, and displacement, across the island of Cyprus and London. She reinforces the imagery of continuity, fig tree as the symbol of continuity between generations and continuity of disjointed histories. According to her, a particularly compelling aspect of the book is its treatment of memory – “not as a clear, chronological account, but as a fragmented emotional experience” (para. 2).

Even though the current academic analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees* support the idea that the novel is lyrically written, deeply historical, and symbolically ecological, there is little criticism on how the novel negotiates diasporic hybridity within a postcolonial context. The majority of the debates revolve around the motifs of trauma, memory, and displacement, yet they do not pay much attention to how Shafak describes hybrid identity as a dynamic process of the negotiation between cultures and the impact of heritage. This gap demands a specific postcolonial reading that decodes the hyphenated identity depicted in the novel and that shows the dynamics of belonging and alienation in the life of diaspora.

Theoretical Framework

Postcolonialism is a concept that was first used by the historians to observe the socio-political realities of the post-decolonization period which cropped up after the World War II (Bag, 2024). The term ‘postcolonial’ was created first “to identify the period immediately after decolonization. It was a periodizing term, a historical and not an ideological concept. Erstwhile colonial territories that had been decolonized were just postcolonial states” (p. 9).). Postcolonial is a notion that describes all cultures “affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (Walder, 1998, p. 35). It bases its criticism the social histories, cultural differences and political discrimination that are practised and normalised by colonial and imperial machineries” (Rukundwa & van Aarde, 2007, p. 1174). To Tyson (1999), the focus of postcolonial criticism is on “the experiences and literary production of peoples whose history is characterized by extreme political, social and psychological oppression” (p. 5). In the same vein, postcolonial theory focuses on “the historical and ongoing impacts of colonialism on knowledge production and the dissemination of scientific theories” (Shakun et al., 2024, p. 196).

“Postcolonial theory challenges the idea of fixed identity by proposing instead that identity is continually reshaped through cultural encounters” (Cherkaoui Rhazouani, 2024, p. 20). According to Ashcroft (1995) et al., hybridity can be described as “the creation of new transcultural forms within the contact zone produced by colonization” (p. 135). Therefore, they utilize the term Hybridity “in postcolonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural exchange” (p. 136). One of the most important additions to the postcolonial theory is the idea of hybridity of cultures and identity by Homi K. Bhabha, who underlines the fact that the identity and culture are dynamic concepts that are constantly re-invented during the process of interaction and negotiations. Bhabha (1994) adopts his concept of hybridity from Mikhail Bakhtin, who uses the term to distinguish works that express a “single voice” (such as lyric poetry) from those that contain a “double voice” (such as novels, in which the narrator reproduces characters who speak with their own distinct voices). Hybridity to Bhabha is “revaluation of the assumption of colonial identity through the repetition of discriminatory identity effects” and signifies “the necessary deformation and displacement of all sites of discrimination and domination” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 112). He confirms that “the process of cultural hybridity gives rise to something different, something new and unrecognizable, a new area of negotiation of meaning and representation” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 211). With continuous but unequal cultural interactions, hybrid identities are created, which challenges the binary oppositions and

undergoes a change in power relations. According to Bhabha (1994), “It is the trope of our times to locate the question of culture in the realm of the beyond” (p. 2), placing identity as the fluid and dynamic “spaces of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 12). Continuing this spatial metaphor, Bhabha (1994) coins the concept of the so-called third space, the border zone in which the cultural fusions create new practices, disrupt hegemonic discourses, and shift the marginality to the empowerment. On the same note, Soja (1996) defines the Third Space as a space where the physical, mental and social realms are brought into interaction where identities can be remodeled as a result of the interaction between the real and imaginary space. In this respect, hybridity, in the words of Bhabha, implies “signifies the cultural mingling and interaction that happens in colonial and postcolonial settings, bringing about the rise of new, hybrid identities that cannot be deftly classified” (Al-Qassab, 2025, p. 313).

Instead of the neutral blending, hybridity acts subversively to disrupt dominant discourses by revealing the artificiality of identity, destabilizing hierarchies, binaries and the mythology of pure cultures and prefiguring the complex power relations between colonizers and the colonized (Saqib et al., 2022). Bhabha (1994) underlines that the productiveness of the colonial power, “its shifting forces and fixities... [in] the name of the strategic reversal of the process of domination through disavowal” (p. 112) shows the instability of the colonial power. Hall and Rutherford (1990) observe that cultures are not fixed but they are constantly being rebuilt by the interplay of numerous identities and influences that makes the concept of a more authentic cultural identity impossible. This is the dynamic process of the confrontation of cultures whereby the clash of cultures gave birth to a new one and mimicry destabilized the colonial power by generating ambivalence in its discourse (Butt, 2024). As Bhabha (1994) notices, “We will find those words with which we can speak of Ourselves and Others. “And by exploring this hybridity, this ‘Third Space,’ we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 209). The Third Space, therefore, is a liminal space where the dominant narratives and fixed identities are shaken, all social and cultural formations, be it nation states, ethnic groups, or diasporic communities, are made apparent as being hybrid. “In the Third Space, dominant narratives are destabilized, creating new cultural meanings and resistance to imposed identities” (Cherkaoui, 2024, p. 20). Hybridity in itself becomes one of the means of resistance which denies the cultural purity and a critical tool of deconstructing colonial discourses and asserting the plural, dynamic, and changing identities. According to Bhabha, “colonised subjects appropriate and enact elements of the coloniser's culture, creating hybrid identities that resist colonial power and reaffirm it” (Khan et al., 2024, p. 308). The discursive subversion of colonial power in the third space can help psychological and spiritual liberation, which is also the decolonization of the mind, but it does not involuntarily produce physical and material liberation. Likewise, not talk about the condition of labor exploitation, unequal access to resources and the use of state apparatus to obtain economic benefits. Rather, it focuses on the formation of subjectivities of the colonized in the intermediate space of the cultural encounter of the colonizer and colonized. In the opinion of Jefferess (2008), this form of resistance reduces colonialism in cultural projects, since it ignores the material conditions and the role of ideology that structures such conditions. Similarly, Bhabha's third space does not speak about the liberation of the colonized people from political and economic exploitation.

Thus, the theoretical insights of postcolonial discourse, particularly Bhabha's hybridity and the structure of third space, lay the foundation for analyzing shifting identities within Shafak's

narrative and understanding how diasporic subjects contest and reconfigure dominant cultural structures.

Research Methodology

The paper uses a qualitative, interpretive approach to discuss the concept of hybrid identity in *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak. It is based on the postcolonial literary analysis grounded on the take of the hermeneutic inquiry to examine the identity that is formed by displacement, memory and cultural inheritance within the generations. A critical textual analysis of narrative structure, characterization, and symbolism is done to reveal exile, hybridity, and intergenerational trauma representations. The main theoretical approach used by Bhabha is the idea of the hybridity and the “third space”.

Textual Analysis

“Identity crisis/hybrid identity is a dominant theme of literature in the rapidly growing globalized society” (Mortaza et al., 2024, p. 4177). Shafak (2021) offers the depiction of diasporic identity as a dynamic, and negotiable construct, which is constructed by the interplay of the memory, hybridity, and cultural heritage. Set in two periods of time: the 1970s in Cyprus and the present-day Britain, the novel indicates the psychological and emotional effects of displacement, which persists long after the main character, Ada, and her family left their home and found themselves in exile. The fig tree as a non human narrator extends the range of the diasporic discourse by introducing the ecological memory into human loss and survival thus connecting environmental continuum with cultural toughness. Not only is it a love story of a Christian Greek and a Muslim Turkish who emigrates to England on a Cyprus island, but it is also a narrative about displacement and migration off the homeland which, through the motifs of identity, belonging, post-memory, trauma, and the symbolic role played by nature in connection to the homeland, reveals the effects of migration on the second generation.

Shafak (2021) examines the intense repercussions of being in exile and shows the characters who left their Mediterranean native and were in England, where where they “[grew] and thrived” yet continue to “yearn to be back. Home. Motherland” (p. 1). This duality emphasizes the bargaining of identity in exile where the material achievement in the hostland is accompanied with trans-long emotional and cultural viability to the homeland. The novel also highlights the symbolic role of maps, used to demarcate borders and determine friends or enemies, and strengthen the liminality of displaced subjects. The case of Ada represents the tertiary effects of being a rootless generation. Compared to her parents, she does not have a first-hand experience of war or forced exile and is considered by them as a British kid that never came to Cyprus. She is a familiar name in the diasporic literature the second generation child who is more easily absorbed into the foreign culture than the first one. However, even being protected against the literal traumas of exile, Ada bears the psychological trace of displacement of her parents. This action is indicative of the indirect relaying of loss and dislocation between generations. Willed to ensure that their daughter will not suffer the same life as her parents, Kostas and Defne strive to disconnect her to Cyprus: “If we want our child to have a good future, we have to cut her off from our past” (Shafak, 2021, p. 317). Nonetheless, this obliteration of history confuses Ada who feels her lack of rootedness without a clear understanding of its origin. She is not aware of her mother, who has had unhealed wounds but these silences on the part of the past of Defne complicate Ada and make her feel alienated. Her sorrow following the death of her mother becomes mixed with another more intangible loss; that of cultural belonging and identity. The inherited burden that Shafak (2021) sums up is summarized in the metaphor, “Family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark” (Shafak, 2021, p. 128). The novel uses the character of Ada to question the

issue of the intergenerational trauma that has continued to haunt a postcolonial diasporic world, and how the effects of displacement can be felt even by people who are geographically and time-wise distant of the original disruption.

A central aspect of Ada's alienation is her linguistic estrangement. Her parents avoid their native languages though they live in a multicultural family. As a result, Ada is unable to speak Greek or Turkish, a native language of her father and mother, respectively: "Her parents had not taught her their native languages... Ada could speak neither her father's Greek nor her mother's Turkish" (p. 7). This linguistic lack is symbolic and functional one: a break that deprives Ada of her cultural legacy and further isolates her. Her ragged assortment of foreign words, which is mentioned as precious pebbles, is an allegory of a heritage that is aesthetically appreciated, but the functionality is unavailable, and the conflict between the memory and the reality of the culture comes to mind. This is unconnectedness that is most apparent at times of extreme emotional sensitivity. Observing the fear of others Ada sees herself momentarily out of the web of human vulnerabilities: "In her unbroken loneliness, [Ada] was complete" (p. 29). It is this dramatic turn that summarizes the paradox of her identity, alien to the continuum of her ancestors but with the fragile and unexpected integrity of her alienation, her exclusion.

"Identity is the most significant concept in postcolonial theory due to colonization and globalization" (Jabeen et al., p. 1026). Shafak (2021) combines personal reminiscence with the universal historical experience of being displaced to reveal the generational intricacies behind diasporic identity. Ada is burdened by her inherited past, which slowly falls upon her self-concept: "Something was strangling [the protagonist, Ada] – the past... the roots" (Shafak, 2021, p. 257). The metaphor of roots summarizes the duality of memory, it provides her with the ground and at the same time, it confines her to the past she did not experience directly. The loss of expression of her feelings indicates the stalling kind of impact of displacement, where identity is paralyzed between the weight of memory and the weight of negotiating the present. One of the key symbols in this bargaining of memory and strength is the fig tree. The novelist describes the invisibility of culture and its continuation in one of the passages: "... Ada opened the curtains and stared into the darkness... She knew the fig tree was there... changing, remembering" (p. 264). In this case, the fig tree serves as a symbol of an invisible but lasting anchor, the continuation of the past that lingers even when buried. Its silent endurance in growing, changing, remembering is much like the one Ada has in trying to build identity in exile itself, the physical dislocation is negated by an immeasurably dislocated cultural inheritance. Interpersonal relations also point out the issues of diasporic belonging. In another case, "Ada... amused at her father's lame attempt to connect with her through emo rap, of which he hadn't got a clue" (Shafak, 2021, p. 263). This scene, which is lighthearted and yet eye-opening, highlights the divide in generations and culture triggered by migration. The fact that Ada holds back her amusement and wonders whether she should talk in his language indicates an effort to overcome this gap, which represent the hybrid negotiations that are typical of second-generation immigrants. Her need to connect in this scene is a diasporic desire to home, as a place of non-mediated communication, a place of collective identity that transcends translation.

"Diasporic identity, in its simplest form, is the evolving sense of self among those who have moved from their homelands, adapting and changing while retaining connections to their origins" (*Sustainability Directory*, 2025, para. 2). In the larger processes of diasporic identity construction, the mild form of prejudice that Defne experiences brings forth the constant bargaining of belongingness in the exile condition. Upon hearing of her origin, the reaction of the man is hesitant. "Oh, she's T-T-Turkish?" —betrays an implicit bias, revealing how ethnic

identity is often received with unease. Defne's immediate retort, "Why?" followed by the sharper question, "Do you have a problem with that?" (Shafak, 2021, p. 57) is the active rejection of internalizing or even normalizing such assumptions. This scene demonstrates how all diasporic people often move between cultural affirmation and the search of social convenience as the identity is temporary and can be challenged. This tension is reduced a notch when the man insists, by saying, "Hey, don't get upset! Yusuf himself is Turkish" (Shafak, 2021, p. 57), a bid to alleviate unrest, by appealing to the similarity of ethnicity. However, this transaction reveals the frailty of diasporic belonging, in which recognition becomes transmitted through hereditary divisions and suppressed prejudices. The stiffening of the gaze and the unwillingness to give in on the part of Defne proves that cultural selfhood needs to be proclaimed in those areas where identity has to be constantly fought.

"Diaspora identity is a fluid construct, shaped by the interplay of host and home country dynamics" (Dhar & Raman, 2024, p. 256). Ada is more attentive to the cultural and familial conflicts that characterize the relationship of her parents due to the charged history of her Greek father and Turkish mother. She acknowledges social backlash that they experienced when they got married and lack of effort put by the family on either side to establish meaningful relationships. It is their absence, which she experiences most sharply at the funeral of her mother, that adds to the vagrant nature of Ada. In refusal of the superficial conformity to cultural norms, she insists upon the authenticity of familial bonds that challenge, and not cover, historical boundaries. "You're Greek, Mum is Turkish" (Shafak, 2021, p. 55), her words underline the legacy of inherited animosities as well as the insistence of the second-generation on honesty. The fact that Ada rejects cultural practices or folk wisdom that hides outstanding grievances is a sign that she is rejecting romanticized history and identity imposed by the outside world. Shafak (2021) predicts the stratified diasporic experience of rootlessness through Ada: the kind that exists in the form of linguistic erasure, disrupted intergenerational family relationships, and the transmission of the historical trauma to future generations. The path of Ada is the final example of the fight to find the way through the broken heritage and to establish the independent sense of self which will not be absorbed by the past aggressions as well as the silence.

Shafak (2021) brings forth the experiences of Ada in educational institutions to bring out the ways of alienation through institutional discourses that are subtle. Ada's lack of connection to this pedagogical rhetoric is part of a wider denunciation of the curricular practices that value hegemony of discourse and exclusion of the multiple histories of diasporic communities, thus marginalizing those students whose experiential knowledge is not recognized. Such institutional forgetting goes hand in hand with a lack of personal connections and further alienates Ada culturally. Her thoughts— "What kind of people were they?...Would they recognize her...?" (Shafak, 2021, p. 7 — accentuate the multiplied impacts of broken kinship and displacement. By so doing, Shafak (2021) prefigures the manner in which identity in the context of diaspora is not only formed through familial recollection and relations, but through absence, silence, and invisibility of the marginalized pasts.

Shafak (2021) continues the meditative theme of the novel by the thoughts of Defne concerning the old people on the island. "...A grandfather or a grandmother was keen to talk when there were no other family members around. For they remembered" (Shafak, 2021, p. 249). Even most of these elders who grew up in ethnically mixed villages were still able to speak both Greek and Turkish. However, others, especially those who were in the grip of the Alzheimer, descended "the slopes of time into a language they had not used in decades" which underscored the precarity of cultural memory as well as its persistence. Their testimonies vary in structure:



some of them are the eyewitnesses of the atrocities, others are relaying them, and some prefer to remain silent or avoid confiding. This plurality of memory reflects the selective, volatile, and essentially embodied quality of memory, showing the ways personal memories are hooked up to wider histories of collective memory. Through foregrounding these voices, Shafak (2021) contextualizes the diasporic identity to a contentious field of memory where language, silence, and memory negotiate the margins of trauma, resilience and forgetting.

The story of Defne is placed in the context of a post-conflict Cyprus, characterized by the stratified memory, cultural hybridity, and intergenerational trauma. Defne wanders the rainy streets in her blue trench coat to find the so-called pieces of forgotten memories penned in the history of the entire island. Her experiences with families show an ambivalent relationship between kindness and reserve of gestures of hospitality by mistrust of historical violence. The nostalgia of the elders, the images of the world that will always remain changed, their free use of both Greek and Turkish, are expressed in memories, which are “like tufts of wool dispersed in the wind” (Shafak, 2021, p. 249), and their ability to move freely between cultures, without strict boundaries. But the silences and evasions of some people emphasize the continuation of the traumatic experience and how displacement imposes forgetting. This ethnographic sensitivity can be seen in the fact that Defne does not push interviewees to their limits, emotionally speaking, because she understands that there are “deep rifts between family members of different ages” (Shafak, 2021, p. 250). These intergenerational rifts indicate a paradox with the survivors of the first generation being the carriers of the splinters of memory that is trapped in the body painfully and under the skin but with younger generations, some have turned to suppression as a survival strategy. Exile and its traumas in this dynamic do not disappear but are transformed throughout the times to create the diasporic identity based on the concurrent memory and destruction.

The diasporic memory is usually characterized by complexity and pain because displacement brings forth memory with loss and trauma. The life of Defne can serve as a bright example of such state: her secrecy about her pregnancy and adoption of the child during riots in Cyprus is followed by the agony of the death of her son. Her mental condition worsens after the move to London together with Kostas due to unresolved trauma and inescapable memories. As opposed to the nostalgic memories that are known to sometimes make the exile experience less traumatizing, the memories of her country have continued to be filled with violence and division, which highlights the fact of forced migration that makes remembrance more of a burden than a comfort. Unlike Kostas who is more flexible in adjusting to his new surroundings, Defne is emotionally tied to Cyprus and the leftovers of war tint the relationship. “The past is a dark distorted mirror [and when you look into it], you [shall] only see your own pain” (Shafak, 2021, p. 112). The fact that Defne cannot bring her past and her present to reconciliations places her in a transitional position between memory and reality. Outwardly adaptable, her memories nevertheless come back as an insider as the oceanic flow that threatens to reappear involuntarily and increase her estrangement in exile.

Culinary traditions are both direct and physical articulations of identity that both affirm cultural affiliation and, in some cases, blaspheme against culture. Food to the immigrants is a means of assimilation to the host culture or a means of fighting back against the culture erosion. This two-sidedness is reflected in the character of Meryem who has been raised in the traditional way of the Turkish and that is why she has been taught that a woman should be judged by her cooking ability and her dedication to the kitchen. She tries to reclaim her culture when she comes to London to see the Kazantzakis family, she alienates assimilation by pouring flavors, aromas, and heritage, which have been forgotten for a long time, into the domestic space. The

inherent connection between gastronomy, memory, and identity is highlighted by the fact that she believes that the cuisine is the core of a culture, and that without the knowledge of the cuisine of your ancestors, “you don’t know who you are” (Shafak, 2021, p. 137). To immigrants, the native food acts as both a source of food and a source of cultural preservation and identity. Simultaneously, the novel also highlights the fact that adjusting to new culinary surroundings is one of the most personal, but also among the most difficult parts of migration, as food forms the process of negotiation between the continuity and the change in the life of the diaspora. The food culture discussed in the novel is not limited to the domestic world but extends to the world of the public and communities, which is most eloquently manifested in the description of The Happy Fig, a restaurant introduced in 1955 by a gay couple (Yusuf and Yiorgos) into a tavern, which serves as a figurative migrant utopia. Being labeled as “a popular hang-out frequented by Greeks, Turks, Armenians, Maronites, UN soldiers...” (Shafak, 2021, p. 87), the location becomes a unique place where solid ethnic, religious, and political divides are softened by mutual joys of eating, dancing, and fellowship. The fig tree, the colorful parrot and the sensual richness of the setting all make The Happy Fig more than a restaurant and give it the air of a mythical place of correspondence and coexistence. In the story, as it appears, “strangers turned into friends, friends into lovers...” (p. 87). Considering the idea of the third space formulated by Bhabha (1994), The Happy Fig represents a hybrid cultural space in which opposing and even hostile identities are re-defined into new forms of belonging. In that regard, the tavern works both literally and allegorically: it shows how peaceful multicultural interaction can be possible and at the same time, it is a contrast to violence, exile, and displacement, which pervade the overall story. Through foregrounding of food and collective exchange, Shafak (2021) demonstrates that the fractures of diasporic life can be provisionally healed with ephemeral glimpses of reconciliation, culture bargaining and human coexistence in hybrid spaces.

The silence between generations also is quite sensitive, as Ada tells Meryem about her marriage with her parents and the opposition it received among “a different generation” (Shafak, 2021, p. 248). The failure of Ada to reach a resolution between the silence of her parents regarding the past and her own need to connect with them is the quintessence of the diasporic subject to attempt the mediation between the historical background of her parents and those of her lived life. The indecisiveness of Meryem, as well as the decision of Ada to turn off the recorder-“This is not for school... It’s for me” -highlights the very personal nature of the quest into the hidden history of the family. On the one hand, such instances predetermine the paradox of the existence of the diaspora: the desire to belong and comprehend oneself, and on the other hand, the burden of reticence and repression. It is these stratified silences that Shafak (2021) uses to show how nostalgia and homelessness are not only processes of emotion but also processes of long-term exile, whose effects are as much due to what remains unspoken and unrecorded as to what does survive. The back to the tavern transforms Ada into a sensory aperture into a forgotten world, where the “delicious odours of steaming food” and the sounds of “chatter and laughter” (Shafak, 2021, p. 231) remind of the feeling of communal warmth, the labour togetherness, and the pride of creation. After being filled with characters Chico, Yiorgos and Yusuf, it is this space that has been animated into a belonging based on history togetherness and solidarity, which is currently broken by displacement and time. Shafak (2021) makes the fig tree speak in symbolic form: “a tree is a memory keeper... the ruins of wars nobody came to win, the bones of the missing” (Shafak, 2021, p. 186), and interweaves personal memories with the greater historical wounds.

The intergenerational dialogue and historical memory demonstrate that exile is not a question of physical displacement only but also a phenomenon of identity homelessness. Meryem tells Ada about her memories of a traumatized ethnic war, but in a tender moment, she envisions the youth of Ada as devoid of such threats: she remembers her past experience full of scars, and she idealizes the youth of Ada who does not have to deal with such threats. But the embarrassment and desire of Ada to get out of her own situation resembles the displacement of her elders even in more violent situations, which may indicate that exile can be more subtle and modern. It is similar in the recollections of segregation by Defne, where the violence between communities closed her indoors instead of living in the streets, depriving her of socializing with others and in their absence she only imagined how it was to live without any of them. The fact that the tavern will soon be shut down and the British expats will have to leave also supports the idea of the disintegration of communal life as those who are left, such as Defne, will have to endure fear, uncertainty, and loss of known territory. Nostalgia stands out as the saving grace, as well as the reminder of the loss beyond rescue: the letter written by Kostas is a slender rope of connection, and the silent cry of Yusuf, the letter, which ends with the words, “let’s not lose hope”, is the embodiment of the force and strength that remain in exile. These are the moments, which can be considered the unhomely according to Bhabha (1994), where the borders between the personal and the political fall, and this very identity becomes the location of the estranged. In this perspective, Shafak (2021) discloses the reverberations of displacement within the context of geography and history as well as in the most personal negotiations of memory, place, and belonging.

Conclusion

The Island of Missing Trees is an intricate exploration of the confounded relationships of the diasporic life and prefigures the emergence of those hybrid identities that transpire as a result of displacement, memory and intergenerational trauma. It exposes exile as not only a physical break but also an emotional and a cultural homelessness, which is passed down through silence, broken kinship and the subjugated history across generations. Defne and Kostas are the symbols of the permanent wound of war and migration, and Ada struggles to emphasize the process of the second generation of negotiating between inherited trauma and cultural displacement. The novelist points out that hybridity is the cause of tension and strength: Ada becomes linguistically and culturally estranged and at the same time, she slowly understands that she is part of it by half-memories, food customs, and ecological continuity with the fig tree. Shafak (2021) situates diasporic identity within a postcolonial framework, exposing the persistence of colonial divisions while envisioning possibilities of reconciliation through dialogue, memory, and cultural hybridity. She reminds us that the absence is as much an aspect of diasporic life as the presence is, but on this fractured terrain, there is still a possibility of resilience, continuity and the reimagined belonging.

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