



MEMORY, SILENCE, AND TRAUMA: A STUDY OF INTERGENERATIONAL MEMORY IN *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES*

Sadia Sarwar sadiasarwar046@gmail.com	MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.
Altaf Ahmad Khan P111042@siswa.ukm.edu.my	PhD Scholar, The School of Languages & Literature, National University of Malaysia, Malaysia.
Naima Tassadiq naimatassadiq01@gmail.com	Lecturer English (Visiting), Department of Linguistics, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.
Muhammad Rizwan hafizrizwan158@gmail.com	Lecturer English, Department of English, Riphah International University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Abstract

This study explores the themes of memory, silence, and trauma in *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak, focusing on how historical conflict shapes intergenerational memory and identity. The novel is set against the background of the Cyprus conflict and portrays the emotional and psychological impact of war on individuals and families. It highlights how traumatic experiences are not confined to those who directly witness violence but are also transmitted to later generations through memories, silence, and cultural narratives. The study examines how the characters carry the burden of unresolved past events and how silence within families often becomes a way of coping with painful memories. However, this silence also deepens emotional distance and confusion among younger generations. Through the unique narrative voice of the fig tree, the novel symbolically presents nature as a witness to human suffering and memory. By analyzing the representation of memory and trauma in the text, this research demonstrates how Shafak portrays the lasting effects of political conflict on personal and cultural identity. The paper argues that intergenerational memory plays a significant role in shaping identity, healing, and understanding the past.

Keywords: *Cultural Memory, Intergenerational Trauma, Silence and Memory, Diaspora Identity, Cyprus Conflict*

Corresponding Author: Sadia Sarwar (MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Lahore Garrison University, Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.).
Email: sadiasarwar046@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In contemporary literary studies, the exploration of memory, silence, and trauma has become an important field of inquiry, particularly in narratives that depict the aftermath of political conflict and displacement. Literature often serves as a powerful medium through which writers represent the psychological and emotional consequences of historical violence. Through storytelling, authors reveal how traumatic events continue to influence individuals and communities long after the physical conflict has ended. One recent literary work that addresses these themes with remarkable depth is *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) by Elif Shafak. The novel examines how memories of war and displacement shape the identities of individuals across generations and how silence within families can both protect and burden those who inherit these memories.

In the field of trauma and memory studies, scholars emphasize that traumatic experiences are rarely confined to the individuals who directly witness them. Instead, trauma often continues to affect subsequent generations through narratives, family stories, and unspoken emotions. According to Cathy Caruth, trauma is characterized by its delayed and repetitive nature, meaning that individuals may continue to relive the emotional impact of traumatic events long after they have occurred (Caruth 4). Similarly, Marianne Hirsch introduces the concept of “postmemory,” which explains how the memories of earlier generations can deeply influence those who did not directly experience the original events (Hirsch 22). These theoretical perspectives highlight the significance of studying how literature represents the transmission of memory and trauma across generations.

Shafak’s novel contributes to this academic discussion by presenting a narrative that intertwines personal stories with historical conflict. By focusing on the emotional lives of its characters, the novel illustrates how the past continues to shape the present. The narrative structure moves between different timelines and perspectives, revealing how memories of violence and loss influence the identities of individuals who attempt to understand their family histories.

1.1. Background of Study

The story of *The Island of Missing Trees* is set against the historical backdrop of the Cyprus conflict, a prolonged political and ethnic struggle between Greek and Turkish communities on the island of Cyprus. The conflict intensified in the 1960s and reached a critical point in 1974 when political tensions and military intervention led to the division of the island. This event resulted in large-scale displacement, social division, and lasting political tensions that continue to influence Cypriot society today.

Shafak revisits this historical moment through the story of Kostas, a Greek Cypriot, and Defne, a Turkish Cypriot, whose relationship develops during a period of intense conflict between their communities. Their love story represents a fragile connection

between two opposing sides of a divided society. However, the trauma and violence surrounding them force the characters to confront the harsh realities of political hostility and social division.

The narrative later shifts to contemporary London, where the couple's daughter Ada struggles with questions about her family's past. Ada grows up surrounded by silence regarding the experiences of her parents during the conflict. As she attempts to uncover the truth about her heritage, the novel demonstrates how unresolved trauma can shape the emotional and psychological development of the younger generation.

An unusual and powerful narrative element in the novel is the voice of the fig tree, which acts as an observer of human history. The tree serves as a symbolic witness to the events of the past, representing the idea that nature preserves memories of human suffering and survival. This narrative strategy allows Shafak to explore the relationship between memory, environment, and identity in a unique and imaginative way.

1.2. Research Gap

Although *The Island of Missing Trees* has received considerable scholarly attention, much of the existing research focuses on themes such as environmental symbolism, migration, multicultural identity, and ecological consciousness. Many critics examine the role of nature in the novel or discuss how the narrative reflects the complexities of diasporic identity. While these perspectives provide valuable insights into Shafak's literary techniques and thematic concerns, they often overlook the deeper relationship between memory, silence, and trauma within family relationships.

Specifically, there is limited research that examines how intergenerational memory functions as a central narrative mechanism in the novel. The transmission of trauma across generations is an important aspect of the story, yet it has not been explored extensively in relation to the psychological and emotional development of the characters. In addition, the role of silence as a coping mechanism within families affected by conflict remains underexplored.

Silence in traumatic narratives often operates as both a protective strategy and a source of confusion for later generations. When survivors avoid discussing painful memories, younger family members may struggle to understand their own identities and histories. This dynamic is clearly illustrated in Shafak's novel through the character of Ada, whose sense of self is shaped by fragments of memory, hidden stories, and unanswered questions about her parents' past.

Therefore, the present study seeks to fill this gap by focusing specifically on the themes of memory, silence, and trauma in the novel. By examining how these elements interact within the narrative, the research aims to provide a deeper understanding of how intergenerational memory influences identity formation and emotional healing.

1.3. Research Objectives and Questions

The main objective of this research is to analyze the representation of intergenerational memory in *The Island of Missing Trees* and to explore how historical trauma continues to influence the identities of later generations. The study also investigates the role of silence within families and how the absence of open communication about traumatic experiences affects relationships and personal understanding.

The research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine how the novel represents the transmission of trauma and memory across generations.
2. To analyze the role of silence as a coping mechanism in families affected by political conflict.
3. To explore how narrative techniques, symbolism, and multiple perspectives contribute to the portrayal of memory and identity.

Based on these objectives, the study addresses the following research questions:

1. How does *The Island of Missing Trees* portray the relationship between historical trauma and intergenerational memory?
2. In what ways does silence function as both a psychological and narrative strategy in the novel?
3. How do literary elements such as symbolism, narrative voice, and shifting timelines contribute to the representation of memory and identity?

1.4. Scope and Significance of the Study

This research focuses exclusively on the thematic representation of memory, silence, and trauma in *The Island of Missing Trees*. It examines how the novel portrays the lasting emotional and psychological consequences of the Cyprus conflict on individuals and families. By applying concepts from trauma studies and cultural memory theory, the study analyzes how historical violence shapes identity formation across generations.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to the broader fields of memory studies, postcolonial literature, and trauma theory. By exploring the relationship between personal narratives and historical events, the study highlights how literature can provide insight into the complex ways in which societies remember and process traumatic experiences.

Furthermore, the study demonstrates how Shafak's narrative emphasizes the importance of confronting the past in order to achieve emotional healing and reconciliation. The novel suggests that acknowledging memory even when it is painful, can help individuals and communities better understand their histories and identities. Through this perspective, the research underscores the role of literature as a powerful medium for preserving cultural memory and promoting empathy across generations.

2.Literature Review

The themes of memory, trauma, and silence have received considerable scholarly attention in contemporary literary and cultural studies. Researchers have increasingly examined how literature represents the lasting psychological and social effects of historical violence. In narratives dealing with war, displacement, and political conflict, memory often becomes a central mechanism through which characters attempt to reconstruct their past and understand their identities. Scholars argue that literary texts not only reflect historical realities but also shape the ways societies remember traumatic events.

One of the foundational contributions to trauma studies is provided by Cathy Caruth, who explains that trauma is characterized by its delayed and repetitive nature. According to Caruth, traumatic experiences are often not fully understood at the moment they occur. Instead, they return later in the form of memories, dreams, or fragmented narratives (Caruth 4). This concept is particularly relevant to literary works that depict characters struggling to articulate their experiences of war or violence. In such narratives, trauma is often expressed indirectly through silence, emotional withdrawal, or symbolic representation.

Similarly, Dominick LaCapra emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between historical trauma and its narrative representation. LaCapra argues that trauma often creates a gap between experience and expression, making it difficult for survivors to communicate their suffering fully (LaCapra 41). In literary narratives, this gap frequently appears through fragmented storytelling, shifting timelines, and incomplete memories. Such narrative techniques allow authors to illustrate how traumatic experiences disrupt conventional forms of storytelling.

Another significant contribution to the study of memory and trauma comes from Marianne Hirsch, who introduces the concept of “post memory.” Hirsch describes post memory as the relationship that later generations have with the traumatic experiences of their parents or ancestors (Hirsch 22). Although the younger generation does not directly experience the original events, they inherit memories through stories, images, and cultural narratives. These inherited memories often shape their identities and emotional responses to history. The concept of post memory is particularly useful for analyzing literary texts that depict intergenerational trauma and the transmission of historical memory within families.

In addition to individual memory, scholars have also emphasized the importance of cultural and collective memory. Jan Assmann argues that societies preserve memories of historical events through cultural practices, narratives, and symbolic representations (Assmann 37). Cultural memory allows communities to maintain a sense of continuity with their past, even when that past involves traumatic experiences. Literature plays a

crucial role in this process by transforming historical events into narratives that can be shared and interpreted by later generations.

Building on this idea, Aleida Assmann further explains that cultural memory functions through both remembering and forgetting. According to her, societies often choose to silence certain painful memories while preserving others that contribute to a coherent national or cultural identity (Assmann 58). This selective process of remembering and forgetting is particularly evident in narratives that deal with political conflict, where silence may serve as a strategy for coping with trauma or avoiding social tension.

The relationship between silence and trauma has also been widely discussed in literary criticism. Scholars argue that silence can function both as a protective mechanism and as a source of psychological burden. Survivors of traumatic events may choose silence in order to protect themselves and their families from reliving painful experiences. However, this silence can also prevent younger generations from understanding their own histories. As a result, the absence of memory may create confusion and emotional distance within families.

In postcolonial literature, the themes of memory and trauma often intersect with issues of identity, displacement, and cultural conflict. Many postcolonial writers explore how colonial and political violence continues to shape the lives of individuals long after the official end of conflict. These narratives frequently highlight the struggles of characters who attempt to reconcile their personal memories with broader historical narratives.

Recent scholarship has also explored the role of environmental and spatial elements in representing memory. Some critics argue that landscapes, objects, and natural elements can act as carriers of memory, preserving traces of historical experiences. In literary narratives, symbolic representations of nature often function as silent witnesses to human suffering. This perspective has been particularly relevant in the analysis of contemporary novels that combine ecological themes with historical memory.

Within this broader scholarly context, the works of Elif Shafak have attracted significant attention for their exploration of cultural identity, migration, and historical memory. Critics have noted that Shafak's fiction frequently addresses the complex relationship between personal narratives and political history. Her novels often depict characters who navigate multiple cultural identities while confronting the lingering effects of historical trauma.

Studies focusing on *The Island of Missing Trees* have primarily examined the novel's ecological symbolism and multicultural themes. Some scholars highlight the significance of the fig tree as a narrative voice that connects human experiences with the natural environment. Others analyze how the novel portrays the Cyprus conflict and its impact on social relationships between Greek and Turkish communities. These studies provide valuable insights into the novel's thematic richness and narrative innovation.

However, despite this contribution, relatively little research has focused specifically on the role of intergenerational memory in the novel. While scholars acknowledge the presence of historical trauma in the narrative, they often do not examine in detail how memories are transmitted across generations within the family structure. The psychological and emotional experiences of the younger generation, particularly the character of Ada, remain underexplored in many existing studies.

Another limitation in current scholarships is the insufficient attention given to the role of silence in shaping identity and memory in the novel. Although silence is frequently mentioned as a thematic element, few studies analyze how it functions as a narrative strategy that influences the characters' relationships and emotional development. The tension between remembering and forgetting, speaking and remaining silent, is a central aspect of the narrative that deserves closer examination.

Furthermore, the connection between memory, trauma, and narrative voice in the novel has not been fully explored. The use of the fig tree as a narrator introduces an unusual perspective that symbolizes the continuity of memory beyond human experience. By presenting nature as a witness to historical events, the novel suggests that memory exists not only within individuals but also within the landscapes that surround them. This narrative technique opens new possibilities for interpreting the relationship between human history and environmental memory.

Given these gaps in existing scholarship, the present study seeks to contribute to the field by providing a focused analysis of memory, silence, and trauma in *The Island of Missing Trees*. By drawing on theories of cultural memory and trauma studies, the research aims to explore how the novel portrays the transmission of traumatic experiences across generations. It also examines how silence within families shapes identity formation and emotional understanding among younger characters.

Through this approach, the study highlights the importance of literary narratives in preserving and interpreting historical memory. By examining how Shafak represents the emotional consequences of political conflict, the research demonstrates how literature can provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between memory, identity, and trauma.

Ultimately, the literature reviewed in this section establishes a theoretical and scholarly foundation for the present study. The works of scholars in trauma and memory studies provide important conceptual tools for analyzing the themes explored in Shafak's novel. At the same time, the limitations identified in existing research highlight the need for a more detailed examination of intergenerational memory and silence within the narrative. This study therefore builds upon previous scholarship while offering a new perspective on how memory and trauma are represented in contemporary literature.

3.Theoretical / Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in theoretical perspectives from trauma studies and memory studies, which provide essential tools for understanding how literature represents the lasting effects of historical violence. The concepts of trauma, cultural memory, and intergenerational memory offer a framework for analyzing how *The Island of Missing Trees* portrays the psychological and emotional impact of the Cyprus conflict on individuals and families. By applying these theories, the research examines how memory is transmitted across generations and how silence functions as a response to traumatic experiences.

One of the key theoretical foundations for this study is trauma theory, particularly the work of Cathy Caruth. She argues that trauma is not simply a past event but an experience that continues to influence individuals long after the original incident has occurred. According to her, trauma often emerges in delayed or fragmented forms, appearing through recurring memories, emotional disturbances, or narrative gaps (Caruth 4). This concept is important for understanding literary texts in which characters struggle to articulate their experiences of violence or loss. In such narratives, trauma is frequently represented through silence, disrupted storytelling, and symbolic imagery.

Caruth further explains that traumatic events are often difficult to express because they exceed ordinary language. Survivors may feel unable to describe their experiences directly, which leads to incomplete or fragmented narratives. As a result, trauma frequently appears in literature through indirect forms of expression, including symbolism, metaphor, and silence. In *The Island of Missing Trees*, this theoretical perspective helps explain why many characters avoid discussing their past experiences during the Cyprus conflict. Their silence reflects both the emotional pain associated with these memories and the difficulty of transforming traumatic experiences into coherent narratives.

Another important concept guiding this research is intergenerational memory, particularly the idea of “post memory” developed by Marianne Hirsch. Hirsch describes post memory as the way in which the memories of traumatic events are transmitted from one generation to the next (Hirsch 22). Although the later generation does not directly witness the original events, they inherit emotional and psychological connections to these experiences through stories, images, and family narratives. These inherited memories can strongly influence identity formation and personal understanding of history.

The concept of post memory is particularly relevant to the character of Ada in Shafak’s novel. Ada belongs to a generation that did not directly experience the violence of the Cyprus conflict, yet her life is deeply influenced by the unresolved trauma of her parents. The absence of open communication about the past creates a sense of uncertainty and emotional distance, demonstrating how inherited memories shape the psychological experiences of later generations. Through Ada’s perspective, the novel illustrates how silence can transmit trauma just as effectively as spoken narratives.

In addition to post memory, this study also draws on the concept of cultural memory developed by Jan Assmann. Assmann argues that societies preserve memories of historical events through cultural practices, narratives, and symbolic representations (Assmann 37). Cultural memory differs from individual memory because it is shared collectively and maintained through social institutions, literature, and artistic expressions. Through these mediums, societies construct narratives that define their understanding of the past and shape collective identity.

Literature plays an important role in preserving and transmitting cultural memory. By transforming historical events into narratives, literary texts allow readers to engage emotionally and intellectually with the past. In the case of *The Island of Missing Trees*, Shafak's narrative contributes to the cultural memory of the Cyprus conflict by presenting a story that emphasizes both personal and communal experiences of trauma. The novel illustrates how historical violence continues to influence the lives of individuals even decades after the conflict has ended.

Another important dimension of cultural memory involves the tension between remembering and forgetting. Societies often struggle to balance the need to preserve historical memory with the desire to move beyond painful experiences. This tension can lead to the suppression or silence of certain narratives, particularly those associated with trauma or conflict. In literary texts, such silence can become a powerful narrative strategy that reflects the psychological and social consequences of historical violence.

The present study also considers the symbolic role of nature in relation to memory and trauma. In Shafak's novel, the fig tree functions as a narrative voice that observes and reflects upon human experiences. This unusual narrative perspective suggests that memory extends beyond human consciousness and can also be preserved in landscapes and natural elements. The fig tree serves as a metaphor for continuity and resilience, symbolizing how memories of the past remain embedded within the environment.

By combining trauma theory, post memory, and cultural memory, this research develops a comprehensive framework for analyzing the themes of memory and silence in the novel. Trauma theory explains how characters experience and respond to painful historical events, while the concept of post memory reveals how these experiences influence later generations. Cultural memory, in turn, highlights the broader social and historical context in which these memories are preserved and interpreted.

Together, these theoretical perspectives provide a structured approach for examining the narrative strategies used in *The Island of Missing Trees*. They allow the study to explore how individual experiences of trauma intersect with collective memory and how silence operates as both a coping mechanism and a barrier to understanding the past. Through this framework, the research aims to demonstrate how Shafak's novel portrays the complex relationship between memory, identity, and historical conflict.

4. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine the themes of memory, silence, and trauma in *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak. Qualitative literary research is particularly suitable for analyzing narrative texts because it allows researchers to interpret meanings, themes, and symbolic representations within literary works. Unlike quantitative approaches that rely on numerical data, qualitative analysis focuses on understanding how language, narrative structure, and symbolism convey deeper cultural and psychological meanings. Since this research aims to explore the representation of intergenerational memory and trauma in a literary text, a qualitative approach provides the most appropriate framework for detailed interpretation and critical analysis.

4.1. Research Design

The research is designed as a textual and thematic analysis of the selected novel. Textual analysis is widely used in literary studies to examine how themes, symbols, and narrative techniques contribute to the overall meaning of a literary work. In this study, the analysis focuses on identifying narrative patterns related to memory, silence, and trauma within the novel. Particular attention is given to the ways in which the characters remember past events, how silence operates within family relationships, and how the narrative structure reflects the transmission of trauma across generations.

The study also draws upon interpretive analysis informed by trauma studies and cultural memory theory. These theoretical perspectives help explain how literary narratives represent the emotional and psychological effects of historical conflict. By applying these frameworks, the research examines how the novel portrays the long-term impact of the Cyprus conflict on personal identity and family relationships.

4.2. Data Sources

The primary data source for this study is the novel *The Island of Missing Trees*, published in 2021. The text serves as the main object of analysis because it provides a detailed literary representation of historical trauma and intergenerational memory. The narrative structure of the novel, which shifts between different timelines and perspectives, offers rich material for examining how memories of conflict influence later generations.

In addition to the primary text, secondary sources such as scholarly books, journal articles, and theoretical works related to trauma theory and cultural memory are used to support the analysis. Works by scholars such as Cathy Caruth, Marianne Hirsch, and Jan Assmann provide important theoretical insights that guide the interpretation of the novel.

4.3. Sampling and Analytical Focus

Since the research focuses on a single literary text, purposive sampling is used to select relevant passages from the novel for detailed analysis. Purposive sampling involves

selecting specific sections of the text that directly relate to the themes being studied. In this research, passages that illustrate the following aspects are carefully examined:

- representations of memory and recollection of past events
- moments of silence or avoidance in family communication
- descriptions of trauma related to the Cyprus conflict
- symbolic elements, particularly the narrative voice of the fig tree
- interactions between generations that reveal inherited memories

These textual elements are analyzed in order to understand how the novel constructs its portrayal of intergenerational trauma and memory.

5. Analytical Approach

The study employs thematic analysis and close reading as the primary analytical methods. Close reading involves examining the language, imagery, narrative structure, and symbolism of the text in detail. Through this method, the researcher identifies patterns and themes that contribute to the representation of memory and trauma.

Thematic analysis is used to categorize and interpret recurring ideas within the narrative. In this study, several key themes guide the analysis:

1. Intergenerational memory – how memories of conflict are transmitted from parents to children.
2. Silence and communication – how characters cope with traumatic memories through silence or avoidance.
3. Trauma and emotional inheritance – how unresolved trauma affects the psychological development of later generations.
4. Nature as witness – the symbolic role of the fig tree as a narrator and preserver of memory.

By examining these themes, the study seeks to demonstrate how Shafak's narrative reveals the complex relationship between personal memory and historical conflict.

5.1. Research Procedures

The research follows several steps to ensure systematic analysis. First, the novel is read multiple times to identify passages related to memory, trauma, and silence. During the initial reading, key themes and narrative patterns are noted. In subsequent readings, specific passages are selected for detailed analysis.

Second, the selected passages are interpreted using the theoretical framework outlined earlier in the study. Concepts such as trauma theory, postmemory, and cultural memory provide analytical tools for understanding the narrative strategies used in the novel. The analysis focuses on how the characters' experiences illustrate broader theoretical ideas about memory and identity.

Third, the findings from the textual analysis are compared with existing scholarship on trauma and memory studies. This comparison helps situate the research within the broader academic discussion and demonstrates how the study contributes new insights to the field.

5.1.1. Ethical Considerations

Although this research involves the analysis of a published literary text rather than human participants, ethical considerations remain important. All theoretical ideas, quotations, and interpretations derived from other scholars are properly cited in accordance with MLA citation guidelines. The research also ensures accurate representation of the original literary text and avoids misinterpretation of the author's work.

Furthermore, the study respects the historical sensitivity of the Cyprus conflict and approaches the topic with scholarly objectivity. By focusing on literary representation rather than political judgment, the research aims to contribute to academic understanding of how literature engages with historical trauma.

5.2. Summary of Methodological Approach

In summary, this research employs a qualitative textual analysis to examine how *The Island of Missing Trees* represents memory, silence, and trauma. Through close reading and thematic interpretation, the study analyzes how the narrative structure and symbolism of the novel reflect the transmission of historical trauma across generations. The use of trauma theory and cultural memory frameworks provides a conceptual foundation for understanding how literature can illuminate the complex relationship between personal experiences and collective history.

6. Analysis / Discussion

This section analyzes how *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak represents the themes of memory, silence, and trauma through its characters, narrative structure, and symbolism. The novel portrays the long-term psychological consequences of the Cyprus conflict and illustrates how traumatic experiences continue to influence later generations. Through a combination of personal narratives, historical context, and symbolic storytelling, the novel demonstrates how memory shapes identity and how silence often becomes both a protective strategy and a source of emotional tension.

6.1. Intergenerational Trauma and the Transmission of Memory

One of the central themes of the novel is the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next. The characters who directly experience the violence and displacement caused by the Cyprus conflict carry deep emotional scars that influence their relationships and identities. These experiences do not remain confined to the generation that witnessed the conflict; instead, they continue to shape the lives of their children.

The character of Ada represents the younger generation that inherits the emotional consequences of historical trauma. Although she grows up in London and does not directly experience the violence of Cyprus, her life is shaped by the unresolved memories of her parents. Her father Kostas and her mother Defne rarely speak openly about their past, which creates a sense of mystery and confusion for Ada. As a result, she grows up with fragments of stories and unspoken emotions that influence her understanding of her identity.

This narrative reflects the concept of intergenerational trauma described by Marianne Hirsch through the theory of post memory. According to Hirsch, later generations can inherit memories of traumatic events through family narratives, cultural traditions, and emotional environments (Hirsch 22). In the novel, Ada's experiences illustrate how trauma can be transmitted indirectly through silence and emotional distance. Even without direct knowledge of the past, she feels the psychological weight of events that occurred before her birth.

The novel also suggests that inherited trauma can manifest in feelings of alienation and identity confusion. Ada struggles to understand her cultural heritage because her parents avoid discussing their experiences in Cyprus. This lack of communication creates a gap between generations, demonstrating how silence can interrupt the transmission of historical memory while simultaneously preserving its emotional impact.

6.2.Silence as a Coping Mechanism

Silence plays a significant role in the narrative as a response to trauma. Characters who have experienced violence often find it difficult to express their memories openly. Instead of sharing their experiences, they choose silence as a means of protecting themselves and their loved ones from painful recollections.

In the case of Defne, silence becomes a strategy for coping with the trauma of war and displacement. Her reluctance to discuss her past reflects the emotional burden she carries as a survivor of conflict. By avoiding conversations about Cyprus, she attempts to shield her family from the painful memories associated with her experiences. However, this silence also creates emotional distance within the family, particularly for Ada, who feels disconnected from her cultural roots.

Scholars of trauma studies emphasize that silence often accompanies traumatic experiences because survivors struggle to articulate events that exceed ordinary language. Cathy Caruth argues that trauma frequently disrupts the ability to communicate clearly, leading individuals to express their experiences indirectly through fragmented memories or silence (Caruth 4). In Shafak's novel, this silence becomes an integral part of the narrative structure, illustrating the difficulty of confronting painful memories.

At the same time, the novel suggests that silence can have negative consequences for later generations. When families avoid discussing traumatic events, younger members may struggle to understand their identities and histories. Ada's search for answers demonstrates how silence can create emotional uncertainty and a sense of incompleteness. The absence of clear narratives about the past forces her to piece together her family history through scattered memories and personal reflection.

6.3.Nature as a Witness to Memory

One of the most distinctive narrative features of the novel is the voice of the fig tree, which serves as a symbolic observer of human experiences. The fig tree narrates several sections of the story, providing reflections on the lives of the characters and the historical events surrounding them. This unusual narrative perspective suggests that memory is not limited to human consciousness but can also be preserved in the natural world.

The fig tree acts as a silent witness to the love story between Kostas and Defne, as well as to the violence and division caused by the Cyprus conflict. Through its narrative voice, the tree recounts events that human characters either cannot or choose not to remember. In this way, the tree becomes a metaphor for the persistence of memory despite attempts to suppress or forget the past.

The symbolic presence of the tree also emphasizes the connection between environment and cultural memory. Landscapes often carry traces of historical events, preserving memories that may be lost in human narratives. By giving the fig tree a voice, Shafak highlights the idea that nature can serve as a repository of memory and history.

This narrative technique also reinforces the theme of continuity. While human lives are limited by time and mortality, the tree survives across generations, observing the changing lives of the characters. Its presence reminds readers that the past continues to influence the present and that memory remains embedded in both human experiences and the natural world.

6.4.Diaspora Identity and Cultural Memory

Another important theme explored in the novel is the relationship between diaspora identity and cultural memory. After leaving Cyprus, Kostas and Defne build a new life in London. However, their migration does not erase the memories of their homeland or the trauma associated with the conflict. Instead, these memories continue to shape their identities and influence their relationships.

Diaspora often involves a complex negotiation between past and present identities. Migrants must adapt to new cultural environments while maintaining connections with their heritage. In the novel, this process is reflected in the experiences of Ada, who grows up in Britain but remains connected to the history of Cyprus through her family.

Scholars of cultural memory argue that literature plays an important role in preserving the histories of displaced communities. According to Jan Assmann, cultural memory allows societies to maintain a connection with their past through narratives and symbolic representations (Assmann 37). Shafak's novel contributes to this process by transforming the history of the Cyprus conflict into a literary narrative that highlights its emotional and human consequences.

Through the characters' experiences, the novel illustrates how diaspora communities carry memories of historical conflict across geographical boundaries. These memories become part of their cultural identity and influence how later generations understand their heritage.

6.5.Memory, Healing, and Reconciliation

Although the novel portrays the painful effects of trauma and silence, it also suggests the possibility of healing through remembrance and storytelling. By confronting the past and acknowledging historical experiences, characters can begin to understand their identities and relationships more clearly.

Ada's journey toward understanding her family history represents an important step in this process. As she gradually learns about the experiences of her parents and the history of Cyprus, she begins to develop a deeper awareness of her cultural identity. This process of discovery allows her to transform inherited trauma into a source of understanding rather than confusion.

The narrative also emphasizes the importance of empathy and dialogue in overcoming historical divisions. The relationship between Kostas and Defne symbolizes the possibility of connection between communities that were once divided by conflict. Their love story challenges the boundaries created by political and ethnic divisions, suggesting that personal relationships can transcend historical hostility.

In this sense, the novel presents memory not only as a source of pain but also as a pathway toward reconciliation. By acknowledging the past and sharing stories across generations, individuals can begin to heal the emotional wounds caused by conflict.

6.6.Summary of Analytical Findings

The analysis demonstrates that *The Island of Missing Trees* offers a complex representation of memory, silence, and trauma. The novel portrays how historical violence continues to influence personal identities and family relationships long after the original events have ended. Through the experiences of its characters, the narrative illustrates the transmission of trauma across generations and highlights the emotional consequences of unresolved historical conflicts.

The use of silence as a narrative strategy reflects the psychological difficulty of confronting traumatic memories, while the symbolic voice of the fig tree emphasizes the

persistence of memory within both human experiences and the natural environment. Additionally, the novel explores the relationship between diaspora identity and cultural memory, demonstrating how displaced communities preserve their histories through storytelling.

Overall, Shafak's narrative reveals that memory is not simply a recollection of past events but a dynamic process that shapes identity, relationships, and cultural understanding across generations.

7. Conclusion

This study examined the themes of memory, silence, and trauma in *The Island of Missing Trees* by Elif Shafak, focusing on how historical conflict shapes intergenerational memory and identity. The novel, set against the background of the Cyprus conflict, presents a powerful narrative about the emotional and psychological consequences of war. Through its complex storytelling and symbolic narrative voice, the text demonstrates how traumatic memories continue to influence individuals and families long after the original events have passed.

The analysis revealed that intergenerational trauma plays a central role in the novel. Characters who directly experience violence and displacement carry emotional scars that shape their identities and relationships. These traumatic experiences do not remain limited to the generation that witnessed the conflict but are transmitted to later generations through family narratives, emotional environments, and unspoken memories. The character of Ada represents this inherited memory, as she struggles to understand her cultural identity while living with the emotional silence surrounding her parents' past. This reflects the concept of post memory described by Marianne Hirsch, which explains how later generations inherit memories of traumatic events that they did not directly experience.

Another significant finding of the study is the role of silence as a coping mechanism. Survivors of trauma often avoid discussing painful experiences in order to protect themselves and their loved ones from emotional distress. In the novel, characters frequently choose silence rather than confrontation when dealing with memories of the Cyprus conflict. While this silence helps them manage their grief, it also creates emotional distance within the family. Younger generations, such as Ada, grow up without a clear understanding of their heritage, which leads to confusion and a sense of disconnection from their cultural roots. This dynamic illustrates how silence can both protect and harm individuals by simultaneously shielding them from trauma and preventing open communication about the past.

The study also highlighted the symbolic importance of the fig tree in the narrative. By giving the fig tree a narrative voice, Shafak introduces an innovative storytelling technique that emphasizes the persistence of memory beyond human experience. The tree

functions as a witness to historical events and personal relationships, preserving memories that human characters either suppress or forget. This narrative strategy reinforces the idea that memory is embedded not only in individuals but also in landscapes, environments, and cultural traditions. The fig tree therefore becomes a powerful metaphor for continuity, resilience, and the enduring presence of history.

Furthermore, the novel explores the relationship between diaspora identity and cultural memory. After migrating from Cyprus to London, the characters attempt to rebuild their lives in a new cultural environment. However, their past experiences continue to influence their identities and emotional lives. The novel shows that migration does not erase historical trauma; instead, memories of conflict travel across geographical boundaries and become part of the identity of diaspora communities. Through Ada's journey of self-discovery, the narrative demonstrates how younger generations seek to reconnect with their cultural heritage in order to understand themselves more fully.

Another important insight emerging from the analysis is the potential for healing through memory and storytelling. Although the novel portrays the painful consequences of trauma and silence, it also suggests that confronting the past can open pathways toward understanding and reconciliation. By gradually learning about her family's history, Ada begins to bridge the emotional gap created by silence. Her process of discovery illustrates how acknowledging historical experiences can help individuals transform inherited trauma into knowledge and empathy.

The novel also promotes the idea that personal relationships can challenge the divisions created by political conflicts. The love story between Kostas and Defne symbolizes the possibility of connection across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Their relationship demonstrates that empathy and human understanding can exist even within contexts shaped by violence and hostility. In this way, the novel encourages readers to consider how narratives of memory can contribute to reconciliation and mutual understanding.

Overall, this research demonstrates that *The Island of Missing Trees* provides a significant literary exploration of intergenerational trauma, cultural memory, and identity formation. Through its unique narrative structure and symbolic imagery, the novel reveals how historical conflicts continue to shape personal experiences and social relationships across generations. By examining the themes of memory, silence, and trauma, this study contributes to broader discussions in trauma studies, memory studies, and postcolonial literature.

The findings of this research also highlight the importance of literature as a medium for preserving historical memory and exploring complex emotional experiences. Literary narratives allow readers to engage with the human dimensions of political conflicts, offering perspectives that may not appear in historical or political accounts. In

this sense, Shafak's work serves as an important cultural text that encourages reflection on the long-term effects of violence and displacement.

Future research could further explore the representation of intergenerational trauma in other contemporary diasporic novels or examine how environmental symbolism functions as a narrative strategy in memory literature. Comparative studies between Shafak's works and other postcolonial or diaspora writers may also provide deeper insights into the relationship between literature, memory, and identity.

In conclusion, *The Island of Missing Trees* illustrates that memory is not merely a record of past events but a dynamic force that shapes identity, relationships, and cultural understanding. Through its portrayal of inherited trauma, familial silence, and the persistence of memory across generations, the novel emphasizes the importance of remembering and acknowledging the past. By doing so, it offers a powerful reflection on the ways individuals and communities attempt to heal from the wounds of history

References

- Alexander, Jeffrey C. *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*. University of California Press, 2004.
- Assmann, Jan. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*. Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996.
- Erl, Astrid. *Memory in Culture*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Hirsch, Marianne. *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*. Columbia University Press, 2012.
- LaCapra, Dominick. *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.
- Shafak, Elif. *The Island of Missing Trees*. Viking, 2021.
- Whitehead, Anne. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh University Press, 2004.