

An Eco-feminist Analysis of Elif Shafak's The Island of the Missing Trees

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Abstract

This research explores the ecofeminist perspective in Elif Shafak's, *The Island of the Missing Trees* (2021). Through the experiences of her characters and their encounters with their natural surroundings, Shafak invites her readers to reflect on the deep connections between environmental exploitation, patriarchal systems, and the urgent need for collective action. Shafak's portrayal of the dynamic relationships between women, nature, and power structures, sheds light on the potential for feminist and ecological resistance. Shafak's portrayal of characters, landscapes, and socio-political events reveal layers of interconnectedness of environmental degradation and oppression. The research explores the intricate/ interplay between ecology, women, and retaliation/healing within the narrative. It examines themes such as healing from generational traumas, nationalism, losing home, coping, and secrets. This research combines close reading methods and discourse analysis to understand the images presented in the novel to answer; How can we heal from past life traumas in our present complicated life? How can humans cultivate resistance, resilience, and responsibility to face tremendous adversity?

Keywords: Eco-feminism, Elif Shafak's, *The Island of Missing Trees*, trauma, healing.

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Introduction:

Elif Shafak, described in 2011 by the Financial Times as “Turkey’s leading female novelist,” is well-received internationally. Her novel *The Forty Rules of Love* (2009) intertwines the past and present, exploring the enduring message of love through the experiences of Rumi and his spiritual mentor, Shams, as well as a modern woman’s journey inspired by their wisdom. The novel became an international bestseller (Safya, par.2), and millions of copies were sold worldwide and translated into 37 languages (Hourany, par.5). Hourany confirms that “Shafak offered a watered-down version of Sufism intended for Western audiences”, in *The Forty Rules of Love* which attracted the attention of Western audiences to Sufism and Shafak. According to a BBC report published in 2014 confirmed ‘that books on Rumi have sold millions of copies in the US, making him the most popular poet in the early 2010s’ (Ciabattari, par.2). She is one of the few ‘Eastern’, or who are considered ‘Eastern’ authors that write directly in English and address Eastern issues alongside Islam. However, since the recognition of *The Forty Rules of Love*, Shafak has distanced herself from being a representative of Islam, “because to be even a ‘Cultural Muslim author’ carries baggage that is not only unnecessary but also harmful to book sales” (Zirrar, par 6). She preferred to highlight the novel’s “spirituality”, “mysticism” and the “inner-oriented spiritual journeys all around the world” (Safya, par.4) that could

fit into any spiritual experience regardless of religion. *The Island of the Missing Trees* (2021) is published after 12 novels all of which take Turkey or Eastern territories as their main setting. Yet *The Island of Missing Trees* is set in Cyprus and London, exploring a romantic relationship between a Greek and Turkish Cypriot against the backdrop of the island's turbulent history. The novel is dedicated to "immigrants and exiles everywhere, the uprooted, the re-rooted, the rootless, and to the trees we left behind, rooted in our memories" (Zirrar, par. 2). In an interview, Shafak has confirmed that she "wanted to write about Cyprus for a long time, but she did not dare because of its difficult story to tell" (Shafak, 2019) due to the "green line which separates the Greek Cypriots from the Turkish Cypriots" (Shafak, 2019, 2:09). The case is similar to many communities around the world, but what makes the Cypriot case unique is that the capital city is split in its middle with partitions monitored by UN troops (Caner, par.12).

It is a contested subject that is repeated in many communities with complex histories and division partitions. She explains that the plot "is a beautiful story of unhealed wounds and accumulated grief" (Shafak, 2019, 3:01). She has challenged herself to write about a divided land, without falling into the trap of nationalism and tribalism. She takes *The Fig Tree*, as her protagonist and main commentator, and puts it at the heart of the love story of the forbidden love that diverse cultures fall into. She uses the speaking tree as a technique that gives her freedom to tell the story

of this divided land. She explores in the novel the concept of dis/re-placement and roots which evokes imaginaries of immigration/ migration dynamics and what people lose with it, memory loss/ preserving it, and all the inherited pain that passes down through generations because of that. The novel alternates between; excavation of the past and living in the present as an immigrant. In one sense, the theme of the novel is a traditional one, a variation on the old Romeo and Juliet theme, set in Cyprus and London. The only place the lovers can meet is a cafe called the happy Fig where its proprietors, a gay couple, one Greek, one Turkish, are sympathetically eager to provide the young lovers with a safe meeting place in a back room. Kostas and Defne are young lovers; he is Greek and Christian, and she is Turkish and Muslim. They were 18 in 1974 when tension between the two communities in Cyprus started, after the British withdrawal in 1960. This leads to war and the partition of the island between the two ethnicities, by a green line. In other words, it is about a migrating tree that tells her memories to heal; it is about acceptance, accepting everyone/thing/animal/insect/tree and trying to accept his/her/its pain. The inheritance and healing of generational trauma keep coming back and forth till the end of the novel through humans, insects, animals, and trees. There are delicate details recounted by the fig tree with its encounter with the surrounding ecosystem, the evocation of Cyprus, its history,

landscape, and culture, and the treatment of lives damaged by public events.

The voice of the fig tree and its commentary on the events offer fresh imaginary about the setting and the events. Shafak crams too much information about nature and the ecosystem into the novel, which makes it impossible to heal without being connected to yourself and nature. There are long passages in the novel about climate change, migrating butterflies, birds, immigrating roots, and Kostas's lessons about burying a fig tree. She intends through the novel to connect human beings to nature, opening possibilities of healing for human beings and the earth.

Theoretical Framework

Shafak presents "cultural identification with women and nature" and "the value of ecological and animal intelligence" or "the practice of eco-spirituality" (Vakoch, par. 3). The term eco-feminism is taken from both ecology and feminism. Ecology: "is the study of relationships between organisms and environmental conditions" (Kingsland, p.1) and feminism generally redresses "the subordination of women in gendered and sexually differentiated relationships" (Beasley, p. 3). Ecofeminism "is a diverse movement traversing various fields of scholarly inquiry and numerous fields" (Vakoch, p.1). Ecofeminism is a concept developed out of anarchist-feminist, which is concerned with abolishing all forms of power and control, whether on human beings or the natural world. (Tuana, p.70). Fracoise d'Eaubonne in

her book *Le Feminisme ou la Mort* (Feminism or Death) (1974), the book's title is an eye opener relating feminism to death (mort). D'Eaubonne has explained the important role of feminism in addressing environmental and gender issues. Gradually, the term has grown out of the definition of mere women and environment. d'Eaubonne relates the oppression of women to the oppression of the earth, exploitation, and colonization of the Western patriarchal society to environmental damage (Warren, p. 43). The late 20th century has identified Eco-feminism as a movement that speaks for women, the environment, and all marginalized groups, including queers (Krishna, p. 103). Vandana Shiva links the interactions of women to nature and economy. According to Shiva, women possess inherent knowledge about the ecological and nature's processes. However, this knowledge is suppressed and not recognized by the patriarchal Western capitalist economic system. She confirms that

These alternative modes of knowing, which are oriented to the social benefits and sustenance needs, are not recognized by the capitalist reductionist paradigm, because it fails to perceive the interconnectedness of nature, or the connection of women's lives, work and knowledge with the creation of wealth. (Shiva, p. 23)

The Western patriarchal perceptions of development and progress separate human beings from nature, perpetuating modern estrangement and traumas. due to separating the baby from its mother, or in other words, humanity from Mother Earth. Maria

Mies is a professor of sociology, while Vandana Shiva is an environmental thinker and campaigner. They collaborated to explore the intersections of feminism and ecological issues in this influential work. In *Ecofeminism* (1993), Mies and Shiva elaborate on this concept that all modern sciences are not objective because they are produced by men to men and are simply a projection of modern Western patriarchy. Modern history tells the glories about brave victorious men, modern medicine fails to address women's miseries, and the industrialization of plant reproduction. There are three major concepts of eco-feminism, which are of prime importance in defining the connection between woman and nature. First, Cultural/Spiritual eco-feminism emphasizes the natural connection between women and nature, which supports the concept of "Mother nature". Second, wisdom/its preservation and protection, which are traditionally allocated to women, supports the concept, of witches/elderly women as possessing the knowledge. Third, diversity/ harmony and autonomy are attributed to women's existence in their house raising balanced children and feeding them balanced food. This involves women with "a variety of perspectives and voices with an extended background" (Vakoch, p. 1). It puts into application the concept of "the personal is political" which is repeatedly described as a defining characterization of second-wave feminism (Lee, p. 163), Linking manhood to patriarchy and the desire to control women's bodies, nature and animals. Gaard combines

“sympathy with the analysis of culture and politics to refine a system of ethics and action” (Lee, p. 163). Nature becomes every woman, man becomes every oppressor; every capitalist, the personal becomes the political, earth is alive, and we are all an interconnected community. Shafak’s theory about eco-feminism is pronounced in blueprints on her YouTube channel *Say*. She explains that ecofeminism is “a branch of feminism” (Shafak, min. 2:11, 2022) and is related to “eco-activism, eco-awareness, eco-consciousness”. She confirms that whichever direction you take to reach the theory is “beautiful because it brings together several threads” (ibid.). She is equally concerned with the etymology of the word and the pedigree behind its concept, which brings her the concept back to d’Eaubonne’s intersectionality of different concerns, but the most significant one is the connection between women and nature. This is evident in the traditional roles, given to women as caregivers, nurturing, cooperation, and observing. Shafak’s nature and women correlate in their struggle from the oppressors and their attempts to heal the oppressed.

“We need to bear in mind that we are not the owners of the earth, we are not the center of the universe . . . we are part of an ecosystem and when we destroy the ecosystem, we destroy our own lives” (min. 3:03- 3:23)

She confirms that there are multiple inequalities, and all these inequalities are connected. To her caring about the environment

and the ecosystem gets you to the point of awareness of racial discrepancies, class discrepancies, gender discrepancies, regional discrepancies, and even digital discrepancies. For Shafak an ecofeminist is “someone who dares to connect the dots”.

A Burden to Carry:

Shafak has lived in Michigan for fifteen years and saw immigrants from the Mediterranean and the levant, burying their fig trees in Winter in exceptionally freezing weather and in Springtime they unbury it (Shafak, p.7). That theme of burying and unburying resonates the plot of the novel which recounts incidents of unburying truth, unburying identity, unburying memories, and unburying the missing dead of the Turks and the Greeks. The novel poses questions about losing home, coping with the innate hurt and secrets. What do immigrants do with their past? And how is the second generation of immigrants affected by the inherited pain. Shafak suggests that generational trauma is inevitable, offering a take on depression that will feel familiar to many communities. “We are afraid of happiness. From a tender age we are taught ... that for every morsel of contentment, there will follow ... suffering.” (Shafak, p.15). She suggests that generational trauma is only cured by opening it and recounting it. In her TEDtalk in 2019she warns her audience of the power of burring pain and living around it:

Be aware of the power of circles, if you want to destroy something in life, be it acne, or a blemish or the human soul, all

you need to do is to surround it with thick walls. It will dry up inside. We all live in some kind of social and cultural circles... we are born into a certain family, nation, class, but if we have no connection whatsoever with the world beyond the ones we take for granted, then we too run the risk of drying up inside our imagination might shrink, our heart might dwindle, and our humanism might wither, if we stay too long in our cultural cocoons... if all the people in our circles resemble us, we will be surrounded with our mirror image. (Shafak min. 0:05 – 0:30)

Covering mirrors is a long-standing tradition in Turkey and many countries in the Middle East, to prevent people from being trapped at their own reflection/ with their likes. The idea is to stop human beings from spending too much time staring at their own reflection and start reflecting on others to include them in their imaginaries.

Shafak presents a perfect juxtaposition of beauty and violence, just as the real world. This juxtaposition is evident in Kostas and Defne; and Yiorgos and Yusuf, those mirroring couples. One is Turkish, and one is Greek; one is bold, and one is timid, and both couples seek refuge from a war destined to destroy them. Shafak writes, "Love is the bold affirmation of hope. You don't embrace hope when death and destruction are in command" (Shafak, p. 168).

The fig tree gives Shafak the freedom to tell the story of this divided land, it enables her to be non-partisan. Shafak resorts to

the fig tree and its surrounding ecosystem as unbiased by nature and is a “memory keeper” (211). Shafak relies on the natural world to decipher human pain and unfolds the events. The fig tree sees both sides of the story, the humans and the natural. Shafak gets someone sentient to tell her story, “Trees, in general, are more sentient beings that are intelligent and wiser” (6). The personification of the fig tree is a mixed device that might be considered infantilizing the novel. However, the more “human” the tree is, the way it feels towards its surroundings and the main characters, takes the reader to an emphatic state. The reader emphatically engages in the plot, having the chance to hear from unconventional characters, which brings truth and honesty to the scene. The fig Tree is a female tree that cares about every human, animal, and insect, to complete the ecosystem cycle. She is an immigrant tree, that was born in Nicosia and replanted in London, like many women, who are forced to move because of wars or financial situations. She describes herself as “tall, robust, self-confident” (55) but like every woman is concerned about her age, I “lived several lives, which is another way of saying, I am old” (54). She will forever be grateful to Kostas for saving parts of her, “even by cutting” (55). She has “worked hard to fit in, to belong” after moving from Cyprus to England, because as a migrating woman, “when you leave your home for unknown shores, you don’t simply carry on as before; a part of you dies inside so that another part can start all over again” (55). She starts a new life in

the new land because she extends her roots there. The reader gets to know the story from her, “where do you start someone’s story when every life has more than one thread and what we call birth is not the only beginning nor is death exactly an end?” (56).

Shafak goes deeper into her arboreal life, the tree’s voice is a delight: the reader comes across reports of the mischief made between carob and fig trees; the subterranean world of roots; the gorgeous diversity of bees; the constant noise, textures, and vulnerability of a perpetual ecosystem; the rats, ants, butterflies and mosquitos that she knew, connecting the plot and the world of humans and nature. Shafak connects human beings to nature through the fig tree’s yearning for its “days in the sun” She listens internally “to the songs of meadowlarks and sparrows, the whistling of warblers and wigeons, the birds of Cyprus, calling (her) name” (81). She directs humans to

take a handful of soil, press it between your palms, feel its warmth, texture, mystery. There are more microorganisms in this small clod than there are people in the world. Packed with bacteria, fungi, archaea, algae and those wriggly earthworms, not to mention broken bits of ancient crockery, all working towards converting organic material into nutrients on which we plants gratefully feed and thrive, the earth is complicated, resilient, generous (80).

The readers of Shafak’s story rely on the natural world to complete the history of its human characters. Shafak writes, “The

human mind was the strangest place, both home and exile. How could it hold onto something as elusive and intangible as a scent when it was capable of erasing concrete chunks of the past, block by block?” (200). Trees, comparatively, are “memory keepers” (211). The reader is lost sometimes in the voice of the tree, is it the fig tree’s voice or Shafak’s voice trying to convince humanity of the importance of the entire ecosystem? She connects the fig tree to human feeling, and her love for Kostas is relatable to every woman, “I know what you are thinking. How could I, an ordinary *Ficus carica*, possibly be in Love with a *Homo sapiens*?” (31). She seeks his attention and is jealous. Her female character-like feelings engage the reader with her problems and sympathize with her. “I get it, I’m no beauty. Never been more than plain-looking” (31). She is jealous of the beauty of the other trees which are better looking and deserve his attention,

I’m no sakura, the dazzling Japanese cherry tree with its winsome pink blossoms extending in four directions, all glitz and glamour and swagger. I’m no sugar maple, aglow in stunning shades of ruby red, saffron orange, and golden yellow, blessed with perfectly shaped leaves, a total seductress. And I am certainly no wisteria, that exquisitely sculptured purple femme fatale. Nor am I the ever-green gardenia with its intoxicating perfume and glossy, verdant foliage or the bougainvillea with its magenta splendor climbing up and spilling over adobe walls under the baking sun ... I don’t have any of their charms admit. (31)

Shafak teaches the reader about trees and invites them to notice their differences, beauty, and diversity. She teaches women through the fig tree, that it is all about inner beauty and resilience, which Defne didn't know of, "what I lack in beauty and popularity, I make up for in mystery and inner strength" (31).

The fig tree expresses her version of history as every woman who has her version of stories. "Throughout history, I have seduced into my canopy droves of birds, bats, bees, butterflies, ants, mice, monkey, dinosaurs" (31). She does not see that it was an apple tree in the story of Adam and Eve, after all, she is sure to have been a fig tree,

make no mistake: that was no apple. it is high time someone corrected this gross misunderstanding. Adam and Eve yielded to the allure of a fig, the fruit of temptation, desire and passion, not some crunchy apple. (31)

She acts as an interpreter for the animal kingdom, a connection to the ecosystem, and a witness to the human storylines. Shafak writes, "Nature was always talking, telling things, though the human ear was too limited to hear them" (207). If a tree tells the story, a whole ecosystem is created, allowing our imagination to extend to nature. We are part of the same ecosystem. She unites the whole of nature and connects each being to the other to bring lovers together.

The fig tree recounts the movement of the butterflies, which appear as a recurring symbol throughout the novel. Butterflies are

engraved on the box that Kostas gives to Defne as a token of his love, Ada doodles them absentmindedly before her screaming spell, it is a butterfly who discovers the grave of Defne and Kostas's baby during a mass migration to Cyprus and they are the material of Kostas research as he studies their movement. They show the effects of environmental threats and climate change, but above all, they have adaptation strategies that migrants need to examine.

Contrary to butterflies, mosquitos are presented as the reason for all foes. The fig tree recounted the reason for Dafne's son as she heard it from a mosquito. She expresses her hate for those creatures.

Mosquitoes are humankind's nemesis. They've killed half the humans who ever walked the earth. It always amazes me that people are terrified of tigers and crocodiles and sharks, not to mention imaginary vampires and zombies, forgetting that their deadliest foe is none other than tiny mosquito. (270)

She also recounts the tales of the honeybee and its role in getting lovers together. The honeybee that showed Kostas the way to Dafne, resting on an Arber of an old tree, and from her the fig tree knew about Defne's job

The honeybee told me that not far from the tavern was a field of ambrosial flowers and lush plants in full bloom. She flew there often, for, as well as daises and poppies ... A sign on the wall read; CMP Laboratory – United Nations Protected Area. (295)

In her years, the fig tree meets many animals as well. A mouse once tells her of the books he munched on in the legendary Leda Palace, now dilapidated from neglect. A line from Ovid caught his eye: “Someday this pain will be useful to you” (307) and from him, she learns about the disasters that fell on the island. She recounts how Chico, the parrot, ended up being in the happy fig tavern because of his owner’s loss of interest. Chico worried that his new owners Yusuf and Yiorgos “would just disappear” (280) like his previous owner, but the fig tree assured him that they are different. The fig tree noticed, how talented he was in imitating sounds repeating; ‘S’agapo,’ Chico would croon in Greek, I love you, something he had heard Yiorgos whisper to Yusuf” and ‘Aglama’ which is Don’t Cry in Turkish (283).

Shafak unites women with the ecosystem because according to her they are an extension of nature with their natural love, healing powers, and endless caring. In an interview, she confesses that hugging a tree is considered an effective healing power to her (17). The novel’s three women connect with nature, taking and giving back to it, trespassing differences. Defne fell in love with a different religion, accepted gay relations, gave birth in a war zone under a tree, and transcended into the roots of the fig tree after her death. Ada went viral by her scream that women followed as a message,

There were messages of support too many of them in fact. A woman in Iceland had recorded herself against a magnificent

landscape, screaming at the top of her voice as a geyser went off in the background. Underneath was a hashtag that Ada noticed many others had also been using: *doyouhearmenow*. (123)

Meryem uses tradition as a salve to Ada's pain. Aunt Meryem arrives with two suitcases emblazoned with pictures of Marilyn Monroe and as many recipes as aphorisms, plaiting, and re-plaiting her hair and never knowing when to mind her business, reminding the reading of the forest's witch that heals and heals others in nature. She represents an aunt in every culture, with her zeal for her niece's well-being and inability to control it. Meryem, goes to London with all her colorful, strange, witch-like clothes, cooking with her strange recipes and spices brought from the East and healing with homemade remedies.

The three women are connected to the earth and the well-being of its people, each in her own way. However, they are aware of their struggles as women. Defne explains to Ada that "in all the myths a fairy tales, a woman who breaks social conventions is always punished. and usually the punishment is psychological, mental" (61). Meryem excuses herself for the mess her luggage causes and introduces the word 'ayip' to Ada.

All my life I've tired up after my sister, my husband, my parents. Even when I'd go to a restaurant, I'd clean up the table so the waiter wouldn't think badly of us. because it's ayip. ... It means 'shame'. It's the word of my life. (123)

She explains that in the East it is the most common word to control girls. “Don’t wear short skirts. Sit with your legs together. Don’t laugh out loud. Girls don’t do that Girls don’t do this. It’s ayip” (123). Till she grows, signs her “divorce papers” and decides that “no one is going to say it’s ayip. If you won’t do it now, when will you ever do it?” (125). Meryem is every woman who was bound by society’s rules but broke them out to connect to herself and nature.

To Kostas you can know people from what they see of the tree, if “the first thing they notice is the trunk. These are the ones who prioritize order, safety, rules, and continuity. Then there are the ones who pick out the branches before anything else. They yearn for change, a sense of freedom. And then there are those who are drawn to the roots, though concealed under the ground. They have deep emotional attachment to their heritage, identity, tradition” (Shafak p. 327). People are not the same in their perception of the same thing, it is all a matter of perception of others and the imaginaries that you accumulate over the years.

Generations of pain/ trauma/ healing

Shafak presents trauma as a burden carried down through generations where nothing is lost.

If families resemble trees, as they say, arborescent structures with entangled roots and individual branches jutting out at the awkward angles, family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark. They trickle down generation.

They ooze down slowly ... moving across time and space, until they find a crack in which to settle and coagulate. The path of an inherited trauma is random; ... sometimes family trauma skips a generation altogether and redoubles its hold on the following one. (128)

She intensifies the concept in Cyprus where generation trauma is carried on both sides because of lost family members and the green line that divides the island. However, the islanders never divided their pain and fear. They “string blue glass beads on necklaces and bracelets . . . summoning all the protection they can get” (129). Women have “similar worries and fear spool in their mind” (215). Women are also “scared of happiness . . . from a tender age ...an uncanny exchange is at work so that for every morsel of contentment there will follow a morsel of suffering, for every peal of laughter there is a drop of tear ready to roll” (129). Shafak notices that especially in cultures that have gone through drastic times of turbulence and trauma people expect every happy moment will be followed by an equal allotment of suffering. (16)

Shafak offers healing strategies for her characters and her readers. She insists that “To heal we should find a closure, a burial, to talk about history” (16) because the trauma they endure compounds on top of the trauma they inherit, “We have to remember in order to heal,” (215). Defne lived her life carrying the shame of being pregnant and having a baby out of wedlock, which affected her relationship with her parents and herself. Her

work at the UN unearthing the corpses of the dead in war zones, is an empowering dynamic to the women who lost their loved ones, waiting all those years to bury them, to put an end to their story. In a London scene, anthropologist Defne and her colleague interview an elderly Cypriot for his war memories but are chased away by the man's son for invading his privacy, unlike women who tell their stories, no matter how painful or shameful they are.

Kostas, the Arborealist, buries a fig branch, *Ficus Carioca*, in England. He cuts a part of the fig tree at the Happy Fig Tavern in Cyprus, carrying part of his memory and roots to London. Kostas attaches his life to that of the fig tree, he tries to bury her to keep her safe from the gusts of freezing weather on British soil, it is his connection to his homeland and his beloved wife. He offers a complete manual for how to bury a fig tree, saving the fig tree from the western weather, and his healing strategy.

Burying fig trees in trenches underground during the harshest winters and unearthing them in Spring is a curious if well-established tradition to immigrants with Mediterranean origins. Italians settles in sub-zero towns in America and Canada are familiar with it. So are Spaniards, Portuguese, Maltese, Greeks, Lebanese, Egyptians, Tunisians, Moroccans, Algerians, Israelis, Palestinians, Iranians, Kurds, Turks, Jordanians, Syrians, Sephardic Jews . . . and us Cypriots. (23)

The fig tree enabled Shafak to think about the idea of the roots, being uprooted and “deracinated” (16) that sense of displacement,

moving from one place to the other, the things that we lose and the things we become with all their imaginaries. Shafak comments in an interview that she has witnessed migrants burying their trees in the cold of western weather to keep them safe, as if from the western weather fallacies, or even trying to keep part of their homeland safe from western atrocities, healing strategies from their displacement trauma. The fig tree sets the imagery of the first-generation immigrants who are as she describes them “a species all their own” as lonely tries trying to survive the harsh weather of a strange country

‘First Generation immigrants talk to their trees all the time’ says the fig tree. The fig tree is the only companion to them they confide in us, describing their dreams and aspirations, including those they have left behind. . . they simply enjoy our company, chatting to us though to old, long-missed friends. They are caring and tender towards their plants, especially those they have brought along with them from lost motherlands. They know, deep within, that when you save a fig tree from a storm, it is someone’s memory you are saving. (24)

The fig tree notices that first generation immigrants exist discreetly.

They wear a lot of beige, grey or brown. Colours that do not stand out. Colors that whisper, never shout. There is a tendency to formality in their mannerisms, a wish to be treated with dignity. They move with a slight ungainliness, not quite at ease in their

surroundings. Both eternally grateful for the chance life has given them and scarred by what it has snatched away, always out of place, separated from others by some unspoken experience, like survivors of a car accident. (24)

They live with their pain but do not show it, they try to exit their estrangement with the least recognition they can get and hold on to anything that links them to their homeland. They hold to their food tradition as if it is their only means of survival, they yearn for its smell and follow the traditional recipe. They

Dream up ingenious ways to smuggle across borders their favorite smelly cheese, smoked pastrami, stuffed sheep intestines, frozen manti, home-made tahini, carob . . . even though they might, if only they searched, find at least some of these delicacies in the ‘international food’ section of supermarkets in their adopted countries. But they would claim it is not the same taste. (Shafak, p.23)

The question lies here in whether first generation immigrants hold on to their memories as part of their survival strategies? Shafak in the novel presets the dilemma of retaining those memories and keeping them untouched, or the need to understand them and uncover them to heal. Shafak writes, “The human mind was the strangest place, both home and exile. How could it hold onto something as elusive and intangible as a scent when it was capable of erasing concrete chunks of the past, block by block?” (Shafak, p. 200). In an interview she confirms her philosophy that

“we wouldn’t heal unless we remember that memory is a continuity and responsibility to understand its beauties and atrocities of the past” (16).

Ada Kazantzakis’s sudden scream in class opens the novel. Ada screams her “pain out” (18) in her London school affected by inherent/ inherited trauma, maybe because of losing her mother and her mother’s trauma of losing her homeland and a baby in a regional fight. Her mourning for her mother is becoming painfully public, as the video of her distressed scream becomes the scream of the oppressed. Ada’s scream becomes everyone’s scream, “It felt like I was screaming at everyone — everything” (175). Unknowingly, Ada reflected a societal desire shared by both women and youth, across the world to be heard, a statement made by the novel about voicing your traumas and speaking up. Ada’s parents have tried to protect her from their painful past in Cyprus. They have kept their past relationship and Cypriot families from her, but with the arrival of her maternal aunt, Meryem, after her mother’s death truth, starts un-raveling. Meryem, grounded Ada to her native country, to her origin, and roots with her traditional Turkish recipes and superstitions. When Ada says she felt possessed during her outburst in school, Meryem jumps to dispel whatever Jinn could have invaded Ada’s spirit. At times she appears more naive and more inexperienced than Ada, but her natural chaos leads Ada to heal because she talks about her pain

and knows about her parents' traumas. She returns to her island to recover from the divide in her spirit and be connected to her land.

Roots/ Nationalism/ internationalism

Shafak in an interview made it clear that she rejected the idea of roots that trap and limit people's imagination and connection with nature. Her root ideology is that roots hold you back from accepting new imaginaries, new territories, and new narratives. It tangles and limits, at a time when humanity should be more inclusive and accepting of minorities and diversity (16). She said her writing of the novel during COVID-19 with its growing nationalistic sentiments, closing borders, and tight limitations has driven her to advocate for internationalism with its vast space of acceptance and inclusion (7). Her tree is cut off from Cyprus and rooted in London, buried in winter and unburied in spring, a dynamic that is strange to trees with their stability and resistance to change. She wanted to give people the option of moving freely without any limitation, fear, or preconceived ideas.

Shafak quotes Amin Malouf to share his opinion about nationalism and hatred of roots. Malouf doesn't like to use roots as a metaphor due to its claustrophobic impact (16) "Malouf doesn't like roots as a metaphor because it is catastrophic, because of the idea of nationalism and he abandoned the idea altogether in his work because roots made him yearn for home" (Shafak, 2017, min. 8:21). You can have roots but not necessarily buried in the ground. This brings us to think about the imagery of portable

homelands, one can carry, or portable motherlands that we can take wherever we go. (Shafak, p.16). Shafak rejects the idea of nationalism, which Malouf abandons, yet she yearns for mobile roots of curious walking trees that can move to discover the world. They could be roots that are upside-down; roots that are not necessarily buried, like the African Baobab tree which looks like it has its roots in the air, free from any connections to soil or obligation to people.

Throughout the novel, Shafak reinterprets the concepts of borders and sovereignty and focuses on those things that do manage to travel beyond borders — such as migrating birds, the Etesian wind, food and its rituals, superstitions, or unexpected bonds of love. Reflecting on the border between Turkish and Greek Cyprus, the Green Line, she draws attention to the color that evokes natural beauty rather than competition or bloodshed. Shafak calls for an international citizen who can move freely and is accepted everywhere with no set rules by the patriarchal system. A citizen that hugs trees and follows the movement of butterflies and migrating birds. to her borders, wars, and misery are man-made, leaving behind a complete ecosystem to heal and women who need to adapt. Roots, stability, connectivity, and a sense of belonging are created to ground people in a certain patriarchal system that controls them and limits their imagination to materialism.

However, according to Shafak, connecting is the only thing that can be done in an age of uncertainty, and opening to the world is the solution, as seen in the novel. Kostas took his tree with him in his estrangement and tried to preserve his tree and roots. Ada was like the Baobab tree with her roots in the air but when she knew her family history gave her a chance to connect with and open up to her new reality. She shares a commitment to being an islander, rather than Turkish or Greek, Muslim, or Christian. Kostas tries to convince Defne to move with him to London quoting Cavafy's

You think you can leave your native land because so many people have done it, so why shouldn't you? After all, the world is full of immigrants, runaways, exiles . . . Encouraged, you break free and travel as far as you can, then one day you look back and realize it was coming with you all along like a shadow. Everywhere we go, it'll follow us this city, this island. (285).

In Kostas' love letter to Defne, he writes, "I've been thinking that you are my country" (183). He gave up his attachment to his homeland and attaches himself to his love that becomes his identity, his 'country' breaking down all barriers, fear, and hate. If Defne is his country, they can move in complete freedom securing for each other a safe place/zone that they might call country.

Defne's death looms over the novel. Kostas argues that she did not die by suicide but rather was plagued with an invisible illness that inhibited her ability to heal from the past. Like a girdled tree that is "strangled by its roots" Defne could not escape her pain,

nor could she ward it off with love (334). Ada blames her mother for not having enough love to accept her being unrooted from her homeland. She dies because she does not extend her roots in the new lands. She protects her own roots till they strangle her. After her death “metamorphosed into” the fig tree her feet “stuck in slow-growing roots to hold on to love” waiting for Kostas to un-dig her “holding her gently in his arms and behind his beautiful eyes, engraved in his soul, they will be there, the remnants of an island at the far end of the Mediterranean Sea, the remains of our love” (343). At the novel’s end, we learn that Defne’s spirit transmutes into the fig tree when it leaves her physical body. While Meryem had prayed for Defne’s spirit to enter heaven, Defne explains: “I much preferred to stay where I am, rooted in the earth” (342).

Conclusion

Shafak’s theory of ecofeminism brings together academia and activism. Activism for that matter is simply reconnecting with the earth not going to the streets and protesting, it is these simple acts that accumulate imaginaries of women and nature; gardening, taking care of trees, and listening to natural creatures. Simple acts like recycling, being aware of deforestation and climate change, with their deeper impact to women than men. In her YouTube channel *Say Shafak* explains that ecofeminism is beautiful because it looks at different inequalities and tries to correct them. That is if you care about the environment that means you need to examine

inequalities and if you care about inequalities in general then there are gender inequalities, racial inequalities, regional inequalities, and class inequalities. An ecofeminist cares about correcting all those inequalities starting from correcting the patriarchal system that built and preserves all these inequalities.

She believes that the world nowadays needs ecofeminism, as a branch of feminism and ecological awareness, and climate activism that people need to pull their threads together or die, as Francoise d'Eaubonne coins it in her book 'Feminism or Death'. She tightly connects women to nature, in every aspect; women's natural role in nurturing, cooperating, caregiving, and caring about natural beings. Women plant, cook, and bring water and if their environment is affected their entire lives would be destroyed. Also, she projects the operation and destruction of nature to women's oppression, in times of wars and immigration.

Ecofeminism in this matter serves in its holistic approach towards nature and women to the welfare of humanity in general. Human beings need to understand in times of wars and tight nationalism that we are part of each other and that we are part of the entire ecosystem. In the video, she directs humanity to slow down, close their eyes, and listen to "nature's wisdom" (Shafak, p. 17). She directs them to understand that they are not the owners of this universe or the center of it. They need to open up to others and let different ideologies filter into their closed circles. She advises humanity to take trees as their role model in sharing their

purpose and beauty with all creatures. She says that on digital media platforms, words have become weapons that fracture and polarize. Beneath the forest floor trees employ complex fungal networks to share resources, information, and knowledge. Interconnectivity should stimulate cooperation and understanding and not exacerbate division and isolation. (Shafak, 2:09– 2:34)

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ملخص

ستكشف هذه الدراسة منظور الإيكوفيمينيزم أو النسوية البيئية في رواية إليف شافاق، "جزيرة الأشجار المفقودة" (٢٠٢١). من خلال تجارب شخصياتها وتفاعلاتهم مع محيطهم الطبيعي، تدعو شافاق قراءها للتأمل في الروابط العميقة بين استغلال البيئة والأنظمة الأبوية والحاجة الملحة للعمل الجماعي. تسلط شافاق الضوء على العلاقات الديناميكية بين النساء والطبيعة وهياكل السلطة، مما يكشف عن الإمكانيات للمقاومة النسوية والبيئية. تصوير شافاق للشخصيات والمناظر الطبيعية والأحداث الاجتماعية والسياسية يكشف عن طبقات من الترابط بين تدهور البيئة والاضطهاد. تستكشف الدراسة التفاعل المعقد بين البيئة والنساء والانتقام/الشفاء داخل السرد. كما تفحص مواضيع مثل الشفاء من الصدمات الجيلية، القومية، فقدان الوطن، التأقلم، والأسرار. تجمع هذه الدراسة بين أساليب القراءة الدقيقة وتحليل الخطاب لفهم الصور المقدمة في الرواية للإجابة على الأسئلة التالية: كيف يمكننا الشفاء من صدمات الحياة الماضية في حياتنا المعقدة الحالية؟ كيف يمكن للبشر زراعة المقاومة والمرونة والمسؤولية لمواجهة الشدائد الهائلة؟

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإيكوفيمينيزم، إليف شافاق، جزيرة الأشجار المفقودة، الصدمة،

الشفاء