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Gendered Trauma and Ecological Witness: Post-Victimology in Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing Trees

Mafruha Ferdous[1*]

[1] *Associate Professor Department of English American International University-Bangladesh Dhaka, Bangladesh*

*Corresponding Author:

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the interplay between gendered trauma and eco-resistance in a post-victimology perspective in Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing Trees. Drawing on feminist trauma theory, ecocriticism, and postcolonial theory, the dissertation explores how trauma is expressed through the gendered bodies and natural landscape in the context of the Cyprus conflict. Through close textual analysis, this article demonstrates how Shafak unsettles conventional victimhood narratives, foregrounding intergenerational healing, narrative authority, and the agency of nonhuman agents—including a fig tree that serves as a witness and participant in memory and resistance. The results also introduce a new paradigm for understanding trauma literature of the Anthropocene, where human and ecological memory are inextricably interconnected.

Keywords: trauma, gender, ecocriticism, post-victimology, post-colonialism, Elif Shafak, fig tree, Cyprus conflict, feminist theory.

INTRODUCTION

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* weaves between the personal and the political, the human and the non-human agenda to explore the long-term consequences of ethnic war, displacement, and identity loss. Set against the backdrop of the 1970s Cyprus conflict, the novel traces the lives of two Cypriots, Kostus and Defne, and their daughter Ada, who inherits not only their love but also a legacy of intergenerational trauma. The violence of war and its haunting aftermath enter the lives of its characters, especially the women. Their pain is woven into forced migration, cultural erasure, and the fragmented memories of a homeland torn apart. Through their stories, the novel gives voice to the unspoken wounds of people still grappling with the echoes of devastation.

At the centre of the novel, a fig tree grows. It stands where lovers meet in secret. This tree has seen birth and burning, loss and renewal. More than just a tree, it becomes a living memory—rooted in the land, yet reaching toward hope. By blending natural disaster with human grief, the novel reflects a developing ecofeminist awareness that acknowledges the interconnected fragility of women and the environment in the context of war and homelessness. As a narrator, the fig tree symbolizes rootedness, continuity, and intergenerational communication. Thus, it provides an alternative counterpoint to the scene out of place in the nowhere of patriarchal and nationalist historiography.

Trauma structures both the personal and collective lives of the characters of *The Island of Missing Trees*. The story demonstrates how war, displacement, and political violence can leave deep and lasting transgenerational scars. Emerging in the late twentieth century, trauma studies reflect on how violence, loss, and catastrophic interruptions affect individuals as well as collective or communal memory. Relying on Freud's foundational work in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, and further developed by psychologists such as Cathy Caruth, trauma is not simply an event but

rather has a quality of returning, sometimes belatedly, in flashbacks, silences, or fragmented narratives (1996). This paper also examines how trauma is profoundly gendered, illuminating cinematic threads of grief, muteness, and resilience in characters' reactions to loss and displacement.

This article also places The Island of Missing Trees at the intersection of post-victimology. This theoretical and practical framework redirects our focus from passive levels of victimhood to active spaces of resilience, healing, and agency. It is a testimony to the healing process that follows as human and natural systems recover from their catastrophic loss. Conventional victimology may tend to emphasise the helplessness and suffering of the victim who may, in the process, become more helpless and dependent. Post-victimology, on the other hand, aims to give power to survivors by acknowledging their agency and their ability to cope and to heal. In *Staying Alive*, Vandana Shiva rewrites the story of the victim.

Demonstrating aspects of the narrative, the fig tree functions within Shiva's ecofeminist framework as a nonhuman witness and a bridge between memory, loss, and regrowth. She says that women who participate in the ecology movement do not act merely as victims. On the other hand, "Their voices are the voices of liberation and transformation which provide new categories of thought and new exploratory directions" (Shiva, 1988, p. 45). Considering gendered dimensions of trauma with ecological themes, it shows how Shafak subverts the conventional narratives of pain to produce an account of healing that includes both human and non-human agencies. Thus, the novel not only addresses the socio-political factors that drive gendered suffering but also rethinks the potentialities for collective survival in memories, stories, and kinship with the earth.

This study, moreover, explores the role of narrative silence in challenging anthropocentric biases, drawing on postmodern and postcolonial theory. According to Adeline Johns-Putra, "narrative silence" might also function as a radical engagement with and revocation of fiction's anthropocentric prejudices (2018, p.28). By inquiring into the sovereignty of master narratives, the centrality of human perspectives, and the hidden sides of narratives focused on trauma and resilience, this study seeks to bring to light the silences and omissions that usually trail the dominant narratives. This entails listening to subaltern voices and to alternative viewpoints that subvert dominant notions about victims and recovery.

In the context of an emerging awareness of the intimate relationship between human and environmental health, this study builds on the ecological bases of trauma and resilience. Reading for the significance of nature in *The Island of Missing Trees*, this paper aims to challenge and further enrich our understanding of the interpenetrations of human anguish and environmental destruction, as well as the possibilities of healing and recovery. By considering gendered trauma *in The Island of Missing Trees,* this research seeks to contribute to a holistic understanding of the human experience in the face of conflict, displacement, and environmental change. In this article, it is demonstrated how Elif Shafak challenges conventional theories of victimhood by drawing on the perspective of post-victimology, grounded in resilience, ecological continuity, and feminist solidarity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* has been increasingly recognised for its intersectional approach to memory, identity, ecological awareness, and trauma. Against the backdrop of the '74 Cyprus conflict, and with various human and nonhuman narrators as its guides, the novel is full of complex themes. Other scholars have studied it from postcolonial, ecocritical, and trauma-theoretical perspectives. Though these works are particularly illuminating, this three-way intersection of gendered trauma, ecological testimony, and post-victimological recovery has not until now been sufficiently investigated, and it is offered as a challenge in the present article.

Abeer Mostafa Abdelrazek Elgamal offers an important reading of this novel in her "Branching Paths of Pain: Trauma and Ecocriticism in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*." Elgamal examines the novel through the lenses provided by Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, and Marianne Hirsch, characterising it as a "narrative of the convergence between human traumas and environmental afflictions" (2012, p. 41). She shows how the fig tree, the novel's main nonhuman character, is an ecological witness to historical cruelties, dispossession, and emotional silencing. The article emphasises that the tree functions as a narrator– as well as a metaphor for resilience, rootedness, and memory. She argues that nature is not merely a backdrop to human suffering but is instead implicated in the process of memory making and healing. She notes "the fig tree is more than an eyewitness of human trauma … it is also a metonymy for the prospect of healing and regeneration" (2024, p.42). Ada's hereditary trauma is explained as symptomatic of intergenerational pain; Kostas's affinity for botany is cast as a mode of ecological mourning and healing. Even though Elgamal's analysis draws a trenchant parallel between environmental memory and trauma, it does not make a gender-specific argument that would situate either with special attention to the shaping of female experience. The silences of Defne, her suffering of war, of loss, of migration, her witnessing of disaster, all are quite unexplored.

Inas Laheg's "Identity Crisis as Intergenerational Trauma Progeny in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees"* discusses Shafak's (2021) *The Island of Missing Trees* and shows how it addresses intergenerational trauma and identity

crisis through the device of magical realism. Centrally, Shafak uses a fig tree as a narrative device to let silent histories and inherited psychological wounds carry their voices across generations – particularly in diaspora families. Laheg situates Shafak's writing in the context of post-colonial trauma and diasporic identity construction. She alerts: "Diaspora, the second generation is reared to reconcile with the traumatic past of their parents, reconnect with their pasts, and to attend to hybrid affiliations" (2024, p. 12). She says the novel is an indictment of the impulse to protect children from traumatic histories, and of the idea that one can bring them up in ignorance of such trauma; that healing involves bringing the past closer, not pushing it away.

Muhammad Iqbal, Maham Imran, and Babar, in "Biculturalism Leading to Third Space Identity: A Postcolonial Analysis of Elif Shafak's The Island of Missing Trees," harness Homi Bhabha's concepts of cultural hybridity and the "Third Space" to excavate the manner in which the bicultural identity determines the emotional and psychological conundrums of Ada Kazantzakis. "The piece interprets Ada's crisis as an embodiment of that diasporic in-between-ness, Ada's own inherited biases and the struggle to thrive in London as a second-generation immigrant," says the article. "She was bruised by the power of ambivalent identity that made her disconnected from place, disoriented, and confined to" and a bruised identity becomes a state of ambiguity; an identity is affected here, the implication is an inability to find herself in the world" (2023, p. 71). The fig tree is read as a symbol of cultural memory and ecological continuity, linking her parents' fractured identities to a potential for reconciliation and rootedness in Ada's present. Although this postcolonial reading offers a convincing way of examining how one negotiates identity and cultural hybridity, it fails to examine how processes specific to trauma influence both Defne's mutism and Ada's emotional break. Moreover, because the analysis is centred on biculturalism and postcolonial identities, it does not really address the affective and gendered aspects of trauma as underlying the characters' emotional itineraries.

Different from these, this article reads this groundwork and the works of trauma theorists Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Herman, and Kali Tal to consider how trauma, especially when gendered and passed down, resists direct enunciation and surfaces through silence, fracturing, and nonhuman telling. Also, *The Island of Missing Trees* has hardly been analysed at all within the framework of post-victimology. This essay aims to remedy this absence by focusing on the centrality of storytelling, ecological condition, and intergenerational memory as means of reparation in Shafak's novel, which allows characters—most prominently, women—to negotiate their own terms of agency outside the logic of silence.

Theoretical Framework: Trauma, Gender, and Nature Intersection: Review of Theoretical and Critical Frameworks:

Theorizing Trauma: From Freudian Rupture to Narrative Recovery:

Trauma is defined as a very disturbing experience that affects someone's emotional and reality perception. Trauma Studies explores this effect upon literature and culture, with emphasis on the psychiatric implications, the rhetoric of trauma, and its cultural significance, as well as on issues of "cultural trauma." Entering the scene in the '90s and building on Freud, these studies constructed a model of trauma as an event severe enough to rupture language, and with that, meaning itself. This idea, that trauma exceeds the threshold of the linguistic, shatters the psyche, and can even crack the concept of meaning, was foundational to the field and remains in many ways its lodestar.

Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis appeared around the historical traumas of the First World War and the post-war situation of a violent world. He examined the way in which violent struggle and suppression of traumatic affect give rise to psychological disorders. He considers war neurosis as traumatic neurosis, "which arises in time of peace after a fright or severe accident, independently of an ego-conflict" (1921, p. 209). As Freud, Cathy Caruth argues that trauma is not an individual neurosis, but a radical disjunction within time, the self, and language. Trauma is "[t]he story of a wound that cries out" (1996, p. 2), which is frequently not inscribed with any significance at the time of the trauma, but rather it is from its haunting aftereffect. Expanding on this, Dominick La Capra (2001) discusses the difference between "acting out" and "working through" trauma, emphasising how hard the task is of attaining a resolution and a psychological closure.

LaCapra differentiates between "acting out" and "working through" trauma (2001, p.91) — two modes of psychological and ethical reaction to historical suffering. **Acting out means** repeatedly reliving trauma through re-enactment, silence, or hostile behaviour, without true processing. While w**orking through means** actively engaging with trauma critically, empathetically, and dialogically to achieve partial healing and rebuild selfhood. This distinction becomes particularly important in a post-victimological context, in which the focus moves from a static picture of didactic victimhood towards understanding victimisation as dynamic, resilient, and sense-making processes. In LaCapra's opinion, testimony is not the telling of fact per se, but a performative act—speech that performs memory, ethics, and historical responsibility (103). Testimony becomes even more fraught when

survivors are women whose stories have historically been suppressed or delegitimised. Her book captures this complexity, showing trauma as a personal psychic scar and a communal, transgenerational malaise conveyed through memory, silence, and ecological metaphor. The fig tree, a symbolic observer, represents that moment from which to be out of whack, out of balance, as LaCapra names it, is to identify with so- called empathic unsettlement (102), a form of encounter that blocks both perverse consumption of trauma and the corporeal dynamics of the ethical affective.

Gendered Silences: Women, Victimhood, and the Politics of Trauma

Yet, conventional trauma theory has been challenged for positioning survivors as stuck in a stationary condition of the innocent victim. Post-victimology, in contrast, is a reparative theory that privileges resilience, agency, and narrative recovery (Kaplan, 2005; Craps, 2013). This model unsettles the hegemony of Eurocentric, psychoanalytical trauma theories while keeping in sight how individuals and communities are actively re-figuring their identity and stories in the aftermath of trauma. Readings of trauma beyond that of victimisation, and particularly in postcolonial and feminist contexts, call for a more complex reading of trauma which, in addition to rupture and damage, allows for healing, recovery, and transformation (Davis, 2019; Gibbs, 2014).

Gendered trauma is an important lens in that it underscores the fact that women's trauma, particularly when rooted in war, displacement, and oppressive silencing, calls for a different kind of critical attention. Women's trauma is frequently relegated to the private sphere and is therefore socially invisible (Herman, 1992). She describes psychological trauma as a crime of the powerless being committed when an individual is subject to an overwhelming situation that they are incapable of addressing. In *Trauma and Recovery*, Herman describes a three-phase model of recovery: (1) safety, (2) remembrance and mourning, and (3) reconnecting with ordinary life (1992, p. 56). Herman insists that trauma is not just personal; it is also social and political, especially when it comes to gendered violence like domestic violence or wartime sexual aggression. She writes that trauma "ruins the reliable organizations of meaning, identity, logical connection, and causality by shredding the assumptive base of life," which can manifest itself in dissociation, numbing, or hyperarousal (1992, p. 203). Recovery involves both the individual's account and community acknowledgement, such as supportive witnesses and the social affirmation of the survivor's story. Healing for Herman is relational — hinging on restoring trust and meaning through story, community, and justice. Herman's observations are useful for making sense of the novel's concern with silence, intergenerational grief, and the importance of allowing space–be it familial, cultural, or ecological–where survivors can speak their traumas and begin the process of reconnecting. In Defne's case, we see an excellent example of this gendered silencing. Surviving war, displacement, and the death of a sibling, she refuses to talk about her past and, as a result, shields her daughter from inherited grief.

Trauma narratives by women refuse to be represented linearly, and instead adopt fragmented and circular forms, which portray the structure of the traumatised woman's internalised pain (Kalí Tal 1996). Kalí Tal (1996) has noted that women's trauma is frequently "encoded in silence" as their stories do not fit within epic or redemptory narratives.

Beyond Victimhood: Post-Victimology and the Ethics of Resilience

Informed by Vandana Shiva's ecofeminism and, more specifically, by her concept of post-victimology, this essay serves as a point of departure for considering the intersection of gendered trauma, ecological witness, and intergenerational resilience in *The Island of Missing Trees*. In taking an ecofeminist approach, Shiva reveals how the systems of patriarchy, colonisation, and capitalism have not only historically subordinated women but have also exploited and destroyed nature. Her concept of post-victimology resists the temptation to cast women and nature as simply victims of these systems. It does not, but sees both as resistance and renewal (1989).

Post-victimology nowhere denies trauma, acknowledging that "women, particularly in situations of war, ecological destruction and displacement, have been deeply affected. But it refuses to define them by that suffering. The way ahead for Shiva is to reclaim agency, especially through practices such as ecological and cultural custodianship. Her idea resonates deeply with Shafak's novel, in which female characters — particularly Defne and Ada — harbour silence and survival side by side. Their co-implication with the fig tree and the broader environment demonstrates alternative, non-linguistic, incarnate mechanisms of witnessing and healing that Shiva argues are indispensable for post-victimological ethics.

Material Ecocriticism: Nonhuman Witness and Trans-Corporeal Healing

This theoretical framework is developed and enhanced by material ecocritical theory, including theories posited by Cheryll Glotfelty, Stacy Alaimo, and Serpil Oppermann, which together reconceptualise how literary texts stage

and bear reactions to nature, matter, and trauma. Though they do not employ the word "post-victimology," their theories dovetail with Shiva's ecofeminist dream by sharply focusing on relational agency, corporeal commingling, and nonhuman memory and meaning.

Cheryll Glotfelty (1996), a founding figure of ecocriticism, asserts that literature has to be read in the context of the physical environment. She recasts what it even means to read a text, making it not just about human characters and cultural forces, but landscapes, ecosystems, and nonhuman actors. This approach aligns with Shiva's insistence that we read the natural world itself as an actor in trauma and recovery, rather than merely a backdrop. The fig tree's voice within *The Island of Missing Trees* thus becomes a direct lateralisation of this ecofeminist precept. It remembers, mourns, and justifies ancestral mourning in creating a space of post-victimological reflection.

Stacy Alaimo's (2010) concept of trans-corporeality takes the framework to a further level. Not separate, she argues, are human and nonhuman bodies. poisonous exposure, environmental injustice, climate change all gestured to the way bodies take in, bear, and respond to harm from outside themselves — a process that is both material and political. In Alaimo's materialism, feminised and ecological bodies are also the ones that are particularly exposed to systems of command and neglect. At the same time, these bodies are resistant surfaces that can produce new meanings and ethical relations. Ada's psychological breakdown in Shafak's novel is not simply the consequence of suppressed familial history—it's a somatic reaction to inherited grief, gathered in like the tree gathers poison. Her shoes-off reconnection to both her roots and to the fig tree in particular models such trans-corporeal healing, as Alaimo writes.

Serpil Oppermann's (2011) material ecocriticism bridges trauma theory and environmental ethics by contending that matter has a story to tell. In such a view, the trees, soil, weather, and other beings are not inert objects, but may bear witness, remember, and express ecological and cultural meaning. Oppermann's work directly attests to Shiva's conception of nature as a lived archive, a site that stores trauma across generations. In Shafak's tale, it is more than a metaphor: The fig tree stands in the way history does, for a kind of repository of memory, kept and displaced from its territories, but rooted there nonetheless, to Cyprus, to war, to exile. The tree tells what the human characters cannot, clouding the silences of trauma and loss. This narrative form confirms Oppermann's statement that a nonhuman voice can bear the burden of human misery and allow spaces for contemplation, lamentation, and rejuvenation.

As a group, these thinkers revolve around a key ethical intuition: recovery from trauma — especially gendered and ecological trauma — needs relational, embodied, and multi-species engagement. Shiva's post-victimology prompts us to recover not only beyond victimhood, but beyond passive victimhood, a reimagining of relationships to self, others, and the earth. Glotfelty's ecocriticism illuminates the need to re-read literature with an environmental mind's eye. Alaimo's trans-corporeality insists that trauma is not just psychological but is written in the body and reactive to the material environment. Oppermann's material ecocriticism reveals that the natural world also narrates, remembers, and mediates trauma in its own terms.

Convergence: A Multi-Species Framework for Reading Trauma in Shafak's Novel

Those frameworks converge in *The Island of Missing Trees*. The silence of Defne is the price of being traumatised and displaced into a gender. Ada's moodiness mirrors embodied inheritance and an inheritance of unspeakable grief. The fig tree features here as a central witness and actor, recounting what has been lost, concealed, and buried. This literary ecology — of human, vegetal, and historical strata — provides a fertile ground for engaging post-victimological ecofeminism, in which trauma is not erased but rather nurtured into new, resilient shapes.

In *The Island of Missing Trees,* a terrain of narrative emerges where trauma history and ecological time intersect. At its heart is the enduring legacy of the 1974 Cypriot war and how it intergenerationally devastated the lives of those caught between Cyprus and London. Shafak describes trauma not as a unique rupture but as a multilayered, intersubjective process that winds its way through bodies, time, and species. Through the story of Defne, her daughter Ada, and the fig tree, which serves as the primary bearer of memory and witness, the novel illuminates how gendered trauma challenges how nature is both witness and conduit of resilience.

Gendered Trauma and Arboreal Memory: Close Readings

Defne's Silence as Symptom and Resistance:

Among characters, Defne Kazantzakis, a Turkish Cypriot archaeologist in London, is a portrait of gendered trauma. Digging up the past is the business of her working life. Her refusal to speak of her teen years on Cyprus with its ethnic turmoil and twin sister loss relegates her, as Dominick LaCapra might have it, to a state of "acting out"–the compulsive reenactment of trauma without distanciated critique or narrative integration (2001, P. 137). The trauma of Defne is not only the psychological one, but the social, the political, which is moulded with the

patriarchal silence of the grief of women and the marginalisation of women's voices in the postcolonial conflict zones.

Defne hardly ever talks of the past in the book. When Ada or Kostas asks her questions, she clams up or deflects. This disengagement mirrors what Judith Herman defines as a typical response among women who have lived through traumatic experience: a self-protective pattern centred on the relinquishing of trust, safety, and interpersonal security (1992). Defne is caught in twin traumas: of war's external violence and of internal ruin in the specific form of the loss of her uncle and the violence committed against her father. This layered trauma organises her entire adulthood.

Cathy Caruth's idea of the "double wound" is operative here. Caruth claims that trauma is originally and essentially incomprehensible at the time of its experience and always returns afterwards in a transformed state as a dream, silence, or fragmentation (1996). Defne's silence is not absence but inactivity. The trauma does not come up in her own voice but in her daughter's crisis. After Defne's untimely death, an isolated explosion rocks Ada. She screamed in a school corridor, which is nothing but the result of swallowed inter-generational trauma. The trauma of the survivor, as Caruth argues, is constantly being visited upon the subsequent generation as "an event that is not fully assimilated" and therefore haunts the future (1996, P. 1-2).

Indeed, Defne's attempt to hide her past from Ada raises ethical questions about testimony and silence. Kali Tal writes that in subtly mainstream images, the traumatic subject cannot speak and, in the process, is rendered silent by the dominant cultural narratives that either "mythologize their trauma or erase it altogether" (1996, P.7). By electing not to tell her story, Defne might seem complicit in this silencing. But Shafak lightly complicates this interpretation. Defne's silence is not just a repressed memory but an act of resistance towards institutional modes of memory that commodify or aestheticise trauma. By holding back the story, she also preserves its rawness, perhaps trying to protect her daughter from its damage. Her silence becomes both a symptom of her unhealed trauma and a form of gendered agency.

Ada's Diasporic Grief and Ecology of Inheritance:

The character of Ada is a substitute for what Marianne Hirsch calls the "post-memory" generation — people who never experienced the trauma themselves but inhabit its outcome. In the wake of the death of Defne, Ada becomes more and more agitated, detached, and emotionally unstable. Her explosion at school is an eruption of what LaCapra calls "empathic unsettlement"—unresolved trauma being passed down through generations without quite the full narrative of the story, or its context, being known (2001). Ada can't articulate her pain because she has inherited a trauma that was never verbalised. "My mum was mentally unwell," she says–speculating: "My mum had mental health issues. So I mean, yeah, I could have whatever my mum had. Genetic, I guess" (2001, P. 175).

Herman's theory of trauma recovery is to become instrumental in reading Ada's Project. The three R's of the process—safety, remembrance, reconnection—are worked out in the structure of the novel. At the start, Ada has none of that from her own history. Then, the presence of Aunt Meryem heralds the birth of recollection. Meryem carries with them narratives, images, and practices from Cyprus, testifying to the passing of culture. While Meryem is not officially acknowledged as a trauma survivor herself, her voice bridges silence and speech, past and present.

Opposition and confrontation characterise Ada's discussions with Meryem, and they lead to a reconnection process. Recovery, as Herman stresses, is not about forgetting or transcending trauma but about reclamation and integration into narrative identity (1992). Ada never gets a full telling of her mother's ordeal, but she begins to recognise the emotional terrain from which she has emerged. Importantly, she also begins to develop a new relationship with the natural world — with the fig tree, that is, which her mother and father once cultivated in London.

At the end of the novel, Ada's engagement with the fig tree represents a transition from inherited trauma to ecological resilience. Now she does not scream or strike out, but she listens. She "listens not just to people, but to nature." She, too, bears witness through exploring "nature-centred testimonies," as Kali Tal calls her—a "reclamation of voice" through other modes of testimony (1996, P. 28). Ada's post-traumatic growth, after a fashion, sends us deep into a post-victimological turn. No longer has she existed as what she does not know; rather, Ada can be seen as learning, developing a capacity to witness and imagine otherwise silenced acts.

The Fig Tree as Witness and Memory in the Posthuman Ecology:

The fig tree is arguably the novel's most potent symbol. It serves both as narrator and seer. As an entity and as a being of war, a being of migration, a being of uprooting and transplantation, the tree enacts a kind of resilience as rooted continuity (1992). But the fig tree is not only a figure of speech; it has a voice, a mind, and a memory. Its chapters are a reflective breakdown of human and natural history that appears throughout the novel.

The tree's point of view is akin to what Dominick LaCapra calls "witnessing through displacement"—testimonies that are not objective but remain ethically present (2001). The fig tree testifies to the violence of 1974, the taboo love between Kostas and Defne, and the afterlife of exile and diaspora. Its roots run deep and across national borders, feeding on memories as well as soil.

Furthermore, the tree is engaged in what Kali Tal calls "resistant testimony". By rejecting a linear, anthropocentric plot, the fig tree defies dominant historical narratives that elide and diminish women as either the bearers of male heroism or producers of nationalist myth. Its voice is personal, fractured, and sometimes poetic—the hallmarks of feminised modes of expression, and those too readily dismissed in histories. But it is these qualities in particular that render the tree's narrative so evocative in a trauma-informed reading. The tree knows what the others forget. It raises a voice for the voiceless — not one of mastery, but of existential endurance.

The fig tree is also a figure of posthuman memory, which challenges the demarcation between human subjectivity and nature. In this regard, Shafak's story resonates with ecofeminist trauma theory, which argues that nature is not a passive backdrop to human suffering but an active agent in remembrance and regeneration. The fig tree, witness and healer, also allows the characters — and, per extension, the readers — to envision that trauma is not a terminus, but a kind of whirligig along which resilience takes root clandestinely, shocked and unremarked.

Narrative Form: Disarray, Memory and Witness.

Formally, the novel sheds light on the psychic structure of trauma in its narrative deconstruction. Internal narrative highlights the fragmented structure of traumatic memory, which Cathy Caruth argues as a central feature of trauma fiction (1996). The reader is gradually made aware of crucial incidents — the massacre, Defne's uncle, the couple's separation by force — only indirectly, through snippets of dialogue, fig-tree monologues, and archival references. This fragmentation does not mystify the story but enacts the very premises of trauma, where truth is partial, belated, and also often borne in silence. This polyphonic construction can, in turn, be seen as underpinning Judith Herman's insistence on the social nature of recovery. No one voice is enough to carry the story; it needs a chorus — Kostas's scientific silence, Meryem's folk memory, Ada's baffled youth, and the fig tree's lyrical musings. Together, they constitute a collective testimony that reaches toward healing — not closure, but persisting acknowledgement of pain, loss, love.

CONCLUSION

In short, Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* builds a new kind of narrative that brings trauma, ecology, and gender together. In its multilayered mediation of individual grief, historical violence, and transgenerational silence, the novel reimagines trauma as an affective and ecological rather than simply a psychic wound. Defne's reticence, Ada's maternal explosion, and the fig tree's collective act of remembering dramatise the transition from acting-out to working through, from victimhood to agency and from rupture to resistant revisioning.

Referring to the work of Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra, Judith Herman and Kali Tal, this essay has demonstrated that trauma is neither fully representable nor fully private. This mediation is operated through dismembered memory, storytelling, silence, and organic fluidity. By locating trauma in the dynamics of the family and the environment, Shafak's novel broadens the terms of testimonial fiction and proposes a post-victimological vision. Narrative is reaffirmed as an ethical force and nature as a redemptive power in the afterlife of violence.

By centring the female experience and providing narrative agency to humans and nonhumans in its saga of loss, *The Island of Missing Trees* offers not just a recipe for sorrow but also a blueprint for how memory, voice and rootedness provide resources for reflection and resilience. It is an invitation to reconsider how trauma is told, who is allowed to speak and how healing can be envisioned outside of familiar binary categories of damage and cure.

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