



Rootless Identity in Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*: A Postcolonial Perspective

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Abstract

This study explores the theme of rootless identity in Elif Shafak's novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* from a postcolonial perspective. It examines how the characters in the novel struggle with their identities in the aftermath of colonization and globalization, specifically focusing on their disconnection from their cultural, geographical, and historical backgrounds. Drawing on postcolonial theory, the analysis investigates the impact of losing roots on the characters' sense of belonging, self-identification, and cultural heritage. This study investigates the complexities of navigating multiple identities and the challenges faced by individuals caught between ancestral traditions and the influences of the modern world. Through a detailed examination of the novel, it explores how rootless identity is shaped by historical narratives, power dynamics, and the lingering effects of colonialism. The present study also explores the characters' journeys of self-discovery, their attempts to reclaim their roots, and the conflicts that arise when traditional cultural practices clash with contemporary values. Additionally, it highlights the broader implications of rootlessness in the context of postcolonial theory, discussing the impact of globalization on cultural homogenization, the erosion of indigenous knowledge systems, and the blending of identities.

Keywords: rootless identity, Elif Shafak, postcolonial literature

1. Introduction

Elif Shafak, the acclaimed author of *The Island of Missing Trees*, explores the profound themes of belonging, identity, and trauma in her latest work set on the divided island of Cyprus. In this intricately woven narrative, Shafak delves into the complexities of rootless identity and the lasting impact of secrecy and suffering that reverberate across generations. The story revolves around star-crossed lovers, grappling with an identity crisis and the challenges of finding a sense of belonging and homeliness in a fractured world. Through her masterful storytelling, Shafak raises thought-provoking questions about the nature of identity and the deep-rooted struggles faced by those who grapple with a sense of rootlessness, displacement and a fragmented sense of self.

Rootless identity serves as a central theme in the narrative, a common motif found in postcolonial literature. The characters are uprooted from their homeland due to conflicting circumstances such as economic, political, or social issues, seeking solace and stability in a new land. Against the backdrop of Cyprus, the novel *The Island of Missing Trees* paints a vivid picture of the challenges and complexities faced by those who experience a sense of rootlessness and loss of belonging. It illuminates the experiences of the Kazantzakis family, highlighting the intricate dynamics of their relationships amidst a backdrop of rootless identity and division. It explores the profound impact of being uprooted from one's homeland and the ongoing search for a sense of belonging and identity. Through its portrayal of characters like Defne, Kostas, Ada, and Meryem, the novel delves into the complexities of rootless identities and the enduring legacy of being uprooted from one's sense of belonging.

The Island of the Missing Trees explores the theme of rootless identity from a postcolonial perspective, delving into the complexities of displacement, diaspora, and the search for belonging. Through the fig tree's narration and observations, Shafak (2021) presents a compelling portrayal of the Kazantzakis family's experiences and highlights the intertwined relationship between human beings, their cultural heritage, and the natural environment. Ultimately, the novel prompts readers to reflect on the significance of place, memory, and the quest for a rooted sense of self in a world marked by postcolonial dynamics. Shafak (2021) takes readers to Cyprus, a terrestrial marked by conflict amidst its picturesque landscapes. The story revolves around Kostas, a Greek boy, and Defne, a Turkish girl, who navigate the challenges of a forbidden romance against the backdrop of societal tensions. The novelist masterfully weaves in historical details of the violent events that shaped Cyprus in the second half of the 20th century, demonstrating how these cataclysms reshape ordinary lives. The narrative alternates between different time periods, unraveling mysteries and posing new questions. As the story shifts between Kostas's experiences in Cyprus and his life as a successful botanist in the United Kingdom, his daughter emerges as a key character, driven to understand her heritage and the circumstances that led to her life in England.

The narrative of the novel explores the construction of stories, the creation of meaning, and the endurance of devotion, involving readers in the task of piecing together fragmented events. Interestingly, the novel introduces an unusual narrator in the form of a talkative fig tree. With memories of its past life in Cyprus and now thriving under Kostas's care in an English garden, the fig tree becomes a witness to the events unfolding throughout the story. It imparts a sense of melancholy wisdom as it listens to confessions, recalls the joys and horrors of the past, and reflects on the symbolic role

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trees play in people's lives. Despite the whimsical nature of the fig tree's perspective, the novel delves into profound themes and invites readers to explore the complexities of love, loss, and the significance of rooted identities.

1.1. Research Questions

- How does Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* depict the consequences of rootless identity in the context of postcolonial literature?
- What strategies and coping mechanisms do the characters in *The Island of Missing Trees* employ to navigate their rootless identities and establish a sense of belonging?

1.2. Research Objectives

- To analyze the portrayal of rootless identity in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* and examine its implications within the context of postcolonial literature.
- To explore the strategies and coping mechanisms employed by the characters in the novel to navigate their rootless identities and establish a sense of belonging.

2. Literature Review

Kondali (2018), in his study titled "Migration, Globalization, and Divided Identity in Kiran Desai's *The Inheritance of Loss*", explores the intersection of migration, postcolonial struggles, and diasporic existence. He argues that these factors intertwine and create a sense of detachment between various worlds and characters within the novel. He further investigates how the tensions stemming from colonial domination in the past impacts the characters, which find themselves caught between the force of assimilation and the force of resistance. The study emphasizes the characters' internal conflict as they strive to establish and maintain their personal and national identities.

In the research work titled "Rootless Identity in Jamil Ahmad's *The Wandering Falcon*" Khanal (2016) examines the theme of rootless identity in Jamil Ahmad's novel, *The Wandering Falcon*. Set in the harsh and desolate landscapes of Pakistan and Afghanistan, the novel explores the lives of various nomadic tribes and their struggles for survival in an ever-changing world. Khanal's research focuses on the characters' experiences of displacement and the resulting formation of a rootless identity. The central argument of the dissertation revolves around the idea that the characters in *The Wandering Falcon*, such as Tor Baz, are caught between different cultures, societies, and belief systems. They inhabit a liminal space where their sense of belonging is constantly challenged and fragmented. This rootless existence is exacerbated by the political and social upheavals of the region, as well as the encroachment of modernity and globalization.

Farlina's (2008) study "The Issue of Cultural Identity in Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*" delves into the issue of cultural identity in Khaled Hosseini's renowned novel, *The Kite Runner*. The researcher focuses on the complex interplay between cultural influences, personal identity, and the impact of historical events on the characters. The study argues that cultural identity is a central theme in *The Kite Runner*, as the characters grapple with their Afghan heritage while being exposed to Western ideals and values. Farlina (2008) analyzes how this clash of cultures shapes the characters' sense of self and their relationship with their homeland. The Afghan society depicted in the novel is marked by traditional customs, societal expectations, and the influence of Islam, which play significant roles in shaping the characters' identities. She examines the impact of historical events, particularly the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the subsequent rise of the Taliban regime, on the characters' cultural identity.

Yousef's (2019) article named "Cultural Identity in Monica Ali's *Brick Lane: A Bhabhian Perspective*" examines the theme of cultural identity in Monica Ali's novel *Brick Lane*, utilizing a Bhabhian perspective. *Brick Lane* is a powerful portrayal of the Bangladeshi immigrant experience in East London, focusing on the protagonist Nazneen's journey of self-discovery and her negotiation of cultural identity in a foreign land. The study argues that *Brick Lane* presents a nuanced exploration of the cultural hybridity and ambivalence experienced by the characters, particularly Nazneen, as they navigate between their Bangladeshi heritage and the demands of assimilation into British society. The researcher delves into the ways in which the characters in *Brick Lane* challenge and subvert fixed notions of identity through acts of resistance, mimicry, and the creation of alternative spaces.

In the article "Fluid Identity of the Muslim Migrants in America: A Case Study of Hayat Shah in Ayad Akhtar's *American Dervish*" Yasin, Nasir, and Rahim (2021) explore the theme of fluid identity among Muslim migrants in America, with a specific focus on the character Hayat Shah. The novel portrays the experiences of a Pakistani-American Muslim boy growing up in the United States and grappling with questions of cultural identity, religion, and belonging. Yasin et al.'s research conducts a case study analysis of Hayat Shah's character to examine the complexities of fluid identity in the context of Muslim migration. The study argues that *American Dervish* offers valuable insights into the challenges faced by Muslim migrants in navigating their cultural and religious identities in an unfamiliar environment. It explores how Hayat's identity is shaped by his interactions with his family, community, and the wider American society. The authors delve into the interplay between cultural expectations, religious beliefs, and the pressures of assimilation. Yasin et al. examine the fluidity of Hayat's identity, highlighting his journey of self-discovery and the evolving nature of his religious and cultural beliefs.

The research article by Ramzan, Arif, Nusrat, and Shakir (2023) titled “Human-Nature Relationship in Shafak’s *The Island of the Missing Trees: An Ecocritical Approach*” examines the portrayal of the human-nature relationship in Elif Shafak’s novel *The Island of the Missing Trees*. Taking an ecocritical perspective, the study explores the intricate connections between humans and their natural environment as depicted in the novel. The research argues that Shafak’s novel delves into the complex dynamics between human beings and nature, highlighting the ways in which human actions and decisions impact the environment. Through an ecocritical lens, the article analyzes the characters’ interactions with nature, their perceptions of the natural world, and the consequences of their choices on the ecosystem. The authors explore the themes of environmental degradation, deforestation, and ecological consciousness in *The Island of the Missing Trees*. The article investigates how the characters’ relationships with nature reflect broader concerns about climate change, sustainability, and the preservation of natural resources.

There is a research gap concerning the exploration of rootless identity from a postcolonial perspective in Elif Shafak’s novel *The Island of Missing Trees*. Existing studies have focused on themes of identity and the human-nature relationship, but there is limited analysis specifically addressing rootless identity within the context of colonial legacies. By addressing this gap, researchers can delve deeper into the complexities of identity formation and the enduring effects of colonialism in the novel. Examining rootless identity from a postcolonial lens will provide insights into characters’ negotiations of fragmented cultural and national affiliations, their resistance or conformity to dominant narratives, and the influences of colonial histories on their sense of self. This analysis contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of identity politics, diasporic experiences, and the ongoing impacts of colonialism in contemporary literature.

3. Theoretical Framework

Postcolonial theory is characterized by its opposition to colonialism and its recognition of the struggles faced by marginalized people who experienced poverty and cultural disruption under colonial rule. Ashcroft et al. (2007) defines the term ‘postcolonial’ as encompassing all cultures affected by colonization from that historical moment to the present day (Ashcroft et al., 2007). Ashcroft (2001) provided a concise overview of postcolonial theory, emphasizing that it emerged in response to the shortcomings of Western theories in adequately addressing the complexities and diverse cultural factors involved in postcolonial writing (P.1). Bhabha (1994) argues that postcolonial critique examines the unequal and uneven dynamics of cultural representation within the modern global order, highlighting the contest for political and social authority (P.171). According to Barry (2020), “hybridity” refers to individuals and groups who simultaneously belong to multiple cultures (P.199). Hybridity arises when individuals find themselves caught between two distinct cultures, leaving behind their language, customs, and religion to immerse themselves in a new culture and language. This experience of living a dual life often leads to a sense of lost identity (Barry, 2020).

In his book *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha (1994) introduced the concept of “hybridity” as a consequence of the oppressive impact of colonization on indigenous populations, who were constrained within the boundaries of colonial discourse. He argues that hybridity signifies a reevaluation of assumptions about colonial identity through the repeated experiences of discriminatory identities. It reveals the necessary disruptions and dislocations within all spaces characterized by discrimination and domination (P.160). Additionally, Bhabha (1994) associates the term “hybridity” with the notion of the “Third Space,” where individuals inhabit an in-between state, navigating two different cultures and ultimately forming a blended identity. According to Bhabha, the significance of hybridity lies not in tracing two original moments from which a third emerges but rather in the emergence of alternative positions within this “Third Space” (P.211).

In our contemporary ‘post-colonial’ era, the notion of identity is intimately tied to a localized sense of place, and the formation of identity is influenced by the impacts of colonialism and globalization. Drawing on Massey’s (1994) concept of identity and place, establishing a connection between a traditional sense of place and one’s original roots can provide a sense of stability in identity. However, Massey (1994) argues that the concept of place is not fixed but rather unstable, as places are in a constant state of flux and transformation (p.155). Massey (1994) emphasizes that places do not possess singular, distinct “identities,” but rather they are marked by internal conflicts, including disputes over their past, present development, and future possibilities. Despite these conflicts, the specificity of each place is continuously reproduced (p.155).

Postcolonial theory, or postcolonialism, is seen as a continuation of colonialism, where former colonies achieved political independence but still grapple with various forms of marginalization and oppression. Countries like Pakistan, India, Sri Lanka, Nigeria, Australia, South Africa, Canada, and various Asian and Islamic nations are home to marginalized and colonized populations who have endured suppression, slavery, migration, displacement, resistance, as well as cultural and racial discrimination. In the contemporary context, the advancement of modernity has added layers of complexity to the issue of identity. Mahoney (2007) remarks that one’s identity can be as intricate as the actual process of developing that identity. This complexity arises from the ever-changing and unstable nature of identity, strongly influenced by the dynamic social conditions that shape human existence. The rapid and constant flux of identity poses a potential challenge to its

overall stability, particularly within the context of technological progress, migration trends, urbanization, and globalization, all of which characterize the present human experience (Howarth, 2002).

The instability of identity has become increasingly pronounced, particularly within the framework of the network society, a concept coined by Castells (2010b) to describe the 21st-century society shaped by significant social, cultural, technological, and economic transformations. Castells (2010b) highlights that this era is characterized by complexity, making it challenging to comprehend various aspects of human existence, including identity. Consequently, identity is now perceived as a socially constructed form of identification, extending beyond the traditional notion of individuals belonging to specific geographical locations. In the contemporary context, people have the ability to adjust and adapt to different spaces, thereby reshaping their identities to suit changing circumstances. As Castells remarks that by empirical observations, it has become evident that “over the past fifteen years”, the progression of globalization has coincided with a resurgence in the affirmation of diverse cultural identities. These identities encompass various aspects, including “religious, national, ethnic, territorial, gendered, and other specific identities”. (Castells, 2010c:89).

As a result, the globalized world has undergone significant transformations that have not only influenced various aspects but also sparked a cascade of further changes, mainly in the social realm. Castells (2010) asserts that alongside technological advancements and the revolution of capitalism, there has been a widespread emergence of powerful expressions of collective identity. These expressions challenge the notions of globalization and cosmopolitanism, instead emphasizing people’s desire for increased autonomy in managing their own lives. These diverse and multifaceted expressions encompass cultural and historical foundations of identity, giving rise to reactive movements such as feminism, environmentalism, and other movements that advocate for specific national, ethnic, religious, or familial interests (Castells, 2010a).

In this context, the concept of identity is no longer perceived as something fixed, but rather as a dynamic construct that undergoes continuous construction and reconstruction. Calhoun (1994) defines identity as a form of self-knowledge that is inherently a construction, even if it may sometimes feel like a discovery or a process of searching. Thus, from a sociological perspective, all identities are socially constructed identifications that draw upon various building materials such as geography, history, biology, collective memory, and religious institutions (Castells, 2010a).

According to Castells (2010a), the social construction of identity always occurs within the framework of power relations. He proposes three forms of identity building: legitimizing, resistance, and project identity. Legitimizing identity refers to the origins of identity introduced by dominant institutions to extend and rationalize their authority. On the other hand, resistance identity emerges from actors who find themselves in more devalued or stigmatized positions, aiming to resist and survive the influence of dominant forces. Project identity, on the other hand, occurs when social actors have access to a range of cultural materials, enabling them to construct a new identity or redefine who they are (Castells, 2010a).

The relationship between remembrance, denial, and identity is often seen as intertwined, as memory and identity are mutually dependent. Identity not only emerges from memory but also shapes what is remembered, highlighting the strong connection between identity and social memory (Misztal, 2003). It underscores the significant role of social memory in the process of constructing identity. In response to the complex phenomenon of identity construction, remembrance, and denial within the network society, literature plays a vital role in depicting and unveiling such dynamics. Literature serves as a social practice that positions itself as a medium for portraying real-life social phenomena. With regard to the issue of identity, literature is considered an effective tool for illuminating the process of identity formation. As Culler (2000) asserts, literature offers diverse models of how identity can be shaped, even if they are often implicit. Moreover, the abundance of identity theories in literature, ranging from race, gender, sexuality, to nationality, is a testament to the wealth of sociological perspectives literature provides on the process of identity construction (Culler, 2000).

4. Textual Analysis

In Elif Shafak's novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* the theme of rootless identity is explored through the experiences of the protagonist, Defne, and other characters in the backdrop of Cyprus, a land plagued by conflict and political strife. Defne, a Turkish girl living on the island, struggles with her dual heritage and the Greek-dominated environment around her, torn between her familial roots and the desire to forge her own path. Shafak (2021) skillfully depicts the challenges faced by individuals caught between multiple cultures, histories, and personal experiences, highlighting the impact of external forces on shaping one's sense of self. The novel also delves into the consequences of denying one's true identity, portraying the emotional and psychological toll of suppressing one's roots. Through richly drawn characters and vivid descriptions, Shafak paints a picture of the complexities inherent in the human experience of identity, inviting readers to embrace the fluidity and multiplicity that define us. The story further explores the Kazantzakis family's journey, particularly the complex relationship between Defne and Kostas, as they navigate a civil war and seek refuge in England. The tension between the past and present, rooted in the characters' sense of displacement, adds depth to the narrative.

Defne, a key character in the novel, adopts a different approach to coping with the harsh impact of war, separation, and uprootedness. Initially depicted as a free-spirited individual drawn to freedom and change, Defne is left behind by Kostas

and is forced to endure the painful conflict in her motherland. During the war, she conceals her pregnancy, ultimately giving up her son for adoption and later discovering his tragic death. Although she follows Kostas to London, where life seemingly improves, Defne gradually experiences psychological decline, unable to overcome the trauma of her past and the weight of her memories. Remembering, in the context of diaspora, is highlighted by Homi Bhabha (1994) as a painful process, involving the reconstruction of a dismembered past to make sense of the present trauma. Defne's time in London primarily portrays her continual remembrance of her homeland through a lens of gloom and sadness. In the context of forced migration, memories are not solely nostalgic but can also evoke recollections of trauma and violence. Unlike Kostas, Defne remains emotionally connected to her motherland, yet she is haunted by the memories of war. Bhabha's (1994) assertion becomes evident in Defne's situation, demonstrating how forgetting the past and moving forward proves impossible for some who have experienced displacement. Remembering and attempting to make sense of the past inflict profound pain: "Because the past is a dark distorted mirror. You look at it, you only see your own pain." (p.112).

Defne's inability to transcend her traumatizing past places her in a difficult position when negotiating between the past and the present. While she initially appears carefree, effortlessly relocating to England with Kostas, she becomes immovable when it comes to reminiscing about her homeland. Defne appears content with her new life in London, yet the memories of her homeland unconsciously resurface, resulting in her depression: "Her death had nothing to do with the absence of love...but underneath something was strangling her—the past, the memories, the roots." (p.334)

Another significant character, Ada, the daughter of Kostas and Defne, also grapples with the effects of rootlessness and its impact on her sense of belonging. Unlike her parents, Ada did not directly experience war and rootlessness. Born and raised in London, her parents consider her a "British Kid" who has never even been to Cyprus. Ada represents the familiar figure found in multicultural narratives, adapting well to the culture of her new land unlike the previous generation. However, despite not directly experiencing her parents' past, Ada inevitably feels the effects of their displacement and trauma. The conflicting past and the repercussions of uprootedness manifest indirectly in the subsequent generation. In an effort to shield Ada from pain, Defne and Kostas deliberately sever her ties to anything related to their motherland: "If we want our child to have a good future, we have to cut her off from our past." (p.317)

The situation regarding Ada's lack of knowledge about her parents' past and homeland places her in a conflicting position of missing a sense of self. Indirectly, she has witnessed her mother's attempts to cope with the pain of the past, but she does not fully comprehend what transpired. Throughout the story, Ada is depicted as a troubled teenager struggling with the grief of losing her mother and losing her own sense of identity. This narrative demonstrates how Ada, to some extent, becomes disconnected from her Cyprus roots while still experiencing and witnessing her parents' displacement-related pain. ... Family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark. They trickle down generations (P.128). Through Ada's situation, Shafak (2021) portrays the complexity of intergenerational trauma in a postcolonial context, where the pain endured by Kostas and Defne inevitably affects Ada as the next generation, regardless of their attempts to shield her from it.

The character, Ada, had always felt a sense of rootlessness in her identity. Growing up in a multicultural household, she found herself caught between different languages and cultures. Despite the vibrant collection of non-English words she carried with her, these linguistic treasures remained distant and unfamiliar, like precious pebbles picked up on a beach, but lacking a purpose. Ada's parents, for reasons unknown, had chosen not to teach her their native languages, resulting in her inability to communicate in both her father's Greek and her mother's Turkish. This linguistic gap further deepened Ada's sense of disconnection and added to her complex journey of self-discovery. Ada's "parents had not taught her their native languages, preferring to communicate solely in English at home. Ada could speak neither her father's Greek nor her mother's n Turkish" (p.7)

In her quest for self-discovery, Ada embarked on a journey to bridge the linguistic divide and seek a sense of belonging that transcended borders, seeking to weave together the threads of her multifaceted identity into a cohesive whole. In this moment of heightened awareness, Ada's keen perception allowed her to sense the fear radiating from those around her. It was a departure from her usual position as the one plagued by apprehension. "Ada sensed their fear and, for once, it felt good not to be the one who was frightened.... She was no part of this chain. She was no part of anything. In her unbroken loneliness, she was complete." (p.29).

Ada found solace in her separation. In her estrangement from the collective, she discovered a sense of completeness within her unbroken loneliness. The raw vulnerability that accompanied her detachment became a source of unexpected power, amplifying her awareness of her own identity. In this moment of simultaneous exposure and empowerment, Ada's experience highlighted the complexity of rootlessness. As Mrs. Walcott passionately expounded on the significance of history, her firm stance behind her desk seemed to symbolize her unwavering commitment to teaching her students.

History is a most fascinating subject,'Mrs Walcott was now saying, her brogues planted firmly behind her desk, as though she needed a barricade from behind which to teach her students, all twenty-nine of them. 'Without understanding our past, how can we hope to shape our future?' Oh, I can't stand her,' Emma-Rose muttered under her breath. (p.8)

Her aversion to Mrs. Walcott's fervor suggests the yearning for a curriculum and teaching approach that acknowledges the diversity of student experiences and fosters a sense of belonging, rather than reinforcing a singular historical narrative that may perpetuate feelings of alienation. Ada's gaze dropped as she confronted the void of connection to her relatives. The absence of any personal encounter with her extended family, both on her mother's and father's side, left her with a profound sense of rootlessness. Ada thought that "What kind of people were they? How did they spend their days? Would they recognize her if they passed by on the street or bumped into each other at the supermarket" (p.7). From above lines it is clear that in her quest to uncover her heritage and forge meaningful relationships, Ada confronted the intricate layers of rootlessness that permeated her existence, constantly searching for a sense of belonging that remained just beyond her grasp.

Ada's experience of accumulating a collection of non-English words resonated with her profound sense of rootlessness. Ada's parents had made a conscious decision not to teach her their native languages, resulting in her inability to communicate in both her father's Greek and her mother's Turkish. This linguistic barrier further deepened Ada's feeling of disconnection, emphasizing her complex journey to reconcile her multifaceted identity. Therefore, "Ada could speak neither her father's Greek nor her mother's Turkish" (p.7). It is conspicuous that this linguistic divide served as a constant reminder of her disconnection from her ancestral languages and deepened her yearning for a more profound connection to her roots. Ada's journey toward self-discovery and identity formation was marked by the ongoing exploration of her own multifaceted heritage and the pursuit of a sense of belonging that transcended language barriers.

Ada's gaze shifted towards her father, her eyes filled with anger and frustration. The weight of her words illuminated her understanding of their family's complex dynamics. She acknowledged the stark divide between her father's Greek heritage and her mother's Turkish roots, recognizing the historical animosity that existed between these two communities. She expressed her disappointment and resentment towards their relatives who had shown no interest in maintaining familial connections. The absence of their presence during her mother's funeral further exacerbated her sense of rootlessness. Ada refused to accept a façade of a united family, expressing her refusal to engage in cultural traditions and proverbs that seemed to overlook the underlying issues. Ada addressing her father Ada said that "You're Greek, Mum is Turkish, opposite tribes, blood feud". (p.55)

Ada spoke with a deep awareness of the complicated familial dynamics that existed between her Greek father and Turkish mother. The historical enmity between their respective cultures was not lost on her, and she acknowledged the backlash they faced when they decided to marry. The lack of effort from their relatives, on both sides of the family, to establish meaningful connections or attend her mother's funeral intensified Ada's sense of rootlessness. She vehemently rejected the idea of feigning acceptance and compliance with cultural traditions that seemed to dismiss the underlying issues and pain. Ada's outburst reflected her desire for genuine familial bonds that transcended cultural divisions, as she refused to settle for superficial unity and sought a more authentic sense of belonging.

The following extract from the novel too emphasizes the theme of rootlessness:

Oh, she's T-T-Turkish?" said the man, his face changing. You didn't say." "Why?" Defne asked instantly and, when she didn't get a response right away her gaze hardened. 'Do you have a problem with that??' The first man chimed in, 'Hey, don't get upset! Yusuf himself is Turkish. (p.57)

From the extract given above, it is clear that the man's initial surprise at learning about the woman's Turkish background was evident in his response, marked by a stutter and a change in his facial expression. However, when Defne immediately questioned the reason behind his reaction, her gaze hardening, and the man's intent shifted to defuse any tension. Another individual, Yusuf, who identified himself as Turkish, chimed in to acknowledge his shared cultural background. His intervention aimed to reassure Defne that there was no reason for her to become upset. This exchange showcases the complexities of cultural identity and the potential for misunderstandings based on assumptions or limited knowledge. It highlights the significance of challenging any biases or prejudices and emphasizes the importance of understanding and embracing diverse cultural backgrounds. Within the context of rootlessness, this interaction serves as a reminder of the need for open-mindedness and acceptance in fostering a sense of belonging and unity.

5. Conclusion

The Island of Missing Trees is a profound exploration of rootless identity, capturing the struggles, longings, and complexities faced by individuals caught between cultures, histories, and personal experiences. Elif Shafak's masterful storytelling invites readers to reflect on their own identities and the ways in which external forces shape their sense of self. The novel serves as a poignant reminder that embracing the fluidity and multiplicity of our identities can lead to a deeper understanding of ourselves and a greater sense of belonging in an ever-changing world. The theme of rootless identity is explored through the experiences of the protagonist, Defne, and other characters in the backdrop of Cyprus, a land plagued by conflict and political strife. The novel skillfully delves into the challenges faced by individuals caught between multiple cultures, histories, and personal experiences, highlighting the impact of external forces on shaping one's sense of self. Defne, a Turkish girl living on the island, grapples with her dual heritage and the Greek-dominated environment around

her, torn between her familial roots and the desire to forge her own path. Defne's struggle with her identity is deeply intertwined with her memories of war and rootlessness. Similarly, Ada, the daughter of Defne and Kostas, also grapples with the effects of rootlessness and its impact on her sense of belonging. Despite not directly experiencing her parents' past, Ada feels the repercussions of their displacement and trauma. Her parents deliberately sever her ties to anything related to their motherland in an effort to shield her from pain. However, this lack of knowledge about her heritage leaves Ada in a conflicting position of missing a sense of self. She struggles with grief, loss, and a troubled sense of identity.

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