

# RHIZOMATIC NETWORKS AND POSTHUMAN AGENCY IN ELIF SHAFAK'S *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES*: RECON- FIGURING MEMORY, IDENTITY, AND MULTISPECIES NARRATIVITY

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## ABSTRACT

**Thesis.** This study analyses Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) through an integrated theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's rhizome theory (1987) and contemporary posthumanist thought (Braidotti, 2013/2019).

**Concept.** Posthumanism challenges anthropocentric epistemologies, emphasising relationality, multispecies entanglements, and decentred subjectivity. Rhizome theory, meanwhile, reconceptualises memory, identity, and narrative as non-hierarchical, interconnected networks that proliferate horizontally. Utilising this combined framework, the study portrays the fig tree in the novel as a multispecies narrative agent, linking human and ecological histories, mediating intergenerational traumas, and facilitating the circulation of memory across temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries.

**Results and Conclusion.** The study foregrounds that the narrative voice of the fig tree exemplifies the posthuman capacity for agency beyond the human realm, while its rhizomatic structure destabilises linear historiography and fixed identity constructs. The translocation of the fig tree between Cyprus and London illustrates the hybrid and dispersed identities generated through migration, conflict, and ecological interconnectedness. Collectively, these findings position *The Island of Missing Trees* as a literary articulation of posthuman memory, in which trauma and belonging emerge from interconnected multispecies assemblages rather than individual human experience.

**Originality.** The originality of this study lies in its synthesis of rhizomatic and post-humanist approaches. By integrating these perspectives, the analysis demonstrates that memory, trauma, and identity in Shafak's novel are constituted as relational and distributed assemblages, highlighting the interaction of human and non-human actors in the co-creation of cultural and ecological memory.

**Keywords:** rhizome theory, posthumanism, multispecies narratology, memory, identity, trauma

## INTRODUCTION

Contemporary literature has grown critical of the limits of human subjectivity, memory, and identity, often challenging anthropocentric assumptions and conventional narrative structures. Elif Shafak's novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), represents this trend through its multispecies narrative approach, where human and non-human actors intertwine in networks of relationality, memory, and trauma. Set against the backdrop of Cyprus's historical and political tensions and spanning several generations, the novel highlights the experiences of characters whose identities are shaped by migration, conflict, and loss. The fig tree, a non-human entity whose narrative agency transcends conventional human-centred perspectives, embodies intergenerational memory and ecological interconnectedness and is central to Shafak's narrative. This study examines *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) using a combined theoretical framework of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's rhizome theory (1987) and contemporary post-humanist thought (Braidotti, 2013/2019), arguing that memory, identity, and narrative in the novel emerge as relational, distributed, and multispecies phenomena.

The idea of the rhizome as expounded by Deleuze and Guattari offers an essentially non-hierarchical and interconnected model of knowledge, identity, and narrative. Unlike arboreal models, which gives priority to linearity, causality, and centrality, rhizomatic structures spread across a wider range, creating networks of active, diverse, and dispersive connections. Literarily speaking, rhizomatic narratives disrupt conventional chronologies and restricted perspective, allowing for the emergence of multiplicities in characters, voices, and temporal orientation (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). In *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), the fig tree embodies a rhizomatic node that links human experiences across generations with ecological and cultural histories. Its narrative presence challenges teleological historiography and fixed identity constructs, emphasising instead the intertwined, relational, and nonlinear processes through which memory and subjectivity are constituted. Hence, the rhizome's principle of connection and heterogeneity provides a conceptual framework for understanding the novel's experimental narrative form, where memory, identity, and storytelling extend over human and non-human sets.

Adding to the rhizomatic framework, posthumanist theory offers a critical perspective on the decentring of the human and the distributed nature of agency. Posthumanism, as articulated by Rosi Braidotti (2013/2019), challenges anthropocentric epistemologies and ethical frameworks, accentuating relationality, interdependence, and the interconnectedness of human and nonhuman life. According to posthumanist theory, agency is not an exclusive attribute of human subjects; rather, it emerges within the networks of interaction between human and nonhuman actors. Within this conceptual framework, the fig tree in Shafak's novel functions as an agentic presence, mediating memory, witnessing trauma, and participating in the co-construction of the narrative. Its narrative voice exemplifies the posthuman capacity for agency beyond the human, prioritising ecological and multispecies relationality as an integral part of the novel's conceptual and ethical vision. Posthumanism thus allows a reading of *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) in which human subjectivity, cultural memory, and ecological consciousness are constituted relationally, highlighting the ethical and epistemological implications of recognising non-human actors as active participants in history and narrative.

Combining these two approaches (rhizome and posthumanism) proves to be quite useful for the analysis of Shafak's novel. While posthumanism detaches agency from anthropocentric frameworks, rhizomatic theory provides a model for understanding how memory, identity, and narrative proliferate within interconnected, nonlinear networks. The fig tree, in this context, operates as both a rhizomatic node and a posthuman agent, facilitating connections across time, space, species, and cultural boundaries. Its translocation between Cyprus and London exemplifies the dispersal of identity and memory in hybrid and diasporic spaces, reflecting both ecological and sociopolitical entanglements. The fig tree's narrative voice destabilises conventional hierarchies of perspective, enabling a literary articulation of relational and distributed subjectivity. By placing the fig tree at the centre of the analysis, this study underscores how Shafak's novel epitomises the posthumanist and rhizomatic convergence of memory, identity, and narrative. The fig tree functions as a rhizomatic node and posthumanist agent, facilitating the transmission of memory, mediating traumas, and connecting human and ecological histories across temporal and spatial boundaries. By highlighting multispecies narrative and nonlinear networks, this study contributes to literary research and posthumanist discourse, emphasising the co-creation of cultural and ecological memory in contemporary literature.

The study addresses the following research questions:

- How does *The Island of Missing Trees* employ rhizomatic narrative structures to destabilise linear historiography and fixed identity constructs?
- In what ways does the fig tree function as a posthuman agent, facilitating the circulation of memory and relationality across temporal, spatial, and cultural boundaries?
- How do human and non-human actors participate in the co-creation of cultural and ecological memory, and what does this suggest about decentring the human in contemporary literature?

Corresponding to the research questions, the following objectives are proposed:

- To examine how rhizomatic structures in *The Island of Missing Trees* reconceptualise memory, identity, and narrative as non-linear, distributed, and interconnected processes.
- To investigate the fig tree as a posthuman agent, exploring its role in mediating intergenerational trauma, ecological interconnectedness, and cultural memory.
- To analyse how human and non-human actors interact within rhizomatic networks to co-construct relational and multispecies subjectivities.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical work on Shafak's oeuvre more broadly situates her as a writer deeply engaged with the diasporic experience, transnational identity, and the politics of memory (e.g., studies of *The Bastard of Istanbul* and other novels that explore trauma and identity construction). However, *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), with its distinctive narrative structure and fig-tree narrator, has spurred a new wave of literary analysis that remains, to a large extent, preliminary. Existing studies predominantly focus on thematic explorations of diasporic identity (e.g., the negotiation of cultural belonging and hybridity), trauma and intergenerational memory, and ecocritical interpretations of human-nature relationships, but often fail to delve into the theoretical implications of non-human agency or narrative form. For example, Zehra and Mohsin's (2023) analysis of the novel illustrate how postcolonial displacement impacts the characters' sense of belonging.

Other researchers focus on the text's interaction with the diaspora and intergenerational memory, arguing that Shafak intertwines personal histories with broader sociopolitical fractures in Cyprus, demonstrating how the characters navigate fragmented identities across time and geography (Fatima et al., 2025). This line of research substantiates traditional readings of Shafak's work, which focus on collective trauma and identity formation in post-conflict contexts. *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) is also the subject of ecocritical studies that examine the relationships between humans and nature and implicate the fig tree as a witness to both ecological loss and historical trauma, thus illustrating how natural elements function symbolically as repositories of memory and healing (Burgan Kiyak, 2025; Elgamal, 2024; Ramzan et al., 2023, Riaz et al., 2026).

While these thematic readings offer important insights into how Shafak's novel addresses trauma, hybridity, and environmental consciousness, they reveal two significant gaps in the emerging literature. First, with few exceptions (O'Neill, 2024; Saunders, 2024), studies tend to treat the fig tree and other nonhuman elements as symbolic devices or ecological metaphors rather than as narrative agents with epistemic and affective significance that extends beyond metaphor or context. Although one recent study explicitly prioritises nonhuman agency, arguing that the fig

tree's narrative perspective connects human trauma with environmental memory and expands notions of agency beyond the human realm (Khanum, 2025). This work remains one of the few to adopt posthumanist or materialist ecocritical frameworks and has not yet been widely integrated into broader critical conversations about Shafak's narrative strategies.

Second, existing analyses generally fail to address the rhizomatic structures of narrative and memory, leaving a gap in how scholars conceptualise form as a reflection of nonlinear and networked configurations of identity and trauma. Most studies are thematic and interpretive, rather than formally theoretical, and focus on what the novel portrays (diaspora, trauma, environment) instead of how its narrative structure participates in the creation of relational modes of memory and identity. For example, several trauma analyses focus on psychological and post-colonial frameworks without theorising the implications of a nonhuman narrator or distributed agency (Bashir & Ishaq, 2024). Furthermore, while ecocritical research highlights the relationship between humans and nature and environmental motives, it tends to apply traditional ecocritical theory rather than address contemporary posthumanist or rhizomatic conceptions of narrative voice, agency, and relational identity (Ramzan et al., 2023).

Another academic trend, such as Lara Abdulhakeem Aloseli's (2024) thesis on diaspora and female identities in *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), demonstrates a continued interest in gender, diaspora, and identity reconstruction, but primarily uses postcolonial and feminist frameworks without engaging with broader critical theories that could elucidate how Shafak's narrative innovations impact readers' understanding of subjectivity and memory (Aloseli, 2024). Similarly, other existing works apply psychoanalytic or archetypal models to character analysis, further reinforcing an anthropocentric approach rather than broadening critical attention to how narrative form and non-human perspectives themselves reconfigure epistemological boundaries (Adnan et al., 2023; Kanwal et al., 2024).

These trends suggest that while *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) has been recognised for its rich thematic focus on trauma, memory, identity, and the relationship between humans and nature, the novel's unconventional narrative structure and its interaction with non-human perspectives remain largely under-theorised in contemporary literature. Specifically, studies are needed that: (a) analyse the fig tree's narrative voice as an epistemic agent mediating memory and relational identity in ways that challenge anthropocentric literary paradigms, and (b) apply rhizomatic models of narrative to explain how memory and identity proliferate through nodes of human and non-human agency, resisting linear or hierarchical forms of representation. Addressing these gaps would not only deepen our understanding of Shafak's novel itself but also contribute to broader conversations in contemporary literary studies about posthumanist narratology, ecocriticism, and nonlinear frameworks of memory.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study analyses Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) through an integrated framework of rhizomatic theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) and posthumanist thought (Braidotti, 2013/2019), allowing for an exploration of memory, identity, and trauma as relational, distributed, and multispecies phenomena. Rhizomatic theory reconceptualises narrative, memory, and identity as nonlinear and interconnected networks that resist hierarchical organisation. In the novel, the fig tree functions as a rhizomatic node that links human and ecological histories, mediates intergenerational trauma, and facilitates the circulation of memory across time, space, and culture. Its narrative voice embodies multiplicity and heterogeneity, challenging linear historiography and fixed constructions of the self.

Posthumanist thought emphasises decentred subjectivity, relational agency, and the importance of non-human actors (Braidotti, 2013/2019). The fig tree exemplifies posthuman agency, witnessing conflicts, transmitting memory, and shaping identity formation. Its presence illustrates that memory, trauma, and cultural meaning extend beyond human experience, highlighting multispecies entanglements as central to narrative and ethical understanding.

The combination of rhizomatic and posthumanist perspectives provides a framework for interpreting Shafak's novel as a space where memory, identity, and trauma are co-constituted between human and non-human actors, and where the narrative form itself reflects rhizomatic connectivity. This theoretical orientation prioritizes multispecies narrativity, ecological relationality, and non-linear narrative, positioning the fig tree as a narrative agent and conceptual bridge between human and ecological histories.

## METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative interpretive approach to analyse Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), focusing on how memory, identity, and trauma are configured through rhizomatic networks and posthuman agency. The novel is examined as a multispecies narrative, where the fig tree functions as a rhizomatic node connecting human and ecological histories and mediating intergenerational trauma.

The primary data source is the text itself, supplemented by scholarly works on Shafak, rhizomatic theory, posthumanism, ecocriticism, memory, trauma and identity studies. The analysis is conducted through thematic and structural textual analysis, identifying instances of nonlinear narrative, distributed memory, and nonhuman agency. These elements are interpreted from the theoretical perspective of Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic theory to examine the novel's non-hierarchical network structures, and from Braidotti posthumanism to explore the fig tree's role as a multispecies relational agent that shapes memory and identity.

## DISCUSSION

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) offers a distinctive narrative that prioritises memory, identity, and trauma from both human and non-human perspectives. This section analyses the novel through a combined framework of rhizome theory (Deleuze, 1987) and posthumanist thought (Braidotti, 2013/2019). The analysis focuses on three interconnected dimensions: a) Rhizomatic narrative structures that destabilise linear historiography and fixed identity constructs; b) The fig tree as a posthuman agent, mediating memory, intergenerational trauma, and multispecies relationality; c) The co-constitution of human and non-human memory and identity, revealing the ethical and epistemological significance of distributed agency.

### Rhizomatic Structures and Non-Linear Narrative

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) exemplifies a rhizomatic narrative structure, echoing Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the rhizome as "A map and not a tracing" (p. 12), emphasising multiplicity, non-linearity, and connectivity rather than hierarchical order. The novel weaves together multiple temporalities, geographies, and perspectives, demonstrating that memory, identity, and trauma are distributed across relational networks rather than confined to individual human experience.

Deleuze and Guattari (1987) assert that "The rhizome connects any point to any other point" (p. 21). Shafak's text embodies this principle through its fragmented structure, which shifts between Cyprus and London, past and present, human, and non-human viewpoints. The fig tree functions as a rhizomatic node, linking human experiences with ecological and historical memory. This allows multiplicity and heterogeneity to flourish within the narrative, disrupting linear chronology and singular focalisation. The novel emphasises this non-linear memory through the fig tree's voice: "Cartography is another name for stories told by winners. For stories told by those who have lost, there isn't one" (Shafak, 2022, p. 01). This aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) argument that rhizomes resist centralised, hierarchical representation, favouring interconnected, networked knowledge.

In contrast to centered (even polycentric) systems with hierarchical modes of communication and preestablished paths, the rhizome is an acentered, non-hierarchical, nonsignifying system without a General and without an organizing memory or central automaton, defined solely by a circulation of states (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

The fig tree, as a rhizomatic node, personifies this principle by circulating memory across generations, geographies, and species, emphasising relational identity over fixed selfhood.

Shafak further demonstrates rhizomatic connectivity in how trauma and memory are transmitted across generations: “A tree is a memory keeper. Tangled beneath our roots, hidden inside our trunks, are the sinews of history, the ruins of wars nobody came to win, the bones of the missing” (Shafak, 2022, p. 211). Here, memory is distributed and intertwined, linking humanity and the environment. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) principle of interconnectedness and heterogeneity is manifested in the fig tree, which acts as a nexus connecting human and ecological histories. This reinforces the study’s aim to show how rhizomatic narrative structures reconceptualise memory, identity, and narrative as nonlinear and interconnected processes.

By employing a rhizomatic form, Shafak disrupts the foundations of traditional historiography and anthropocentric narrative patterns. The fig tree’s simultaneous awareness of past, present, and ecological networks demonstrates that identity and memory are formed together through dynamic relational networks, rather than localised within individuals. This aligns the literary strategy directly with the theoretical insights of Deleuze and Guattari (1987), showing how rhizomatic structures allow multiplicity, heterogeneity, and interconnectivity in contemporary literature.

The rhizome is an anti-genealogy. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots. The rhizome pertains to a map that must be produced, constructed, a map that is always detachable, connectable, reversible, modifiable, and has multiple entryways and exits and its own lines of flight (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 21).

## Posthuman Agency and the Fig Tree as Narrative Node

Posthumanist theory emphasises relational, distributed, and multispecies agency (Braidotti, 2013/2019). In the novel *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022), the fig tree embodies posthuman agency, acting as a witness, mediator, participant in the narrative, thus decentralising the human and exemplifying how memory and trauma transcend anthropological frameworks.

Braidotti (2013) defines posthuman subjectivity as evolving from “Networks that interconnect human and non-human life, creating distributed forms of relational agency” (p. 56). The fig tree embodies this concept through its role in transmitting trauma and memory across generations. Shafak writes: “Humans think they know with certainty where their being ends and someone else’s starts. With their roots tangled and caught underground, linked to fungi and bacteria, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected” (Shafak, 2022, p. 30).

This passage demonstrates the tree’s awareness of interconnection across species and time, directly reflecting Braidotti’s (2013) posthuman principle that identity and agency are relational and distributed, not exclusive to humans. The fig tree does not merely observe; it actively participates in the exchange of memory, trauma,

and cultural knowledge, highlighting its role as a posthumanist narrative agent. Braidotti (2019) emphasises that “Posthuman ethics involves recognizing the consequences of action across human and non-human networks” (p. 102). Shafak reflects this when the fig tree comments on historical conflict: “On an island plagued by years of ethnic violence and brutal atrocities, humans were not the only ones that suffered. So did we trees – and animals too experienced hardship and pain.” (Shafak, 2022, p. 190). The tree places non-human experience alongside human suffering, decentering anthropocentrism and enabling readers to grasp the interconnectedness of social, ecological, and historical traumas. This aligns with Braidotti’s (2013) argument that “Posthuman agency and ethical responsibility extend to the multi-species relational field” (p. 57).

In addition, the fig tree mediates diasporic memory and transgenerational identity, connecting Ada’s experiences in London to her family’s history in Cyprus: “I still carry the Island with me. The places where we were born are the shapes of our lives, even when we are away from them.” (Shafak, 2022, p. 33). Here, posthuman agency and rhizomatic connectivity converge: the tree acts as a node linking temporal, spatial, and species networks, illustrating that memory, identity, and trauma are co-constituted by human and non-human actors. By combining posthumanist relationality with rhizomatic structure, Shafak challenges conventional narrative hierarchies and foregrounds multispecies ethical and epistemic engagement (Braidotti, 2019; Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).

In conclusion, the fig tree embodies posthuman agency in its capacity to bear witness to, transmit, and connect human and ecological histories. Its narrative role aligns with Braidotti’s (2013/2019) posthumanist principles, illustrating distributed, relational, and multispecies agency, and complementing the rhizomatic narrative structures discussed previously. Taken together, these theoretical lenses sheds light on how Shafak reframes the concepts of memory, identity, and trauma as interconnected, relational, and multispecies phenomena.

## **Intergenerational Trauma, Diasporic Identity, and Multispecies Memory**

Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) highlights intergenerational trauma and diasporic identity, explaining how memory and history are distributed across human and non-human networks. Trauma is not confined to individual experience but is disseminated through relational assemblages, mediated by both human and ecological actors. This approach aligns with Braidotti’s (2013/2019) posthumanist perspective, which posits that subjectivity and experience are co-constructed within multispecies relational networks.

The fig tree functions as a narrative node linking past and present, allowing memory to be passed down through generations. It mediates the trauma caused by the political

conflict in Cyprus, while connecting Ada, a second-generation diasporic protagonist, to her familial and cultural roots. Shafak observes: “Ada opened the curtains and stared into the darkness canopying the garden. She knew the fig tree was there, binding its time, growing, changing, remembering – trunk, branches, and roots all together” (Shafak, 2022, p. 328). This analogy emphasises relational memory, reflecting Braidotti’s (2013) concept of distributed agency, where trauma and identity are shared between human and non-human actors. The fig tree preserves collective memory, embodying both ecological consciousness and cultural history, while facilitating intergenerational understanding.

Diasporic identity in Shafak’s novel is similarly networked and relational. Ada’s sense of self emerges from the intertwining of personal, familial, and ecological histories, challenging traditional notions of fixed, individual identity. Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizome theory supports this perspective, asserting that identity is non-linear, multilayered, and shaped by connections: “Any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). Ada’s hybrid identity, shaped by migration and the constant presence of the fig tree, exemplifies this rhizomatic formation of subjectivity. Her selfhood is not isolated but emerges through relational clusters of people, places, and ecological actors.

The narrative also illustrates how trauma circulates beyond human consciousness, embodying Braidotti’s (2019) posthumanist emphasis on multispecies relationality: “It matters to me, so long as I am able to tell this story, I am going to include in it the creatures in my ecosystem” (Shafak, 2022, p. 190). This passage emphasises that trauma is distributed, relational, and ecological, thus broadening the scope of literary analysis beyond anthropological frameworks. The fig tree mediates these processes, creating a network of memory that connects people in the diaspora to their historical, cultural, and ecological contexts.

Additionally, Shafak’s novel exemplifies how posthuman ethics and rhizomatic structures intersect in the context of trauma and diaspora. By situating memory and identity within multispecies networks, the novel emphasises interdependence, relationality, and ethical responsibility. Braidotti (2013) argues that posthuman subjectivity involves “Acknowledging one’s embeddedness in a web of life, and taking responsibility for the consequences of one’s actions within that web” (p. 57). The fig tree, as a non-human agent, embodies this principle by witnessing human suffering, preserving memory, and facilitating the transmission of trauma across generations.

Shafak further elaborates on diasporic and multispecies memory: “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” (Shafak, 2022, p. 55). This reinforces the rhizomatic and posthumanist framework: memory, trauma, and identity are non-linear, dispersed, and entangled across species and spaces. The novel positions the fig tree as a central mediator, ensuring that cultural and ecological histories are inseparable from human experience, highlighting the ethical dimension of posthuman relationality.

In short, Shafak's novel demonstrates that intergenerational trauma and diasporic identity are shaped within multispecies, rhizomatic networks of memory. The fig tree functions as both a posthuman agent and a rhizomatic node, linking temporal, spatial, and ecological domains. By integrating the theories of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) and Braidotti's (2013/2019), the novel reconfigures the traditional notions of memory, trauma, and identity, illustrating how contemporary literature can represent distributed, relational, and ethically attuned subjectivities.

## **Migration, Dispersed Identity, and Ecological Connectivity**

Migration and displacement are central themes in *The Island of Missing Trees* (Shafak, 2022), shaping not only the formations of human identities but also the relational and ecological networks within which memory and trauma circulate. Shafak's narrative situates the experiences of displacement within a broader, multi-species ecological context, emphasising how identity and memory are distributed across spatial, temporal, and species boundaries. This perspective aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) rhizome theory, which conceptualises identity as non-linear, heterogeneous, and interconnected, and with Braidotti's (2013/2019) posthumanism, which emphasises relational agency beyond the human.

The fig tree serves as a symbolic and agentic connector between Cyprus and London, embodying the translocation of memory and identity. Shafak writes: "I still carry the Island with me. Of the past we left behind I remember everything" (Shafak, 2022, p. 33). This demonstrates the rhizomatic principle of connection, where nodes (human and non-human) thrive horizontally, linking multiple temporalities, geographies, and histories (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Migration is not merely a physical movement; it involves the dispersal of identity, memory, and trauma, which are preserved and transmitted through ecological and relational networks.

Thus, the diasporic identity in the novel is a hybrid and relational one. Ada's self-identity emerges from her experiences in London, intertwined with her family's history in Cyprus. As Shafak observes: "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" (Shafak, 2022, p. 55). This statement exemplifies rhizomatic multiplicity and Braidotti's posthuman notion of distributed subjectivity (2013), where identity is relationally constituted, across human and non-human agents, rather than being a limited, individual characteristic. The fig tree mediates this process, bridging cultural and ecological memory and reminding humans that identity is inseparable from the relational web of life.

Migration also amplifies trauma and the need for ecological and relational witnessing. The fig tree acts as a posthuman agent that preserves memory and continuity amidst displacement. Shafak writes: "All around the world, where there is, or has ever

been, a civil war or ethnic conflict, come to the trees for clues, because we will be the ones that sit silently in communion with human remains” (Shafak, 2022, p. 211). Here, memory is distributed across species and geography, highlighting Braidotti’s (2019) argument that “ethical responsibility and subjectivity emerge in interconnected networks of life” (p. 102). The fig tree’s agency ensures that cultural and ecological histories survive dislocation, allowing individuals scattered in the diaspora to maintain their sense of continuity and belonging.

Ecological connectivity is another crucial dimension of Shafak’s exploration of migration. The novel emphasises the inextricable link between humanity and nature, echoing Braidotti’s (2013) call for posthuman ethics, that acknowledges the interdependence across species and environments. The fig tree embodies this connectivity: “The Happy Fig had touched people’s lives in so many unknown ways” (Shafak, 2022, p. 87). This passage highlights rhizomatic and posthuman entanglement, illustrating how ecological and human histories shape together identity, memory, and ethical awareness. Migration, then, is not only a human experience but a shared ecological and narrative process in which both humans and non-humans participate in creating continuity and relationality.

In short, migration in *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) exemplifies the intersection of rhizomatic narrative structures and posthuman relationality, producing hybrid, dispersed identities that are ecologically and culturally intertwined. The fig tree functions as both a rhizomatic node and a posthuman agent, transmitting memory and trauma across space and species, and linking diasporic experiences to ecological and historical continuity. Through this lens, Shafak’s novel reconfigures traditional notions of migration, memory, and identity, highlighting the ethical and epistemological significance of multispecies networks in contemporary literature.

Shafak’s novel *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) offers a profound literary exploration of memory, identity, trauma, and ecological interconnectedness, foregrounding the agency of non-human actors within a rhizomatic and posthumanist framework. Throughout the novel, the fig tree functions as both a rhizomatic node and a posthuman agent, connecting human histories, ecological networks, and temporalities, thereby decentring the human and redefining narrative, memory, and identity as relational, distributed, and multispecies phenomena.

The analysis reveals that rhizomatic narrative structures (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) form the basis for the novel’s non-linear temporalities and multiplicity of perspectives. The fig tree, Ada, her parents, and the historical events of Cyprus are all interconnected in a non-hierarchical network, exemplifying the rhizomatic principle that can be “Connected to anything other, and must be” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 7). The narrative resists teleological historiography and linear storytelling, “Unlike in history books, stories come to us in bits and pieces” (Shafak, 2022, 262), allowing memory, trauma, and identity to diffuse across generations, geographies, and species, “A tree is a memory keeper. Tangled beneath our roots, hidden inside our trunks, are the sinews

of history, the ruins of wars nobody came to win, the bones of the missing” (Shafak, 2022, p. 211). This metaphor positions the fig tree as a central node in a rhizomatic network, linking human and non-human experiences while mediating intergenerational trauma and cultural memory.

From a posthumanist perspective, the fig tree embodies distributed and relational agency, illustrating Braidotti’s (2013/2019) argument that subjectivity emerges within interconnected networks that encompass non-human life. The tree does not merely witness human events; it actively participates in memory-making, trauma mediation, and identity formation: “Humans think they know with certainty where their being ends and someone else’s starts. With their roots tangled and caught underground, linked to fungi and bacteria, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected” (Shafak, 2022, p. 30). This passage emphasises that agency is not exclusive to humans; rather, identity, trauma, and memory are collectively shaped through relationships, consistent with Braidotti’s (2013) posthumanist ethics of interdependence.

The novel also highlights intergenerational trauma and diasporic identity, demonstrating how multispecies and rhizomatic memory is. Ada’s identity emerges not only from her personal experiences but also through her deep connection to her family’s history in Cyprus and the ecological network of the fig tree. Shafak (2022) writes: “Loneliness is a human invention. Trees are never lonely. With their roots tangled and caught up underground, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected” (p. 211).

This establishes that memory is distributed, networked, and relational, reflecting both Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) rhizomatic model and Braidotti’s (2013, 2019) notion of posthuman relational subjectivity. Trauma, therefore, is shared across temporal, spatial, and species boundaries, highlighting the ethical and epistemological importance of recognising interspecies relationships in contemporary literature.

Migration further complicates the process of identity formation, producing hybrid and fragmented selves that exist across geographies and species. The fig tree, uprooted from Cyprus and transported to London, preserves memory, trauma, and ecological history “The voices of our motherlands never stop echoing in our minds. We carry them with us everywhere we go” (Shafak, 2022, p. 341).

This analogy demonstrates rhizomatic connectivity across borders, showing that identity is not fixed but emerges from networked assemblages of humans, non-humans, and ecological contexts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). The tree embodies the ethical and relational dimension of posthumanism (Braidotti, 2013/2019), reinforcing the novel’s commitment to multispecies awareness, ecological consciousness, and intergenerational memory.

In general, the integration of rhizomatic theory and posthumanism provides a compelling framework for understanding how Shafak reconceptualises narrative, memory, identity, and trauma. The fig tree serves as a central epistemic and narrative node, mediating trauma, connecting diasporic and ecological networks, and challeng-

ing anthropocentric assumptions. The novel demonstrates how memory and identity can be understood as relational, distributed, and multispecies, thus contributing to contemporary literary discourse on non-linear storytelling, multispecies narrativity, and posthumanist ethics.

Essentially, *The Island of Missing Trees* (Shafak, 2022) shows that memory, trauma, and identity are shaped together through rhizomatic and posthuman networks, mediated by both human and non-human agents. By centring the fig tree as a posthuman and rhizomatic node, Shafak disrupts linear narratives, deconstructs anthropocentric agency, and illuminates the ethical, ecological, and generational dimensions of memory and identity. This analysis stresses the importance of integrating rhizomatic and posthumanist frameworks into literary studies, offering new insights into how contemporary narratives grapple with trauma, migration, hybridity, and ecological relationality.

## CONCLUSIONS

Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* (2022) offers a compelling exploration of memory, identity, trauma, and ecological relationality, challenging traditional anthropocentric paradigms and linear narrative forms. Through the fig tree, the novel foregrounds non-human agency, demonstrating that memory, identity, and trauma are not solely human experiences but are distributed across multispecies and ecological networks. The fig tree functions as both a rhizomatic node linking multiple temporalities, geographies, and perspectives, and a posthuman agent, mediating intergenerational trauma, preserving cultural and ecological memory, and fostering relational consciousness between humans and non-human actors.

The analysis of the novel reveals that its narrative structure exemplifies rhizomatic principles, wherein memory, identity, and history are not linear or hierarchical but rather emerge from non-linear, interconnected, and heterogeneous networks. By interweaving the perspectives of human characters with the non-human consciousness of the fig tree, Shafak disrupts conventional historiography and fixed notions of identity, enabling a multiplicity of voices and temporalities to coexist. The novel's non-linear narrative demonstrates how trauma and memory spread horizontally through rhizomatic connections, linking individual, familial, and ecological experiences across time and space.

From a posthumanist perspective, the fig tree exemplifies the concept of distributed agency, actively participating in the co-creation of memory and identity. Its narrative voice bears witness to human trauma, absorbs cultural and historical memory, and participates in ethical relationality, demonstrating that agency is not an exclusive attribute of humans. The fig tree's role underscores that memory and identity are formed together through interactions between multispecies, and that ethical responsibilities extend to acknowledging non-human actors as participants in the relational networks that constitute subjectivity. Braidotti (2013) emphasises that posthuman subjectivity

emerges from interconnected assemblages, a concept that novel exemplifies through its depiction of humans and the fig tree sharing historical and emotional experiences.

The novel also foregrounds intergenerational trauma and diasporic identity, demonstrating how memory is transferred and transformed through relational networks that span generations and species. For example, Ada's identity is shaped not only by her personal experiences in London but also by her family history in Cyprus and the ecological memory of the fig tree. The tree's relocation between Cyprus and London symbolises hybrid, dispersed, and networked identities, illustrating the complex interplay of memory, trauma, and ecological consciousness. This interplay aligns with both rhizomatic theory and posthumanist thought, asserting that identity emerges through horizontal, distributed networks rather than linear, human-centred narratives.

Furthermore, the novel explores the theme of migration and ecological interconnectedness, demonstrating how human and non-human actors collaborate in creating relational spaces of memory and identity. The fig tree serves as a repository of both ecological and cultural memory, linking the personal, political, and ecological dimensions of life across temporal and spatial boundaries. Shafak's text exemplifies the ethical and epistemological implications of acknowledging multispecies agency, showing that humans are fundamentally connected to ecological systems and non-human actors in shaping memory, identity, and trauma.

This study highlights how *The Island of Missing Trees* by integrating rhizomatic and posthumanist frameworks, reconceptualises literature as a space where memory, trauma, and identity become relational, distributed, and multispecies phenomena. The dual function of the fig tree (as a rhizomatic node connecting diverse temporalities and as a posthuman agent mediating memory) demonstrates how narrative can mediate trauma, foster ecological awareness, and reconstruct identity beyond anthropocentric paradigms. Moreover, the novel's exploration of diasporic experience, migration, and ecological interconnectedness underscores the ethical imperative of relationality, encouraging readers to recognise the interconnectedness of human and non-human life in the co-creation of memory and identity.

In general, Shafak's novel makes a significant contribution to contemporary literary studies by illustrating how non-linear, rhizomatic narrative structures and posthumanist perspectives provide innovative frameworks for understanding memory, trauma, and identity. It underscores literature's capacity to engage with multispecies networks, decentring the human and fostering relational, ethical, and ecological consciousness. Finally, *The Island of Missing Trees* represents a transformative approach to narrative, subjectivity, and ethics, signifying that memory, trauma, and identity are not merely human concerns but emerge through interconnected, multispecies assemblages. By foregrounding the fig tree as both a rhizomatic and posthuman agent, Shafak invites readers to reconceptualise literature, identity, and memory as relational, non-linear, and ecologically embedded, offering a profound model for posthumanist and rhizomatic literary scholarship.

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