

**YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY**  
**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES**

**DISCLOSING THE “OTHER(S)” IN ELIF SHAFAK’S *THE*  
*ISLAND OF MISSING TREES* AND CHRISTY LEFTERİ’S  
*SONGBIRDS***

**GKIOULAI OUZOUN**

**Istanbul - 2024**

YEDITEPE UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DISCLOSING THE “OTHER(S)” IN ELIF SHAFAK’S *THE ISLAND OF MISSING  
TREES* AND CHRISTY LEFTERI’S *SONGBIRDS*

By

Gkioulai Ouzoun

In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

in

English Language and Literature

Supervisor

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Catherine MacMillan

Jurors

Assist. Prof. Dr. Burak Akkurt

Assist. Prof. Dr. Serhat Uyurkulak

Istanbul - 2024

## **DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY**

I hereby declare that this thesis is my own work and that all information in this thesis has been obtained and presented following academic rules and ethical conduct. I have fully cited and referenced all material and results as required by these rules and conduct, and this thesis study does not contain any plagiarism. The necessary permissions have been obtained if any material used in the thesis requires copyright. No material from this thesis has been used to award another degree.

To the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person nor material accepted for the award of any other degree except where due acknowledgment has been made in the text.

I accept all kinds of legal liability that may arise in cases contrary to these situations.

Gkioulai Ouzoun

## ABSTRACT

### DISCLOSING THE “OTHER(S)” IN ELIF SHAFAK’S *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES* AND CHRISTY LEFTERI’S *SONGBIRDS*

This thesis aims to explore two contemporary novels, Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* and Christy Lefteri’s *Songbirds* by using Mikhail Bakhtin’s theoretical framework on language and the novel. The Bakhtinian concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony, and dialogism are used to unveil the different viewpoints which emerge through the utterances of the narrators and characters. The first aim of the thesis is to disclose the viewpoints which consider certain groups or entities as “other(s)”. The second aim is to analyse these viewpoints by employing ecocritical and ecofeminist theories. Ecocritical analysis of both novels reveals that nature and everything related to it is being othered. By using ecofeminist theories, this study also aims to show that in both novels, there are ideologies which support anthropocentric behaviours, regarding certain groups as others. Through both analyses, the thesis claims that in *The Island of Missing Trees* and in *Songbirds*, nature, women, underprivileged individuals, female immigrant workers, and nonhuman entities are depicted as inferior others in a society marked by patriarchy and anthropocentrism.

*Keywords: other, heteroglossia, dialogism, polyphony, ecocriticism, ecofeminism, anthropocentrism, the island of missing trees, songbirds*

## ÖZET

### ELİF ŞAFAK'IN *KAYIP AĞAÇLAR ADASI (THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES)* VE CRISTY LEFTERİ'NİN *ÖTÜCÜ KUŞLAR'INDA (SONGBIRDS)* ÖTEKİLERİN AÇIĞA ÇIKARILMASI

Bu tez, Mikhail Bakhtin'in dil ve roman teorik çerçevesini kullanarak Elif Şafak'ın *The Island of Missing Trees (Kayıp Ağaçlar Adası)* ve Christy Lefteri'nin *Songbirds (Ötücü Kuşlar)* adlı iki çağdaş romanını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bakhtin'in heteroglossia (çok dillilik/söylemlilik), polifoni (çok seslilik) ve diyalojizm kavramları, anlatıcıların ve karakterlerin ifadeleri aracılığıyla ortaya çıkan farklı bakış açılarını açığa çıkarmak için kullanılmaktadır. Tezin ilk amacı, belirli grupları veya varlıkları "öteki" olarak değerlendiren bakış açılarını ortaya koymaktır. İkinci amaç ise bu bakış açılarını ekokritik ve ekofeminist teoriler kullanarak analiz etmektir. Her iki romanın ekokritik analizi, doğa ve onunla ilgili her şeyin ötekileştirildiğini ortaya koymaktadır. Ekofeminist teoriler kullanılarak yapılan çalışma, her iki romanda da belirli grupları öteki olarak gören antroposentrik (insanmerkezci) davranışları destekleyen ideolojilerin bulunduğunu göstermeyi amaçlamaktadır. Her iki analiz yoluyla tez, *The Island of Missing Trees* ve *Songbirds* romanlarında doğa, kadınlar, dezavantajlı bireyler, kadın göçmen işçiler ve insan dışı varlıkların, ataerkillik ve antroposentrizm ile işaretlenmiş bir toplumda değersiz görülen ötekiler olarak tasvir edildiğini ileri sürmektedir.

*Anahtar Kelimeler: öteki, heteroglossia, diyalojizm, çok seslilik, ekokritisizm, ekofeminizm, antroposentrizm, the island of missing trees, songbirds*

## DEDICATION

To my most precious: my children, Selin and Mert



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With immense gratitude, I acknowledge the support of my supervisor Assoc. Prof. Dr. Catherine MacMillan. You have been a great source of inspiration, helping me navigate the challenges with your expertise and patience.

I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Prof. Mediha Göbenli, Prof. Charles Sabatos, Prof. Adriana Raducanu, Assist. Prof. Bahar Karlıdağ, Assist. Prof. Nina Cemiloğlu, and Assist. Prof. Simla Doğangün for their guidance at different stages of the MA program. Thank you for broadening my horizons. Each of you has played a crucial role in shaping my intellectual growth during my academic journey. Your courses were truly enlightening, enriching my learning and helping me to create a better 'me'.

Finally, I thank my family for their patience, endless love, and support.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY.....	ii
ABSTRACT.....	iii
ÖZET.....	iv
DEDICATION.....	v
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	vi
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	vii
INTRODUCTION.....	1
1. CHAPTER I THE THEORY.....	5
1.1. Bakhtin’s Theory of the Novel and Language.....	5
1.2. The Novel, Dialogism and Polyphony.....	7
1.3. Heteroglossia.....	8
1.4. Ecocriticism.....	10
1.5. Ecofeminism.....	20
2. CHAPTER II THE OTHER(S) IN <i>THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES</i> .....	26
2.1. Listening to the Voices Emerging through Polyphony, Dialogism and Heteroglossia in <i>The Island of Missing Trees</i> .....	27
2.2. The Other(s) in <i>The Island of Missing Trees</i> .....	30
3. CHAPTER III PLEADING TO BE NOTICED: THE WHISPERS OF THE OTHER(S) IN <i>SONGBIRDS</i> .....	43
3.1. Bakhtin’s Polyphony, Dialogism and Heteroglossia in <i>Songbirds</i> : Searching for the Voices.....	44
3.2. The Other(s) in <i>Songbirds</i> .....	50
CONCLUSION.....	63
REFERENCES.....	67

## INTRODUCTION

“The First Law of Ecology: Everything is connected to everything else.”

Barry Commoner

Cited by William Rueckert in *Literature and Ecology, an Experiment in Ecocriticism* (1996, p. 108)

“After Adam, there are no nameless objects nor any unused words. Intentionally or not, all discourse is in dialogue with prior discourses on the same subject, as well as with discourses yet to come, whose reactions it foresees and anticipates.”

Tzvetan Todorov

Introduction to *Mikhail Bakhtin, The Dialogical Principle* (1984, p. x)

In our world, everything is connected according to the first law of ecology. From the tiniest to the most gigantic organism, all entities in the ecosystem are part of a complex network, impacting each other and their environment. Similarly, Mikhail Bakhtin through his theory of language, emphasizes the interconnectedness of all discourse, starting from biblical Adam onwards. This can lead to the simple conclusion that all entities in the ecosystem are linked, and that language does not occur in a vacuum but rather has links across epochs that expand even into the future. Excluding the unique human ability to acquire and produce language, numerous connections exist among different entities. However, some groups have tended to consider themselves as different and even superior to the rest of the inhabitants of this planet. This view has been reinforced by religions that have their roots in Judaism, placing the human species at the center of the universe. As Lynn White, Jr. (1996) asserts in *The Roots of our Ecological Crisis*, in religions such as Christianity, the belief that God created all species to serve man, granting him every right to their exploitation is a clear demonstration of anthropocentric behaviour (pp. 9-10).

The view that humans are the masters of the universe separates the human species from animals and all nature since animals are perceived to be servants or resources. This

idea can be linked to the notion of the “subject”, which can be simply explained by using the poststructuralist understanding pointed out by Andrew Bennett and Nicholas Royle:

Poststructuralism demonstrates that the ‘I’ or human subject is necessarily decentred. It argues against the reductiveness [...] of rationalism, in particular through its attention to what is other [...] as regards Western ‘rational’ thinking. And it persistently shows up the presumptuousness of the model of an autonomous, supposedly masterful human being, [...] exposing the barbarities of anthropocentrism in general. (Bennett&Royle, 2004, p. 131)

This notion of the “human subject” can be further explained when considered against subjectivity and the “other”. As pointed out by Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin (2007), the construction of the subject and its other(s) are closely linked (p. 9). The self-identity of the subject as related to the colonial subject is expressed by referring to the colonized “other”. (p. 10). This idea is further explained by adding that the colonial other is regarded as a ‘child’ and as “a primitive and degraded subject of imperial discourse” (p. 156). In defining the position of the “other”, this study is informed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s ideas referring to the othering of the colonized. These others are created by making them “the objects of imperialism” (p. 157). In her essay *Can the Subaltern Speak?* Spivak (2010) questions whether those who are on the margins, the silenced, those having the lowest status in society, the “subaltern”, the oppressed can speak, stating ultimately that they cannot (pp. 37, 40). Together with Spivak’s view of the oppressed, the study also benefits from Greta Gaard’s (1993) understanding of the marginalized in determining the “other” and those being “othered”. In the ecofeminist view, the ideology that oppresses people based on their gender, race, class, sexuality, and physical ability oppresses nature as well. She goes on to define this ideology through the ecofeminist lens as patriarchy. This current study uses a combination of these views to determine the “other(s)” as being underprivileged, marginalized, oppressed, exploited, considered a resource, and having no voice.

The aim of this thesis is to disclose the others in two contemporary English novels: Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* (2021) and Christy Lefteri’s *Songbirds* (2021). It employs Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory of language and the novel as a guide to explore how the utterances of characters and narrators reveal certain ideologies. The thesis will try to show how these ideologies emerge in novelistic discourse, through heteroglossia, dialogism and polyphony. By analysing the emerging viewpoints in the novels, the study will try to

determine the entities that are perceived as others. To achieve this, the study will use ecocriticism and ecofeminism as the two main theories. Through an ecocritical analysis, this study will investigate how nature and everything related to nature is perceived. Looking at the novels through the ecocritical lens, it will show that nature, animals and nonhuman entities are considered inferior others. Informed by ecofeminist theory, it will explore how the emerging viewpoints perceive women and underprivileged groups. By using ecofeminism, it will show that ideologies and political systems oppressing women and those who are perceived as closely related to the female also oppress and dominate nature. This thesis will reveal that in both novels, together with nature, women, the nonhuman, and underprivileged female immigrant workers are the others.

The first chapter presents the theoretical framework employed in the analysis of the two novels. Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on language and the novel expressed in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (1981) is used as the umbrella theory to uncover hidden viewpoints and ideologies. His theory mainly focuses on the discourse of the novel and its expression through the utterances of narrators and characters. The Bakhtinian concepts of dialogism, polyphony, and heteroglossia as related to the novel are also explained in the first chapter of this thesis.

In disclosing the ideologies present in the novel, this study benefits from ecocritical theories. These describe anthropocentric behaviour and have evolved into different movements, including deep ecology and material ecocriticism, both of which are presented in the theory chapter. A third field of ecocriticism called ecofeminism is also the focus of the first chapter, which details how the system that oppresses women and other underprivileged groups also oppresses nature (Gaard, 1993, p.1).

The second chapter explores Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* by using Bakhtin's polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia. These terms guide the analysis of the language used by the characters and narrators. True to Bakhtin's understanding of the novel and novelistic discourse, certain ideologies emerge from the utterances. More specifically, it is revealed that the human species is considered as the most powerful entity, which has the right to exploit nature and the environment, causing destruction and death. An ecocritical analysis reveals that the anthropocentric behaviour displayed by the human species, as presented in the novel, results in the death of trees and animals. An ecofeminist analysis shows that patriarchal and exploitative systems in a postcolonial society consider women as

inferior others. They are associated with nature and part of the dualism man/woman-nature, with “man” being the logical (Garrard, 2012, p. 26). Based on this notion, anything connected to nature is a resource that can be used for the benefit of man. In Val Plumwood’s (2002) words: it has to be “master[ed]” (p. 118). The ecofeminist analysis reveals that the abuse is not limited to women but extended to the gay couple who are also associated with nature. Therefore, androcentric behaviour, displayed in a patriarchal system considers nature and everything associated with nature as ‘other’.

The third chapter of this study investigates the ideologies emerging from Christy Lefteri’s *Songbirds* by employing Bakhtin’s polyphony, dialogism, and heteroglossia. The analysis of the different narrators and the utterances of certain characters show that anthropocentrism is a central ideology. Nature is denied agency, it is regarded as a resource and destroyed mercilessly. All entities, however, according to material ecocritics, have agency, even the non-living matter existing around us (Iovino&Oppermann, 2014, p.3). In their ignorance, humans destroy nature while at the same time, they instrumentalize everything associated with it. Women are given value, just like nature, based on their usefulness (Plumwood, 1986, p.120). In *Songbirds*, nature, women, and the domestic workers are seen as objects, are degraded, and are denied a voice. They are the marginalized, and based on Spivak’s ideas of the marginalized, or the subaltern, this group cannot speak. In other words, they are inferior others. They are the others who are oppressed by the privileged of the patriarchal system. As Gaard (1993) points out, the privileged are male and developed while the oppressed are “poor, or working-class, nonhuman animal, undeveloped nature, and female” (p. 1).

## 1. CHAPTER I

### THE THEORY

“The author is a captive of his epoch, of his own present. Subsequent times liberate him from his captivity, and literary scholarship is called upon to assist in this liberation.”

M.M. Bakhtin, Response to a Question from *Novy Mir*

#### 1.1. Bakhtin’s Theory of the Novel and Language

The theory brought forward by Mikhail Bakhtin in the last century is diverse, having applications in a variety of disciplines. As Craig Brandist (2002) points out in his book *The Bakhtin Circle*, Bakhtinian concepts have been used to interpret a large variety of phenomena including novels, political events, and the cinema. “Bakhtin offers something for everyone”, he says, adding that “there are as many ‘Bakhtins’ as there are interpreters” (p. 1). Indeed, Bakhtin’s theory of the novel and his concepts associated with language have multiple applicability because they can be interpreted in numerous ways. They have many connotations as Brandist suggests, so it is only logical that Bakhtinian terminology be used to interpret literary works and the novel in particular.

As noted above, Mikhail Bakhtin’s theory on language and how language affects the understanding or interpretation of a novel will be used to analyse and disclose the viewpoints and ideologies that emerge from Elif Shafak’s (2021) novel *The Island of Missing Trees* and Christy Lefteri’s (2021) *Songbirds*. Moreover, the two novels are described through the interrelated Bakhtinian terms and concepts of polyphony, heteroglossia, and dialogism.

Bakhtin theorized in the areas of linguistics and language in general, but for the purpose of the analysis and argument proposed in this thesis, it is necessary to dwell on his notion of language and specifically, his assertion that language is inherently dialogic. As explained by David Lodge (1990), in contrast to the understanding brought forward by

Ferdinand de Saussure that language is a system of rules “which allow language to function”, Bakhtin focused on the actual function of language, that is, *parole*, or discourse (p. 56). In fact, Bakhtin (2004) saw the utterance as the unit which carries meaning belonging not just to the person who uttered it but also to ‘others’, too. He stated that “Our speech, that is, all our utterances (including creative works), is filled with others’ words, varying degrees of otherness or varying degrees of ‘our-own-ness,’ varying degrees of awareness and detachment” (Bakhtin, 2004. p.89). In this respect, utterances incorporate meanings from others, or “an echo of another’s individual expression” (Bakhtin, 2004. p.89). This idea is explained by Tzvetan Todorov (1984), who suggests that “It is not necessary then to be actually addressing someone else: even the most personal act, becoming conscious of oneself, always already implies an interlocutor, the other’s glance upon us” (p. 30).

For Bakhtin (2004), what a speaker utters constitutes a connection to the “chain of speech communication” (p. 93). What he means is that each speaker is just a “carrier of a specific utterance” in the string of communication. The utterance does not belong solely to him/her. He states that “All this is other’s speech [...], and it cannot but be reflected in the utterance” (p. 94). Since an utterance includes the speech of another, in a sense, it is in dialogue with the other. It has “dialogic reverberations” (p. 94). In this respect, as Lodge (1990) explains, Bakhtin saw “language not as system, but as social activity, ‘dialogue’” (p.2). As it is part of social interaction, then, discourse cannot be considered in isolation, but rather, it can be said that every utterance “exists in the process of intersubjective communication” (Lodge, 1990, p. 56). This suggests that utterances can be explained and evaluated within the context (verbal and non-verbal) in which they appear. Since the context is necessary and utterances are part of an interactional process, then Bakhtin suggests that language is inherently dialogic. Alistair Renfrew explains this idea:

Bakhtin’s core ideas on the dialogic nature of speech and writing suggest that meaning is in one sense immanent in the utterance or the literary work, while it is at the same time intensely connected to the environment in which it is produced. His thought ultimately seeks to erase any comfortable distinction between what is intrinsic and what is extrinsic to the literary work or, indeed, to any utterance. (Renfrew, 2015, p.3)

## 1.2. The Novel, Dialogism and Polyphony

David Lodge (1990), in his interpretation of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of dialogism in language explains that for Bakhtin, "The words we use come to us already imprinted with the meanings, intentions and accents of previous users, and any utterance we make is directed towards some real or hypothetical Other" (p. 21). In other words, what we say carries multiple meanings which, as speakers, we may intend for an audience that may or may not be present. As Lodge explains based on Bakhtin's notion of the use of language in literature, of the genres which can be described as "canonic" like the lyric and the epic, it is the novel which provides the conditions for language to be used in its dialogic form. Indeed, he states that;

It was the destiny of the novel as a literary form to do justice to the inherent dialogism of language and culture by means of its discursive polyphony, its subtle and complex interweaving of various types of speech – direct, indirect and doubly-oriented (e.g. parody) – and its carnivalesque irreverence towards all kinds of authoritarian, repressive, monologic, ideologies. (Lodge, 1990, p.21)

Just like Lodge, Alastair Renfrew (2015) draws attention to Bakhtin's theory of the novel agreeing that it is the novel which serves as the platform for the dialogic characteristics of language. Specifically, he points out that;

The 'kind' of literature Bakhtin is primarily interested in is the novel, or at least the ways in which novels (or some novels) manifest his idea of 'novelness', which becomes at different points a near synonym for his key category of the dialogic. Reading Bakhtin can therefore provide, at the most basic of levels, a range of uniquely powerful insights into the novel, [...]. (Renfrew, 2015, p. 3)

This shows that in Bakhtinian terms, the novel is the literary genre where there is evidence of dialogism and polyphony. Since the novel incorporates more than one voice due to dialogue and polyphony, it is suggested that the authorial point of view is not the only 'voice' of the novel. As Lodge (1990) explains, "[...] the variety of discourses in the novel prevents the novelist from imposing a single world-view upon his readers even if he wanted to" (p. 22).

By what he terms polyphony in the novel, Bakhtin refers to the ways characters in a novel are allowed to express their different points of view and ideologies. In this sense, they are not “subordinated” by the authorial viewpoint (Lodge, 1990, p.22). As Renfrew (2015) points out, “Whether in the context of everyday life, in the mouths of real people or on the pages of literary works, in the mouths of Bakhtin’s no less real ‘authors and heroes’, language both embodies and provides access to the various phases of human experience” (p. 4).

### 1.3. Heteroglossia

As Pam Morris (1994) indicates, Bakhtin refers to polyphony as the multitude of individual voices. However, he uses the term heteroglossia to refer to social languages incorporated in the novel. The language of groups is without doubt spoken by individuals, therefore, the individual’s speech in the novel is vital to display the heteroglossia (p. 113).

In the Introduction to *The Dialogic Imagination Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin*, Michael Holquist (1981) points out that the novel as a genre “constantly experiments with new shapes in order to display the variety and immediacy of speech diversity” (p. xxix). To do so, it may incorporate different genres, with their special languages, too. By the integration of the different languages in the novel, heteroglossia becomes evident. Heteroglossia in the novel, as explained by Lodge (1990), is the existence of a variety of discourses such as the polite ‘standard’ discourse, the vulgar, the discourse of the literary world, the written, etc. By incorporating heteroglossia in the novel, the author ensures that there is no one dominant discourse. Having such a variety of different discourses, which in essence, are found naturally in society, provides an opportunity for the different “voices” to be heard. “The one grand literary form that is for Bakhtin capable of a kind of justice to the inherent polyphonies of life is the novel”, says Wayne Booth (as quoted in Lodge, 1990, p.23). Therefore, in a way, the novel is the medium where the different voices that naturally exist in society can be heard. This idea is also expressed by Craig Brandist (2002), who points out that “The novel [...] becomes the means by which interacting discourses are transformed into artistic images, tendering their intentional essences intuitable” (p. 118).

Through the author’s incorporation of the various discourses, different ideologies can emerge. The ideologies and any hidden or semi-hidden motivations can be seen thanks to

the novel. The variety of discourses in the novel can also display one's own perspective as it emerges from the incorporation of multiple discourses "that compete within the individual psyche" (Brandist, 2002, p.118). What a person or a character in the novel believes is demonstrated or brought to the reader's attention through the language or discourse he or she uses. "In a word, the novelistic plot serves to represent speaking persons and their ideological worlds," states Bakhtin (Bakhtin, 1981, p.365). By using this notion on the discourse employed in the novel, this thesis aims to disclose the ideologies on the 'other' as depicted in Shafak's and Lefteri's novels.

Heteroglossia in the novel, as suggested by Bakhtin (1981), is present in the language used by the characters or the narrators. As Bakhtin points out, heteroglossia is displayed in different ways such as "provincialism, characteristic professional and technical expressions" (p. 418). Other than the 'standard' language there are languages used by different communities and social groups. The different types of jargon and all the other languages spoken in the novel are "orchestrated" by the author (p. 418). This way, in the novel, heteroglossia exists both in the authorial language and in the languages used by the narrators and characters. According to Bakhtin, "Authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters are merely those fundamental compositional unities with whose help heteroglossia [...] can enter the novel" and through it all the different voices emerge (p. 263). The compositional unities are made up of the types of the authorial narration, the different oral narration styles integrated in the novel, the various genres that the author may have inserted in the novel literary or semi-literary, such as letters, or even scientific statements as well as the individualized speech of the characters (p. 262). Through the connections of these unities, it is possible to observe the existence of heteroglossia and to identify and analyse the social languages evident in the novel. Ultimately, these languages are expressed in the various voices, points of view and ideologies that can be present in the novel. As Todorov (1984) explains in his interpretation of Bakhtin's ideas on the concept of language and discourse, "[...] culture consists in the discourses retained by collective memory (the commonplaces and stereotypes just as much as the exceptional words), discourses in relation to which every uttering subject must situate himself or herself" (p. x). This means that by analysing the discourse of the characters, it is possible to understand their points of view and, as a result of this analysis, draw conclusions about the particular culture of the person/character who made the utterance.

#### 1.4. Ecocriticism

By using Bakhtin's theory of the novel and its related concepts, this thesis aims to disclose the existence of ideologies that consider nature as "other". Indeed, non-human organisms and non-living entities are seen as of lesser value in a world dominated by the human species. The theory that is applied to disclose this point of view is ecocriticism.

Connecting literature and the environment started in the 1970s while gaining ground during the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. More and more scholars started to cooperate in the field of environmental literary studies, bringing environmental awareness to literary fields (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xii). As the interest increased, a critical approach to literature was born: *ecocriticism*: that is, "[...] the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xiii).

In his essay *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment on Ecocriticism*, William Rueckert (1996), explains that he attempts to use ecological terms in the study of literature. This is important as there is a necessity to find ways to prevent humans from causing further harm to the natural environment. He points out that the "human and the natural communities can coexist and flourish together" (p. 107). The starting point of developing the ecological viewpoint is the First Law of Ecology, which states that "Everything is connected to everything else" and as Rueckert adds, this is a law that is "common to [...] all ecological visions" (p. 108). This kind of vision necessitates the understanding that ecology is not concerned just with the individual but with all living and non-living things, the biosphere. It focuses on how all organisms are in reality, closely dependent on each other and on whole communities (Rueckert, 1996, p. 112). Having such an understanding of the role of the human species and the rest of the organisms living on the planet leads to the question of whether humans have the right to destroy or damage the nonhuman. Rueckert does not see humans having this freedom. This is explained by what he calls "one of ecology's basic maxims: 'We are not free to violate the laws of nature'" (Rueckert, 1996, p. 113). He clarifies by stating:

The view we get of humans in the biosphere from the ecologists these days is a tragic one, as pure and classic as the Greek or Shakespearean views: in partial knowledge or often in total ignorance (the basic postulate of ecology and tragedy is that humans

precipitate tragic consequences by acting either in ignorance of or without properly understanding the true consequences of their actions), we are violating the laws of nature, and the retribution from the biosphere will be more terrible than any inflicted on humans by the gods. (Rueckert, 1996, p. 113)

In this context, clearly, humans act either selfishly or in total ignorance. By placing themselves in the centre, they emphasize that the remaining living organisms and non-living entities are inferior and considered to be ‘in the service of humanity’. In fact, this is a demonstration of anthropocentrism and the ideology that everything on planet Earth exists to serve the human interests. The term “anthropocentrism” is explained by Timothy Clark. It refers to the viewpoint that places the human above all species. Based on this view, everything that exists in the natural world is considered a resource for all sorts of exploitation by one species only: the human. A biocentric view, in contrast, places all the ecosystem in the centre, without giving a privileged position to one species only (Clark, 2011, p. 16). As a result of the anthropocentric view, humans are considered to have a special, higher status than the remaining living things, which leads to the destruction of the natural world. According to Rueckert, “In ecology, man’s tragic flaw is his anthropocentric (as opposed to biocentric) vision, and his compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing” (Rueckert, 1996, p. 113).

What contributes to anthropocentrism or even constructs it is the various organizational systems that exist in the human society. In his book *The Value of Ecocriticism*, Timothy Clark (2019) states that certain political systems are directly linked to the exploitation of nature. They show disrespect to nature and anything and everything. This is one of the concerns of ecocriticism. As he points out:

For most ecocritics, human abuse of the natural world is best understood as the corollary of unjust or oppressive systems of government and economics, and forms of social organisation (hierarchy, plutocracy, patriarchy) that both abuse other human beings and which have no hesitation taking a similar stance towards anything else. (Clark, 2019, p. 3)

This anthropocentric behaviour is the concern of Deep Ecology, a movement which was initiated in 1972 by the Norwegian Philosopher Arne Naess. Deep ecology emphasizes the idea that environmental problems cannot be treated as the result of lack of economic

growth. Instead, deep ecology “affirms an understanding of life in which the thinking of the ‘self’ must already include other organisms, and all that supports them, as part of one's own identity” (Clark, 2011, p. 44). Harming other organisms, according to deep ecology and the biocentric perception that emerges from it, means harming ‘the self’ (Clark, 2011, p. 44). Based on this movement, which was amended and expanded to include various principles, human beliefs need to radically change to respect the “inherent value” of all living things (Clark, 2011, p. 45). This idea is explained further by Greg Garrard (2012) who states that deep ecologists are asking for the “recognition of intrinsic value in nature” (p. 24). They believe that the cause of the environmental crisis is the fact that Western Culture supports and promotes the “dualistic separation of humans from nature” (p. 24). Garrard also adds that deep ecology promotes the change of values from a human-centred value system to a nature-centred one. In this sense, the inherent value of nature is especially emphasized. Possessing this value is not necessarily a characteristic of living organisms or of those that can display some form of feeling. Entities which can be characterized by some kind of organisation within themselves have inherent value, too. Examples of such entities among others can be rivers, a bird or an ecosystem (pp. 24-25).

Due to the central value that deep ecologists place on nature, it has been argued that some of them have views that can be considered misanthropic (Garrard, 2012, p. 25). Counter arguments, however, insist that deep ecology is not misanthropic but ecocentric. While it is definitely against anthropocentric behaviour, deep ecology promotes the idea that in certain situations, an individual has the right to place him/herself above other things. Garrard explains that “it seems likely that any given concerned individual will probably have both eco and anthropocentric attitudes at different times, under different conditions” (p. 25).

What all the different approaches within ecocriticism agree on is the destructive human behaviour towards nature. Undeniably, there is an urgency to reduce the impact of anthropogenic activities and literature has to play its role in this effort. Ecocriticism asks broad questions on the degree of relevance of a literary work to environmental concerns, including inquiries on the ways nature is depicted in selected works or “how the concept of wilderness [...] changed over time” (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix). Moreover, as William Howarth (1996) points out in his essay *Some Principles in Ecocriticism*, “ecocriticism seeks to examine how metaphors of nature and land are used and abused” (p. 81). Therefore, the degree of destruction of the natural world due to human exploitation is just one of the areas

of concern of ecocriticism. As Howarth asserts, ecocriticism looks at the way language is used to point, which is called deixis. Rather than just use language for the purpose of representation, ecocriticism looks at how “deixis locates entities in space, time, and social context”. Through deixis, meaning develops from what is said or signed relative to physical space” (p. 80). Thanks to this function of language, the author can tell the stories of the landscape, or nature and natural objects in general. Indeed, what an author does is “mapping the cultural terrain” (p. 80).

Although in the broader sense ecocriticism looks at the details of the connections between literature and the environment, as Glotfelty (1996) indicates, the role of culture is prominent since culture plays a significant role in this connection. In fact, Glotfelty states that ecocriticism involves the study of the “relationships between human culture and the physical world” (p. xx). It can be claimed that ecocriticism is concerned with culture and nature, or what is part of nature. As Glotfelty explains:

[...] all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it. Ecocriticism takes as its subject the interconnections between nature and culture, specifically the cultural artifacts of language and literature. As a critical stance, it has one foot in literature and the other on land; as a theoretical discourse, it negotiates between the human and the nonhuman. (Glotfelty, 1996, p. xix)

Other than focusing on culture, ecocriticism also investigates society, but with a different understanding of the concept that is generally referred to as society. It is suggested that what other critical theories claim to be the “world” or its synonym “society”, ecocriticism refers to as the “ecosphere”, a more inclusive term. It is in this ecosphere that all things human or nonhuman are connected, as suggested by the first Law of Ecology. Relating these connections to literature, as Glotfelty (1996) explains, “[...] literature does not float above the material world in some aesthetic ether, but, rather, plays a part in an immensely complex global system, in which energy, matter, *and ideas* interact” (p. xix).

Looking at a literary work from the ecocritical stance involves asking certain questions, which can help disclose the ideology concerning the depiction of the ecosphere. More specifically, ecocriticism asks questions related to the causes of environmental destruction, looks into the ways environmental crises are depicted and interpreted in literary

works and the discourse used to communicate the environmental crises. Ecocriticism is also trying to disclose the cultural assumptions and the viewpoints which emerge from the ways issues involving the environment are described (Clark, 2019, p. 5). Using ecocritical theory is about showing the commitment that will “highlight and analyse the often inseparable relation between human and political injustice and environmental destruction” (Clark, 2019, p. 8).

In summary, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationship between the human and the nonhuman in the context of the ecosphere. This relationship is strongly guided by culture and its representations through language. Instead of looking at anthropocentrism as it exists in ‘society’, ecocriticism is concerned with the anthropocentric behaviours in the ecosphere. Therefore, looking at a literary work such as a novel with an ecocritical ‘eye’ has a certain mission. As Glotfelty states:

Ecocritics encourage others to think seriously about the relationship of humans to nature, about the ethical and aesthetic dilemmas posed by the environmental crisis, and about how language and literature transmit values with profound ecological implications. (Glotfelty, n.d.)

In the case of the novel, as Timothy Clark (2019) explains, as a literary genre, it is particularly suitable for portraying the relationship between humans and the environment. He states that the novel is “free to trace all imaginable scenarios and to survey how prejudice, personal background, cultural assumptions, scientific research and the complacencies of day-to-day life all form part of how people engage or evade environmental questions” (p. 78). Clearly, then it can be argued that the novel is the platform where human relationships with nature and the nonhuman can be investigated by using ecocritical theory. Clark also adds that literature engaging in the human-nonhuman-nature relationship actually can be considered a “public witness” in the sense that it incorporates scientific data or abstract information into personal narratives. It achieves that by translating the data or making it relevant to these narratives (p. 78). Literature by means of representation, characters, plot, etc., can be the witness of ecological disasters or of any viewpoints that might exist involving the human and the nonhuman in the local or global level. Literature, and particularly the novel, offers an opportunity for immersion in the understanding of environmental issues in all levels. This idea is put forward by Erin James quoted in Clark (2019). She asserts that “narratives are the only texts that can provide us with cognitive and

emotional access to people's conception and experiences of their ecological homes" (p. 79). Therefore, the novel is invaluable in revealing the attitudes of the human toward the nonhuman in different cultures.

While ecocriticism investigates the ways humans and nonhumans interact in a literary work, there is always the question of whether the relationship and the interaction are described through the human viewpoint since the literary work is written by a human. At best, there can be an attempt to present the condition of the nonhuman by speaking for the nonhuman. This is an obvious challenge for the ecocritical theory. In a parallel drawn by Lawrence Buell (2005), in most theoretical discourse, there are efforts to speak for social groups that are silenced due to race or gender, for instance. The argument that the oppressed and marginalized are silenced by dominant groups and that they cannot be represented by intellectuals is also put forward by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010). She explains that those in the margins, such as the poorly educated or those belonging to the lowest social strata, in contrast to what intellectuals including Foucault and Deleuze think, cannot speak, even when they are supposedly given the chance (p. 37). She insists that it is imperative to question whether the subaltern can speak or not (p. 38). By subaltern, she refers to the base or the general population that is different from the elite (p. 39). Pelagia Goulimari (2015) explains that Spivak's 'subaltern' is the part of the oppressed population which "escapes-or is excluded from any discourse" (p. 327). In Spivak's understanding, the subaltern is permanently silenced. Theorists who attempt to speak for this group need to be aware of certain aspects. According to Goulimari, Spivak emphasizes the importance of 'unlearning' the privileges experienced by intellectuals and their readers. As Goulimari explains, Spivak believes that theorists can attempt to decipher - without claiming to be accurate - the acts or, what Spivak calls the 'speech acts', of the subaltern. In a way, the theorists can take the role of the investigator of the acts of the subaltern. However, this undertaking by the theorists does not translate into speech or words spoken by the subaltern (p. 328).

In a similar manner, when nature, the environment or the nonhuman are considered, it is not possible to speak as if we are them; "self-evidently no human can speak as the environment, as nature, as a nonhuman animal (Buell, 2005, p. 7). In this sense, there is no way of knowing how an animal or an insect feels although any attempt of trying to show some kind of understanding is noteworthy. As Buell (2005) continues, it is noble to attempt to speak for the remaining non-living things from the viewpoint of the human who is

considered part of the “biotic community”, a human that is “ecologically embedded” (p. 8). Thus, it is noble, Buell argues, to speak against the human domination of nature.

In a literary work, when there is an attempt to ‘speak’ for the nonhuman or animals, the tendency is to resort to anthropomorphism. This is a challenge for the author who uses this technique in his/her works. This attempt to personify the animal, for instance, is questioned by Clark (2019). He asks questions related to the world that animals have or whether it is possible for humans to have any idea about the feelings of animals. He also wonders whether there is a just way of representing the animal subject by using the language of the human. He agrees that anthropomorphism can be helpful but there are doubts and risks. Anthropomorphism describes the nonhuman in the context of human qualities, such as consciousness and dignity. Despite the existence of a great variety of nonhuman entities, anthropomorphism tends to ‘explain’ them through the human qualities. As Clark emphasizes, there is a “risk of obliterating the singularity of very different modes of life and communication” (p. 81). It is about pretending as if, in a way, all creatures in the ecosystem speak the same language - that of the human species - to explain their feelings, thoughts and actions. It is about pretending that all these different species share the same feelings and thoughts with the human species. Anthropomorphism is a way of annihilating the speech and communication variety that exists naturally in the biosphere. Nevertheless, anthropomorphism can be regarded as the ‘noteworthy’ attempt of giving a ‘voice’ to the entities which have been typically ignored by the anthropocentric world.

The field of ecocriticism that places particular emphasis on the variety of entities which are present in the environment is material ecocriticism. It is particularly interested in the interconnectedness of all ‘things’ that exist in the biosphere. Serenella Iovino and Serpil Oppermann (2014) explain that the world “is filled [...] with intermingling agencies and forces that persist and change over eons, producing new forms, bodies, and natures. It is through all these natures, agencies, and bodies that “the world we inhabit,” with all its stories, is “alive” (p. 1). Based on this understanding of the ecosystem-biosphere that we live in, it can be argued that even non-living things have something to say, they have their own stories. As Iovino and Oppermann point out, “the world’s material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be “read” and interpreted as forming narratives, stories” (p. 1). Therefore, it can be suggested that matter has its own story to tell. According to Iovino and Oppermann, humans are not the only control mechanism in the whole ecosystem. There

are a lot more powers beyond human control. Although it may look as if humans are capable of repairing what they have destroyed, it is not so. Humans cannot control, as Iovino & Oppermann assert, the microcosms or the world of electricity, the fungi, or the way the climate is changing. Ignoring such powers and the processes that surround the human body can have enormous consequences (p. 3).

Material ecocriticism claims that humans need to accept the agency of the inanimate, of the matter that is part of the biosphere. Although not “alive” in the real biological sense, matter strongly affects human existence. According to Iovino & Oppermann (2014), “Agency, [...] is not to be necessarily and exclusively associated with human beings and with human intentionality, but it is a pervasive and inbuilt property of matter, as part and parcel of its generative dynamism” (p. 3). This suggests that it is necessary to give agency to matter or the nonhuman. They add that ‘Nonhuman’ refers not just to animals but everything that exists and operates in the biosphere, “from electricity to hurricanes, from metals to bacteria, from nuclear plants to information networks” (pp. 3-4).

Attributing agency to human and the nonhuman is only part of the focus of material ecocriticism. Specifically, Iovino & Oppermann (2014) define material ecocriticism as:

the study of the way material forms – bodies, things, elements, toxic substances, chemicals, organic and inorganic matter, landscapes, and biological entities –intra-act with each other and with the human dimension, producing configurations of meanings and discourses that we can interpret as stories. (Iovino & Oppermann 2014, p. 7)

Therefore, it can be argued that all entities, living and non-living, are strongly related with each other, affect each other and produce their own stories. The discourses and meanings of these stories need to be interpreted to disclose a world where the human species is just part of the whole and not its supreme component. Material ecocriticism follows an approach where “objects” and the nonhuman are considered “actors” (Iovino & Oppermann, 2014, p.4).

The connections among all these entities and their products are the premise of material ecocriticism. This is further explained by Iovino & Oppermann (2014) who claim that:

a distributive vision of agency, the emergent nature of the world's phenomena, the awareness that we inhabit a dimension crisscrossed by vibrant forces that hybridize human and nonhuman matters, and finally the persuasion that matter and meaning constitute the fabric of our storied world are the basic premises of material ecocriticism. (Iovino & Opperman, 2014, p. 5)

Iovino and Opperman (2014) explain that the environmental problems, poverty, oppression, and the myriad other problems that humanity faces are a complex entanglement among the different entities within nature and culture. It is necessary to disentangle the entities and understand them by analysing and explaining them through narratives that reveal their 'intraconnectedness' in constituting the world we live in (p. 6). Iovino & Opperman add that material ecocriticism "heeds matter not solely as it appears in texts, but as a text itself" (p. 6). In this sense, it can be argued that matter communicates its stories not just through its various representations in a text but also by creating its own texts. As bodies are considered matter interacting with other matter and resulting in or creating a variety of different matter, material ecocriticism suggests that this agency of matter and the resulting narratives need to be analysed. As Iovino and Opperman (2014) assert:

Material ecocriticism argues that there is an implicit textuality in the becoming of material formations, and this textuality resides in the way the agentic dimension of matter expresses itself, as well as in the way bodies emerge in the combined and simultaneous action of material dynamics and discursive practices. (Iovino and Opperman, 2014, pp. 6-7)

In this context, when narratives are produced or read with the material ecocritical perspective, matter is attributed agency. This can be explained as a metaphor or as anthropomorphism. Material ecocriticism emphasizes that anthropomorphism can be helpful because it attempts to link the human and the rest of the entities. As Iovino and Opperman (2014) explain, when we apply anthropomorphism, we "use this human lens as a heuristic strategy aimed at reducing the (linguistic, perceptive, and ethical) distance between the human and the nonhuman (p. 8). They add that anthropomorphism can even help to show the similarities between humans and nonhumans. This way, anthropomorphism can reveal the reality of "dis-anthropocentrism" (p. 8).

A similar point is made by Jane Bennett (2010) in her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, where she argues that humans are ‘matter’ themselves, therefore, it is not necessary to place them in a more privileged position than the rest of ‘matter’ (p. 11). She insists that this does not suggest that humans need to be objectified or instrumentalized. In fact, she states that often, to protect humans from suffering, making the distinction between human and object has been useful. While doing so, such a distinction has led to the instrumentalization of nature, which is an unethical act (p. 12). Instead, Bennett proposes raising the status of the materiality humans are made of. Since everything is made of matter, including humans, raising the status of materiality will, in effect, raise the importance of matter, too. Her explanation is as follows:

If matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated. All bodies become more than mere objects, as the thing-powers of resistance and protean agency are brought into sharper relief. (Bennett, 2010, p. 13)

In this sense, Bennett (2010) asserts that raising the importance of matter will also increase the importance assigned to any bodies that do not ‘fit’ to the morality of Euro-American, theocratic, or bourgeois standards. Although she admits that recognizing the importance of matter is not going to end unethical behaviour, still, “it can inspire a greater sense of the extent to which all bodies are kin in the sense of inextricably enmeshed in a dense network of relations” (p. 13). She adds that harming one part of this network is in essence causing harm to oneself.

Since everything is considered matter which is somehow interconnected, Bennett (2010) suggests that the differences between humans and nonhuman entities may not be as big as they are believed to be. She exemplifies this idea by referring to worms. She states that “worms are ‘like’ us and that [...] we must posit a certain nonhuman agency as the condition of possibility of human agency” (p. 98). She explains that anthropomorphism was used by Darwin while he observed worms, which he described as being intelligent and wilful. Based on Darwin’s descriptions of worm behaviour, Bennett argues that by employing anthropomorphism it is possible to reveal the links between different vibrant matter (in this case worms and humans). She points out that:

A touch of anthropomorphism, then, can catalyze a sensibility that finds a world filled not with ontologically distinct categories of beings (subjects and objects) but with variously composed materialities that form confederations. In revealing similarities across categorical divides and lighting up structural parallels between material forms in “nature” and those in “culture,” anthropomorphism can reveal isomorphisms. (Bennett, 2010, p. 99)

Acknowledging the interdependency between all types of matter and the interaction and intraaction leads to the recognition of the idea that there should be no ‘other’. This is suggested by Oppermann (2014) in her essay *Ecological Modernism to Material Criticism* by stating that:

This world of coconstituted beings necessitates a different ethical stance, one that implies obligations for the world. Underlying this radical rethinking of human and nonhuman relations is the attempt to dehierarchize our conceptual categories that structure dualisms and to reconfigure our social, cultural, and political practices. Material ecocriticism is mainly concerned with amending artificially naturalized systems of meaning that precipitated anthropocentric epistemologies. (Oppermann, 2014, p. 35)

It is, therefore, suggested that the stories or narratives of matter, including those stories told in human language need to be interpreted within the framework of interdependency of all matter. Although, as Oppermann (2014) says, humans should not refuse responsibility for their wrongdoing toward nature, it is necessary to interpret their own existence in terms of the matter narratives they are part of. Discourse might need to change as it can shape all types of cultural, literary, and social ideas. This is necessary as it is known that discourse together with narrative have the power to change the world (p. 35).

### **1.5. Ecofeminism**

In a broad sense, ecocriticism identifies the human species as the source of the environmental crisis. Deep ecology, as mentioned above, is concerned with the anti-ecological beliefs that stem from the idea that humans are above nature. It focuses on the human/nature dualism. Ecofeminism includes in the sources of environmental problems and

the existences of anti-ecological perspectives the “androcentric dualism man/woman” (Garrard, 2012, p. 26). It identifies this dualism which supports the view that, for some reason (i.e. larger brain), men are associated with logic, culture and the abstract. Women are seen as inferior and emotional, and are associated with nature (Garrard, 2012, p. 26). In this respect, adds Garrard (2012), since women and nature are linked, then “it may seem worthwhile to attack the hierarchy by reversing the terms, exalting nature, irrationality, emotion and the human or non-human body as against culture, reason and the mind” (p. 26). Despite this idea, many ecofeminists argue that considering gender distinctions are the product of patriarchal societies, a different perspective needs to be adopted. According to Davian (quoted in Garrard, 2012), there are ecofeminists who are not so radical, and who approach these ideas more philosophically. They agree that “a truly feminist perspective cannot embrace either the feminine or the masculine uncritically, [but] requires a critique of gender roles, and this critique must include masculinity and femininity” (p. 27). Garrard (2012) states that most ecofeminists generally agree with the above perspective.

Based on the above explanations of ecofeminist tendencies, it is suggested that a link exists between patriarchy, nature, ecology, and the female. As Douglas Vakoch (2023) explains, when the term ‘écoféminisme’ was first used by Françoise d’Eaubonne in 1974, the aim was to explore the connections and effects of the exploitation of women and nature, ultimately seeking to liberate the oppressed from their oppressors (p. xxv). As Patrick D. Murphy (2023) points out in the introduction to *The Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature*, this connection of environmental issues and gender became the concern of many fields such as political science, philosophy as well as literary studies (p. 1). The theory that emerged is what Glotfelty (1996) calls a hybrid theory of ecocriticism, that is, *ecofeminism*. She describes it as “a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature” (p. xxiv).

However, ecofeminism does not just investigate the relationship of the oppressors with women and nature. Sam Micky (2018) in the preface to *Ecofeminism in Literature, Intersectional and International Voices*, explains:

The point of ecofeminism is [...] not to focus on nature and women to the exclusion of everything else. The point is rather to focus on the interconnections and networks of coexistence, which include the entangled categories of race, class, age, ability, religion, nationality, ethnicity, and many others, along with species, gender, and sexuality. In other words, the point of ecofeminism is fundamentally intersectional, attending to the multitudinous ways in which the various aspects of coexistence interconnect. (Vakoch & Mickey, 2018, p. xvii)

The same idea is supported by Greta Gaard (1993), who asserts that “ecofeminism's basic premise is that the ideology which authorizes oppressions such as those based on race, class, gender, sexuality, physical abilities, and species is the same ideology which sanctions the oppression of nature” (p. 1). Indeed, she explains that some groups are considered privileged, and others oppressed. She goes on to define the privileged as male and developed while the oppressed are “poor, or working-class, nonhuman animal, undeveloped nature, and female” (p. 1). She adds that ecofeminism is a theoretical “framework that authorizes these forms of oppression as patriarchy, an ideology whose fundamental self/other distinction is based on a sense of self that is separate, atomistic” (p. 2).

In this regard, the self-centredness of the human male refers to the more general anthropocentric view. In Val Plumwood's (2002) words:

An anthropocentric viewpoint treats nature as radically other, and humans as emphatically separated from nature and from animals. It sees nature as a hyper-separate lower order lacking continuity with the human, and stresses those features which make humans different from nature and animals, rather than those they share with them, as constitutive of a truly human identity. (Plumwood, 2002, p. 107)

According to Plumwood (2002), having an anthropocentric view which alienates what is considered ‘nature’ or anything related to nature is, in fact, a realization of ‘othering’. This includes women as they have been perceived as emotional and reproductive bodies. Dominant groups also perceive colonized peoples as subordinates as parts of the wild nature that need to be dominated by the rational and the superior. This ‘othering’ of anything considered to be ‘nature’ can realize in a variety of forms (p. 107). Homogenization and stereotyping, backgrounding, denial, and assimilation are just a few of the ways through which nature and anything considered ‘nature’ is being ‘Othered’ (pp.107-109).

Instrumentalism which considers nature and the inferior to be an instrument of the dominant group, leads to the perception of nature as nothing more than a resource to be exploited. As Plumwood (2002) explains, “Human-centred ethics views nature as possessing meaning and value only when it is made to serve the human/coloniser as a means to his or her ends” (p. 109). When property is concerned, Plumwood states that dominant groups see the Other, that is, nature and the inferior groups as either a resource or a waste. The Other is under the total control of the dominant groups, which can decide to consume or discard it (p. 111).

The othering is a result of systems based on different ‘centrism’. These are, other than anthropocentrism, eurocentrism, ethnocentrism and androcentrism. This is explained by Plumwood (2002), who indicates that:

The centric structure provides a form of rationality, a framework for beliefs, which naturalises and justifies a certain sort of self-centredness, self-imposition and dispossession, which is what eurocentric and ethnocentric colonisation frameworks as well as androcentric frameworks involve. The centric structure accomplishes this by promoting insensitivity to the Other’s needs, agency and prior claims as well as a belief in the coloniser’s apartness, superiority and right to conquer or master the Other. (Plumwood, 2002, p. 118)

It is therefore suggested that the needs and the willpower of the other are subordinated by all means by various ‘centric’ mechanisms. As the needs of the ‘othered’ are subdued, the powerful, hegemonic powers, ranging from colonizers, males, or European culture supremacists all claim superiority and a right to control the Othered. While this perception of the Other continues, the remaining hegemonic powers have a false perception of themselves too. This is what Plumwood (2002) supports when she says that “centrism does not provide a basis for sensitive, sympathetic or reliable understanding and observation of either the Other or of the self; centrism is (it would be nice to say ‘was’) a framework of moral and cultural blindness” (p.118).

Plumwood continues to explain the blindness, adding that centrism leads to illusions that affect the powerful forces which she calls ‘the One’. She mentions the illusion of ‘disembeddedness’. It is the sense that the powerful has regarding the inferior. The One thinks that it is radically apart from the inferior Other, which is considered to act in an annoying way. The more the powerful withdraws from the Other-in the case of nature, for

example-the more difficult it becomes to empathize or relate to it. As a result of the human-centeredness and the illusions that come with it, nature's irreplaceability is denied. (Plumwood, 2002, p. 120).

While Plumwood focuses on how the 'centrisms' create illusions around the 'Othered', many ecofeminists explore the role of literature in the representation of the 'Other'. Since ecofeminism identifies the powerful as the patriarchal force, it explores the connections that force has with the abuse of nature, women and all the othered groups. Gretchen Legler (1997) claims that in order to justify this abuse or any kind of harmful environmental ethics, patriarchy depends on constructions of nature as being female. This is necessary for the patriarchal cultures because they can continue to oppress all the Others, which they rank as 'natural' or 'close to nature' (p. 228). Legler argues that ecofeminists explore the discourse used by patriarchy, which depicts the connections between the female body and nature. She explains that nature is described as "passive, interceptive, docile [ ...]" (p. 233).

This suggests that in patriarchal cultures and discourses, nature and woman are perceived as being nearly one and the same. This clearly leads to the discussion concerning ecofeminist explorations. As Karen Warren (1997) points out in her essay *Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective*, ecofeminism insists that issues concerning the nonhuman and the unjustified exploitation of nature are all feminist issues. In fact, ecofeminism extends its critique of the various types of domination and exploitation such as racism, sexism and agism into the domination of nature. She lists environmental issues such as water depletion and deforestation as being clearly ecofeminist problems as they are closely related to the roles of women in communities. For example, women contribute to local economies by producing food. Therefore, any environmental issue is in fact a feminist issue (pp. 4-8). Warren goes on to comment on the language used to refer to women in patriarchal cultures. She gives examples such as "old hen" and "chick" and "mother Nature", that same nature which is mined and dominated by 'man', to show how sexist-naturist language is a problem of feminism. She adds that in patriarchal cultures, "The exploitation of nature and animals is justified by feminizing them; the exploitation of women is justified by naturalizing them" (p. 12).

In brief, ecofeminism focuses on the identification of dualisms such as male/female, culture/nature and self/other, while it discloses the links between patriarchy and these

dualisms. To address a literary work from an ecofeminist perspective is to explore how women, nature and all that is considered inferior or 'other' in a male-dominated culture, are depicted in that particular work. It also involves analysing the impact of patriarchy on the 'Other', how hegemonic powers aim to silence it, while they try to destroy it.



## 2. CHAPTER II

### THE OTHER(S) IN *THE ISLAND OF MISSING TREES*

“Too often the philosophical rejection of anthropomorphism is bound up with a hubristic demand that only humans and God can bear any traces of creative agency. To qualify and attenuate this desire is to make it possible to discern a kind of life irreducible to the activities of humans or gods. This material vitality is me, it predates me, it exceeds me, it postdates me.”

Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2010, p. 120)

*The Island of Missing Trees* is about two Cypriots, Kostas and Defne, who develop deep feelings for each other from their teenage years onwards. Due to their conservative communities, which forbid any type of love relationship between a Christian Greek and a Muslim Turk, they have no other option but to meet secretly in a local tavern called *The Happy Fig*. The owners are Yusuf and Yiorgos, a gay couple who, despite the entertainment and happiness they offer to anyone visiting their tavern, they are rejected by society. As violence among the various groups unfolds on the island, Kostas is sent to live in London, while Defne, not knowing what happened to Kostas, gives birth to their baby under the most difficult conditions. The child is given for adoption and the two lovers do not see each other for many years. In the 1970s, peace is restored, leading to the division of the island into two parts: the Greek Cypriot side in the south and the Turkish Cypriot in the north. Their birthplace, the city of Nicosia, is partitioned by a green line, which is guarded by UN forces. In the early 2000s, Kostas visits the northern part of Cyprus and finds Defne working for an organization involved in the search and identification of bodies which were killed and went missing during the civil war. During Kostas' visit, the two lovers reconnect and decide to start their joint life in London. Their daughter, Ada is born there, and Defne continues to collect information about the troubled years of Cyprus. In the meantime, she suffers from depression and melancholia, which worsen her alcohol problem. As Defne slips into a state

of constant battle with her past and present life, she gets closer to her death. She is found unconscious by Ada and dies when Kostas is away in Australia. Kostas and Ada are devastated, and while Ada struggles to get on with her life and meet the demands of her school, Kostas is withdrawn and appears to be in a state of continuous mourning. What seems to provide Kostas with a chance to forget his sorrow is his job which is related to trees. In fact, other than his daughter, he is preoccupied with a fig tree, which he had brought as a sapling from his native Cyprus and later planted in the garden of his London home. At the outset of a storm, just before Christmas, he buries the tree, hoping that it will survive the harsh conditions of the British weather. In the last days of 2010, Kostas and Ada are visited by Defne's sister, Meryem, who makes a great effort to get to know Ada and teach her the Turkish Cypriot culture before she returns to Cyprus. Ada and Meryem connect, and Ada learns about the events that shook both communities. At the end of the novel, the fig tree is "unburied" and Defne's soul which had joined the fig tree starts to heal.

### **2.1. Listening to the Voices Emerging through Polyphony, Dialogism and Heteroglossia in *The Island of Missing Trees***

In an interview, after the publication of her novel *The Island of Missing Trees*, Elif Shafak explains that in her work, she aims to give voice to the "silenced". While doing so, she looks for diversity in perspectives. In the case of her novel, when telling the story of an island divided by religious, ethnic, and nationalist ideas, she is faced with a challenge, and says that she needs to find an approach through which she would be able to avoid falling into the trap of tribalism and nationalism. To overcome the issue, she "appoints" the fig tree as a narrator allowing herself, as the author, to tell the story from a different perspective (Interview by E. Hu, n.d.).

Looking at Shafak's aims of incorporating a variety of perspectives and giving "voice" to the "silenced", it can be argued that by employing the fig tree as a narrator, the novel displays evidence of the Bakhtinian concept of polyphony. As explained by Bakhtin (1981), "the novel is the maximally complete register of all social voices of the era" (p. 430). The fig tree is one of the tools that can transmit social voices of the eras mentioned in the novel, offering a multitude of perspectives. The fig tree expresses its intention to do that when it says: "What I tell you, [...] I tell through the prism of my own understanding,

undoubtedly. No storyteller is completely objective. But I have always tried to grasp every story through diverse angles, shifting perspectives, conflicting narratives” (Shafak, 2021, p. 189). Such a revelation openly invites the reader to look for the different voices and perspectives in the stories told by the fig tree.

The fig tree is not the sole narrator, however. Employing a third-person narrator reinforces the concept of polyphony emphasized by Bakhtin. Clearly, a second narrator, an omniscient one, provides an objective perspective, and becomes the medium through which many more voices emerge. It is this notion of polyphony which allows for the emergence of the plurality of voices, deemphasizing a single dominant authorial voice. As Lodge (1990) explains, in the polyphonic novel, the characters are allowed to express their own viewpoints and ideological stances without being subordinated by the authorial speech (p. 22).

True to Bakhtin’s theory of the novel, it is through the incorporation of different narrators and the language used by them and the other characters that heteroglossia enters the novel. Indeed, language itself is heteroglot according to Bakhtin (1981). He asserts that:

[...] at any given moment of its historical existence, language is heteroglot from top to bottom: it represents the co-existence of socio-ideological contradictions between the present and the past, between differing epochs of the past, between different socio-ideological groups in the present, between tendencies, schools, circles and so forth, all given a bodily form. These ‘languages’ of heteroglossia intersect each other in a variety of ways, forming new socially typifying ‘languages’. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.291)

*The Island of Missing Trees*, as a heteroglot novel, presents the events from the point of view of the different characters as well as from that of the fig tree. Therefore, the reader is given the opportunity to hear the various human voices as well as those belonging to nonhuman entities. All these voices project their own viewpoints which, according to Bakhtin (1981), are disclosed through the discourse of the characters and narrators. This is evident from what he calls an ideologeme:

The speaking person in the novel is always, to one degree or another, an ideologue, and his words are always ideologemes. A particular language in a novel is always a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for a social significance. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 333)

The authorial voice does not overpower the other voices in the novel. Although Shafak mentions in her interview that she adores trees and that they are a lot more sentient than humans may think, her voice is not the only one “heard” in the novel (Interview by E. Hu, n.d.). This is because in a polyphonic novel, thanks to heteroglossia, the authorial voice is “refracted”, as Bakhtin (1981) suggests:

Heteroglossia, once incorporated into the novel (whatever the forms for its incorporation), is another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way. Such speech constitutes a special type of double-voiced discourse. It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking, and the refracted intention of the author. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 324)

Therefore, the author’s viewpoint reaches the readers through narrators or characters. But it is not the only voice heard in the novel. In the *Island of Missing Trees*, the author, who supports nature and trees, can perhaps be best heard through the character of Kostas, who is a botanist and a tree-lover. But at the same time, the authorial voice is heard through the fig tree’s narration, which supports nature and the nonhuman.

In *The Island of Missing Trees*, in addition to the two narrators, Kostas the nature-lover, Defne, the woman who is caught in-between, Ada, who represents the young generation, and Meryem, the traditionalist are among the characters whose voices are heard. The gay couple, Yusuf and Yiorgos, as well as Panagiota, the mother who conforms to the religious and societal rules, are also given chances to be heard. All these different voices are heard while they are “in dialogue” with each other. This understanding is based on Bakhtin’s concept of dialogism evident in the novel. As explained by Michael McDowell (1996):

In discussing this theory of dialogics, Bakhtin names authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, and the speech of characters as means the writer employs to achieve an interplay of social voices and a variety of relationships among them. The effect is a kind of dialogue among differing points of view, which gives value to a variety of socio-ideological positions. (McDowell, 1996, p. 372)

It can be argued, as a result, that the different voices of the various characters and the narrators are in dialogue, projecting their different viewpoints. As Bakhtin (2004) asserts, “world views, trends, viewpoints, and opinions always have verbal expression” (p. 94).

Therefore, an utterance, being a verbal expression, discloses a viewpoint. Since an utterance, as Bakhtin points out, is not produced by “biblical Adam”, it incorporates “dialogic overtones” (p. 92). Therefore, based on Bakhtin’s ideas on the utterance and its dialogic implications, when Meryem’s speech is analysed for instance, it shows signs of another’s speech. Her thought of herself is shaped by what others think, in terms of traditional values set by previous generations. While Meryem tries to define herself in her speech, she incorporates Defne’s thought about her as well as some pre-set traditional values such as the domesticity and conventionality of a woman bound to her roots. She tells this to her sister:

You know what hurts me the most? The way you treat me as if I don’t have any brains of my own. You are clever, right, and I’m not. I’m conventional, traditional. Domestic Meryem! You belittle me and your family. Your own roots! Baba adores you, but he was never good enough for you. (Shafak, 2021, p. 237).

Other than telling Defne how she is bound to traditions, Meryem shows her loyalty to traditional values by referring to proverbs very often. To display this loyalty, based on Bakhtin’s theory of dialogism, she brings forward ideas that have been accepted as “correct” by many generations. She creates dialogic relations between the old and the younger generation, in this case, Ada. She mentions quite a lot of Turkish proverbs such as “We’re not going to search for a calf under an ox” and “A cheese vessel will not sail merely by words” linking the Turkish Cypriot culture and traditions with Ada. Through the use of such discourse, Meryem apparently accepts without questioning the beliefs of the Turkish Cypriot community. She also believes in deeply rooted superstitions, saying that these are in people’s DNA. When talking about djinns, she says to Ada: “But this is ancient wisdom I’m talking about. It’s part of our culture. Your culture. It’s in your DNA” (Shafak, 2021, p. 195). Through her discourse, which incorporates proverbs, and her belief in djinns, Meryem displays a character rooted in the traditions followed by the Turkish Cypriot community. At the same time, she is in dialogue with the past generations, acting as a link and transmitting traditional beliefs to Ada.

## **2.2. The Other(s) in *The Island of Missing Trees***

Together with the humans, plants, insects, and small mammals get to “speak” through the fig tree. To be able to speak on behalf of trees and of other living entities, the fig tree is

anthropomorphized. It is presented as having experiences comparable to those of humans. Other than having the ability to narrate, for example, the tree needs to sleep and rest (Shafak, 2021, p. 161). It also feels melancholia because it is planted in an English garden, where there are native trees, unlike itself, which comes from Cyprus. Thus, the fig tree considers itself an immigrant, just like humans do in a foreign land. It attributes this feeling to the fact that it “carr[ies] the burden of another land” (Shafak, 2021, p. 189). As a result of such anthropomorphic qualities, it is possible to feel closer to the entity of the “tree” although it is impossible to know exactly how it feels. This effort of anthropomorphism, according to Buell (2005), is noble since, in this way, the human is made to feel part of the biotic community and, thus, anthropomorphism’s role in speaking against the destruction of nature is particularly valuable (pp. 7-8).

Anthropomorphizing the fig tree carries the risk of portraying unique entities as being the same as humans. However, there is no way of knowing exactly how these entities feel. Clark (2019) supports this idea since he states that anthropomorphism is about pretending that different species share the same feelings with humans. Nevertheless, using anthropomorphism is noteworthy because it gives a voice to entities that are typically silenced (p. 81). In this sense, the “speaking” fig tree provides an insight into the “feelings” of plants, insects, and mammals, and similar to the case of trees, insects including ants, bees, and mosquitos are given human-like characteristics. Notably, in the fig tree’s narration, ants are given prominence. The fig tree tells the ant queen’s story, while it leads to the revelation of the discovery of the bodies of the gay couple, Yusuf and Yiorgos. The ant is given human-like qualities, bringing the reader closer to the ant community. The ant queen, “Still panting from the arduous climb, [...] begins to tell her story, “she was born by an old well, not far away. She had good memories of growing up there” (Shafak, 2021, p. 288). The queen shows signs of sadness when she tells the fig tree about the dead bodies belonging to Yiorgos and Yusuf. As the tree explains, “Her features contorted in sadness, she then said that when the walls came down, they had found, there at the bottom of the well, two dead men. She didn’t know who they were until she met me and learned about the couple who owned this place” (Shafak, 2021, p. 289). This anthropomorphism of the ant queen leads to “disanthropocentrism” as described by Iovino&Oppermann (2014) since the feelings of panting and sadness are experienced by humans as well as ants. This way, humans are

brought closer to these little insects, reducing the distance between these living entities (p. 8).

One of the viewpoints emerging from the novel is the idea that the human characters tend to act in an anthropocentric manner, considering themselves as being above every existence. In the novel, there are descriptions of dying bats during a heatwave. As the tree describes the heatwave and the death of the fruit bats, it refers to anthropocentrism by saying: “[...] based on personal experience, I can tell you one thing about humans: they will react to the disappearance of a species the way they react to everything else – by putting themselves at the centre of the universe” (Shafak, 2021, p. 149). The reaction of humans towards the dead bats is made clear by Panagiota’s reaction: she feels disappointed because her son, Kostas, shows interest in the bats, which for her, are nothing but vermin. She would like him to be interested in human suffering and not in these dirty animals. This anthropocentric stance is explained by Rueckert (1996) when he asserts that humans tragically tend to overpower every natural thing to serve their own interests (p. 113). In this sense, for Panagiota, bats are not of any use, so there is no harm in them dying. They are a nuisance and need to be thrown in the rubbish, as Panagiota suggests (Shafak, 2021, p.147). However, the fig tree, being part of the ecosystem, is aware of their use together with the ignorance of the human species. It explains that bats are necessary for pollination, but humans do not consider this to be important, adding that humans are only interested in those animals that are cute, and bats do not belong in that category. So, when these animals die in thousands, not many people “shed a tear for them” (Shafak, 2021, pp. 149-150). This ignorance of the human species towards nature is emphasized by Rueckert (1996) when he explains that humans act in a similar manner as in a Greek or Shakespearean tragedy: they cause destruction due to their ignorance or because they do not fully understand the results of their actions (p. 113). Therefore, ignoring the role of bats in a process as vital as pollination is an example of such a tragedy.

Panagiota’s viewpoint concerning nature and the right of humans to exploit it is demonstrated with her attitude towards the songbirds. Being part of a culture where animals are used for the benefit of the human species, for her, it is normal to preserve and eat songbirds, and her viewpoint is proven through her actions. As Bakhtin (1981) points out, “The action and individual act of a character in a novel are essential in order to expose—as well as to test— his ideological position, his discourse” (p. 334). In the novel, the third-

person narrator describes in detail how Panagiota preserves songbirds: “Tonight Panagiota was preserving songbirds. Opening their breasts with her thumbs, she stuffed them with salt and spices, softly singing to herself” (Shafak, 2021, p.131). Her 11-year-old son Kostas watches her doing this: “Hard as he tried, he could not tear his gaze from the rows of tiny maroon hearts arranged on the wooden worktop or from the gutted warblers in glass jars, their beaks half open (Shafak, 2021, p. 131). When Kostas tells his mother that she should stop doing that, she says that they eat different animals so that they do not starve (Shafak, 2021, p.132).

The way Panagiota views the relationship between humans and nature is opposed to that of Kostas. Because her son is against this exploitation from a very young age, Panagiota considers him to be weak and sentimental, both traits being undesirable for a man. In her letter to her brother, we get to hear directly her voice and viewpoint. Thanks to the discourse of the novel which integrates different stylistic unities -in this case, the letter- the reader gets to hear Panagiota’s voice, representing her view on nature. As Bakhtin (1981) asserts:

The stylistic uniqueness of the novel as a genre consists precisely in the combination of [...] subordinated, yet still relatively autonomous, unities (even at times comprised of different languages) into the higher unity of the work as a whole: the style of a novel is to be found in the combination of its styles; the language of a novel is the system of its ‘languages’. (Bakhtin,1981, p. 262).

Therefore, thanks to this variation in style and languages which contribute to the heteroglot novel, Panagiota’s view can emerge. It can be argued that Panagiota’s viewpoint is that which considers nature and animals to be in the service of humans. As she was born in that culture that supports such views, in her letter to her brother, she explains that her son is different from the rest, which is considered as a negative trait. She describes her son as being very sensitive and that he would even not eat meat if he could and adds that at the age of eleven, he cried about the preservation of songbirds. Kostas is described as being so sensitive that the death of bats “broke his spirit” (Shafak, 2021, p.172). Panagiota writes in her letter that, “He is more interested in trees and shrubs than in his fellow compatriots. It’s hardly a blessing, I’m sure you would agree. It can only be a curse” (Shafak, 2021, p.172). Thus, she considers her son’s interest in nature’s suffering to be a curse since in the society they live in, human suffering is more important than anything. She tells her brother that her son’s character has not changed over time and that looking at his reactions towards the songbirds

and bats, she believes that he would be unable “to deal with the hardships of life” (Shafak, 2021, p. 172).

The viewpoint that nature is in the service of humanity and the idea that consuming animals and ignoring their suffering is part of life is clearly displayed in Panagiota’s voice. Her way of thinking is mainly based on her cultural upbringing. As Clark (2019) suggests, there are cultural assumptions related to the ways the environment is perceived, and the novel is the platform which helps these assumptions to emerge (p. 78).

In addition to Panagiota’s understanding that nature is inferior to humans, another example of anthropocentrism is brought forward by the depiction of the destruction caused to nature and trees. When the fig tree describes human conflict, it refers to the destruction that results from wars. The tragic results are seen in the description of the land of Cyprus through its history:

Forests had been decimated, cleared for vineyards, cultivation and fuelwood, and at times deliberately destroyed in endless vendettas. Constant logging, multiple fires and sheer ignorance were all responsible for our disappearance, not to mention the blatant neglect of the previous administration. But so were wars, of which we had already had too many throughout the centuries. Conquerors from the East, conquerors from the West: Hittites, Egyptians, Phoenicians, Assyrians, Greeks, Persians, Macedonians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Franks, Genoese, Venetians, Ottomans, Turks, British ... (Shafak, 2021, p. 85)

This anthropocentric behaviour as seen in the example provided by the fig tree is the result of different organizational systems as suggested by Clark (2019). He states that oppressive political systems and certain organizational forms such as plutocracy not only oppress humans but also abuse nature (p. 3). Therefore, it can be argued that throughout history and under different political systems, nature has been exploited and destroyed.

The fig tree emphasizes the different ways nature is destroyed and exploited by humans. Because of anthropocentric behaviours, humans regard animals and plants as being inferior, denying them agency. By looking at the ways the fig tree describes mice, these rodents that are so much despised by humans, it can be argued that in reality, these little creatures are depicted as having agency. Through the description of the mice that “take over” the deserted Ledra Palace, the world-famous luxury resort, the fig tree tells the reader how

humans first destroy everything and then leave their destruction behind only to be taken over by nature or animals. The fig tree says:

There is a fundamental truth that, although universally relevant and worth recognizing, is never mentioned in history textbooks. Wherever humankind has fought wars, turning fertile lands into battlefields and destroying entire habitats, animals have always moved into the void they left behind. Rodents, for instance. When people lay waste to the buildings that once gave them joy and pride, mice will quietly claim them as their own kingdom. (Shafak, 2021, p. 303)

Therefore, despite denying nature agency, evidently, animals have the ability to take over human-made structures, in this case, a luxury hotel. While animals or mice take over the building of Ledra Palace, they witness history. They witness the fights between the two sides, and later, the meetings held by the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) that tries to locate the dead. The mouse experiencing the events in Ledra Palace talks to the fig tree about them. As Clark (2019) suggests, this type of literature that engages in the human-non-human relationship can shed light on the events of the time (p. 78). Through the story of the mouse and its description of historical events, some factual information is embedded in the discourse of the mouse. According to the fig tree, the mouse “munches” Ovid’s books but at the same time, it remembers what is written in the books. One example is a quote it mentions to the fig tree: “Some day this pain will be useful to you” (Shafak, 2021, p. 307). The incorporation of factual information in the discourse of the mouse, based on Bakhtin’s theory on the novel, shows the existence of heteroglossia. By using Ovid’s sentence, the fig tree hopes that the pain experienced by the old generation of Cypriots would be useful to the new generations.

A prominent idea in the novel is the humans’ denial that they, themselves are matter, just like everything else on earth. In contrast, the fig tree says that everything is connected. “Trees are never lonely. Humans think they know with certainty where their being ends and someone else’s starts. With their roots tangled and caught up underground, linked to fungi and bacteria, trees harbour no such illusions. For us, everything is interconnected” (Shafak, 2021, p. 30). Based on this claim, it can be argued that even the smallest entities have a role to play in a tree’s life, which is connected to the lives of others. Humans are presented as being ignorant of the existence of such a link. However, as Bennett (2010) points out there is a kind of “kinship” between the human and the nonhuman, even the tiniest entities. This

is evident in the human symbiosis with bacteria in our microbiome, as Bennett exemplifies, and in the existence of tribes of bacteria moisturizing our elbows (p. 112). Humans tend to disregard this. The fig tree explains this weakness of humans: “But if you are going to claim, as humans do, to be superior to all life forms, past and present, then you must gain an understanding of the oldest living organisms on earth who were here long before you arrived and will still be here after you have gone” (Shafak, 2021, p. 44). The interconnectedness of different life forms or matter and the existing links among them are emphasized by Bennett (2010), who focuses on minerals and the formation of bones to explain this. She suggests that humans are actually the products of an evolutionary process. “In the long and slow time of evolution, then, mineral material appears as the mover and shaker, the active power, and the human beings, with their much-lauded capacity for self-directed action, appear as its product” (p. 11). It can be argued then that humans and other nonhuman entities such as animals share the same source of life since they are made up of minerals. Nevertheless, humans destroy what is, in a way, part of themselves. In the case of plants, as the fig tree states, “most arboreal suffering is caused by humankind” (Shafak, 2021, p. 45).

Bennett (2010) also focused on the idea that the world was made up of beings which, in contrast to common belief, were not ontologically distinct categories. These were confederations which were made up of differently composed materialities. Showing the structural similarities rather than the differences among them can display “isomorphisms” (p. 99). It can be argued that in the novel, the attempt to show the differences between human and non-human entities is far from creating isomorphisms. In fact, it does just the opposite, it reveals subject-object relationships, so that human denial of “matter” as emphasized by Bennett (2010), leads to instrumentalization of nature, which is not ethical (p. 11). One example where such an instrumentalization of nature is evident is the planting of invasive trees and the mass killing and trading of songbirds in Cyprus. Both acts are described by Kostas who gives details about the background of the songbird “tradition” and how it evolved to become a mass murder. In Cyprus, as Kostas points out, invasive acacia trees, which he believes were planted without any bad intentions, damaged the local ecosystem. However, acacias were also planted by those who had bad intentions, that is, the illegal bird hunters. On those acacia trees, Kostas sees songbirds trapped in nets, and when he looks around, he sees sticky lime spread on tree branches and on them, dead songbirds. (Shafak, 2021, pp. 248-249). This killing of songbirds or *ambelopoulia* is not unusual in Cyprus.

These birds were traditionally eaten, and this was considered harmless. In Kostas' thoughts, "Among the islanders, the older generations regarded it as a harmless tradition and the youth saw it as a way to prove their mettle" (Shafak, 2021, p. 249). But since the time he had seen his mother pickle songbirds, things had changed. These birds "had become a profitable business for international gangs and their collaborators" (Shafak, 2021, p. 250). They were smuggled into several countries in Europe and as far as Asia. They were killed in millions every year. Many other bird species were caught too but not all of them were valuable. Those that were not worth anything were thrown away (Shafak, 2021, p. 250). Even though Kostas complains to the police and to the British Sovereign Base, he does not achieve anything. The police are indifferent and those at the base tell him they want to have good relations with the locals. If they ask questions about the songbirds, the locals are not happy about it (Shafak, 2021, p. 251).

Such an instrumentalization of nature is far from what Bennett (2010) proposes, that is, raising of the status of materiality and in effect, raising the status of matter, that same matter which all entities are composed of (p.13). Since matter is not elevated, the result is the instrumentalization of nature. Although she admits that even increasing the status of matter will not end unethical behaviour, still, such an endeavour can emphasize the close connections that exist among different bodies (p. 13). In *The Island of Missing Trees*, as the fig tree explains, far from elevating the matter which links all bodies, the nonhuman is considered of lesser value. To illustrate, ants, according to the fig tree, are important for the survival of trees but humans do not pay any attention to the role of the little insects. As the fig tree explains:

[...] trees owe a lot to them. So do humans, for that matter. Yet they regard ants as trivial, of no major consequence, as they do so often with things that lie beneath their feet. It is ants who sustain, aerate and improve the soil over which Greeks and Turks have fought so bitterly. Cyprus also belongs to them. (Shafak, 2021, p. 287)

Despite being so unimportant in human eyes, these ants are the ones who have knowledge of the place where the missing persons are buried. This is information that Defne and the Committee on Missing Persons (CMP) team are trying hard to find, but with limited success. It can be argued that these animals act intelligently, a quality that humans attribute mainly to themselves. The fig tree provides information supporting this quality when it says that:

Ants know our island better than anyone. They are familiar with its igneous rocks, recrystallized limestones, ancient coins of Salamis, and they are experts at making use of the resin that drips from tree barks. They also know where the missing lie buried. (Shafak, 2021, p. 287)

In line with the emphasis on anthropomorphism suggested by Bennett (2010), this intelligence attributed to ants by the fig tree emphasizes an attempt to disclose an isomorphism. Therefore, by providing them with anthropomorphic qualities, a link between humans and ants in terms of intelligence and knowledge can be established. It can be argued that establishing such a link can contribute to bridging the gap between humans and the nonhuman.

Despite the attempts to link the human and the nonhuman in terms of their materiality, it can be argued that dualisms of the type of human/nature do exist in the novel since human practices are displayed as the main causes of environmental destruction. This is in line with the idea suggested by deep ecologists, who identify “the anthropocentric dualism humanity/nature as the ultimate source of anti-ecological beliefs and practices” (Garrard, 2012, p. 26). Based on this notion, practices that lead to climate change result from irrational human behaviour. As Ada explains to her aunt Meryem, the storm causing destruction in London is not the Apocalypse. She says, “‘It’s climate change,’ [...] ‘Not a revengeful God. We are doing this to ourselves. We are going to see more floods and hurricanes if we don’t act now. No one is going to save us. Soon it’ll be too late for coral reefs, monarch butterflies.’” (Shafak, 2021, p. 122).

While the human/nature dualism exists according to deep ecologists, when *The Island of Missing Trees* is analysed through the ecofeminist lens, the dualism man/woman-nature emerges. This argument is based on ecofeminist ideas which propose that anti-environmental practices result from the existence of dualisms that identify as man/woman-nature. Garrard (2012) states that ecofeminists blame androcentric dualisms where women are accepted as emotional and closely associated with nature whereas men, as being logical (p. 26). In this sense, as Garrard suggests, gender distinctions are rooted in androcentric patriarchal systems. Therefore, it can be argued that patriarchy or any system that exalts androcentric behaviour simultaneously creates ‘others’. These exploited others are, in effect, oppressed. As Glotfelty (1996) points out, ecofeminist theory is concerned with the

connection that exists between the oppression of women and the domination of nature (p. xxiv).

An analysis of Meryem, a person who is bound to her traditions, shows that she is the victim of oppression of a patriarchal system, having embedded values about the role of women in society. Gaard's (1993) understanding of ecofeminism identifies the privileged as being male and developed whereas the oppressed as being female, the poor, the "nonhuman animal, [the] undeveloped nature [...]" (p. 1). Meryem's experiences can be explained through this ecofeminist perspective. Explaining her role to her niece Ada, she talks about 'ayip', a societal norm which is imposed on her and other women in the Turkish side of Cyprus. This norm is the product of the patriarchal system which orders women to behave in a certain way. Meryem describes this order as *ayip*: "It means "shame". It's the word of my life. Don't wear short skirts. Sit with your legs together. Don't laugh out loud. Girls don't do that. Girls don't do this. It's ayip. (Shafak, 2021, p. 123). She tells Ada that she could not wear colourful dresses in her teenage years or even as a grown-up woman. On her trip to London, Meryem decides to take all the colourful dresses she possesses and wear them there since people do not know her and would not say it is 'ayip' (Shafak, 2021, p. 125). According to Meryem, women in her community from their teenage years onwards are forced to prepare for marriage. This kind of life is decided by their families and their prospective husbands. Therefore, teenage girls are not allowed to behave as teenagers and enjoy their teenage years. As Meryem explains:

Where I come from, at seventeen you're usually preparing your dowry. At eighteen you're in the kitchen brewing coffee because your future husband is in the sitting room with his parents, asking for your hand in marriage. At nineteen you're serving your mother-in-law supper and if you burn it, you get an earful. (Shafak, 2021, p.138)

Gaard (1993) asserts that historically, in the West, anything related to women, nature, animals, emotion and the body has been considered of a lesser value than that of men, humans, reason, culture, and the mind (p. 5). As seen in the case of Meryem, a woman is not given a chance to decide for herself because she is controlled by the dominant culture.

Gaard also suggests that a connection has been made between feminism, animal liberation and environmentalism by trying to expose the ways environmental destruction affects the lives of women and animals. Issues such as toxic waste production have a direct

effect on the well-being of women and children and are the concern of ecofeminists. Gaard (1993) writes:

Especially in third world countries, ecofeminists assert that women, animals, children suffer the most. By documenting the poor quality of life for women, children, people in the Third World, animals, and the environment, ecofeminists are able to demonstrate that sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression. (Gaard, 1993, p.5)

Therefore, as Gaard (1993) points out, in places exploited by the West, women, children, animals, and nature are oppressed. In *The Island of Missing Trees*, it is mentioned that in Cyprus, in the past, there were mines which were exploited not by locals but by the West. The mines which produced iron, copper, and other minerals generated profits for international companies while they poisoned the local workers. One of these workers was Kostas' father who died of lung disease. Families are also affected by the toxic substances produced at the mines; notably, asbestos causes cancer, killing the wives of the workers as they are the ones who wash their husbands' overalls (Shafak, 2021, pp. 106-107). After the death of their husbands, widows are forced to look for solutions to raise their children. Panagiota, Kostas' mother makes and sells home-made goods to local shops in order to raise her children and survive.

As Plumwood (2002) suggests, nature is a mine that is exploited and "othered" since it is instrumentalized by the dominant group, that is, the West. She states that:

Nature as resource, as labour, and as externality is also the subordinated Other in systems of oligarchical economic centrism, where there is radical economic inequality and hyper-separation between classes, those of 'persons' who are owners (increasingly corporations and their personnel) and those who are counted as property or as externality. (Plumwood, 2002, p. 110)

Plumwood's understanding of the instrumentalization of nature reinforces the existence of the reason/body dualism, where "reason" represents the "white-male-developed-privileged" and the "body" is represented by the local workers.

Based on the anthropocentric view as explained by Plumwood (2002), it can be argued that the dominant groups consider nature and anything related to nature, as inferior groups as ‘other’, which can be either resource or waste (p. 111). In this sense, those who are ‘other’ are stereotyped and backgrounded. In the *Island of Missing Trees*, Yusuf and Yiorgos, the gay couple is othered. This is the result of anthropocentrism and the related “centrisms”, including “androcentrism”. Plumwood (2002) points to the androcentric frameworks creating “the other”. She says that this is achieved by ignoring the needs of the “other” and the belief that the “other” has to be mastered (p. 118). The right to superiority is claimed not just by the colonizer but also by the remaining hegemonic powers. In the case of Yusuf and Yiorgos, they are regarded as ‘other’ and excluded because they are stereotyped as being different from the rest of the community. The patriarchal forces believe that they have the right to abuse the ‘other’, and Yiorgos and Yusuf are attacked in their tavern. Defne, who experiences the incidents, explains that locals were against their relationship:

They knew Yusuf and Yiorgos were a gay couple and wanted to teach them a lesson. They probably thought the place was closed. They were going to vandalize it, smash the windows, break a few things, write ugly slurs on the walls and leave. With all the chaos across the island, they trusted nobody would bother to investigate such a trivial incident and they would get away with it. (Shafak, 2021, p. 275)

The hegemonic, androcentric culture thought that the destruction and intimidation of the other- the gay couple was not going to be worth investigating. This culture had to teach Yusuf and Yiorgos a lesson because they did not act ‘man-like’. As Legler (1997) points out, patriarchy justifies harmful actions by linking nature and the female (p. 228). In other words, nature is female. Anyone close to nature and, in effect, to the female is an ‘other’ and therefore, deserves the abuse.

The various types of domination such as sexism, racism, agism evident in languages are the concern of ecofeminists. This is based on Warren’s (1997) understanding that in patriarchal cultures women and nature are considered one and the same. Therefore, through language, nature is feminized and women are naturalized (p. 12). According to this ecofeminist perspective, a representative example is the way Meryem expresses her understanding of a “woman”. Representing women under patriarchy, in her conversation with Ada, she explains that women’s priorities are their families. They should not have sexual desires, as they do not have time for it. She says:

‘Women are different.’ ‘Different because we have no sexual desires?’ ‘Because we are busy! Women have more important things to do. Taking care of our families, our parents, our children, our communities, making sure everything runs smoothly. Women are holding up the world, we don’t have time for monkey business!’ (Shafak, 2021, pp. 320-321).

While explaining the woman’s position, Meryem says that women cannot be like Canada geese, as Ada suggests. Women have to be beautiful to avoid losing the male. She says: “A woman needs pretty plumage. [...] Because otherwise another female will swoop down and snatch her mate away. And, trust me, when a bird reaches my age, she does not want to be alone in her nest” (Shafak, 2021, p. 322). This language, of a woman being ‘a bird’ who lives in a ‘nest’, is an example of what Warren (1997) mentions as a language used by patriarchal communities to refer to women. In this way, women are naturalized and nature is feminized (p. 12).

It can be argued then, based on patriarchal cultures claiming that “the female” is “nature” and “nature” is female, this exploitation of women, which denies the female the right to have desires, is linked to the exploitation of nature. In a patriarchal society, women and in effect, nature, lose either way. As Meryem tells Ada, through a proverb: “The world is unfair, [...] If a stone falls on an egg, it is bad for the egg; if an egg falls on a stone, it is still bad for the egg (Shafak, 2021, p. 322).

### 3. CHAPTER III

#### PLEADING TO BE NOTICED: THE WHISPERS OF THE OTHER(S) IN *SONGBIRDS*

*Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage, blow!  
You cataracts and hurricanoes, spout  
Till you have drenched our steeples, drowned the  
cocks.  
You sulph'rous and thought-executing fires,  
Vaunt-couriers of oak-cleaving thunderbolts,  
Singe my white head. And thou, all-shaking  
thunder,  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world.  
Crack nature's molds, all germens spill at once  
That makes ingrateful man.*

William Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 3.5. 1-11

The human species' instrumentalization of nature as emphasized by religions such as Christianity and Judaism, the notion that nature needs to be under human command and control, and the belief that all non-human species and environmental forces must display their servitude to 'man' have been adopted for centuries. Nature and everything related to it have been believed to exist for the benefit of humans, who, as the powerholders, have all the rights to their exploitation. As pointed out by Lynn White Jr (1996), religions like Christianity taught humans that "[...] no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man's purposes" (p. 9). Based on such ideas, humans believe that they have been given all the rights to use, kill, and destroy nature.

Exploitative human actions are described and incorporated in the narrative of Christy Lefteri's (2021) novel *Songbirds*, which tells the story of a Sri Lankan domestic worker, Nisha, one of the hundreds of workers who arrive in the southern part of Cyprus to be

employed in the homes of Greek Cypriots, leaving behind their homeland and their loved ones. Because of their debt to the companies that provide them with this ‘opportunity’, they are in a way “bound” to the whole employment system, having almost no chance of going back to their homeland. They are exploited by their employers and ignored as human beings. Among these domestic workers is Nisha, who works for Petra, looking after her daughter Aiki. Although it is not normally allowed, Nisha has an affair with Yiannis, who is secretly a bird-poacher. While Nisha navigates her life around her chores, love life, and her longing for her own daughter Kumari, she finds out about Yannis’ occupation. She shows her disappointment to Yannis and decides to speak to Seraphim, the person mainly responsible for Yannis’ involvement in the illegal hunting and trading of migratory birds. On the night of the agreed meeting with Seraphim, she mysteriously disappears, and as it turns out, she has become one of the victims of a murderer who targets female foreign migrant workers.

Nisha’s tragic end and the deaths of other domestic workers and their children in southern Cyprus are revealed after the investigation of just a few people: Yannis, Petra, and Tony. In fact, Tony is the only person the foreign domestic workers trust. The local police do not show interest in pursuing the cases of the missing people, until a body emerges from a toxic lake near the village of Mitsero, following a heavy rainfall. The bodies that are found belong to female migrant workers. All of these people were ignored, trapped, and then killed, just like the millions of migratory songbirds.

### **3.1. Bakhtin’s Polyphony, Dialogism and Heteroglossia in *Songbirds*: Searching for the Voices**

In *Songbirds*, the writer employs Petra and Yannis to tell Nisha’s story. There is also an omniscient narrator, who provides the reader with factual information such as the environmental changes in the area around the toxic lake, the transformations in nature, the various weather conditions, and the events prior to the discovery of the dead bodies of the domestic workers. Although these are the main voices narrating the events, at the end of the novel, Nisha is given the opportunity to speak through her diary.

When analysing each narrator’s responsibility in providing the reader with their own account of the narrative, Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony is once again very relevant. Giving the reader the accounts of the employer, the lover, and Nisha contributes to the construction

of a plurality of voices. This view is also supported by Booth (1982) in his interpretation of Bakhtin's idea of the plurality of voices that exist in language:

Though some speakers may aspire to the condition of monologue, we have all inherited languages from many different sources ("science, art, religion, class, etc."), and to attempt to rule out all voices but "my own" is at best an artificial pretense. We are constituted in polyphony. (Booth, 1982, p. 51)

Therefore, polyphony is present not only in the novel that employs more than one narrator, allowing the different voices of characters to be heard but also within the characters' discourse which incorporates different languages adopted throughout a character's life. To illustrate, in Petra's speech, the readers can "hear" her father, a fisherman by profession, speaking to her about the importance of water. As she remembers her father's words, she introduces his point of view about the way water links humans and all entities in the world: "I could almost hear my father's voice: *Since it came to earth, water has been cycling through air, rocks, animals and plants. [...] Remember we all have something in common, and that is the water that runs through us.*" (Lefteri, 2021, p. 201). By mentioning her father's words, Petra introduces another voice, quite different from her own.

The omniscient narrator provides facts about nature and the changes it has gone through before and right after Nisha's disappearance. The narration is mainly focused on the area around the toxic lake. The narrator appears like a modern-day drone, watching from above, describing the terrain around the toxic lake as well as some natural processes like the earth's reclaiming the dead body of a hare. While describing the nature around the lake, this narrator occasionally refocuses the lens of narration to provide minute details on the tiniest scale. For example, there is a reference to the larvae that feed on the dead hare's tissue (Lefteri, 2021, p.149). This narrator watches everything that goes on around the toxic lake, reporting the activities of different animals, climatic changes, and human activity. Through the descriptions provided, it is possible to gain an insight into the environmental issues and nature's exploitation by humans. For instance, the narrator explains that the lake is of a reddish colour and highly toxic because it is filled with yellow-orange water overflowing from an old copper mine.

In *Songbirds*, Petra, whose name means "stone" in Greek and can suggest someone who is tough or even without feelings, is the Greek Cypriot employer who ignores Nisha,

her foreign domestic worker. For instance, she denies her certain freedoms such as having a day off when she needs it. Before Nisha disappears, Petra knows nothing about Nisha's life. She only starts to wonder about Nisha's life after she goes missing. "Who was Nisha? What had life taught her? Why had she travelled such a great distance? To save her daughter . . . from what? I had never asked these questions," she admits (Lefteri, 2021, p. 84). While Petra provides the viewpoint of the employer, in this double-voiced discourse, it is possible to hear Nisha's voice as well. It is the voice prompting the reader to wonder too about Nisha and her story. When Petra asks herself these questions about Nisha, she provides the answer herself, in other words, she answers as if she were Nisha: to save her daughter. Nevertheless, she does not have all the answers to her questions. In Bakhtinian terms, this could be both a rhetorical question and double-voiced as he points out that "it is proper to speak of a distinctive *rhetorical* double-voicedness, or, put another way, to speak of the double-voiced rhetorical transmission of another's word [...]" (Bakhtin, 1981, p.354). In this sense, through Petra's questions, it is possible to hear Nisha, asking to be investigated and understood.

By analysing Petra's questions mentioned above, it is also possible to detect Bakhtin's ideas related to discourse. According to Bakhtin (2004), utterances do not belong solely to the person who utters them. Instead, they have embedded in them "varying degrees of otherness" and "ownness" (p. 89). This idea is interpreted by Todorov (1984) who suggests that addressing someone else is not actually necessary in a discourse, as an interlocutor is implied (p. 30). As in the case of Petra, there is no interlocutor present, still, the speaker/character's discourse implies or seems to address an interlocutor. It can be argued that Petra's questions "Who is Nisha?" and "What had life taught her?" address multiple interlocutors such as Nisha, Yannis, Nisha's daughter Kumari, the reader as well as everyone else who has an idea about Nisha's life journey. In this sense, through her questions, Petra engages in a dialogue with the different implied interlocutors. Therefore, in Bakhtin's (2004) words, it can be argued that her utterance has "dialogic reverberations" (p. 94). This dialogic characteristic of language or any utterance is explained by Renfrew (2015), who points out that "[...] the uttered word is always and everywhere uttered in anticipation of a response (even when it is apparently uttered in isolation)" (p. 92). Through this dialogue, it is evident that Nisha's life and the lives of those in a similar position to her are not part of their employers' interest. Therefore, through Nisha's employer's voice, Nisha's voice can be heard, a voice desiring to reveal the life of the female migrant worker in Southern Cyprus.

Yannis, the third narrator in *Songbirds*, is another source of information concerning Nisha, as he describes her life and character when she is not at work. Through his account of Nisha, the reader is informed about various aspects of her life such as her home in Sri Lanka, her marriage, and the birth of her daughter Kumari. Yannis also narrates his relationship with Nisha and his feelings for her. In his narration, other than the voice of Nisha, he incorporates Kumari's voice, which we hear "speaking" to her mother and Yannis via video call using an iPad.

In the novel, having the characters use communication devices like the iPad or a mobile phone introduces a discourse that is special for users of such devices. For example, when Yannis tries to locate Nisha's whereabouts, he talks to Seraphim, who denies any kind of involvement in Nisha's disappearance. To prove this to Yannis, he shows him text messages written by himself and Nisha on the night of her disappearance. Through the text messages, Nisha is given an opportunity to speak using discourse specific to mobile phone messaging. In Bakhtinian terms, this is a display of heteroglossia, which contributes to polyphony in the novel. For example, in this excerpt from their conversation, she clearly uses text messaging language, such as "2" for "to":

31/10 22.16

Dear Mr seraphim I am running a little late because it was difficult for me 2 leave but I will be at Marias bar in half an hour. (Lefteri, 2021, p.310)

As this short message exemplifies, this kind of language is historically bound. It did not exist before the invention of mobile phones. Its incorporation in the novel serves, therefore, a purpose; in a way, it places the novel in a particular period. It is a special feature of language as stated by Bakhtin: "language is something that is historically real, a process of heteroglot development, a process teeming with future and former languages [...]" (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 356-357). Since this language of texting is used and understood by active mobile phone users, it is a clear example of heteroglossia and polyphony.

As mentioned above, in *Songbirds*, heteroglossia is evident in the discourse used by the different characters. These different languages, according to Bakhtin (1981), are "orchestrated" by the author (p. 418). For example, Kumari's baby talk, the language used in writing banners for protesting the murders of the maids, the incorporation of Sri Lankan and Greek food names are just a few of the examples of heteroglossia. Moreover, the writer

uses Greek sayings which, even though they do not make much sense when translated, add to heteroglossia. To illustrate, Mrs Hadjikyriacou is an elderly neighbour and utters the following when asked if she knows the person Nisha was going to meet the night she disappeared: “Do you think if I sniff my nails they will tell me the answer?” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 35). This was her “stock phrase”, based on Petra’s account. According to Bakhtin (2004), such utterances are more or less fixed. As he explains: “Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances. These we may call *speech genres*” (p. 60). Based on this definition of speech genres, it can be argued that the Greek saying used by Mrs Hadjikyriacou is an utterance that is stable. Bakhtin (2004) provides more details about speech genres saying that they are part of the historical development of language. He adds that throughout history, everywhere, in life, and in all activities, there are specific customs that are conveyed through language: in written works, in sayings, and expressions (pp. 88-89). Therefore, sayings are representative of traditions, so it can be argued that the character using them represents history and traditions. In the case of Mrs. Hadjikyriacou, she represents the living memory of the island of Cyprus, as she often refers to the life before, during, and after the partition of the island. As Petra states:

She remembered everything – her mind like a journal, full of pages and pages of the past, or at least every bit of the past that has walked her way. It is a well-known fact that her hair turned white overnight, during the war, when the island was divided. That’s when she started storing everything in her mind, so that nobody could take her soul from her. That is what she told me once, many years ago. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 33)

Mrs Hadjikyriacou is perhaps similar to Meryem in the *Island of Missing Trees* who also uses proverbs and is strongly bound to the traditions of her community and the island.

Apart from being incorporated via the various types of discourses as discussed above, heteroglossia in *Songbirds* is evident through the inclusion of different literary genres. For example, at the end of the novel, the author has inserted Nisha’s journal which is addressed to her daughter Kumari. This way, Nisha can speak directly to her daughter and provide her own version of the narrative. As Bakhtin (1981) explains, when different genres are incorporated into the novel, they “intensify [the] speech diversity in fresh ways” (p. 321). Adding to the speech diversity with the help of her journal, Nisha speaks directly, telling her story herself. This way, her perspective emerges, allowing the reader to hear her voice.

With the inclusion of the characters' diverse discourse, the narrators' voices, and the incorporation of different genres, polyphony is achieved. According to Lodge's (1990) interpretation of Bakhtin's theory, "polyphonic" has almost the same meaning as "dialogic". As he explains, when language includes more than one tone, then it displays its nature: the fact that language is dialogic. Therefore, Lodge (1990) says, there is a need to look for meaning in the dialogic interactions among speakers (p. 86). In this sense, through the dialogic interactions of the different characters and the discourse of the narrators, we can search for meaning and as a result, disclose the existence of different viewpoints.

The authorial viewpoint is worth discussing before trying to disclose the various viewpoints that emerge in *Songbirds*. The authorial viewpoint in a novel is not straightforward. In fact, it exists in a refracted way. As Bakhtin (1981) explains;

We acutely sense two levels at each moment in the story; one, the level of the narrator, a belief system filled with his objects, meanings and emotional expressions, and the other, the level of the author, who speaks (albeit in a refracted way) by means of this story and through this story. (Bakhtin, 1981, p.314)

To illustrate how Lefteri's views are refracted in the novel using various characters, it might be useful to look at her perspective on migrants. As she explains in the afterword to her novel, migrants often have to leave their home country because they do not have any other choice. She states that in the particular case of Cyprus, migrant domestic workers are employed to work at home however, they end up being assigned a lot more duties, like serving in their employers' restaurants or walking the dogs. This way, migrants are exploited while their employers and society in general continue to be biased and prejudiced about them. Despite leaving their countries in search of a better future, in fact, many of these women migrants get trapped and cannot leave, and just like natural resources and animals, they are taken advantage of by those who are powerful. Lefteri asserts that ignoring these women and the failure of the authorities to search for them demonstrate a serious fault which is present in our society and civilization (Lefteri, 2021).

Lefteri's aforementioned ideas on migration and the exploitation of nature are refracted in a variety of ways. The authorial voice is evident in Petra, who ignores her employee, Nisha. It also exists in Yannis who, despite his love for Nisha, continues to illegally hunt the migratory birds. Moreover, Lefteri's voice is also evident in Nisha's voice

which describes her life in Sri Lanka and the ways her homeland was exploited by the British colonizers in the past. Through these characters, the author's intentions are brought to the surface. In Bakhtinian terms, the authorial speech can be displayed through the language of the characters. Indeed, he asserts that:

[...] the character speech almost always influences authorial speech (and sometimes powerfully so), sprinkling it with another's words (that is, the speech of a character perceived as the concealed speech of another) and in this way introducing into it stratification and speech diversity. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 315)

Therefore, it can be argued that Lefteri's authorial view is not displayed by one narrator or one single character. Instead, it is presented in fragments by the different characters in the novel. As Bakhtin points out, the author might appear in more than one character, by using a variety of languages, while avoiding disclosing himself to any of the characters (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 314). When the authorial speech and, as a result, her viewpoint emerges, it adds to the diversity of speech in the novel. This diversity according to Bakhtin's theory, contributes to heteroglossia and polyphony in *Songbirds*.

### **3.2. The Other(s) in *Songbirds***

Similar to the *Island of Missing Trees*, where nature is presented as being under the domination of the human species and, as a result, being 'othered', in *Songbirds* too, we encounter the reality of nature and animals being destroyed and used as a resource or product that can provide great profit. Common to *The Island of Missing Trees* and *Songbirds* is the description of the illegal trade of migratory birds, which involves trapping, killing, and processing them to be sold. In *Songbirds*, Yannis, the poacher, describes the whole process in detail, from preparing the traps to the stage where the birds are put in containers filled with vinegar, ready to be taken to restaurants and hotels. In his description, he mentions the various bird species and the ways they are lured with recorded birdsongs. He also talks about the migration route of those who are lucky enough to escape. In ecocritical terms, such information performs what Howarth describes as "deixis". Thanks to this characteristic of language, that is, "pointing" to certain aspects, the reader gets to learn the details about the variety of bird species passing from the skies of Cyprus on their way to Europe. As Howarth (1996) explains, "deixis locates entities in space, time, and social context" (p. 80). Through

deixis, in this case, the naming of different bird species, the behavioural characteristics they display, the locations where they rest, and their role in the natural world, it is possible to gain insight into the relationship islanders have with nature. As Howarth (1996) asserts “[...] the landscape contains many names and stories, so that learning and writing them becomes a way of mapping cultural terrain” (p. 80). Therefore, thanks to the details about the birds provided by the character of Yannis, we can understand the role that migratory birds play in the lives of the Greek Cypriots. For example, Yannis mentions how in the past, when he was a little boy, his grandfather would catch around ten birds, so that his family could eat some meat in the winter (Lefteri, 2021, p. 97). In those days, the people respected the land and the animals according to Yannis. This clearly contrasts with the behaviour he displays when killing thousands of birds for money. Through this juxtaposition of the behaviour of the people towards the birds in his grandfather’s time and his own, Yannis reveals the changes in the locals’ cultural and societal attitudes towards the birds. Evidently, in his grandfather’s time, nature was used to support human life, but was treated with respect since it was important for human survival. In Yannis’ time, birds are a resource which is used to satisfy human greed. The birds “are worth more than their weight in gold” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 9)

Yannis talks about the different ways birds are treated in his grandfather’s time and during his own time. However, it is his grandfather’s voice through which the reader gets to understand the human-induced changes in nature, which must have taken place in different eras. When Yannis and Seraphim walk in the forest to set up the mist nets to trap the birds, Yannis recalls his walks with his grandfather. He remembers how he had told him about the ancient times when the island was covered with dense forests. His grandfather wanted Yannis to imagine how wildlife would have been at times when it was not disturbed by humans, who tend to take a lot more from nature than they actually need (Lefteri, 2021, pp. 304-305). It can be understood through Yannis’ memory of his grandfather’s remarks that nature is being ‘othered’ because the dense forest does not exist anymore. For centuries, the forest and its wildlife have been consistently destroyed as a result of anthropocentric behaviour. When Yannis recalls his grandfather’s words, Seraphim is with him, his rifle in hand ready to hunt in the forest. “Wait for the wildlife to wake up”, he tells Yannis. He plans to hunt a hare but instead, he kills the rare mouflon ovis, which he considers to be a “prize” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 307). This behaviour depicts the way nature and everything natural is being instrumentalized by the powerful and is considered an object and a trophy.

The actions of the two characters mentioned above demonstrate that human activity destroys animals and nature. As Rueckert (1996) points out, “[...] man’s tragic flaw is his anthropocentric (as opposed to biocentric) vision, and his compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing” (p. 113). Evidently, Seraphim kills the mouflon ovis because, for him, it is a prize. He ignores the fact that it is a rare and protected animal. It can be argued that killing it is a display of the domination of humans over nature. This is also supported by Costanza Mondo (2022), who considers the mouflon ovis to be the embodiment of nature, killed mercilessly and purposefully by humans (p. 307). Similarly, the idea that humans consider themselves to be in a privileged position compared to the nonhuman is also evident in the way cats are viewed by Petra and the locals. She says that she, as a rule, does not allow cats to enter her house because they are considered vermin (Lefteri, 2021, p. 101). The same idea about cats is expressed by the poacher Vyacheslav, who argues with Seraphim about giving a cat one of the dead birds: ““You shouldn’t do that,” Vyacheslav said, with creased brows. ‘You might as well throw the vermin money.’” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 47). Based on Clark’s (2011) definition of anthropocentrism which refers to the belief that humans and their interests are the only things that matter and should be given priority over the interests of the nonhuman, it is evident that viewing other animals as vermin supports this anthropocentric idea and that only humans and their interests are of the highest value (p. 19).

In an anthropocentric world, where nonhuman entities are not valued, obviously, they are not considered to have agency either. This view emerges in *Songbirds*, too. Before the mouflon ovis is killed, it does not choose to run away, but stares at Seraphim and Yannis, as if accepting its forthcoming death (Lefteri, 2021, p.308). As described by Mondo (2022), although “majestic”, the animal is “meek” (p. 304). This “meekness” and submissiveness can be interpreted as acceptance of its destiny, which is determined by humans. Similarly, the songbirds are lured by the recorded birdsong and follow the path that will bring them to their death (Lefteri, 2021, p. 189). It appears that animals are at the mercy of the human species, being unable to do anything to escape. This is how Yannis describes their inability to escape from the human trap:

Then the birds filled the sky – their music filled the sky. They swooped down in their thousands, their wings alight in the sunrise – gold and red and blue. They veered

down sharply, diving towards the calling birds, to the song that was luring them to their death, down, down, down to the water's edge. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 189)

As seen from the excerpt above, birds cannot choose to change their route and avoid falling victim to cruel anthropocentric behaviour. They are presented as beings with no agency. However, based on material ecocriticism, agency should be attributed even to the nonhuman. By nonhuman, material ecocritics describe “things”, that is, the non-living matter that exists in the world we live in. As Iovino&Oppermann (2014) point out, agency is an inherent characteristic of matter and an obvious feature of its dynamic nature (p. 3). They suggest that different entities are connected and for centuries, they have been coming up with “new forms, bodies, and natures” (p. 1). Iovino&Opperman's focus on the dynamic nature of material which includes natural phenomena such as hurricanes, metals, and bacteria suggests an inherent agency, an ability to transform and create change which can affect the existence of humans. Based on this idea, it can be argued that in *Songbirds*, unlike the “othered” birds and the mouflon ovis, certain non-living entities are presented as having “agency”. For example, the heavy rainfall that causes the flooding of the tunnels inside the mine brings the dead body to the surface of the lake, revealing the murder of the domestic worker. It might seem that the murderer, who had, without doubt, “agency”, had everything “under control” after he had thrown the body in the mine. However, the rain, if viewed through the material ecocriticism lens, had “agency” too, and had its own story to tell. As material ecocritics state, “[...] material phenomena are knots in a vast network of agencies, which can be “read” and interpreted as forming narratives, stories” (Iovino&Oppermann, 2014, p. 1). This suggests that, although not “alive”, weather conditions like rainfall, which are beyond human control, can cause tremendous changes. Therefore, in *Songbirds*, the rain is ‘responsible’ for changing the narrative. It changed the murderer's plans and brought the bodies to the light.

Clearly, matter as described by Iovino&Oppermann, can influence the way the narrative unfolds as well as alter human life. They claim there are different ways that matter and all the various entities and substances “intra-act” and affect each other, suggesting that the human component is not superior but “just part of the whole” (Iovino&Oppermann, 2014, pp. 4-7). In *Songbirds*, human actions prove that there is a denial of the existence of such a connection among all the entities found in the biosphere. The toxic lake which was created by humans themselves is by all means avoided by the locals due to the toxic

substances it contains. However, the toxic lake continues to “intra-act” with everything around it, affecting human existence. “No vegetation grows around the lake, the soil is arid. But, further out, the soil is rich in copper and pyrite and gold [...]” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 74). Clearly, no matter what humans do, the material entities continue to cause change in a dynamic way, proving that the human component is not superior since it cannot reverse the damage it has caused but instead, it chooses to avoid it.

The environmental damage caused by humans as seen in the example of the toxic lake can also prove the “interconnectedness” of different entities within nature and culture. Reading the text of matter as suggested by material ecocritics requires looking at the “implicit textuality in the becoming of material formations” (Iovino&Oppermann, 2014, pp. 6-7). This implies the Bakhtinian understanding of a speaker’s utterance, which is “other’s speech”, having “dialogic reverberations” (Bakhtin, 2004, p. 94). In this respect, combining Bakhtin’s dialogic characteristics of utterances and the interconnectedness and implicit textuality of material formation and entities in *Songbirds*, the link between nature and culture can be revealed.

This strong connection among different forms of matter is also emphasized by Bennett (2010), who, as mentioned earlier, asserts that humans are matter as well. To support her idea, she points out that anthropomorphism can become a kind of tool to show the similarities among those who may have been considered different. It can thus be used to reveal isomorphisms (p. 99). In *Songbirds*, the little bird shows anthropomorphic qualities which can be considered to reveal isomorphism. A blackcap was among all the different birds captured during a hunt by Yannis. It was injured but not dead. During the sorting process, Yannis notices that the bird is not dead and decides to rescue it. The bird is shown to be “mad” at Yannis. “It was suspicious of me, kept giving me that look”, says Yannis. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 22). When he gives the bird water, it responds. Yannis feels reassured as he looks at the bird thinking that it appears to be “treating [him] less like a killer [...]” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 22). The bird continues its recovery with Yannis’ help and Yannis believes that the bird has started to “trust” him (Lefteri, 2021, p. 186). Before the bird is freed, it witnesses a money exchange between Yannis and Seraphim. It “inspects” the money, according to Yannis (Lefteri, 2021, p. 335). A few days later, Yannis sets the bird free. Through the use of words describing action mostly attributed to people, the bird is anthropomorphised. At the same time, the author shows how both humans and the captured bird share similar characteristics,

they are not as different as we might think. Such isomorphism serves the purpose of linking the human and the nonhuman. The bird is first suspicious of Yannis as he is a killer, then slowly starts to trust him, while in the end, it inspects the money earned by poaching. Seemingly reacting just like a human would react in a similar situation, the bird as a non-human entity is shown to display similar qualities.

In *Songbirds*, the interconnectedness of all entities, the human, nonhuman and the inanimate material, is evident through the disappearing boundaries among them as argued by Mondo (2022). She asserts that in the novel, the connection is established through the use of the motif of the colour gold, which is used several times to describe the mouflon ovis, Nisha's eyes, leaves, and a migrant worker's voice. Gold, the colour of a precious metal links all these entities and shows that they are equally important (p. 310).

To reveal the others in *Songbirds*, ecofeminism proves very useful. Greta Gaard (1993) explains that ecofeminism supports the idea that the ideology which oppresses women and people based on their race, class, sexual orientation, and physical abilities is the same as that which oppresses nature (p. 1). From an ecofeminist perspective, in a system defined by patriarchy, nature and animals are inferior to men, and since women are considered nature, they, too, are seen as inferior to men. This is stated by Warren (1997), who asserts that "Animalizing or naturalizing women in a (patriarchal) culture where animals are seen as inferior to humans (men) thereby reinforces and authorizes women's inferior status" (p. 12). When explaining ecofeminism, Val Plumwood (1986), also points out that there are similarities in the way women and nature are treated. She asserts that the traditional roles attributed to women share similarities with those attributed to nature in terms of domination. Women and nature have been instrumentalized and given value based on their usefulness (p. 120). In Lefteri's *Songbirds*, there are ideologies and opinions expressed by several characters illustrating this domination and instrumentalization. Indeed, the non-Cypriot female domestic workers, anything considered part of nature, and the local women are othered, objectified, and degraded.

Seraphim is one of those characters who openly others foreign maids by referring to them as "assets" (Lefteri, 2021, p. 181) or as "not too expensive" (Lefteri, 2021, p. 43). They are like commodities or property that can have a value and can be sold for a certain price. Similarly, for the agencies which provide their employment contracts, domestic workers are "merchandise, not people" (Lefteri, 2021, p. 205). These women are further degraded when

their intelligence is being questioned. One of the employers, Mrs Kostas, says that they “have the attention spans of fleas” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 147). Female domestic workers are likened to animals in an attempt to show that they do not “think” but instead act instinctually, like animals. For instance, the police officer is totally disinterested in pursuing Nisha’s case saying that women like her are animals, so they follow their instincts (Lefteri, 2021, p. 79). Similarly, one of the maids says that their employers treated them “like children or worse, like animals”. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 210). The police officer goes on to describe the maids as exotic and beautiful but at the same time having no prospects because they come from families who are peasants in their home countries. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 221). Therefore, maids are seen as owned property, having monetary value, unintelligent, animals, and belonging to the poor lower class. These exploitative and degrading characterizations can clearly be linked to classist, racist, and discriminatory ideologies. These are explained by Gaard (1993), who states that “[...] sexism, racism, classism, speciesism, and naturism (the oppression of nature) are mutually reinforcing systems of oppression” (p. 5).

While the police officer mentions how these women leave their own families behind without much thought, he contrasts them with “Cypriot ladies”. “You wouldn’t see a Cypriot lady making that sort of decision, now would you? Leaving her children behind? That would be unheard of, no matter the circumstances” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 221). By integrating the definition of patriarchy provided by Janis Birkeland (1993), it can be claimed that “‘Patriarchy’ [...] the male-dominated system of social relations and values” assesses the maids and deems them ‘unladylike’” (p. 17). This assessment is based on “‘masculine’ constructs and values which have been internalized in our minds, embodied in our institutions, and played out in power-based social relations [...]” (p. 17). In a society led by patriarchal values, women are considered the carers of the family, and there is no place for those who leave without looking back. They are “not like us,” the police officer explains, “they are made of different stuff” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 221). Such a view does not just degrade maids by othering them from the rest of the women living in Cyprus but also reveals the masculine-sexist attitude towards Greek Cypriot women. As Birkeland (1993) explains, through patriarchy, “a complex morality based on dominance and exploitation has developed in conjunction with the devaluing of nature and “feminine” values” (p. 19). It can be argued that this dominance defines morality while declaring that it is a woman’s role to look after

the family and anyone who does not prioritize it is deemed unladylike or made of “different stuff”.

Women, domestic workers as well as the nonhuman animal are the subjects of exploitation by those holding patriarchal values since “The dualistic conceptual framework of Patriarchy supports the ethic of dominance and divides us against each other, our ‘selves’, and nonhuman nature” (Birkeland, 1993, p. 20). In *Songbirds*, Mondo (2022) points out that the animal, in this case, the mouflon ovis is connected to the invisible foreign woman, that is, Nisha as “both are marginalized in human society” (2022, p. 208). The idea that women and animals are othered by those valuing patriarchy is supported by Lori Gruen (1993) who asserts that:

The categories “woman” and “animal” serve the same symbolic function in patriarchal society. Their construction as dominated, submissive “other” in theoretical discourse (whether explicitly so stated or implied) has sustained human male dominance. The role of women and animals in postindustrial society is to serve/be served up; women and animals are the used. (Gruen, 1993, p. 61)

Clearly, women and animals are considered to be the servants of those who value patriarchy. Women among their many roles are carers, ladies, maids, servants, and reproductive agents. In *Songbirds*, animals are used for food, hunted for entertainment purposes (Seraphim hunts down the crow to practice with his ‘new’ gun), trapped to serve the greed of the poachers, and considered as prizes as displayed in the shooting of the mouflon ovis.

Ecofeminists insist that women, animals, and other underprivileged groups are othered since the system that oppresses one group is likely to exercise power on other groups, too. This system of domination in the case of *Songbirds* is the patriarchal system. Petra acknowledges that there is a system that has created different roles in the society she lives in, with women being “tucked away, wrapped up safely in [their] domestic routines” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 176). She realizes that the freedom of one person depends on the “servitude of another” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 177). Therefore, it is the same system that “enslaves” women, who would only be free if they enslaved another group of women, in this case, the maids. This idea is expressed by Gruen (1993) when she explains the aims of ecofeminism:

Ecofeminists [...] attempt to establish a different system of values in which the normative category of ‘other’ (animals, people of color, ‘Third World’ people, the

lower classes, etc.) is reevaluated. By recognizing that the exploitation that occurs as a result of establishing power over one group is unlikely to be confined to that group only, ecofeminists are committed to a reexamination and rejection of all forms of domination. (Gruen, 1993, p. 80)

In this sense, the domination, exploitation, and murder of some foreign domestic workers, the theme of the protest described in *Songbirds* has a wider scope. Women march to the Presidential Palace in order to be “visible” and demand those holding power to “notice” them. Their banners read “‘Misogyny and Racism Must Stop’, ‘End discrimination towards women and foreigners’ and ‘We sacrifice our lives’” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 343). What is written in the banners is not just an outcry against the instrumentalization of the maids; at the same time, it is a protest against the subordination and discrimination of women. Furthermore, it is an attempt to vocalize the existence of racism and a call to stop it. Therefore, the whole system represented by the Presidential Palace, is called to “hear” what those “othered” have to say. Although not openly described as “oppressive”, in ecofeminist terms, it can be argued that the system represented by the presidential institution and the authorities supporting it, such as the police, can be described as classist and racist. As Stephanie Lahar (1993) points out:

Oppression and repression are sustained by individuals and institutions that are also most often sexist and heterosexist, racist and classist, as well as exploitative of the natural world. Invisibility and violence are strangely and intimately related; refusing to perceive or acknowledge another person is one end of a continuum whose other is murder and genocide. (Lahar, 1993, p. 93)

The invisibility mentioned in the above excerpt by Lahar is evident in the perception of the “other” in *Songbirds*. This invisibility is expressed on several occasions throughout the novel. Nisha does not “see” herself when she is playing “I Spy” with Aliko during an outing in the mountains. She is asked to find something beginning with the letter N. She looks around her and after mentioning several items, she pretends that she cannot figure out that it is her own name that she must guess. Aliko is very surprised that Nisha cannot “see” herself. She tells Nisha that she “saw everything” however, she could not see her own self. (Lefteri, 2021, p. 171). This in a way, proves that Nisha chooses to be invisible when she is with her employer. She is aware that unlike Aliko, who is an innocent child and does not pretend, Petra does not see Nisha. Therefore, in Petra’s presence, Nisha accepts her

invisibility. Similarly, the maids helping the Cypriot women in the home doing various jobs are invisible since no one is interested in them as individuals. This idea is supported by the outcry of the maids during the protests following the murders. They chant saying that they are human beings, having their own pasts and futures, and that they have voices, too (Lefteri, 2021, p. 347). The fact that nobody pays attention to them or considers them to be of equal status to the locals is expressed by the way the murderer approaches his victims. Based on the account he gave to the police, he was not interested in learning his victims' names, so he never asked the names of two of his victims. When he confessed to the murders, he said that he targeted these women because it was easier to capture them, and that nobody would look for them, therefore, he thought he would not be caught (Lefteri, 2021, p. 339).

Based on Lahar's ideas mentioned above that patriarchal and oppressive systems support racist, sexist, and all kinds of exploitative attitudes which link invisibility with violence and extermination, it can be argued that the invisibility of the maids proves the existence of such an oppressive system in *Songbirds*. However, this system is not just visible through the attitude towards the maids. It has roots that affect the local population, which used to be a British colony. Indeed, according to Lahar (1993), "[...] history has rendered women and most non-European, nonprivileged people invisible or despicable, destroying identities and cultures" (p. 93). It is this ideology supporting this exact history that has destroyed the identities of the underprivileged, or the colonized. This is expressed by Yannis when he talks about how he and Nisha share the same feelings about the occupier of their native lands. He mentions the existence of tales passed down by older generations, the fact that their land and culture were stolen and that there had been a fight for freedom and identity (Lefteri, 2021, p. 91).

As Lahar (1993) points out, "Invisibility and, ultimately, violence happen most easily within a short-sighted and fragmentary mindset that is isolated from the existence and needs of others, qualities that characterize a modern, reductionist, and patriarchal intellectual and scientific tradition" (p. 96). This short-sightedness can be extended to the treatment of all underprivileged groups as well as nature. This is because based on this mindset, violence does not just target women and all entities marked as others but towards nature too. In *Songbirds*, as in the *Island of Missing Trees*, the land of the colonized is used for the benefit of the powerful. In both novels, nature is "mined", exploited, and abused. When the resources are depleted, the locals are left to deal with the results of the abuse. In both novels,

there is a mention of the mines in which the local people died of silicosis. In *Songbirds*, it is not just the deaths of the workers who died in the mines that exemplify the abuse caused by the powerful. Nature is abused and left to die, too. The remains of the copper mines lead to the creation of the toxic lake and the arid land around it (Lefteri, 2021, p. 318). In Sri Lanka a similar situation takes place as the occupying British powers in the name of industrialization and development, exploit the land by mining precious stones. In a similar way to Cyprus, workers die in the mines. Nisha's husband dies following a collapse of the land in the gem mine. The powerful system that creates such jobs is the same system that leads to the destruction of the natural environment. As mentioned in *Songbirds*, the mines were located in an area near a river. The foliage along the banks of the river was destroyed to expose the earth. There the earth was muddy, and men had to go down mineshafts to bring out the precious stones (Lefteri, 2021, p. 227). As in the *Island of Missing Trees*, in *Songbirds*, the earth is presented as an entity that is exploited and mined by those who have power, leaving behind destruction and death.

Together with nature, the nonhuman animal, women, and underprivileged groups are utilized and degraded by patriarchy and those holding power. As mentioned above, those that are inferior are also invisible. In Nisha's case, she is invisible to herself and her employer. As an invisible entity, she does not speak throughout the novel. The reader gets glimpses of her through the narration of her employer Petra and her lover Yannis. At the end of the novel, following the protests after the murders, Nisha speaks through her letters in her diary. However, as an invisible person, does she have a voice?

As the underprivileged other, Nisha can be considered a subaltern, and based on Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "the subaltern cannot speak". Spivak (2010) asserts that even if the subaltern is given a "chance" to speak, she would not know how to express the fact that she is exploited. In Spivak's words, "The woman is doubly in shadow" (p. 258). In *Songbirds* as victims of exploitation of a system of power, the voice of the female domestic worker represented by Nisha is only heard through her lover's and her employer's narration.

Nisha is given a chance to speak only in the end, through her letters in her diary, addressing her daughter. Even when writing to her daughter, Nisha does not speak about the unpleasant realities of her life as a domestic worker but rather asks her daughter to wait. "Be patient", she writes, "Reality and truth need time to unravel" (Lefteri, 2021, p. 358). Although Nisha has the opportunity to speak about her oppression and her hardships she

does not do so. What prevents her from speaking? It can be claimed that Nisha and all the oppressed maids are objects, or “others” in a society displaying ideologies of patriarchy and capitalism. In this society, which used to be occupied by the British imperial power, the “other” is the non-Cypriot female domestic worker who helps at home and is ignored by her boss. As Spivak (2010) points out, ignoring the subaltern is, in a way, a continuation of the imperialist project (p. 271). In *Songbirds*, the middle class represented by Petra and particularly by the Kostas couple, contributes to the continuation of the imperialist project pointed out by Spivak. This is a society where the middle class can afford a domestic worker. This domestic worker is not local but foreign, usually Asian. For example, Petra has Nisha from Sri Lanka and Mr and Mrs Kostas have Binsa and Suneeya, both from Nepal. These employers have relations with the rich, living a life full of luxuries. Petra gets invited to the Kostas’ mansion because she is deemed worthy since she has connections with the rich and famous because of her work (Lefteri, 2021, p. 140). In this capitalist society, as if supporting the continuation of the imperialist project, the maids are owned by their employers. For example, Petra calls Nisha “her girl”, and Mrs Kostas does not allow her maids to leave the house because they might “be led astray” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 142). Mrs Kostas is so controlling that she makes sure that the two women do not have any friends. Other maids or women coming from countries to become servants of the locals are also ignored. One of them who works for the tavern opposite Yannis’ house, is heard singing but is totally ignored by those drinking in the tavern. “She was merely background noise” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 57).

In such an environment, it can be argued that a maid is clearly “othered”, and as a female subaltern “captured” by the elite or the wealthy locals, she cannot speak, she can only become “background noise”. In Spivak’s (2010) words, “[...] if you are poor, black and female you get it in three ways” (p. 266). Therefore, in *Songbirds*, the domestic workers, who are poor, mainly non-white, and female are discriminated against and othered, having no words to express themselves individually, telling their own stories. Instead, at the end, the chant, trying to speak as a single voice as if there are one homogenous entity. Nisha is heard after her death, through her letters to her daughter. However, the ignored subaltern has no past for the elite people. Petra for example does not want to learn anything about Nisha’s life when they meet (Lefteri, 2021, p. 244). As Spivak (2010) asserts, “[...] the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow” (p. 257). Based on Spivak’s argument on the female subaltern’s inability to speak, it can be claimed that these women do not know the language they need to use to express their

exploitation while emphasizing the fact that they are being “othered” even when they are given the chance to speak (p. 258). The immigrant domestic workers are far from expressing their mistreatment by their employers. That time has not arrived yet. As Nisha concludes in her journal, “Reality and truth need time to unravel” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 358).



## CONCLUSION

This thesis has explored Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees* and Christy Lefteri's *Songbirds* by using Mikhail Bakhtin's perspective on novelistic discourse as an umbrella theory. With the guidance of his theory of the novel, which as a genre, he describes as having a variety of styles and forms when considering speech and voice, it can be concluded that both novels provide enough evidence to prove the applicability of his theory (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 261). As he points out, a novel is made up of different narrative techniques and styles that may include semiliterary and everyday narration (p. 262). He provides details stating that incorporating various styles creates the uniqueness of the novel as a genre. He goes on to define it as "[...] a diversity of social speech types (sometimes even diversity of languages) and a diversity of individual voices, artistically organized" (p. 262).

Based on the above definition of the novel, what Bakhtin considers as polyphony and heteroglossia becomes very relevant. The plurality of social voices that emerge are closely related to his concept of polyphony. He explains by stating that this polyphony or multiplicity of voices is established thanks to heteroglossia: these are different languages which are used in a society. The incorporation of "[...] authorial speech, the speeches of narrators, inserted genres, the speech of characters", all contribute to the creation of the heteroglot novel (p. 263). This way, according to Bakhtin, different social voices emerge, disclosing the links and interrelationships among them. He asserts that these links exist due to an inherent feature of the utterance and language, which he calls dialogism. He focuses on the utterance as he believes that it "brush[es] up against thousands of living dialogic threads [...]" (p. 276). He suggests that an utterance is part of a dialogue. It is in dialogue since an utterance expects an answer and while doing so it is also influenced by the anticipated answer (p. 280). Therefore, the utterance of a character in the novel is in dialogue with the utterances of the other characters. Through this dialogic relation, the utterance provides the means through which characters and narrators can be heard. Their voices express their ideologies, which Bakhtin calls "ideologemes" (p. 333). These ideologemes emerge in the novel displaying different viewpoints.

Using Bakhtin's concepts as a guide, this study has revealed that there are common ideologies, which emerge from both *The Island of Missing Trees* and *Songbirds*. These ideologies are explained by using ecocriticism and ecofeminism. Specifically, in *The Island*

of *Missing Trees*, nature is violated as humans are presented as masters, having all the rights to its exploitation. Through the voices of the fig tree, Kostas, Ada, and other characters, it can be understood that humans act in an anthropocentric way. This behaviour leads to the destruction of animals and plants, which play a vital role in the continuation of life. Humans act in ignorance, just like the actors of a Greek or Shakespearean tragedy, and do not fully understand the results of their actions (Rueckert, 1996, p. 113).

In *The Island of Missing Trees*, the fig tree describes vividly how plants, insects, and even small mammals are ignored and often considered vermin by humans. It also provides information about the ways humans instrumentalize them for their benefit. Songbirds are caught and traded. Bats die in their thousands, but people do not care at all for their death. Trees are destroyed during wars. The earth is mined and exploited. In this thesis, such human actions and behaviours are explained through ecocritical theories, which state that anthropocentrism is responsible for the destruction of nature. Humans believe that they are superior to all other organisms, so they deny them agency. The abuse of nature, according to Clark (2019), is the product of different oppressive political systems (p. 3). Therefore, the exploitation and abuse of animals and plants as expressed through the viewpoints of the fig tree clearly demonstrates that nature is seen as an inferior other.

Analysing Elif Shafak's novel through an ecocritical lens shows that the anthropocentric behaviour displays the "humanity/nature" dualism, expressed by Garrard (2012). This irrational human behaviour which is explained by the young character Ada, exemplifies the belief that humans see themselves as separate from and superior to nature. Still, this anthropocentrism which creates this dualism, is also the source of oppression towards the entities that are considered close to nature. In ecofeminist terms, these are women and the groups that are associated with nature (Garrard, 2012, p. 26). Glotfelty (1996) argues that there is a connection between the oppressive political systems, the oppression of women, and the domination of nature (p. xxiv). In *The Island of Missing Trees*, Meryem is oppressed by the patriarchal society in which she was raised and continues to live in. She is considered to be inferior to men as she is controlled by societal norms and traditions.

Based on ecofeminist theory, the other group that is perceived as inferior other is the gay couple, since they are perceived as closer to the female and therefore, associated with nature. They are stereotyped and othered. As Plumwood (2002) asserts, this behaviour

towards these groups stems from the belief that the inferior other has to be mastered (p.118). In *The Island of Missing Trees*, Yusuf and Yiorgos are intimidated and ultimately murdered as a result of androcentric behaviour. According to Legler (1997), patriarchy justifies androcentric actions (p. 228). It links anything associated with the female and nature, and because it considers it an inferior other, it abuses it. In this sense, nature, animals, women, and the stereotyped gay couple are others who are exploited, abused, and finally, murdered by patriarchy.

This thesis has also investigated the others that are revealed through the ideologies emerging from Cristy Lefteri's novel *Songbirds*. The ideologemes, as Bakhtin (1981) defines the worldviews of the characters and narrators in a novel, display nature, animals, women and the foreign domestic workers as inferior others. In Bakhtinian terms, this polyphonic and heteroglot novel, allows for the voices of the employer Petra, the lover Yannis and those who destroy nature to be clearly heard. The omniscient narrator provides factual information related to changes happening in nature and specifically around the toxic lake. Through the dialogic nature of the novel, even the voices of long-lost characters can be heard. For instance, through Yannis' utterances, we hear his grandfather's voice, telling him to respect nature. Incorporating different genres such as text messaging and a journal, as well as a variety of discourses like baby talk, and integrating Sri Lankan and Greek food are just a few examples of how heteroglossia has entered *Songbirds*.

The viewpoints that emerge through this polyphonic and heteroglot novel have been analysed in this thesis by using ecocritical theories. Through Yannis' and Seraphim's utterances and actions, nature's instrumentalization is clearly evident. Songbirds are illegally captured, killed, traded and sold, with poachers earning incredibly high amounts of money. The mouflon ovis, a rare animal which symbolizes nature, is killed, too. This destruction of animals displays the domination of humans, who according to ecocritical theory, behave in an anthropocentric way. As Clark (2011) points out, in anthropocentrism, only humans and their interests matter (p. 19). In this sense, songbirds are considered a resource that is continuously exploited, becoming victims of anthropocentric behaviour.

By using ecocritical theory, this study has shown that non-living things, which are part of nature and the environment are also exploited. The toxic lake in *Songbirds* is the byproduct of a mine, which was used by the imperial and capitalist powers that controlled Cyprus for years. This seemingly dead lake and its surroundings have agency, despite the

opposing views of those who act in an anthropocentric manner. In fact, material ecocritics Iovino & Opperman (2014) focus on the way non-living substances “intra-act”, asserting that humans have no superiority over them. In reality, humans are “just part of the whole” (pp.4-7). They are matter themselves just like all the matter around them as proposed by Bennett (2010). The little bird, which is rescued by Yannis, is part of this attempt to reveal the close connection of all species, through isomorphism, a term used by Bennett.

Through an ecofeminist analysis of *Songbirds*, this study has shown that the system/ideology that oppresses women is one and the same as that which oppresses everything related to the female, including nature. In *Songbirds*, other than the illegal trade of the birds, another form of oppression is evident: that of women and female immigrant workers. Through the utterances of the narrators and characters, it is revealed that Nisha, the domestic worker from Sri Lanka, and many more Asian women are considered to be commodities, “merchandise, not people” (Lefteri, 2021, p. 205). They are treated as property, with their “owners” denying them basic rights. They cannot express themselves freely, until the end of the novel where Nisha “speaks” through the letters in her diary to her daughter Kumari. The rest of the immigrant domestic workers only raise their voices during the protest after several of them are murdered. Throughout the novel, these degraded women are silenced. Just like the animals and nature, these women are the servants of the androcentric, patriarchal system. In such a system, they are the inferior other as they are invisible, in other words, “the subaltern” who, according to Spivak’s view on the subaltern, cannot speak.

To conclude, a Bakhtinian analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees* and *Songbirds*, using the concepts of heteroglossia, polyphony, and dialogism has provided a framework pointing to the role of the utterance in novelistic discourse. This role has been crucial in revealing the ideologies existing in the novels. The insight provided by the Bakhtinian analysis has been useful in demonstrating how the ideologies are linked to oppression and those views which consider nature, women, and foreign domestic workers as inferior others. Having shown through ecocritical theories the relationship between the human, animals, nature, and nonhuman material entities, I hope this thesis can contribute to the field by inspiring more studies that will give prominence and value to the inherent connections that exist among all the inhabitants of the biosphere. After all, to use Bennett’s and Commoner’s viewpoints combined, we are all matter that is interconnected.

## REFERENCES

- Ashcroft, B. Griffiths, G., Tiffin, H. (2007). *Post-Colonial Studies, The Key Concepts*. Routledge, New York.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (1981). *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M.M. Bakhtin* (M. Holquist, Ed.; C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, M. M. (2004). *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (C. Emerson & M. Holquist, Eds.; V. W. McGee, Trans.). University of Texas Press.
- Bennett, A. & Royle, N. (2004). *Introduction to Literature, Criticism and Theory*. Pearson Education Limited, UK.
- Bennett, J. (2010). *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Duke University Press Books.
- Birkeland, J. (1993). Ecofeminism: Linking Theory and Practice. In G. Gaard (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (pp.13-59). Temple University Press.
- Booth, W. C. (1982). Freedom of Interpretation: Bakhtin and the Challenge of Feminist Criticism. *Critical Inquiry*, 9(1), 45–76. <https://doi.org/10.1086/448188>
- Brandist, C. (2002). *The Bakhtin Circle: Philosophy, Culture and Politics*. Pluto Press.
- Buell, L. (2005). *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*. Blackwell.
- Clark, T. (2011). *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*. Cambridge University Press.
- Clark, T. (2019). *The Value of Ecocriticism*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gaard, G. (1993). Living Interconnections with Animals and Nature. In G. Gaard (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (pp.1-12). Temple University Press.
- Garrard, G. (2012). *Ecocriticism (The New Critical Idiom)* (2nd ed.). Routledge.

- Glotfelty, C. (n.d.). *ASLE » Definitions of Ecocriticism Archive*. ASLE - Association for the Study of Literature and Environment. Retrieved January 25, 2023, from <https://www.asle.org/explore-our-field/ecocriticism-and-environmental-humanities/definitions-of-ecocriticism-archive/>
- Glotfelty, C., & Fromm, H. (1996). *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. University of Georgia Press.
- Goulimari, P. (2015). *Literary Criticism and Theory: From Plato to Postcolonialism*. Routledge.
- Gruen, L. (1993). Dismantling Oppression: An Analysis of the Connection Between Women and Animals. In G. Gaard (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (pp.60-90). Temple University Press.
- Hay Festival. (2021, October 1). *The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak | Hay Festival Book of the Month SEPTEMBER 2021* [Video]. YouTube. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SZIrKkohSCK>
- Howarth, W. (1996). Some Principles of Ecocriticism. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 69–91). University of Georgia Press.
- [Interview by E. Hu]. (n.d.). A TED Original Podcast. Retrieved April 8, 2023, from [https://www.ted.com/talks/elif\\_shafak\\_the\\_island\\_of\\_missing\\_trees](https://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_island_of_missing_trees)
- Iovino, S., & Oppermann, S. (2014). Introduction: Stories Come to Matter. In S. Iovino & S. Oppermann (Eds.), *Material Ecocriticism* (pp. 1–17). Indiana University Press.
- Lahar, S. (1993). Roots: Rejoining Natural and Social History. In G. Gaard (Ed.), *Ecofeminism: Women, Animals, Nature* (pp. 91-117). Temple University Press.
- Lefteri, C. (2021). *Songbirds*. Manilla Press.
- Legler, G. T. (1997). Ecofeminist Literary Criticism. In K. J. Warren (Ed.), *Ecofeminism Women, Culture, Nature* (pp. 227–238). Indiana University Press.
- Lodge, D. (1990). *After Bakhtin: Essays on Fiction and Criticism* (1st ed.). Routledge.

- McDowell, M. J. (1996). Bakhtinian Road to Ecological Insight. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 371–391). University of Georgia Press.
- Mondo, C. (2022). Ecocritical Hues in Christy Lefteri’s “Songbirds”: The Dissolution of the Human/Nonhuman Distinction. *English Studies at NBU*, 8(2), 301–313.  
<https://doi.org/10.33919/esnbu.22.2.9>
- Morris, P. (Ed.). (1994). *The Bakhtin Reader: Selected Writings of Bakhtin, Medvedev, Voloshinov*. Edward Arnold.
- Murphy, P. D. (2023). Introduction. In D. A. Vakoch (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* (1st ed.) (pp. 1-14). Routledge.
- Oppermann, S. (2014). Ecological Modernism to Material Criticism. In S. Iovino & S. Oppermann (Eds.), *Material Ecocriticism* (pp. 21–36). Indiana University Press.
- Plumwood, V. (1986) Ecofeminism: An Overview and Discussion of Positions and Arguments, *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 64:sup1, 120-138,  
<https://doi-org.lproxy.yeditepe.edu.tr/10.1080/00048402.1986.9755430>
- Plumwood, V. (2002). *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. Routledge.
- Rapaport, H. (2011). *The Literary Theory Toolkit: A Compendium of Concepts and Methods*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Renfrew, A. (2015). *Mikhail Bakhtin* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Rueckert, W. (1996). Literature and Ecology, an Experiment in Ecocriticism. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 105–123). University of Georgia Press.
- Shafak, E. (n.d.). *The Island of Missing Trees* [Video]. TED Talks.  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/elif\\_shafak\\_the\\_island\\_of\\_missing\\_trees](https://www.ted.com/talks/elif_shafak_the_island_of_missing_trees)
- Shafak, E. (2021). *The Island of Missing Trees*. Penguin.

- Shakespeare, W. (n.d.). *King Lear* (B. Mowat & P. Werstein, Eds.). The Folger Shakespeare. <https://www.folger.edu/explore/shakespeares-works/king-lear/read/>
- Spivak, G. C. (2010). "Can the Subaltern Speak?" revised edition, from the "History" Chapter of Critique of Postcolonial Reason. In R. C. Morris (Ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (pp. 21-78). Columbia University Press.
- Spivak, G. C. (2010). Appendix: "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In R. C. Morris (Ed.), *Can the Subaltern Speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea* (pp. 237-291). Columbia University Press.
- Todorov, T. (1984). *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle (Theory & History of Literature, Vol. 13)* (W. Godzich, Trans.). University of Minnesota Press.
- Vakoch, D. A. (2023). Preface. In D. A. Vakoch (Ed.), *The Routledge Handbook of Ecofeminism and Literature* (1st ed.) (pp. xxv-xxvi). Routledge.
- Vakoch, D. A., & Mickey, S. (Eds.). (2018). *Literature and Ecofeminism: Intersectional and International Voices*. Taylor & Francis.
- Warren, K. J. (1997). Taking Empirical Data Seriously: An Ecofeminist Philosophical Perspective. In K. J. Warren (Ed.), *Ecofeminism Women, Culture, Nature* (pp. 3–20). Indiana University Press.
- White Jr., L. (1996). The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis. In C. Glotfelty & H. Fromm (Eds.), *The Ecocriticism Reader, Landmarks in Literary Ecology* (pp. 3–14). University of Georgia Press.