

The In-Between as Home: Memory, Hybridity, and the Reconstruction of Self

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Abstract:

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) interrogates the fractured formation of identity within Cyprus's divided history, where ethnic, national, and personal belonging are perpetually negotiated amid trauma, displacement, and silence. This paper examines Shafak's deconstruction of fixed identity categories through a postcolonial and memory studies framework, drawing on Homi K. Bhabha's third space (1994) to analyze how hybridity disrupts binary oppositions (Greek/Turkish, colonizer/colonized), and Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizome (1980) to frame identity as a non-linear, decentralized process. The novel's hybrid narrative—interweaving human and non-human perspectives—further challenges essentialist divisions by centering intergenerational memory and trauma as an unclaimed legacy (Caruth, 1996), which haunt and reconstruct the self across generations. Methodologically, the paper employs close textual analysis of key scenes—such as the fig tree's arboreal memory and Kostas and Defne's forbidden love—to trace how Shafak dismantles nationalist myths. It also applies postcolonial discourse analysis (Fanon, 1967) to critique the power dynamics of historical silences resulting in a fractured self. The analysis argues that Shafak proposes a rhizomatic model of identity, where belonging transcends fixed territories and instead emerges from shared stories, ecological interconnectedness, and mnemonic resistance. The central problematic lies in how identity is simultaneously fractured and rebuilt in post-conflict diasporas, while the hypothesis contends that the novel advocates for a decolonized selfhood—one that resists nationalist discourses by embracing hybridity, memory, and the in-between as sites of radical possibility.

Keywords:

Identity, Postcolonialism, Memory, Trauma, Hybridity, Third Space, Elif Shafak.