

Un-burying the Buried: Exploring Silence and Generational Trauma in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*

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Abstract:

*The paper aims at examining the interplay of silence and intergenerational trauma and its effects in Elif Shafak's latest novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021). It yearns to demonstrate the fact that personal tragedy developing into collective tragedy is not limited to one generation, rather passes to the next manifesting into many subtle and obvious ramifications. Therefore, Intergenerational trauma and silence as a strategy forms the theoretical underpinnings of the study. The Greek-Turk enmity and the consequent division of the Island in 1947, forces the young couple, the Greek Kostas and Turk Dafne, to flee to London. The horrors of division coupled with personal and collective suffering is indescribable as both Dafne and Kostas seek solace, comfort and escape in silence. However, as the study will demonstrate, this silence along with integrational trauma seeps into their daughter, haunting her present. The study significantly points to silence as multifaceted strategy of survival which seems to cause more harm than escape in the long run. It is only through breaking her silence that Ada, the couple's daughter, comes to terms with herself and accepts her identity.*

Keywords: Silence, Trauma, War Narratives, Migration, Displacement.

I. Introduction

"It makes you crazy, for something you know to be true, know from the very core or root of you, to remain unspeakable." –Mark Doty

WWII and the Holocaust made human beings conscious of the significance of cultural and collective trauma. Dealing with and recovering from pain has been a subject proper in psychological studies. However, as literature and other art forms reflect various social and cultural realities, modern literature also abounds with themes of trauma. Since Cathy Caruth's ground breaking work (1991; 1996), trauma studies have gained importance in the current landscape of humanities and cultural studies. The first instances of transgenerational trauma were noted in the children of Jewish Holocaust survivors (Sigal & Weinfeld, 1989; Adelman, 1995; Fossion et al., 2003; Alford, 2019). Kahane-Nissenbaum (2011) has studied the effects of trauma in the third generation of Holocaust survivors. Since then, intergenerational trauma and transgenerational trauma are being

studied in its various forms, e.g., refugee trauma (Sangalang & Vang, 2017), post-slavery traumatic stress disorder in African-Americans (Hicks, 2015; Broussard, 2013) and victims of human trafficking and modern-day slavery (Evans et al. 2022), genocide trauma (Schaal & Elbert, 2006), war trauma (Somasundaram & Sivayokan, 1994), and domestic violence trauma (Johnson & Benight, 2003).

Fiction writers are actively exploring the inherent complexity and multifaceted nuances of trauma as it shapes the lives of many characters. Elif Shafak, a renowned Turkish-British writer, with twelve novels and six non-fictional works keenly explores the idea of trauma through displacement, migration, domestic violence and racism. Her novel, *The Island of Missing Trees* (henceforth referred as TIMT) is her most recent work of fiction, dealing with the lives of a Cypriot diaspora couple and their daughter. The plot of the novel is divided between the postcolonial Cyprus of the 1970s civil war, post-division Cyprus of the 2000s, and London in 2020. The main protagonists of the novel are Defne and Kostas. They meet clandestinely in a tavern named 'The Happy Fig', named after a flourishing fig tree standing tall in the travel. Their union is highly unlikely as Defne is Turk while Kostas is Greek. In an environment of mutual rivalry between both nationalities, their love is forbidden. The story is told alternatively in third-person narration and first-person narration by the fig tree. The tree serves as a meeting point between the human and the natural world. The novel actively explores the effect of social and political crises on people and their children. The ravages of war at home, existential problems of diaspora and their inability to belong in the adopted country is also a theme. This study therefore, will aim at unpacking the transmission of trauma from a war-torn generation to the next generations as well as to see the use of silence in relation to post-trauma experience.

As the novel revolves around the Turkish invasion leading to the partition of the island, drawing a historical background of the event is necessary. Its history has been rife with colonisation and exploitation. The colonial legacies inherited by Cyprus made its existence very challenging. There was excessive mistrust and rivalry between the Greek Cypriot population and the Turk Cypriot population, with the latter wishing the island to be ceded to Greece—forming *Ethniki Organosis Kypriou Agoniston*, EOKA, or National Organisation of Cypriot Fighters, (Crawshaw, 1978)—and the latter wanting partition of the island between Greek and Turkey—forming Turkish Resistance Organisation, TMT, *Türk Mukavemet Teşkilatı* (Isachenko, 2012). A radical leftist group had also taken shape over the years. Meanwhile, the British hastily left the island in 1960, Cyprus was declared a republic. All sides were actively striving to achieve their goals. Intercommunal hatred flared up leading to unrest, riots, and violence (Ker-Lindsay, 2011; Varnava, 2019).

Foreign powers also partook in shaping the turbulent history of the island (Hitchens, 2012) deciding to form the Green Line that divided the island in 1964. In 1974, after a coup sponsored by the Greek junta, Turkish forces invaded Cyprus occupying the northern part of the island (Dodd, 2010; Borowiec, 2000; Asmussen, 2020). In these decades of bloodshed and violence, millions were dislocated and disinherited from their land with violent memories that transformed their identities and ideologies regarding the future.

A. Trauma and Silence: Literary and Philosophical Theoretical underpinnings

Trauma can be defined as a state of distress and powerlessness resulting from the individual's experiences and subjugation to external atrocities or natural disaster (Herman, 2015) or from "war, residential schooling, oppression and racism, natural disasters and other events" (O'Neill et al., 2016). Caruth offers a general definition of trauma as, "an overwhelming experience of sudden, or catastrophic events, in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (p. 181). Levine (2006) defines trauma as the "antithesis of empowerment" (p. 4), while Herman (2015) has associated trauma with terror and has called psychological trauma, "an affliction of the powerless" (p. 33) resulting in loss of control, connection, and meaning. She has cited the common effects of trauma from the *Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry* as experiencing "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation" (ibid.). The threat of annihilation can cause certain reactions in the individual's body and mind, for instance, changes in the person's arousal, attention, perception, cognition, memory, and emotion. These manifestations can arise even when there is no clear memory of the event or when there is no immediate threat to the individual. Hence, the individual can find herself/himself in, "a constant state of vigilance and irritability" (34). The long-term effects can be, "attachment disruption and resulting coping adaptations" (O'Neill et al., 2016, p. 173). The central dialectic of trauma is the conflict between denial and acceptance of traumatic events (Herman, 2015).

Danieli (1998) has identified three main repositories of collective trauma: the cultural, communal, and familial (cited in Tcholakian et al., 2019). Commenting on the historical and collective nature of trauma, Cathy Caruth says that, "history, like trauma, is never simply one's own" (Caruth, 1991, p. 192). The contagious nature of trauma has been asserted by psychotherapists. The term intergenerational trauma refers to the possibility of trauma to be passed down from one generation to another. This trauma can have psychological as well as physiological manifestations. It has been established that the effect of trauma can be transcribed on genes leading to alterations in an individual's genetic makeup (Erdelyi, 2022). In their research on genetic transformations occurring due to stress, Stenz et al. (2018) note that intergenerational trauma and transgenerational trauma are related but distinct terms. Several psychological, behavioural, and social changes in the offspring can result when the mother receives traumatic stress during pregnancy. When the epigenetic changes in DNA resulting from traumatic experiences sequences are transmitted from the generation directly affected by trauma (named F0) to the first filial generation (named F1), it is intergenerational trauma. When F1 transmits the effects to the subsequent progeny (F2 or later), it is called transgenerational trauma.

O'Neill et al.'s (2016) research on indigenous families in Canada found breaking silences as a healing mechanism to break the pattern of historical trauma and suffering. They have cited several studies revealing silence and isolation to be a chief result of trauma. As trauma shatters a person's self-esteem and positive assumptions about the self, the victim faces trust issues with other people and loses self-confidence. After interviewing Holocaust survivors and their families, Danieli (1982; 1984) in his study on the "conspiracy of silence" concluded that the survivors chose to maintain silent because they received no understanding of their suffering either from people or therapists. The silence is then transmitted and becomes a collective strategy. It is also referred to as "intergenerational conspiracy of silence" (Nagata & Cheng, 2003). The silence and

secretiveness surrounding trauma does not prevent it from being passed on (Byers & Gere, 2007) rather served as “the most prevalent and effective mechanism for the transmission of trauma on all dimensions” (Danieli, 1998, p. 66). The silence, although a defence mechanism to prevent complete breakdown and collapse, is harmful and destructive for the individual, the family, and the society at large because it is indicative of the society's inability to integrate trauma in its common narrative. The survivors are left without a vocabulary to narrate their suffering and the ability to cope with it. (ibid.)

Phillips (2015) has noted that violent traumas can silence us, “existentially, neuropsychologically, psychologically, developmentally, interpersonally, and culturally” (p. 70). The silence, however, is far from being effective in coping from trauma. It rather intensifies the trauma and is harmful because it prevents the victim from achieving “safety, remembering, grieving and connection” crucial for healing (p. 65). In one way or the other, this “unspoken, unwitnessed and unclaimed trauma from violence ‘outs itself’ as violence to self or others” (p. 66). and haunts the survivor (Caruth, 1996, cited in ibid.). The study has shown using empirical evidence that violence begets trauma and trauma begets more violence, causing a tragic “vicious cycle” (p. 66). The path to healing will begin with shattering the silence and giving voice to the sorrow, mutual sharing, community, and care. According to Sontag, “silence is not exclusively a choice, it is dimension of language-whether that language is speech, dance or painting-that the artist has to confront or acknowledge. In that confrontation, and only in its acknowledgment, can silence take on the quality of dissonance” (pg. 84)

II. Literature Review

The current age is rife with various geographical, social, and political conflicts. Resultantly, trauma and psychological damage resulting from such conflicts has become an increasingly prevalent phenomenon. Trauma and narration of traumatic experiences have become a potent presence in modern and postmodern fiction. As the world is seeing more conflicts in different parts of the world, more fiction dealing with the effects of war, slavery, and other forms of domestic and social violence on individual and collective mental health is emerging. Various forms and genres of literature have been employed to represent the survivors’ testimonies and memories. However, not only literature, but also painting, film, and other art forms have been created in response to and as representation of traumatic experience (Stahl & Williams, 2010).

This section summarises a few notable works done in the perspective of transgenerational trauma and the importance of breaking silence and paving way to recovery. As the setting of Shafak’s novel is a conflict-afflicted island, Zackheos’s (2011) study of trauma in island literature can be cited in connection with it. Using Cyprus, Puerto Rico, and Sri Lanka as examples, the study has investigated the trends in representations of the islands’ conflicted histories and their rejection of ideologies hindering their recovery. The ideologies are related to nationalism, the construction of idealised island space, and the monumentalising of trauma. Similarly, Rendell’s (2017) study explores testimonies of the aborigines to explore patterns of colonial violence and the resulting trauma Randolph Stow’s 1958 account titled of his visit to Forrest River in western Australia, titled *To the Islands*. However, this study takes a verbatim account of the massacre included by Stowe in the novel and pinpoints the moments of slippage in the highlighting of colonial violence in the novel. In the same vein, Ciocia (2018) discusses the psychopathological nature of the geographies of an island in trapping the inhabitants

in its atrocious histories. The cycle of violence repeats itself, thereby condemning the islanders to perpetual trauma. This idea is contrasted with the idea of personal responsibility in confronting age-old patterns of persecution and dogma.

Various works of fiction have appeared in relation to Cyprus's war-torn history. Chatzianastasi's (2019) study on Ira Genakritou's *Beyond the Barbed Wire* explores the effects of borders and barbed wires on children as represented in the juvenile fiction by Cypriot writers. The Green Line dividing the island left people torn by the dilemma of staying put and avoiding dislocation or leave and suffer from all the predicaments attending homelessness and diaspora. Those who chose to stay put were condemned to living in enclaves. The children's literature emerging is rich in images of barbed wires. The literature deals with themes of invasion and its sub-themes, "the coup, the invasion and war, division, occupation, refugees, the enclaved, the missing and dead, unemployment and economic migration, destruction of cultural heritage, and the need for peaceful coexistence" (p. 178). In a study on Andrea Busfield's novel, *Aphrodite's War*, (2017) Žindžiuvienė studies collective representation of trauma memory and the narrative style of the novel. This novel also uses post memory as a motif, using the refrain "we do not forget", the collective noun highlighting the collective nature of trauma. Apart from literature, paintings and other art forms have been produced in the wake of the Cyprus partition, on which Antoniou and Danos (2014) have conducted a study. Their work studies the modernisation of Greek-Cypriot art, their representation and processing of post-traumatic memory without overtly claiming to be about trauma. Drawing on Cathy Caruth's on memory and trauma and Deleuze's work on affect, they explain how memory of violent events become part of the collective subconscious and is manifested as sensation through the figural and the abstract.

On the subject of art and intergenerational trauma, Waterman (2015) presents a unique take on Sorayya Khan's novel *Noor*. The novel is written in the backdrop of the 1971 cyclone and war in East Pakistan, now Bangladesh. He argues that the protagonist Noor is a translator or "the passeur" of trauma from one form to another. Noor is possessed by an uncanny insight into the individual and collective psyche of her mother's generation. This clairvoyant perception combined with her artistic talent produces works that retrieve memories of familial tragedies and bring them to the surface of consciousness. It allows her family to confront and narrate their experiences. Their corrosive effect is subdued by the intervention of art. Trauma in the novel is translated into the medium of art across a generation.

The literature of South Asia abounds with themes of trauma in face of natural and man-made calamities, disasters, and crises. Starting from the British partition of the Subcontinent, a plethora of fiction has been produced that narrates personal and social tragedies arising from this great divide. Saint (2019) traces the development of partition narratives through time by delving into the writing of many notable writers, including Khushwant Singh, Saadat Hassan Manto, Balachandra Rajan, Attia Hosain, Abdullah Hussein, Rahi Masoom Raza, and Anita Desai. The early writings show a pervasive lack of suitable language for the expression of the pain. Words and expressions were borrowed from other situations and the metaphor of madness was extensively used. The second generation of writers, however, deals with the memories of partition, seeking to fill in the holes to create a collective memory. Kabir (2005) points out in her work on Bapsi Sidhwa and Krishna how such incidents demand both remembrance and forgetting

from their survivors, and the author's duty of having to negotiate between "traumatic recall and narrative commemoration" (p. 178). These works suggest the conflicting need to forget the agony following violence, and later the personal and collective need to remember in order to commemorate those who lost their lives. Heriyati et.all (2020) in their paper, 'Speaking Through Silence: Trauma in Literary Work' explores Kuswanti's *Lasmi* which centres on the female protagonist of the same name whose experience of trauma are muted and narrated by Tikno, her husband. His selective narration highlights the complexity inherent in narrating trauma as, "not all voices can be represented because voicing some aspects might result in silencing other things" (pg. 169). Khan et.all (2022) in their study based on Aslam's *The Blind Man's Garden* explore the relationship between trauma and identity by analysing the how deeply traumatic experiences effect and transform the lives of the characters in the novel. The study significantly illustrates the recurring nature of traumatic experience that continues to haunt the main characters of the novel, Rohan and Naheed thus forcing them to hallucinate between past and present.

III. Discussion

The novel overtly discusses the effects of war, dislocation and migration on the people living in war-zones. It makes frequent references to the inheritability of parents' pain to their children, and many subsequent generations.

If families resemble trees ... family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark. They trickle down generations. They ooze down slowly, a flow so slight as to be imperceptible, moving across time and space, until they find a crack in which to settle and coagulate. The path of an inherited trauma is random; you never know who might get it, but someone will.... Sometimes family trauma skips a generation altogether and redoubles its hold on the following one. You may encounter grandchildren who silently shoulder the hurts and sufferings of their grandparents. (*TIMT*, p.121)

The story explores the continuity of tradition, pain, and familial stories through generations, and the need to break away from persistent age-old traumas in order to grow and make one's place in the world. The novel also emphasises, "the redemptive power of stories" (Ünlüönen, 2021) to combat the coercive forces that silence survivors and victims of injustice and violence. The silence is adopted on Defne's volition, who thinks that the pain and suffering had better be suppressed and not passed down to the children. Despite these measures to save children from the parents' pain, they inadvertently transfer their predicament to the children. She had observed the importance of silence as during the partition riots people on both sides of the Island suffered yet were silent as, "people on both sides would hate it if you said that aloud" (*TIMT*, P.112). This silence is kind of denial signifying terror, helplessness and pity that the people experienced.

A Migration and Displacement: Kostas

Kostas's character is that of a quiet, introverted and tender-hearted man. From early childhood we see him crying over cooking, birds and lamenting the ravaging of trees. He sees the natural and human world as a whole, their lives as inorganically linked with each other. The Fig Tree is a representative and spokesperson for Kostas's soul. She (it is a female, Kostas asserts) experiences the pain of both Defne and Kostas. It sees the island battered by violence and also suffers the trauma of displacement when it migrates to London with Kostas. It speaks of that which the characters find difficult to express or

have wilfully suppressed. It is uprooted from its home soil because its trunk is infested with disease. To prevent its certain death, Kostas cuts its branch and plants it in his London home. This relocation, however, does not sit so well with the tree. It grows melancholy over the years, carrying with it, “the shadow of another land” (*TIMT*, p.174). The cold, alien environment is in stark contrast to the warm, tropical air of its homeland. It will take seven years for it to bring forth fruit. Even then it will be unable to completely acclimatise to the London air and has to be buried underground during harsh winters.

That is what migrations and relocations do to us: 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”, the Tree says, speaking wistfully of home (*TIMT*, p.54).

Kostas undergoes the same when he is forced to leave Cyprus and immigrate to London. In the beginning, he is in constant anxiety about the country because the situation has worsened since his departure. He tries to drown his worries in ceaseless work and reading about trees. Listening to news of bloodshed and violent clashes at home and being away from home increases his consternation. His character can be likened to the image of millions of migrating butterflies passing through Cyprus, a mass of colourful splendour, “trying to take off into the air and flutter freely across the Mediterranean, but weighed down, each time, by its wings encased in broken bones” (*TIMT*, p.203).

Kostas’s trauma lies in his abandonment of the island and Defne at the most critical moment of her life. His elder brother was a radical revolutionary, opposing both Greek and Turk elites, believing that it is they who are the real enemy. He was killed by EOKA for betraying their cause. The younger brother, upset by the brother's murder, leaves home and joins the nationalist party. As Kostas is the only remaining son of his mother, she becomes fearful of his safety when tensions escalate in the summer and sends him to her brother in London. Hopeful of returning within a week or two, Kostas leaves, not knowing that his stay will be prolonged indefinitely. Like the island itself, Defne and Kostas are torn apart.

Kostas is unaware that when he left, Defne was pregnant with their child. He only finds it out later from a fellow refugee from Cyprus. Defne points out that those who left and those who stayed can never be the same. She says that, “a chasm opens between those who go away and those who stay”, to which Kostas replies, “The ones who stayed dealt with the wounds and then the scars, and that must be extremely painful, but for us ... we never have a chance to heal, the wounds always remain open” (*TIMT*, PP.206-207). Kostas tries to assert here that the migrants receive no sense of closure for their separation from the homeland and their loved ones and not being able to help them in their suffering. Their different experiences have shaped their destinies, their consciousness is on different planes.

B Violence and Silence: Defne

When she is young, Dafne is shown as an independent, assertive, headstrong, and courageous girl. She does not want to be dominated by anyone. Her free-spiritedness can be exemplified by her defying the family rules and cultural and traditional values by being in love and that with a Greek boy. She is a year older than Kostas and likes to maintain her individuality. On their first clandestine meeting, she refuses to take Kostas's

coat despite cold. These traits are carried into her personality even in later life, but with certain modifications. Her independent and strong personality is shattered by the tragedy around her. The last straw is the episode in the tavern when Yousuf and Yiorgos are forcefully taken to an unknown place. She regrets not having gone out and helped them. There is the personal pain of losing her lover, having a child and seeing him die, estrangement of her family for having a child out of wedlock, and then the collective tragedy of her island suffering as a whole. Experiences of death and violence have lent a grief to her strength. She channels her grief into social work for the islanders. Digging up mass graves and finding the identities of the dead gives her solace. Her trauma is assuaged by listening to others like her.

Defne's case is suppression of trauma. Her strength of character prevents her from accepting and acknowledging the intensity of her pain. She openly acknowledges the need to be open about trauma in order to heal, yet she masks it in an aura of rage and hardness, while inside she is breaking continually. Her repeated refusal to talk about her dead child to Kostas and the episode with the clairvoyant are suggestive of her rising reserve in relation to her loss and trauma. Her trauma is augmented when she leaves Cyprus for London, accompanying Kostas. She meets Cypriot immigrants there in order to learn their stories and form a community with them, only to be shockingly rebuffed. She realises that collective traumas never leave a family. "How strange that in families scarred by wars, forced displacements and acts of brutality, it was the youngest who seemed to have the oldest memory" (*TIMT*, p.289). Despite Kostas's disapproval, she resolves never to discuss the past with her daughter.

Defne's alcoholism in later part of her life is an indication of her worsening mental condition. She had taken to smoking and drinking when in Cyprus and quit during pregnancy. Her married and professional lives are as good as she could want. Kostas's utmost efforts to keep her afloat fail as she drowns in the dark waters of her sorrow. Demons from her past keep haunting her and she succumbs to them. She tells Kostas that, "people from troubled islands can never be normal". No matter how much progress they make in life, the ground that feels rock hard to others is choppy waters for [their] kind" (*TIMT*, p.64). It is her drinking that claims her life in the end. This leaves a lasting scar on Ada's mind.

C. Transgenerational Trauma, Loss, and Post-traumatic Growth: Ada

Although much of the novel tells us the story of Defne and Kostas in the 1970s, it is Ada in whose hands the strings of the future are. Ada in Turkish means *island*. The choice of the name indicates the couple's attachment to their homeland. When she carries the name to which they are inextricably bound and yet which is reminiscent of the pain and suffering, she is also bound to the spirit connecting it to her parents. When they fly from Cyprus to England, they bring with them small parts of the island, the branches of the withering fig tree and their daughter already conceived, both planted in the strange soil, both carrying with them the "curse of memory" (*TIMT*, p. 31). In Ada, it is latent, inscribed on her genes or unconsciously transferred from her mother as a contagion. Shafak makes it clear in the beginning that she has inherited the melancholy of her mother, which she strove so hard to keep from Ada. This unbidden and unexplained sorrow sometimes makes her wonder if she is carrying the sadness of someone else within her. "So many times, in the past she had suspected that she carried within a sadness that was not quite her own" (*TIMT*, p. 171).

Ada's ethnic background creates a barrier between her and her classmates. The troubles of teenagers any young person can face is magnified by her strange background and her ability to empathise with people. She is acutely aware of sadness in the air and, "could smell [it] the way one animal could smell another of its kind" (*TIMT*, p.11). A possible explanation for this sensitivity is that she developed it at an early age by seeing her mother quietly suffering. However, it is implied in the phrase "another of its kind" that it is her own sadness that recognises its kin. An additional scar that she bears is of her mother's death. Already a reserved person, the death has made her draw inwards. She was aware of her mother's drinking habit and being in the dark about Dafne's past, she considers Dafne's death a betrayal. It makes her question her mother's love for her.

This feeling of alienation, nostalgia for a home she has never seen, can be the foundation of a strong life. Shafak seems to endorse the famous adage "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger". In the same vein, Kostas tells Ada that saplings possess "some kind of 'stored memory', like they know about the traumas their ancestors have gone through. That's a good thing because the saplings can adjust themselves better" (*TIMT*, p.162). The Fig tells us the rings of a tree's bark reveal not only its age but also the shocks it has endured, the fires it has survived. Each circle on the bark is "an unhealed scar" (*TIMT*, p.43). Psychologists have found empirical evidence for it and termed this concept as post traumatic growth. Tedeschi (1998; 2004), who coined the term after his experiments with trauma survivors, describes it as growth and positive psychological effects resulting from encounters with highly challenging events in life. In such cases, trauma can be a highly fertile ground for personal growth and gives one a fresh lens to view life. Though Ada never experienced traumatic events herself, her knowledge of her family's history gives a new meaning to her life. The past has been concealed from her and the revelation of her parents' silent suffering gives her courage to face challenges in her own life.

D. Representation of Silence in the Novel

The novel presents a multifaceted representation of silence. Ada is aware of the conscious silence adopted as a shield to protect her from the traumatic past. This conscious 'absenting' of the past only works to make Ada more aware of its presence. When she confronts her Aunt Mariam regarding the missing pieces of her parents' life, the silences carefully maintained over the years and only occasionally broken by her drunken mother, her aunt quotes a famous cultural saying, "Keep your tongue in your mouth as a prisoner. Wisdom consists of ten parts: nine parts of silence, one part of words" (*TIMT*, pg.115). Here, silence is presented in the novel, as a shield from the possible harm, both psychological and emotional, it may cause Ada on learning the illicit love affair of her parents, the death of her unborn sibling, the separation, pain, misery and trauma both Dafne and Kostas had to go through before they were able to finally marry and move to London. The difficulty inherent in explaining the long-gone scenarios can be understood from the following quote of the novel, "There is then in words a residue of silence: somethings always remain to be said" (*TIMT*, pg. 76). This indicates that whilst breaking the silence, especially in relation to trauma, is important to move on yet the question arises can the silence be broken completely? The silence that Ada grew up with continued to traumatise her both consciously and unconsciously. At the beginning of the novel during a class room discussion Ada is asked to contribute her view regarding family traditions and memories. Ada's lack of knowledge about her family background and history makes it difficult for her to respond. Consequently, the humiliation of being

exposed before the class results in Ada's most strange reaction of screaming at the top of her lungs while the teacher and the students watch in amazement and horror. This scream appears to be a symbolic verbalisation of repressed trauma, the silences maintained and the family secrets carefully guarded from her. Ada feels excluded both from the family history and traditions as well the British society she is growing up in. This marginalisation and exclusion stems from the fact that she is unable to relate with her past, her mother and father's homeland due to lack of any narrative. Her parents never spoke to her about the Island they belonged to. The silence surrounding her history and roots augments and hurls her into an identity crisis and she uses a scream to let out the silences that were unbearable for her to contain any longer.

The surprise visit of her aunt, Meriam (mother's sister) and her discussions with Ada regarding her mother and her life finally works to reconnect Ada with her parents' past. Her aunt serves the role of a surrogate mother who heals Ada by 'speaking', narrating, introducing, explaining and thereby slowly filling in the holes left in the fabric of Ada's life. She is able to move on with her life and breaking the silence regarding her past enables her to connect with the present.

IV. Conclusion

Trauma caused by war, migration and exile leaves indelible marks on human souls and mind. Consequently, individual, collective, cultural and familial silence is often taken as a strategy of survival. Both Defne and Kostas experience personal as well as collective silencing of the painful experiences as a way to cope, forget and move on in their lives. Ironically, trauma is able to seep into the next generation, as Ada feels traumatised by the unexplained silences around her family history. It is only through breaking the silence that she is able to lessen the effect and feeling of trauma and reconnect with the past as well the present.

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