

Disclosing the “Other(s)” in Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* and Christy Lefteri’s *Songbirds*

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Preprint

Abstract

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 analyze 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: Ecocriticism; ecofeminism; heteroglossia; other; the island of missing trees; songbirds

INTRODUCTION

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, other than nature, women, the nonhuman, and underprivileged female immigrant workers are depicted as inferior 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).

RESULTS

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory on language and how language affects the understanding or interpretation of a novel are 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.

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.

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).

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).

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.

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).

Shortly, 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.

In a broad sense, ecocriticism identifies the human species as the source of the environmental crisis. One of its fields, deep ecology, 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). Glotfelty (1996) calls ecofeminism a hybrid theory of ecocriticism, describing it as “a theoretical discourse whose theme is the link between the oppression of women and the domination of nature” (p. xxiv).

Using Bakhtin’s theory of language and the novel, ecofeminism and ecocriticism, this study analyses two contemporary novels: Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees* and Christy Lefteri’s *Songbirds*. It looks at the narrators’ and characters’ utterances and how heteroglossia, polyphony, and dialogism relate to the novel. With the guidance of these concepts, the viewpoints that emerge are analysed using ecocriticism and ecofeminism. When these two theories are applied, the study claims that nature and what is considered nature-related is being “othered”. The analysis reveals that nature, nonhuman entities, women, underprivileged groups, and immigrant female workers are depicted as inferior ‘others’.

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. 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).

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.

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).

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). 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”.

It can be argued that based on patriarchal cultures claiming that “the female” is “nature” and “nature” is female, the 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).

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.

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.

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).

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).

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.

The actions of Yiannis and Seraphim 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).

To reveal the others in *Songbirds*, ecofeminism proves very useful. When explaining ecofeminism, Val Plumwood (1986) 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. For instance, 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.

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. For example, 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).

DISCUSSION

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. This idea which links the utterance and context has been helpful to

analyse character and narrator speech in *The Island of Missing Trees* and in *Songbirds*. Bakhtinian terms have also proved useful in disclosing the ideologies that certain characters and narrators hold.

A Bakhtinian analysis of *The Island of Missing Trees* suggests that the novel is polyphonic as the author has employed more than one narrator to tell the story of Kostas and Defne. In the novel, the voices of those who are usually silenced are also heard. Namely, trees, plants, small mammals, and insects are given a voice. The novel is heteroglot not only because of the incorporation of multiple voices, but also due to the insertion of genres such as letters, menus, etc. This heteroglot and polyphonic novel reveals viewpoints that are analysed using ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The results of the analysis disclose values that exist in a patriarchal society.

In *The Island of Missing Trees* there are several characters who hold the viewpoint that nature is in the service of humanity and the idea that consuming animals and ignoring their suffering is part of life. One of them is Panagiota, Kostas' mother. She believes that humans should eat animals, and a person who feels for the dying animals is "weak". 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).

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.

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).

An analysis of one of the characters, namely 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. Therefore, when looked through an ecofeminist lens, Meryem is clearly depicted as ‘other’ since her actions are controlled by the patriarchal system.

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).

Just like in *The Island of Missing Trees*, in *Songbirds*, the ideologies that emerge following a Bakhtinian analysis depict nature, nonhuman entities, women and underprivileged groups as inferior others.

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.

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).

Underprivileged groups are also othered in *Songbirds*. Female immigrant workers are likened to 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. 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).

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 that 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 analyzed 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.

Preprint

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