

AALBORG University



**Master's Programme:
Development and International Relations**

THESIS TITLE:

**ALTERNATIVE DISCOURSE IN INTERNATIONAL
RELATIONS: UNDERSTANDING IMMIGRANT IDENTITY
THROUGH HISTORICAL FICTION**

AUTHOR:

LAVINIA-ROXANA GHENT

SUPERVISOR:

TAMIRACE FAKHOURY

DATE: MAY 2023

Table of Contents

Abstract	5
I. INTRODUCTION.....	6
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Research objectives and research question.....	7
1.3 Study Rationale and research gap.....	7
1.4 Research hypotheses	8
II. CONTEXTUALISATION	9
2.1. Brief recollection of events.....	9
2.2. (Trans)generational trauma and its manifestation within the Cypriot war context	10
III. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY	11
3.1. Chapter outline.....	11
3.2. Research design – theory-guided case study	12
3.3. Research methods	12
3.4. Data validity and data analysis	13
3.5. Limitations.....	14
3.6. Researcher’s positionality	16
3.7. Research audience	17
IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW	18
4.1. Preamble.....	18
4.2. Theory choice	18
4.3. Brief historical considerations of Poststructuralism.....	19
4.4. Poststructuralism employment in understanding IR.....	20
4.5. Conceptual framework for explaining identity and truth	21
4.6. Novel writing as a form of alternative discourse in IR.....	24
4.7. Poststructuralism, language, and the central issue of identity	26
V. ANALYSIS	28
5.1. Preamble.....	28
Part I: The role of fictional writings in understanding past and immigrant identity in IR...28	
5.2. Chapter outline.....	28
5.3. Soft diplomacy exerted through the work of fictional writers	29
5.4. Understanding the past in IR through historical fiction	29
Part II: Case study: Novel analysis	31
5.5. Chapter outline.....	31
5.6. Novel choice: The Island of Missing Trees	32

5.7.	The author’s affinity for international politics	32
5.8.	Novel’s structure, plot, and characters	33
5.9.	Interpretation of language in contouring identity and generational trauma	39
5.10.	Past, post-memory, truth, and identity quest in novel.....	43
5.11.	The power of historical narrative and subjectivity in cultural identity formation.....	44
5.12.	Identity articulation and Otherness in the novel	47
VI.	<i>DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS</i>	50
6.1.	Chapter preamble	50
6.2.	Findings on novel writing as alternative discourse in IR.....	50
6.3.	Findings on the indeterminacy of identity and truth, shaped by narratives	52
VII.	<i>CONCLUSION</i>	55
VIII.	<i>BIBLIOGRAPHY</i>	58
IX.	<i>APPENDIX</i>	66

List of abbreviations

EU. – European Union

e.g. – for example

Ibid. – Ibidem

IR – International Relations

No. – number

p. – page

pp. – page

Vol. – volume

Alternative discourse in International Relations: understanding immigrant identity through historical fiction

Abstract

This paper aims to analyse through a post-structuralist lens the narrative potential that historical fiction has in understanding relevant aspects of international relations, such as the fluidity of identity of migrants fleeing war. *In concreto*, the article focuses on the analysis of a recent novel having as a central theme the diffident formation of migrant's identity and the generational trauma generated by the 1974 civil war in Cyprus. The novel „*The Island of missing Trees*”, written by Elif Shafak is just another sample of historical fiction, which aims to shed light on the psychological outcomes that war has on people's identity, as well as to draw attention to the indeterminacy of historical truth as it is created by official narrative discourses. The study converges to the conclusion that novel writing represents a form of alternative discourse, when it deals with relevant aspects which aim to mirror global issues, to signal their implications.

Key words: Poststructuralism, immigrant identity, (trans)generational trauma, novel writing, historical fiction, alternative discourse, truth, narrative.

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Since ancient times, the interactions specific to the concept which nowadays we call „international relations” included various forms, sometimes exceeding the classic political sphere of foreign affairs. Although a modern concept, International Relations (IR) has always been an interdisciplinary ground „that combined a variety of disciplines in its creation and development” (Ashworth, 2009, p.16).

Faced with the underlying feeling of uncertainty determined by global politics, even involuntarily we end up by exploring ‘the relationship between fact and fiction, trying to unravel how are these two entangled or to find out how a certain thing can be seen as a fact (Sungju, 2015, p.362). We start looking for alternative truths of historical events, which are recognized from the beginning as subjective and which we conventionally accept. If the history is a fable, we all agreed upon, the path to ‘alternative truths’ is always open to be explored, however, as we will see, historical truth must not be confounded with its interpretation.

One of these alternative ways of giving interpretation to historical truth is found in novel writing, in different genres. Historical novel, ethnobiography, historical fiction, speculative fiction or science fiction are different ways to look at the past, present, or future world and shed lights on its issues. After all, „the conjuring up the past requires art as well as information” (White, 2005, p.149).

The political potential of novel writing has already been explored in the scholarship of IR (Edkins, 2023, p.281) Intercultural aspects have always taken an essential place in international relations and diplomacy, often spurring a unison interest of representatives of the cultural world, be they athletes, artists, or writers from anywhere in the world. Over time, the world of international relation and its development, was depicted through poems, prose, or dramaturgy, from past to present and leaning into the future.

This research aims to show, through a case study analysis, that beyond the mainstream theories in IR used by scholars in search of explaining historical truths, one could delve into an alternative, even cathartic way, to explore past events in a fictional universe often mirroring issues of the global reality. For this purpose, the paper will focus on analysing fluidity of immigrant multicultural identity and generational trauma caused by the Cypriot civil war of

1974, as depicted in the recent novel “*The Island of Missing Trees*” written by British-Turkish author Elif Shafak.

1.2 Research objectives and research question

Starting from the novel „The Island of Missing Trees” written by Elif Shafak, which explores the theme of identity and generational trauma experienced by those forced to abandon their war-ravaged homeland in Cyprus after the civil war, this paper aims to answer the following problem formulation:

How historical fiction, as alternative discourse in IR, contributes to the understanding of immigrant identity and generational trauma?

For this purpose, the power of historical narrative in Elif Shafak’s novel “*The Island of missing trees*” will be analysed through the cultural symbols and images it presents, to reveal the central theme of the novel: the identity of those who left and the way they relate to the blurred, obscure events of the past.

1.3 Study Rationale and research gap

The idea of proposing this research subject took shape while coming across an article of a teacher in international relation. Professor Cynthia Boaz challenged her students to identify application of IR theories in fictional writings and recorded the observations of this activity in her article “*How Speculative Fiction Can Teach about Gender and Power in International Politics: A Pedagogical Overview*”. Fictional universes can be seen “as discrete units of analysis in which we see the operation of international relations theory” (Boaz, 2020).

Many fiction writers have shown interest in projecting the reality of global politics through their writings, sometimes even lamenting the reality or masking criticism behind the creative mix of words, themes, plot, and characters. It has already been recognised that in the field of IR, narrative approaches and alternative ways of writing have received expanding attention by recent scholarship (Sungju, 2015, p.361).

The liaison between fictional writings and IR, although it plays an important role in shaping alternative discourses about the world, often seems neglected by scholars in international

relations. The literature of IR focuses most of the time on the analysis of Hard politics through mainstream theories, although throughout history, international relations have not only been limited to this. Soft power or soft diplomacy plays a crucial complementary role in the dynamics of international relations, weighing sometimes enormously in making political decisions, as well as in the consolidating symbols of a culture. Moreover, when it comes to the issue of immigrant identity, although it has been recognised that the process of identity formation has important implication in the psychological well-being and adjustment of refugees, the identity formation and resolution of identity distress of refugees or immigrants have not been properly considered by mainstream theories (Ertorer, 2014, p. 269).

This research aims to highlight that beyond what is generally accepted as the reality of international relations or historical truth, one could find an alternative way to explore aspects of past world in a fictional universe often projecting the global reality, by moaning caustic issues as much as the psychological traces these leave on people's identity. The paper will focus on the formation of emigrational multicultural identity, an identity questioned by the absence of knowledge of the past and the anguish of lacking means to verify the veracity of events. The real, contemporary problem of the division in Cyprus as reflected in Shafak's novel deserves attention, since currently, Cyprus is an accepted state in the European Union, despite the ethnic separation between its inhabitants by a physical border.

Moreover, the novel '*The Island of Missing Trees*', although relatively recently published, it has been discussed by numerous reviews and reactions. However, possibly, this is the first analysis of immigrant identity and generational trauma, as they are outlined in the novel, seen through a poststructuralist lens.

1.4 Research hypotheses

Drawing upon what was presented in the previous sections regarding the study rationale and research objectives, the research assumptions are also implicitly stated. The hypotheses this thesis seeks to examine are the followings:

- 1. Novel writing represents an alternative discourse which can illuminate realities in world politics.*

2. *The power of historical narrative has the potential to shed light on complex facets of IR phenomena including international migration and migrants' trajectories and identities.*

II. CONTEXTUALISATION

2.1. Brief recollection of events

Cyprus is a European country currently divided by an internal border, which makes its capital Nicosia, the sole remaining divided capital in the world (Oktay, 2007 apud Volkan & Hadjimarkou, 2022, p. 989). For more than half a century the island has been exposed to multiple conflicts, culminating in inter-ethnic violence, bloody civil war in which human beings lost their lives. Displacement, division, and trauma were experienced by people who either stayed or fled the path of war. Migration and conflict were considered as „important diachronic elements in the history of Cyprus” (Demetriou, 2019, p. 4).

The Mediterranean Island has a history strongly marked by conflict. Inhabited by a majority Greek Cypriot population (around 80%) and only 18-20% Turkish Cypriots, from the year 1878, it came under British control as a colony, until 1960 (Hoffmeister, 2006, p.1). Around 1950, the Greek Cypriot majority wished to remove the island from the British control and desired the union with Greece, movement known under the name of *Enosis* (Imperial War Museums, n.d). A Republic since 1960, The Island of Cyprus had further to confront the inter-ethnic clashes between Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots, which led to bloody outcomes culminating with the Civil war in 1974 (*Ibid.*). In July 1974, a coup was orchestrated against the President of Cyprus, Archbishop Makarios III, and the Greek military coup aiming to unite the island with Greece (operation called '*enosis*') collided with the Turkish invasion of the island and determined its division between Northern Cyprus and Southern Cyprus (Smith, 2014). In 1983, the north part of the island declared its independence under the name of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, while the south part kept the title of the Republic of Cyprus and enjoys international recognition (Volkan & Hadjimarkou, 2022, p. 989).

The conflicts led on the one hand to the displacement of the two ethnicities which settled separately in the North (Turkish-Cypriots) and the South (Greek-Cypriots) of the island (*Ibid.*), and on the other hand, to the exile and displacement of both Greek and Turkish Cypriots from

their homeland. A considerable number of both Turkish-Cypriot, and Greek-Cypriot population was displaced between 1960 and 1974 and a large number had to emigrate to other countries in the Commonwealth (Demetriou, 2019, p. 4-5). It was also estimated that this event is the long lasted internal displacement in Europe (Ergun, D., *et al.* 2008). In view of the events, the Cypriot conflict was considered “an identity-based conflict that challenged the international community for over 40 years” (Fisher, 2001, p. 307). The notion of ‘social protracted conflict’ in international dynamics, coined by Azar, emphasis on the fact that “such conflicts lay predominantly within and across rather than exclusively between states” where one of the preconditions for the escalation of these conflicts to high levels of intensity is the identity group – racial, religious, ethnic, cultural and others” and the relationship between the identity groups (Ramsbotham, 2005, p.114-115). Azar observed that historical factors in multicomunal societies very often lead to structural inequalities and differential access to political power, expressed by the domination of a group over another” (Azar, 1990 *apud* Fisher, 2001, p. 307).

Considering the situation of the state characterized by inter-division, it appears as a surprising compromise that the EU accepted Cyprus accession and even the derogation consisting in a suspension of the *acquis communautaire* in the northern part of the country, although in the view of the EU, The Green Line does not constitute an external border of the EU (Hoffmeister, 2006, p.198)

2.2. (Trans)generational trauma and its manifestation within the Cypriot war context

For a better understanding of the concepts used in the analysis, the following lines propose to offer a brief explanation of the notion of (trans)generational trauma.

In the assertion of some psychologists based on scientific studies of epigenetics, traumas can be written in the family DNA and transmitted generationally (Henriques, 2019; Gillespie, 2023). The lives of those who escaped unfortunate events were forever affected, but it seems that according to some studies, this did not stop only at their generation, certain psychological experiences being felt even two or three generations later (Henriques, 2019).

Trauma is strongly interconnected to the formation of one’s identity, since “trauma can alter the course of identity development and destabilise identity commitments” (Berman *et.al.*, 2020). Research showed that refugees resettled in third countries might be at risk of facing

identity distress, crisis, and its resolution, because “the resettlement process impaired the sense of temporal sameness and continuity, promoted confusion and crisis in identity, prolonged identity resolution, and stimulated distress concerning social and personal identity issues (work, career, values, group loyalties)” (Ertorer, 2014, p. 268). Moreover, people exposed to war-related incidents may show trauma-related symptoms, evident in difficulties dealing with the memories and the experiences from the war (Hunt, 2010 *apud* Henriques, 2019).

Another important psychological study examining the subliminal existence of war-related trauma in the Greek-Cypriot and Turkish-Cypriot communities concluded that “Cypriots, regardless of their ethnicity have been affected by many psychological burdens, including anxiety and trauma related symptoms due to the wars in Cyprus “(Volkan & Hadjimarkou, 2022, p. 989). In the study, participants from both parts of the country, representing different walks of life were selected, and the observed responses of participants indicated that traumatic psychopathology specific to the wars of Cyprus may still be present for Cypriots even after 50 years from the events (*Ibid.*).

Considering the context of the events and how they are felt years later after their ending, it comes as no surprise that most of the themes approached in the Turkish-Cypriot literature are related to transition from stability to instability, the feeling of physical and psychological loss, migration, or shattered identities (Katsigianni, 2019, p. 29)

III. METHODS AND METHODOLOGY

3.1. Chapter outline

This section aims to describe the methodology approached in conducting the research, together with the methods employed in the analysis of the problem formulation. The approach that contributed to the choice of data, their interpretation and validity is presented, to justify the data selection. Finally, the limitations of the research will be outlined, as well as the researcher’s positionality, along with a description of the audience to whom the present research is addressed.

3.2. Research design – theory-guided case study

I have appreciated a theory-guided case study methodology as being the most appropriate way to answer the problem formulation. Without bearing a single definition, case study has been explained as ‘a research methodology’, typically employed in social and life sciences, where “an intensive study about a person, a group of people or a unit”, is conducted, aiming to be generalised over several units (Gustafsson, 2017 *apud* Heale & Twycross, 2018, p.7). Another similar definition, narrower definition describes case study as "an in-depth study of a single unit (a relatively bounded phenomenon) where the scholar’s aim is to elucidate features of a larger class of similar phenomena” (Gerring, 2004, p. 341).

The single case study approach allows for an in-depth understanding of the selected subject, since the analysis was limited to a single specific phenomenon arising from a particular entity (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p.7), which in this case is the novel published for the first time in 2021. The motivation behind choosing a case study based on textual analysis of a novel lays in the conviction that it would have been impossible to answer the problem formulation without concretely use a sample of historical fiction which proves the existence of such alternative narratives in IR.

The analytical process of answering the problem formulation is conducted through textual analysis and library research consisting in a collection of books or scholarly articles. Novel analysis circumscribes to a Case study approach, where a sole sample of fiction is dissected to answer to the problem formulation. For this purpose, I used a primary source represented by the novel “*The Island of Missing Trees*” written by Elif Shafak, in completion to mainly secondary sources.

3.3. Research methods

The methods will combine analytical, qualitative, and descriptive research, by using qualitative data analysis. It aims to answer to the problem formulation by analysing through literary analysis how contemporary historical fiction contributes to the understanding of complex phenomena in IR, particularly the articulation of immigrational identity and generational trauma.

Literary analysis is a method which looks critically at a work of fiction to understand how the parts contribute to the whole, by considering relevant elements as context, plot, settings, characters, themes etc. (Texas A&M University Writing Center, n.d.). In literary analysis, an arguable claim about the text is identified and then connected with specific proofs of the text, by using diverse tools of language or so-called ‘literary devices’ as allusions, foreshadowing, metaphors, symbolism (*Ibid.*). This method helped me in identifying the problem formulation, by following the main leitmotifs/themes of the text: generational trauma and indeterminacy of identity and past. I used several reviews of the novel to cross-check and support my interpretations. Occasionally I made use of semiology and semiotics, while trying to analyse the text as „a semiologist by looking for the cultural values that are affirmed or reaffirmed in the text” (Belsey, 2002, p.26)

The work is conducted through deductive research, as it aims to apply an existing theory by testing how this theory is valid under certain circumstances. As explained by scholars the deductive research is corresponding to a so-called “hypothetico-deductive method” because, it starts with the researcher outlining “a hypothesis based on the theory, and then uses empirical methods to see whether it is confirmed or not” (Davies, 2007, p. 235).

3.4. Data validity and data analysis

The process of data collection used for this paper involves exclusively qualitative data, which were analysed in connection and with the purposes of answering to the problem formulation. *In concreto*, scholarly articles relevant for interdisciplinary studies were employed to explain how historical fiction can be recognised as an alternative discourse in IR, by shading light on the formation of immigrational identity and understanding of the generational trauma. For this purpose, I initially divided the data selection into three parts: **(1)** relevant data about novel/fiction writing in IR; **(2)** data regarding identity and trauma; **(3)** data selected from the novel.

I tried to keep a delimitation of data in the analysis, but many times the explanations overlap or support each other, for example in historical fiction in there is a relevant degree of indeterminacy of truth. But this was also reflected in the story from the novel, through the inability of the character Ada of directly accessing knowledge about the past. In the end, the chosen theory - Poststructuralism is one that brings together numerous inter-related concepts between which it is impossible to draw a blunt demarcation link. Poststructuralist theory at

work through textual analysis of the novel, search for fluid meanings around concepts as identity and truth.

Seminal conclusions were drawn from the analysis of the primary source, the novel „*The Island of Missing Trees*”, written by Elif Shafak, where I followed the main themes, leitmotifs, symbols, characters, and the course of events to understand more about how the identity of the immigrant who fled the war is constructed. Priorly, several reviews of the book were consulted, where the convergence was edifying about the novel. Through a love story which at its time was seen as forbidden, Elif Shafak draws attention towards a world marked by division, while exploring important themes as identity in postcolonial Cyprus, generational trauma, migration, and the feeling of belonging (Ross, 2021). Following the epic thread of the novel, we find that the psychology of the characters leads us to understanding coping mechanisms of a migrant, somehow estranged identity. The problem formulation arose from this very first action of reading reviews and studying the novel, by selecting the most relevant text samples which describe generational trauma and indeterminacy of historical truth, and how the formation of migrant’s identity is modulated under their influence.

Furthermore, I wanted to understand the author’s position regarding the main themes of the novel, therefore I watched different interviews where Elif Shafak talks about identity and multicultural belongings or how political narratives shape individual’s identity. Having the experience of reading previous novels by this author, I noticed that these themes are recurrent in her writings, as well as in her public speeches.

3.5. Limitations

Recognising limitation of any research as matter of academic fairness represents an important part, since the findings should be seen in the light of these limitations. As with most research results, this study is subject to several limitations, which will be presented below.

First and foremost, there might be a perceived limitation in a qualitative study which stems from the method employed itself. The use of qualitative methods was broadly discussed by scholars, as qualitative research „was linked to perceived weakness in quantitative research” and the perspective is largely influenced by the researcher’s own perception of the field being investigated” (Davies, 2007, p. 135). However, the same author recognised that both methods

provide valuable learning experience and represent legitimate ways to illuminate on social realities (*Ibid.*).

In continuation, another hypothesis I initially wanted to test had to be excluded, because it could not be irrefutably demonstrated by looking at a novel, as a single unit of analysis. The hypothesis refers to the fact that character Ada, through her psychological experiences, is representative for an extended category of people (migrants). After reading the novel, and necessarily in conjunction with the scholarly articles, at most we can conclude that through the construction of the characters, Elif Shafak manages to surprise characteristics that could be relevant for understanding the identity of immigrants who fled the war.

Of course, this limitation could stimulate further research, by employing triangulation of data. However, such research requires considerable resources and can stretch over an extended period. For example, I can imagine two types of investigations that could be taken:

- (1) selecting a group of immigrants (first, second or even third generation) who had to abandon their homeland because of war, and interviewing them after reading the novel, to establish how they relate to the characters; by analysing the resulted data, one could evaluate if there are commonalities among them.
- (2) second type of research could be conducted by selecting several historical novels in which the central theme revolves around the formation of the identity of the migrant fleeing war, and comparing the resulting data; however, such research is still insufficient for being generalized, without measuring immigrants' stances. Nevertheless, the concern of novelists in outlining a certain identity of the immigrant could indicate the correspondence of this identity with the real identity experience of immigrants. In this case, the choice of "*a multiple-case research study allows for a more in-depth understanding of the cases as a unit, through comparison of similarities and differences of the individual cases embedded within, therefore the evidence arising from multiple-case studies is often stronger and more reliable than from single-case research.*" (Heale & Twycross, 2018, p.7).

Ultimately, when it comes to dealing with research topics involving a high level of interdisciplinarity, two limitations must be recognised by researchers:

(1) the limited time resources in gathering, analysing, and interpreting data, since the subject dealt with proves to be considerably multifaceted, and

(2) the specificity of the knowledge needed to explain heterogeneous facets of the researched subject could limit the capability of an in-depth analysis for each of these parts.

To exemplify these statements, when it comes to understanding and answering the problem formulation, I have encountered concepts whose explanation requires knowledge from heterogeneous fields, as psychology, philosophy, literary studies, intercultural communication etc. It goes without saying that for a student in the field of international relations, the depth of knowledge in these fields will vary, according to previous experience or interests in employing interdisciplinary means of research.

Research on transgenerational trauma has resulted in a multitude of articles on epigenetics that affirm the transmission of trauma to future generations, but for practical reasons these cannot be extensively debated here. Most of these are focused on the experiences of the generations that escaped the path of war (e.g., Holocaust or US civil war) (Henriques, 2019). Moreover, numerous bibliographic resources that support the research conclusions were excluded, not necessarily because they would be less relevant, but rather for reasons of making the research process more efficient. Similarly, several quotes from the novel have been left out, but they converge around the same idea that answers the research question: the identity of the immigrant is subject to fluidity and (re)change, and when it comes to those who fled from bloody conflicts, the traumas transmitted intergenerationally offer an inherent identity code marked by these events.

3.6. Researcher's positionality

Positionality represents an integral part of the qualitative research and is circumscribed to those elements which can be qualified as „researcher's lenses“: philosophical, personal, theoretical beliefs and perspective having potential influences on the research (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013 *apud* Holmes, 2020, p.4).

Facing this challenge of awareness, some of the values, experiences and beliefs that might have marked my research. First, I am myself passionate about reading historical fiction novels, which I perceive as a cathartic way to understand the global reality without resorting to official

discourses, which most of the time represent a form of gaining narrative power and control. Following the same category of passions, when I travel, I try to investigate the history of the place, people, society and its habits and I try to capture them in my own pieces of creative writing. For these reasons, at least at the beginning of my research, I wondered if this could constitute a confirmation bias, in which, starting from something I truly believe, I tried to prove this by searching and selecting exactly those parts of the text that help me support the idea that the novel represents a form of alternative discourse in IR *lato sensu*. Secondly, I must admit a predilection for the interdisciplinary approach that can sometimes appear slightly neglected in the academic space.

After reading the novel, I experienced almost an attachment to the main character Ada, which made me reflect on certain aspects of my own identity. Although, fortunately, I have not experienced military conflicts, I have the experience of being a migrant and living in several countries. During time, I could observe the implications of Western European discourses which often that portrays the East as "the Other". Most of the time the migrant's identity is formed at the confluence between trying to fit into a new society and staying in touch with one's own roots. The stubbornness to remain rooted, often seems a resistance to adaptation from the host country perspective. I have also encountered divisive dichotomous discourses on religious issues in the society I come from, as well as in the family. Empathizing with the character made me consider, perhaps idealistically, that the experience of reading such a novel could contribute to understanding the position that the migrant has in the host country and the difficulties he faces to adapt, as well as the importance of maintaining ties with the homeland.

In conclusion, as a personal reflection starting from the idea that any system of meanings can change over time, as discovered in my research using poststructuralist theory, I must accept the idea that positionality can change over time (Holmes, 2020, p.8), since the context and future experiences of the researcher may lead to a change of vision.

3.7. Research audience

The purpose of this research is to spread awareness on the fact that in the sphere of international relations, alternative discourses, whatever their form may be, can help to understand complex phenomena. The research sheds light on the formation of immigrational identity and the generational trauma of those whom history has disadvantaged, by analysing a sample of historical fiction. Primarily, the work is addressed to the academic environment compounded

by researchers, teachers, and students, nevertheless the target audience would be a wider one. The larger audience may include as fictional writers, non-governmental organisations, social activists, or even social media influencers concerned with the subject. Ultimately, the findings of this research could be used by everyone interested to understand the interdisciplinarity of learning International Relations through novels.

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK & LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1. Preamble

The purpose of this section is to highlight the main theoretical benchmarks used in the process of answering the research question. To begin with, a justification of the selection of the underpinning theory of the analysis is required, followed by a brief overview of the historical context in which it developed. Since the theoretical framework creates ‘a roadmap’ for further arguments developed in the paper (Vinz, 2022), the explanations of the precepts of Poststructuralism aims to offer a vision of the specific notions recurrently used in the analysis. In continuation, the section will examine how the poststructuralist theory contributes to the understanding of IR. Ultimately, I reserved two special sections for the two assertions introduced in the problem formulation: (1) *How can novel writing be seen as an alternative form of discourse in IR*, and (2) *The issue of immigrant identity*.

4.2. Theory choice

The chosen subject belongs rather to an interdisciplinary category, reason for why the most suitable approach which can be employed in understanding immigrational identity struggles and generational trauma through historical fiction is Poststructuralism. Beyond being reduced to merely a theory, Poststructuralism rather represents a critical attitude or ethos that explores the assumptions that make certain ways of being, acting and knowing possible (Campbell & Bleiker, 2021, p.197).

The very domain of IR founds its formation on pillars of interdisciplinarity. The way that the discipline of IR explains the world highlights the importance of representation, the power-

knowledge interplay, and the politics of identity to the production and understanding of global politics (Campbell & Bleiker, 2021, p.197).

In the 1980s, Poststructuralism opened the way of social and political inquiry, by showing the importance of discourse, language, identity, subjectivity and power and the influence these exert on international politics (*Ibid.*). Scholarship recognised Poststructuralism as not being „a field with fixed limits, but [rather] an evolving field overlapping with other fields” (Thomassen, 2017, p. 541), in other words, ‘a moving target’ (Braidotti, 2010; Dillet et al., 2013 *apud* Thomassen, 2017, p.541)

Since the notion of identity is central to Poststructuralism, this approach is the one most helpful to shed light on the message given to the reader through the novel „*The Island of Missing Trees*”, where the issue of identity is the striking theme, the Leitmotif of the narrative. The novel itself, depicts through *language* an initiatory path for defining identity, reflected in almost all its characters, as they are outlined.

Also, as pointed out, „Poststructuralism refers to a way of thinking that emphasizes the radical uncertainty of knowledge” (Quiogue Andrews, 2022), particularly related to language, by asserting that “truth”, far from being a ‘fixed concept’, is rather a variable which “constantly changes based on [one’s] cultural, political, social, and economic position in the world” (*Ibid.*). The theme of the relativity of discourses on historical truth is only another pressing concern of the novel, making the poststructuralist critical attitude the most appropriate to tackle the analytical approach of the paper.

4.3. Brief historical considerations of Poststructuralism

Post-structuralism evolved as a critical theory in relation to a forerunner theory - Structuralism, where a specific concept or a sign had a sole signifier. Poststructuralism criticises to rejection some of the main structuralist assertions (Harcourt, 2007). Structuralist theory was developed by the linguist Ferdinand de Saussure and the anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, and its main assertions emphasized the existence of and underlying structure, of ‘general laws and principles’ that apply to all instances of a subject/thing (Quiogue Andrews, 2022). Through Structuralist eyes, “human behaviour and language all follow some basic, *structural* laws”, regardless of culture or spoken language (*Ibid.*).

The works of French philosophers, as Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida, contributed to the creation of a “distinctly *philosophical* response to the challenge posed to philosophical thinking by the emergence of structuralism, as the dominant intellectual paradigm in the late 1950s” (Schrift, 2018, p.178). One of the leading names of scholars in Poststructuralism, Michel Foucault analysed in his works how “the concept of elites, discourses and the power of language and binary oppositions all tie together to create what he labels as ‘regime of truth’ (Mc Morrow A., 2017). Derrida and Foucault have been labelled “the most misunderstood philosophers of our time” an attitude which apparently stemmed from the relativisation of truth and moral and the assertion that everything is subject to interpretation (Salmon, 2021). The writer’s duo oriented their philosophical discourse around the idea that “to question truth, and to point out how it is constructed, is to embrace complete relativism” (*Ibid.*).

By opposing Structuralism, Poststructuralism states that even what is considered as ‘general laws and principles’ are just other examples of multiple meanings, hence the nature of the things we may know and give a fixed meaning could always be upended by another signification (Quiogue Andrews, 2022). The structure of meanings must, therefore, make allowance for gaps and ambiguity (Harcourt, 2007) and requires giving up in finding out exactly what is going on while we try to make sense of the world (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 477), by becoming comfortable to live with uncertainty.

A central question which preoccupied poststructuralist thinking was how knowledge becomes possible at any time under specific historical conditions (Harcourt, 2007). Jacques Derrida introduced the poststructuralist vehiculated concept of ‘*difference*’ by explaining how meaning of language fluctuate depending on a social context (St. Pierre, 2002, 481).

Because language plays an essential role in shaping identity, its multiple and variable meanings will constitute a set of circumstances in which identity is formed as a fluid. Since meaning must be subject of difference, we can never know exactly what something means (*Ibid.*), therefore “none of us know quite what we mean when we say ‘I’“(Belsey, 2002, p. 67).

4.4. Poststructuralism employment in understanding IR

One of the main contributions of Poststructuralism is represented by its aim to challenge mainstream visions about the world through its way of questioning what is accepted as ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’ (Mc Morrow A., 2017). From a poststructuralist perspective, what we count

as valid knowledge and our assumptions on the society are pretty much influenced by the authority of main actors in IR through manipulation of discourse (*Ibid.*).

Poststructuralism asserts that the official discourse, across an event, although powerful will never account for understanding the entire situation (Mc Morrow A., 2017). From this point of view, we could say that the foundations of the poststructuralist doctrine, which raises the principle of tolerance to ambiguity, can sometimes be difficult to digest for those agents who always seek certainty. The idea of accepting an incomplete truth may seem unsatisfactory, although what blows one's mind resides in the fact that it is justified by the very formation of knowledge as a subjective interpretation applied to explain unknown objective facts. Poststructuralism raises a sense of interrogation in people's mind by making us to question the many ways that power is exercised via discourse (Mc Morrow A., 2017).

In understanding Poststructuralism and its contribution to IR, a notable attention should be given to the concept of discourse in shaping IR. From this perspective, as form of expression and creation of ideas, novel writing could be considered a type of discourse, which has the potential to influence and contribute to the understanding of IR. The notion of *power* relevant to Poststructuralism could be seen as related to an often-underestimated concept of contemporary IR, however with huge contribution to its dynamic: *Soft-power* or *Soft-diplomacy*.

'Poststructuralist approaches' were considered the source of "multiple realities, shifting subject position and incomplete truths, [a framework fitting researches] about movement, change and individual specific lives" (Carroll, 2002).

4.5. Conceptual framework for explaining identity and truth

The poststructuralist approach uses a set of current concepts designed to offer an alternative vision of political discourse or narratives of historical truth. The correlation of the concepts that will be presented in the following lines, addresses the issue of subjectivity, along with the multiplicity of meanings or discourses that influence the formation of identity as a fluid, as a vector in a continuous, never ending and never all-encompassing process of formation.

Identity, power, subjectivity, meaning, language, deconstruction

From a poststructuralist perspective, concepts as '*truth*' or '*knowledge*' represent subjective entities which should be seen as produced, rather than indubitable universal laws discovered (Mc Morrow A., 2017).

Derrida's assertion "that truth is constructed and, [therefore] can be deconstructed" does not equate to eliminating the possibility that it exists (Salmon, 2021). Truth was considered "a monolithic, unitary, self-explanatory entity" whose position is assimilated with the function that God has for religion – "[one] may have faith in it, one may generate concepts around it, but one cannot *prove* it" (*Ibid.*). Through his philosophical position, Derrida invited to a committed endeavour "to *more* critical thought, not its disavowal" (*Ibid.*). In the poststructuralist critique, the focus falls on "the contingency and exclusions of particular discourses, [by] showing that things could be different" (Thomassen, 2017, p.541), while pointing out how ideology is presented as 'common-sensical truth' (Weedon, 1987 *apud* Dolan, 1989, p.64).

Deconstruction represents a critical attitude associated to Poststructuralism. From a poststructuralist perspective, when it comes to handling truth, "what one can do is deconstruct the idea and look [for] the hows and whys of this Truth", by assessing the followings: "[i]n whose interests is its assertion? [w]ho speaks for it? [and if there are] alternative narratives which call it into question" (Salmon, 2021). It was showed that "[a]ny piece of literature or art is subject to deconstruction, but some are deconstructive in their messages" (Cruz, n.d.).

Language plays an essential role in creating, perpetuating, or reforming discourses, reason for why it has been given a central place by Poststructuralism. Poststructuralist views have shown that in creating discourse, language is almost always characterised by dichotomies or 'binary oppositions' (Mc Morrow, 2017). By giving priority to language in a construction process, poststructuralism thinks in terms of grammatical categories and talks about subject-positions, the subject being a person or a thing (Belsey, 2002, p.52). Foucault's work tried to explain by tracing the history of language how it has been used to construct "binaries, hierarchies, categories, [...], and complex classification schemes that are said to reflect an innate, intrinsic order in the world." (St. Pierre, 2002, p.480).

Since poststructuralism looks at the power structures underlying representation, and how subjectivity is shaped and withheld through discourse. (Dolan, 1989, p.64), language is the

main tool of creating these representations which reach the receivers of communication through *discourse*: “[t]hings (or otherwise) are told in language” (Belsey, 2002, p.71)

Subjectivity undoubtedly affects the interpretation and the process of creating meaning, as Poststructuralism “concentrates on the moment when we impose meaning in a space that is no longer characterised by shared social agreement over the structure of meaning” (Harcourt, 2007). Therefore, the agency of creating meaning could be seen as a *hic et nunc* process, which detaches from the social context imposed in understanding, giving the freedom to the one who interprets to stand in a personal own truth and formation of knowledge. Poststructuralism attempts to explain how we fill the gaps in our knowledge and come to consider as truth what we believe (Ibid.). Harcourt suggested in “*An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Poststructuralism?'*” that this subjective process might come with a ‘distributive cost’ for society, for decision making process is guided ‘by beliefs about virtue and the self, and not [necessarily] by moral or political principles’.

To exemplify how one could understand the process of interpretation, we could start from acknowledging that two people reading a text will always understand it differently or at least, in different nuances. The interpretation given will be different as “[no] two people can have the exact same experiences with a particular word, and thus no word can have the exact same meaning for two people” (Cruz, n.d.). With reference to a representative novel in IR, *The Politics of Exile* written by Elizabeth Dauphinée, “[t]his work could [be] read like fiction, autoethnography, or both, or even other forms, depending on the reader” (Sungju, 2015, p.367)

Subconsciously, human mind is seeking to stay attached to an own understanding – here is how subjectivity is involved; temporality of the process is important as one seeks to give meaning when immediately in context to what needs to be interpreted – the formation of thought comes inherently, based on a system of own prior beliefs and experience. This immediate phenomenon in thought cannot be totally shaken, and from this perspective absolute objectivity in formation of knowledge remains unattainable.

Scholarship affirmed that “[a]ccording to poststructuralism, subjectivity is never monolithic or fixed, but decentred, and constantly thrown into process by the very competing discourses

through which identity might be claimed.” (Dolan, 1989, p.60). Therefore, the issue of *identity*¹, as a fluid concept, becomes vital in Poststructuralism:

“Poststructuralist practice suggests that any such coherent conceptions of identity are specious since even race, class, and sexuality, as well as gender, are constructed within discursive fields and changeable within the flux of history.” (Dolan, 1989, p.59)

What all these concepts relevant to Poststructuralism have in common is their ability to create *meaning*. Imperiously, we must acknowledge their indivisible interplay in generating meanings. Admitted by scholars, the quest for meaning becomes the central pursuit of postmodernists even when their approach reveals ‘scientifically ironic’ attitudes towards “the possibility of ever finding meaning in the congeries of things we call ‘reality’” (White, 2005, p. 151). White explains this as a paradoxical position, where the only source of meaning is a history rather seen “as a millennial quest and continual failure to find meaning anywhere other than in ourselves” (*Ibid.*). This statement reinforces the main assertions of Poststructuralism for which meanings are variable, relative and essentially subjective. In the process of articulating identities, what gives meaning is the linkage between symbolic and material, where the materiality of the surrounding reality becomes both “product and object of our sense-making and shapes what meanings are possible” (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.893). For illustrating this allowance of meanings, Drzewiecka offers an example related to the construct of immigrant identities, which is relevant for the subject this paper aims to analyse: “*immigrant identities are formed through articulation of meanings from pre-emigration and emigration discursive contexts and material structures*” (*Ibid.*).

4.6. Novel writing as a form of alternative discourse in IR

It was recognised by scholars that ‘the messy entanglement of everyday’ contributes to creating a plethora of discourses which coexists and influence our view of international relations (Mc Morrow A., 2017, p.61). Although a dominant discourse is usually assumed, there are still many other competing discourses at play when it comes to shaping IR, which have the potential of contributing to understanding of ‘knowledge’ or ‘truth’ (*Ibid.*)

¹ As this research revolves around the concept of identity, I have chosen to allocate a separate section at the end of the theoretical part, where I will provide a more detailed explanation on the concept.

The question of interpreting fiction literature as an alternative discourse was not directly addressed, however a definition that seems pertinent to explain the understanding of alternative discourse was speculated by some scholars: “The term of ‘alternative discourses’ [...] should be understood as a descriptive and collective term referring to that set of discourses that had immersed in opposition to what is understood to be mainstream” (Atalas, 2000, p.4). In the article titled “*World literature as alternative discourse*”, Damrosch recognises the quality of fictional literature as an alternative discourse, where the “[w]orld literature is often thought of in terms of circulation” and imported from culture to culture (Damrosch, 2011, p. 307).

Before approaching a case study-based analysis by employing a novel, it appears pertinently to clarify why and to which extent novel writing could be considered as a type of alternative discourse in shaping the understanding of different events in IR. In the end, ‘Poststructuralism’s sacrilege’ was found in “its unwillingness to idolize the text and its insistence on the shifting, historical nature of the meanings representation produces.” (Dolan, 1989, p.59)

The narrative influence that fiction literature has on political sciences has been touched upon by scholars, even if the subject of this correlation seldom makes the object of studies in the field of IR. In her representative and inviting article, titled “*Novel writing in international relations: Opening for a creative practice*”, Edkins explores the political potential of writing that disrupts linear forms of temporality, by allowing the inhabitation of ‘trauma time’ (Edkins, 2013, p.281). The ethnographic literary landmark, which opened the curiosity of exploring this interdisciplinary path between novel writing and IR, is Elizabeth Dauphinée’s *The politics of exile*. This literary production represents ‘an academic text written as a novel’, by being the first published text in the discipline of IR which utilizes novel as form of scholarly production (*Ibid.*)

The same attitude towards fostering the proliferation of fictional writing in IR was expressed by Sungju, which proposed ‘the concept of fictional IR’, by recognising its benefits in the ability to articulate “sensitive and complicated problems in a more flexible and imaginative way” (Sungju, 2015, p.361). Preoccupied by using imagination in IR, Sungju considers fiction writing as a handy method to deal with uncertainty, “the lack of data and contingency surrounding it” (*Ibid.*, p.362). Zehfuss concluded that examining novel is a fruitful way of discovering main preoccupation of societies, but also to challenge them, since novels not only tell memories, but at the same time challenge their possibility, resuscitating the reader’s active participation through critical thinking (Zehfuss, 2007 *apud* Edkins, 2013 p.282). For Zehfuss,

novels ‘speak in a different voice’, which may be deconstructive, by disturbing the official memories of war and other certainties (*Ibid.*).

4.7. Poststructuralism, language, and the central issue of identity

Many poststructuralist writings put the notion of identity and subjectivity at the centre of their debate. Identity was defined as being ‘one’s self-concept or sense of self’ and it relates to “how individuals view themselves and their place or positioning in the world” (Jackson, 2017, p.831).

In explaining the Poststructuralist philosophy, a plethora of writing materials not only do they deal with notions as *language, power, truth, knowledge*, subjectivity, but also with the notion of identity and psyche (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.888).

Based on the Freudian assertions that the self is driven by powerful unconscious forces, psychoanalysis was often invoked in poststructuralist studies, as being the way leading to understand how inner psychic processes shape subjectivity (*Ibid.*, p.894). Psychoanalysis indicates that we are all [primarily] foreigners to ourselves and that our consciousness is redoubled by „unconscious processes that exercise other determinations, according to an agenda we do not even recognize” (Belsey, 2002, p.63-66).

As we will see while analysing the novel, this place of unconscious drives and experiences that contribute to the formation of identity is brought into discussion countless times, whether it is about genetic predilections, dreams, exposure to certain signs and superstitions, or traumatic experiences.

By learning a language, we enter the symbolic order, our experiences, ideas, and sense of self are forever subject to indeterminacy of meaning, which this makes the self to never achieve a unified or stable socle, as there is no core identity (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.895). From this perspective, the shaping of identity follows a winding path, marked by ‘fluidity and indeterminacy’, due to the cultural inconsistencies, or in a broad sense, the different circumstances, and environments to which the subject is exposed. From a psycholinguistic perspective, language was considered as a skill acquired by the language learner, which develops under the influence of certain psychological factors and external environmental stimuli (Khan I.U., *et. al*, 2021, p. 257).

When it comes to identity formation, scholarship attested that our conception of identity is, “constituted by, and negotiated within, social processes, where concepts such as social class,

sex, gender, race, ethnicity, and other social positions” play a constitutive role in identity construction and identity negotiation within a social group (Kramsch, 2011, apud Khan I.U., et.al. 2021, p. 258).

Identity is far from being based on a singular physiological concept, since it is dependent on a combination of different ‘variables’, which acquires an even greater complexity when it comes to immigrants (Khan T., 2020). It was observed that immigrants possess “identities on the go” (Katsigianni, 2019), since they carry with them not only identity characteristics of their homelands, but also specificities of the place they moved to (*Ibid.*), manifesting double or multiple bondings.

In trying to observe the formation of identity, firstly, we must acknowledge that the notion of identity becomes closely related to that of ‘Intersectionality’. The identity of any individual is consisting by “multiple identities that intersect in various ways in different contexts creating unique formations” (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.889). Questioned on the issue of identity as a fluid, which she often addresses in her novels, the writer Elif Shafak stated in an interview for Romanian Television in 2021, that people regardless of how isolated they are geographically, still have multiple belongings (Shafak, 2021).

Secondly, ‘the articulation of identity’ (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.893) is inextricably linked to the poststructuralist concept of ‘Otherness’ or ‘Othering’. ‘Othering’ was defined as being “*the exclusionary process by which people perceive, represent, and respond to those they see as different from themselves*” (Noor E. & Syed, 2022, p.310). Formation of identity not only answers the question “who am I?”, but also its negative form “who am I not?”, therefore it is shaped by relation to *others*, be they close individuals, groups, and communities we differentiate ourselves from (*Ibid.*)

Belsey remarked that “*we became subjects at the price of an organic loss, ... [which] is not simply a single event in the past, but repeats itself throughout human life, and we subsist as an uneasy conjunction of organic impulses and cultural values, each at the expense of the other*” (Belsey, 2002, p.66). In other words, far from being an ‘undifferentiated whole’ identity formation happens by excluding those things one cannot resonate or identify with, by opposition to ‘the big Other’ (*Ibid.*). In a similar way, Culler observed that the coherent, self-aware individual subject is dependent of the subject identified by theory as ‘the Other’ and that ‘ethics of alterity’ require to respect the otherness of the other (Culler, 2011, p.123).

These underpinnings of the identity formation are important, because they are manifested in the representation of characters in the novel subject to analysis, since they belong to two different ethnic groups.

V. ANALYSIS

5.1. Preamble

The following section aims to test the precepts of the poststructuralist theory by applying them empirically to a case study consisting of a recent novel, published in 2021. The chosen novel “*The Island of Missing Trees*” written by a well-known contemporary author with a solid background in political sciences, falls in the category of historical fiction. The analysis is split in two parts

Part I: The role of fictional writings in understanding past and immigrant identity in IR

5.2. Chapter outline

We consider this first part necessary for understanding the broad context of how fiction literature contributes to the understanding of IR, as well as the fact that fiction writers are the ones who most often seek a free space outside the borders of the politically imposed discourse to express their concerns against the event tournament. Therefore, their work becomes an alternative discourse about past, present and even future.

When it comes to the burning contemporary issue of migration and displacement, the fiction literature is abundant. The sorrowful stories of migrants and refugees are given an important attention by writers around the world, who are trying most of the time to make appeal to empathy, and through nuances to remove preconceptions and stereotypes (Wong *et al.*, 2020). Most of the authors seem to have an establish interest on following issues of migration around the world. And the willingness to bring these stories to people’s mind though a different discourse, outside the political one. Taking note of this, on many occasions, these writers play an important diplomatic role, by shaping their own culture due to the import of international

elements, or vice versa, by bringing the specifics of their culture to the international scene. At the same time, the interdisciplinarity of the subject makes the IR field closer to its origins and invites a necessarily multidisciplinary approach to some complex social problems, such as migration and generational trauma.

5.3. Soft diplomacy exerted through the work of fictional writers

It was stated that there is a reason why writers are among the first people targeted at the dawn of authoritarianism, and the motivation behind this fact is that writers can offer to their audiences some inroads to truths inaccessible in other public realms (Boaz, 2020, p.240). Damrosch observed that „almost all writers live in a particular culture, and their work becomes part of a national literature” (Damrosch, 2011, p. 307), therefore by the act of writing they contribute to the understanding of culture and most of the time to importing multiculturalism and alternative discourses in their own culture. If there is no discourse without a Master and even so, no discourse of the Master can succeed in fully mastering, or governing, the contingency of discourse and of life (Lacan, 2006, apud Thomassen, 2017, p. 542), then fictional writers have the power of mastering an alternative way in approaching cultural diplomacy and IR.

In 2021, author Elif Shafak highlighted that „[e]very nation state has its official narrative, in that regard countries are very similar [...] but what makes the difference between a democracy and a non-democracy [is that when] you walk into a bookstore you can easily find books that question the official narrative.” (Shafak, 2021). Sometimes, these books will not be part of non-fiction category, since these alternative narratives Shafak talks about hide in the fictional books, the proof being her own novels.

5.4. Understanding the past in IR through historical fiction

Scholars of Literary theory showed that „[i]n the English late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the word „novel” seems to have been used about both true and fictional events” (Eagleton, 1983 apud Sungju, 2015, p.362).

Like any other literary genre, historical fiction hasn't always been easy to get labelled as such because the difficulty of establishing how much distortion of history could be involved for a

text to fall into this category (Lee, n.d). The Historical Novel Society² admitted that there will never be a satisfactory answer to this question, although some answers, even ‘arbitrary’, should be given (*Ibid.*). To this question, The Historical Novel Society, through the voice of Richard Lee, answered the following: *„To be deemed historical (in our sense), a novel must have been written at least fifty years after the events described. Or written by someone who was not alive at the time of those events, and therefore approaches them only by research.”* (*Ibid.*).

Although we recognize the indicative attribute of the definition established by The Society, it seems rather a much too simplistic attempt to fix the historical fiction genre in a Procrustean bed, which The Society itself admitted being ‘arbitrary’.

Historical novel³ has been defined by The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms as:

„[a] novel in which the action takes place during a specific historical period well before the time of writing (often one or two generations before, sometimes several centuries), and in which some attempt is made to depict accurately the customs and mentality of the period. The central character—real or imagined—is usually subject to divided loyalties within a larger historic conflict of which readers know the outcome. [...] historical novel attempts a serious study of the relationship between personal fortunes and social conflicts” (Baldick, 2015b)

Baldick acknowledged that the novel “has frequently incorporated the structures and languages of non-fictional prose forms (history, autobiography, journalism, travel writing)”, even to the point where non-fictional elements outweighs the fictional ones (Baldick, 2015c). Sometimes, we must accept that history could take the look of a novel, in aiming to give representation not only to the truth of the past, but rather to ‘the possible meanings of this truth’ (White, 2005, p. 151).

Also, one of the theorizers of the historical novel, György Lukács, acknowledged in his works that the real merit of historical novels rather than lying in their ability “to reproduce local

² The Historical Novel Society was founded in the UK in 1997, as a campaigning society aiming to promote the interest towards historical fiction (The Historical Novel Society, n.d).

³ Regarding the definition of the novel, it has been defined as an extended fictional prose narrative, with fewer constraints than other literary forms in terms of structure, style, or subject-matter; different types of novels may be encountered: some are non-fictional, some have been written in verse, and some do not even tell a story (Baldick, 2015c).

customs and language with great accuracy”, is mostly the fact that “they dramatize historical forces in such a way that the inevitability of what happened becomes clear” (Lukács, 1963 *apud* Ünlüönen, 2021).

The writer Elif Shafak sees the art of storytelling as one of the last remaining democratic spaces we have at our disposal (Shafak, 2020) and literature plays a universally relevant role in healing and fighting against bigotry, by creating discourses which reverse the process of dehumanisation of the “other” into humanisation, inclusion, and acceptance (*Ibid.*). Ultimately, fiction suggests a possibility that our vision of the world might be as imperfect as the vision that fictional characters have on the world they live in, for this reason some fictional characters become supreme examples of the real human condition⁴ (Eco, 2015, p.139).

Part II: Case study: Novel analysis

5.5. Chapter outline

The section aims to present main narrative threads of the story, while following the connection with historical reality of the Cypriot civil war which began in 1974 with Turkey invasion of Cyprus, leading to the Turkish occupation of the northern part of the island. Outcomes of this conflict are outlined in the novel though the construction of characters, plot and symbolic insertions charged with relevant obvious or sometimes hidden meaning. Identity, migration, and generational trauma seem to embody the main concerns of what was once a violent conflict, which in the contemporary world takes valences of a frozen conflict. In the process of finding meaning behind the words, as much as multiple or changing interpretations, the novel analysis will constantly relate to the Poststructuralist underpinnings about identity and its fluid articulation, as much as the ambiguous context of the past, which shaped the premises of this identity.

Firstly, a short presentation of the novel and its author are required, followed by a brief examination of the relevance that historical fiction plays for IR.

⁴ Translated from Romanian language.

5.6. Novel choice: The Island of Missing Trees

Through the play of its symbols skilfully woven into the narrative thread, the novel places at the centre of the discourse the problem of identity faced by the immigrant forced to uproot from homeland, to flee war. The action of the novel traces the effects of post-war migration to several generations, emphasizing the differences that exist between what is representative of the identity of these different categories of migrants

The novel was published recently, for the first time in 2021, in a global context in which the problem of migration and implicitly the identity of the immigrant is increasingly debated. The concern of the author Elif Shafak for current issues of global politics determines her, it seems, not to miss the opportunity to illustrate these social aspects in the prose she writes. When choosing the novel, I considered it relevant for my study because it presents an alternative historical reality, which, although dressed in fiction, is thoroughly documented by the author Elif Shafak. Her research and historical resources are disclosed in *Notes to the Reader*⁵.

In a global context marked by the suffering of many people forced to flee wars, I considered this topic relevant to illustrate the outcomes that natural disasters or armed conflicts have on human beings and how they can persist and be transmitted to the next generations. The events rendered in the novel not only have a strong historical significance, but also have an impact on the present, most probably persisting in the future. In a European Union member country, with full membership rights, Nicosia is the last divided capital of the world (The Guardian, 2017).

5.7. The author's affinity for international politics

Introducing the author of the studied novel, while presenting her velleities for IR themes might be extremely useful before proceeding to analysing the novel itself.

Elif Shafak, Turkish-British author (Ünlüönen, 2021) is one of the most prolific contemporary authors, the most widely read woman writer in Turkey, whose books were translated into more than twenty languages (Gürbüz, 2019, p.130). In multiple interviews and public appearances, Shafak emphasized the importance of contemporary writers in shedding light on difficult aspects of the contemporary world, as well as their role in mitigating for a new world in which peace, equality, and respect for the human being beyond the political, social, religious

⁵ Appendix 1.

background become insurmountable principles. Most of her writings address relevant topics in the field of international relations, such as human rights, feminist women identity and gender equality, conflicts, Eastern and Western culture dichotomy, religion, division, migration etc. Shafak has been noted as Turkey's leading female novelist by the Financial Times in 2011 (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022, p.63). Ichim also noted that "Elif Shafak's fiction is deeply rooted in the political events that define the 21st century; issues such as mass migration, the resurgence of nationalism, the clash between Western and Eastern cultures and ideologies have been skilfully incorporated in the novels of this Turkish writer." (Ichim, 2022, p.75)

Elif Shafak's affinity with the field of international relations and her educational background in the political sphere seems to fuel the author's predilection for historical fiction. Through words and symbols that are waiting to be deciphered, interpreted, and reinterpreted, Shafak manages successfully to shed light on historical events with charged implications in the sphere of global affairs, offering the reader an effective channel to understand the dynamics of international relations through a fictional universe.

5.8. Novel's structure, plot, and characters

The chosen language of the novel, as much as its structure or characters, helps in presenting concepts, and events in binary oppositions specific to the image of the two ethnical groups. The central theme of the novel deals with how the identity of the generations of those who fled the war is affected and inter-generational trauma.

The structure of the book hides important peculiarities that, through its symbolism, reveal the underlying theme of the novel. A perhaps less common aspect, which captures the attention of the reader is the fact that almost half of the novel is narrated by the voice of a fig tree.

The narrative of the novel is compounded by a Prologue and six parts, with suggestive titles, inspired by the symbol of the fig tree:

Contents

<i>Prologue: Island</i>	I
PART ONE How to Bury a Tree	7
PART TWO Roots	73
PART THREE Trunk	143
PART FOUR Branches	191
PART FIVE Ecosystem	257
PART SIX How to Unbury a Tree	309
<i>Note to the Reader</i>	345
<i>Glossary</i>	349
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	353

The association with main part of a tree's body might be symbolical, the name of each part of the novel revealing a possible way of processing the trauma. The tree, itself having a migrant identity, does not survive in cold London under the same conditions as on the Mediterranean Island, and it needs to be buried during winter to survive. The process of burying the tree, described in Part I: "*How to Bury a Tree*", corresponds to the mourning of the Kazantzakis family after the wife's/mother's death. Circularly, the last part "*How to Unbury a Tree*", with the arrival of spring, when the tree is replanted, also coincides with the discovery and the acceptance of main character's roots and talks about healing trauma: "*It will take time, renewal. It will take time, healing.*" (Shafak, 2021, p.343/novel).

The characters

The main character of the novel is teenager **Ada**, the child of one Greek-Orthodox father and a Turkish-Muslim mother, who lived a forbidden, banished love story in Cyprus during the civil war. They immigrated to London while the mother was pregnant with the child. Ada, now maternal orphan, doesn't know too much about her origins, as their parents wanted to raise her by keeping away painful parts of their past. Her inquiry and curiosity about discovering the past arises when her aunt Meryem, the sister of Ada's mother, is visiting London.

In the novel, Ada takes a journey in discovering and defining her own identity. Due to its dichotomous roots, this identity cannot be loyal neither to the Greek-Orthodox or Turkish-Muslim side, but undoubtedly it is defined at their confluence plus something else – supplemented by the fact that Ada now belongs to the category of immigrants whose identity is rather marked by multiculturalism. That must lead to the conclusion that identity is fluid and shaped by discourses and circumstances which are culturally/politically dictated.

Therefore, the subject sometimes needs to challenge "the given truth", created via discourses. Ada was appreciated to be the type of character often encountered “in a multicultural narrative, who, unlike the generation before her, seems to adopt the culture of the new land very well” (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022). Ada's name means island in Turkish, a fact that suggests her identity is undeniably linked to the Island, as she accepts at the end of the novel.

By her multicultural personality, Ada is subject to deconstruction of the binary. In building her identity, Ada must confront polarized subjectivities between associated with either Greek-orthodox culture, or Turkish-Muslim one. Letting one of them to prevail would be both socially and psychologically painful. It was remarked that “[w]orks that seeks to remove traditional binaries might be considered deconstructive, especially those that trouble notions of race, gender, religion, and so on” (Cruz, n.d.). These types of works attempt to suggest that individuals may evince any of these qualities at a given time (Ibid.). Through Ada’s character the reader can contextually analyse and understand the formation and transmission of intergenerational memories and the concept of ‘postmemory’ (Sharma & Jha, 2023, p.1).

The couple Kostas and Defne are illustrative for the binaries specific to Poststructuralism, since they belong to distinct ethnical roots, whose fusion seems to be prohibited. In their cultures, they each represent for each other what the society they belong to identifies by "The Other". Defne, a Turkish Cypriot woman, raised in a Muslim culture, faces unfortunate experiences that lead her to over-drinking to cope with hunting memories from the past. Pregnant, single mother-to-be during the war years, she gives birth to a boy whom she must keep hidden from society and who loses his life 1 year later. Young Kostas, a Greek-Orthodox, manages to flee the island, forced by his mother, leaving Defne behind, not knowing about her pregnancy.

In the story, both became scientists destined for research and discovery: Kostas is a botanist preoccupied to burry and dig up plant and trees (Inskeep, 2021), while Defne is an archaeologist dedicated to digging up bodies of those who disappeared during the Cypriot civil war.

Aunt Meryem's personality is marked by tradition, conservatorism, with a hesitant but striking curiosity towards modernity. She was directly experiencing war and division between culture and religions (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022, p.64). Because of her strong bond with the Turkish-Mulsim identity, in the novel, she creates a bridge between identities and culture. It is through her that Ada gets in touch with a hidden, latent part of her identity, because her narrative challenges the views and resuscitate the identity of the immigrant that have experienced displacement (Ibid., p.66).

Yusuf and Yiorgos, the two owners of the tavern, they also live an even more controversial love story that we only learn about in Part III of the novel: „*God knew there were enough people on this island who would hate to see a Turk and a Greek involved romantically, but the number of those people probably quadrupled if the couple in question were gay*” (p.151/novel). The problematic of intersectionality here is even more preeminent, as the political/cultural discourse of the society the couple lives in is far from being inclusive towards a homosexual couple. The issue of discrimination against an identity considered as repugnant in society's view is highlighted by using the word „*hate*” – a word with a strong negative, destructive sentimental charge. Through the narrative language employed in the novel, the reader gets insights on the societal conceptions and main power discourses imposing what is viewed as accepted or forbidden. Their forbidden love story led them to death, a mysterious death introduced in the Prologue, but untangled only when the reader reaches the end of the novel. A symbol of (a)temporality, the pocket watch found by their corpse with an inscription of Cavafy's poem may itself suggest the quest towards both self-identity and unknown past: „*Arriving there is what you are destined for, / But do not hurry the journey at all ...*”.

The Fig Tree is one of the most prominent characters, as he also has the role of a narrator. The author, Elif Shafak, affirmed in an interview with Steeve Inskeep that she wanted „an observer that lives longer than human beings”, moreover the fig tree was the most suitable to illustrate „what does it mean to be *rooted, unrooted, rerooted*” (Shafak, 2021 *apud* Inskeep, 2021). Its fate is strongly intertwined with that of the character Ada; however, it bears a special symbolism because it sums up multiple qualities and identity elements, in which all family members are reflected, each with their own personality. For example, in the case of character Defne's depression, the manifestation is similar for the tree:

„the tree was being strangled by its own roots. Because it was happening under the earth, it was undetectable. If the encircling roots are not found in time, they start putting pressure on the tree and it just becomes too much too bear” (Shafak, 2021, p.334/novel)

„Her death has nothing to do with the absence of love. [...] but, underneath, something was strangling her – the past, the memories, the roots ’” (Shafak, 2021, p.334/novel)

The tree mirrors all the other characters identities and struggles, being a symbol of intergenerational trauma:

“... some people stand in front of a tree and the first thing they notice is the trunk. These are those who prioritize order, safety, rules, continuity. Then are the ones who pick out the branches before anything else. They yearn for change, sense of freedom. And then there are those who are drawn to the roots, though concealed under the ground. They have a deep emotional attachment to their heritage, identity, traditions...’ (Shafak, 2021, p.327/novel)

Therefore, it has been justifiably appreciated that in *The Island of Missing Trees*, as in most of Shafak’s novels, “[t]he characters productively enable a representation of gaining mixed perceptions in the journey of their physical and psychological experiences” (Gürbüz, 2019, p. 134).

The plot of the novel revolves around the destiny of Kazantzakis family which is forced by circumstances to flee their homeland Cyprus to England (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022).

Two epic threads divide, but without losing connection with each other:

(1) The psychological journey of the main character Ada to the discovery of her origins, as well as the generational trauma that marks her life and her identity as an emigrant: *„family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark. They trickle down generations (p.128/novel)”*.

(2) The love story between Kostas and Defne - Ada's parents – begun in 1974, in Cyprus during the civil war. Their story marked by division is condemned by their orthodox and muslim families, and therefore lived under the sign of fear and danger.

The plot is built upon three times of the narrative are interspersed, without respecting a coherent chronological order, rather aiming to create the impression of past flashbacks superimposed on the present:

(1) London, late 2010s;

(2) Cyprus, during the civil war, in 1974, and

(3) Cyprus, 2000.

In her history class, in London, Ada starts to scream uncontrollably while the teacher introduces the subject of the next topic – ‘migration and generational change’ and asks pupils to interview one of their elderly relatives (p.12 /novel). One of Ada’s classmates captures the embarrassing moment on video and posts it on social media. The video goes viral, giving rise to an online movement under the hashtag #doyouhearmenow (Ünlüönen, 2021). Obviously, the scream has a strong psychological source: Ada has recently lost her mother - victim of alcohol abuse to repress a painful past, and at the same time Ada feels alienated from her Cypriot roots. Her parents, Kostas and Defne decided not to disclose too much about the past to protect Ada:

“Once it’s inside your head, whether it’s your own memory or your parents’ or, your grandparents’, this [...] pain becomes part of your flesh. It stays with you and marks you permanently. It messes up your psychology and shapes how you think of yourself and others. [...] If we want our child to have a good future, we have to cut her off from our past.” (Shafak, 2021, p.317/novel)

The love story between Defne and Kostas lived within the walls of the tavern "The Happy Fig", in Nicosia, it was destined for some battles, from its beginnings. Born when they were teenagers, the love story between two young people belonging to enemy ethnicities, develops secretly in times of war. Circumstances push Kostas to leave the island, finding refuge in London and leaving behind the young pregnant Defne. He manages to return 25 years later, during which time Defne has become an archaeologist for the UN Committee on Missing Persons, searching for and identifying the skeletons of war victims. They revive their love story despite the years that kept them apart and conceive a child, who will be born after the family moves to London. When the girl Ada turns 16, her mother loses her life due to alcohol addiction. No one from her mother's family comes to the funeral, which causes Ada to hold a grudge against these relatives, whom she has never met. When Aunt Meryem, her mother's sister, comes to visit London, Ada is skeptical and reluctant to receive her visit. But both curiosity and consideration for her father lead her to change her opinion. The meeting with her aunt gradually turns into a path of searching for a part of her identity with which she hasn't

been in touch, managing to transform Ada's perception of herself, as well as the perception of her relatives, perceived as 'the Others'.

At the end, after the winter vacation spent with Aunt Meryem, Ada returns to school proud of her homework in which she interviewed an elderly relative with an interesting life. However, what lays behind her pride is rather the hidden feeling of self-consciousness, since Ada accepts a side of her identity not revealed until then, namely that of an islander: "*I'll come to the island,*' Ada said, a new note in her voice. *I just want to meet islanders, like myself*" (Shafak, 2021, p.339/novel).

As Belsey noted, "[b]inary oppositions do not hold, but can always be undone" (Belsey, 2002, p.87). Therefore, through the desire of the one raised under a multicultural, diasporic identity to return to the origins, the end of the novel shrinks the attitude of 'Othering', which will be discussed in the following sections. Ada shows her desire to know the community in which she has roots and to engage with it, from a place of belonging.

5.9. Interpretation of language in contouring identity and generational trauma

From a poststructuralist, "signs of a language acquire meaning from signifying practices of a community, but these meanings are not fixed and shared across the community", which transforms language in "a contested arena where claims of truth and power are challenged or negotiated" (Norton, 2013 *apud* Khan et.al., 2021, p.258). The signs are given a special importance in the book, a recurring motif that invites with every opportunity to follow and discover them. In no case should they be ignored, as the text itself seems to highlight. There is inseparability between sign and interpretation (Foucault, 2013 *apud* Schrift, 2018, p.176).

The signs seem to offer rational or less rational explanations for events, although, in both cases, they imply an inherent psychological impact. In the novel, signs have the power of creating unforgettable images – e.g., Kostas's mother explaining the superstitions and the connection with the conquest of Constantinople: „*Of all the days of the week, Tuesday was the most unpropitious [...] Panagiota explained that it was a Tuesday on May, centuries ago, when the Ottomans captured the queen of cities, Constantinople. It happened after a statue of the Virgin Mary, carried out to a shelter to evade the tumult of the ongoing siege, tumble down, shattering*

into pieces so small it could never be put back together again. It was a sign, but people didn't recognize it in time. Panagiota said one should always look out for signs” (p.109/novel)

The same invitation to follow the signs is issued by The Fig Tree, who from its position of narrator directly approaches the reader: *„Where there is trauma, look for the signs, for there are always signs. Cracks that appear in our trunks, splits that won't heal, leaved that display autumn colours in spring, bark those peels like unmoulded skin” (Shafak, 2021, p.100).*

Symbols and their interpretation play a crucial role in understanding how cultures shape identity, sometimes at the cost of generating psychologically traumatic experiences by overshadowing reason. The idea was illustrated by the famous writer and semiologist, Umberto Eco: “Expressive symbols are explained in a theory that privileges cognitive thought processes over the objective world, which is, in turn, seen as dependent and ancillary to an autonomous realm of social interaction and communication” (Eco, 1976 *apud* Olssen, 2003). Behaviours and symbols create a plethora of images through which the reader comes to understand society and culture, observing at the same time how they transform the identity of those who inhabit it. Imagology plays an important role in understanding identity, as stated by the imagologist Joep Leerssen, since it “focuses primarily on the investigation of the dynamics between images which characterize the Other (*hetero-images*) and images which characterize one's own identity (*self-images* or *auto-images*)” (Leerssen, 2007 *apud* Ichim, 2022, p.76).

Belsey noted that “[c]ulture consists of the meanings its subjects produce and reproduce, [therefore] in the process of analysing it, we are simply taking up another position in culture, [by] inhabiting a space culture itself provides, or can be induced to provide.” (Belsey, 2002, p.26). In novel, this induction of space, culture, inter-relational specificity is created and transmitted through language and symbolism.

Not only superstitions seem to be a binder between cultures, but also food. Although they have different names on one side and the other of the island, the dishes that her aunt prepares for Ada help her to discover a previously unknown cultural aspect of her own roots that should not be neglected. Including in the kitchen, we encounter the dichotomy "us" vs "other", since each gastronomy claims its authenticity and superiority:

“Food is the heart of culture, replied Meryem. ‘you don't know your ancestors' cuisine, you don't know who you are’[...]’Everyone makes baklava, true, but not

everyone succeeds. We Turks make it crispy with roasted pistachios. That's the right way. Greeks use raw walnuts – God knows who gave them that idea, it just ruins the taste. [...]

Ada said, 'You make it sound as if we should judge a culture not by its literature or philosophy or democracy, just by its baklava'" (Shafak, 2021, p.137/novel).

Slightly hilarious, the dialogue between Ada and her aunt suggests the fact that the process of 'Othering' is installed subconsciously in the mind through the small, trivial, apparently insignificant but recurring things in everyday life, which contribute to the formation of a cultural identity based on the dichotomy 'us' and 'others'. As a language learner coming across cultural practices, Ada becomes user of what scholarship called "a symbolic and semiotic resource with far-reaching repercussions for personal and social identities" (Khan I.U. et.al., 2021, p.264).

The fig tree itself incorporates a special symbolism, with many roles. Not only a family axis, but also a sage connoisseur of history, which although possesses a considerable longevity compared to humans, humbly accepts its limits in terms of the ability to comprehend the whole truth. Moreover, as we understand from the denomination of the six parts of the novel, Shafak brilliantly uses the tree as a metaphor of a displaced family with all its characteristics and problems (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022, p.69). The meanings behind the choice of a fig tree as a narrator was explained by Shafak in an interview:

"I wanted an observer that lives longer than human beings, [...] Trees have this [...] longevity. They were here before us, and they will most probably be here long after we humans have disappeared - but also to think more closely about issues like, what does it mean to be rooted, uprooted and rerooted? So, if you're telling the story of immigrants, people have experienced displacement, either within the island or outside. Then to think this through roots and uprootedness was an important [...] metaphor" (Shafak, 2021 *apud* Inskeep, 2021)

Enumerating salient social conflicts of recent years, Elif Shafak remarked in an article written for The Guardian that history doesn't start with concentration camps or mass murder, or civil war or genocide, but it always starts with words which have the power to create stereotypes,

cliches, tropes (Shafak, 2020). In a similar sense, following the study of symbolism in Elif Shafak's novels, Ichim pertinently concluded the following:

“In a dynamic society in which power relations change so frequently, cultural images evolve in time and their creation is influenced by the historical context, as well as by prior mental images that the target audience may already have of other nations or peoples. The concepts of prejudice, stereotype and ethnic cliché have been extensively discussed by imagologists such as Joep Leerssen, Manfred Beller and Waldemar Zacharasiewicz, who have shown that ethnic images are effectively disseminated through literary works, [particularly] through travel books and novels.” (Ichim, 2022, p.76).

All these suggestive images are outlined with the help of words and transmitted to the reader through textual language. The importance of words in shaping minds and realities is stated in the text, regardless of the context they might acquire. In this way, the influence of words appears to be axiomatic, since the language used in the novel asserts its own importance, through the mastery of words:

“There was something childlike in the way grown-ups had a need for stories. They held a naïve belief that by telling an inspiring anecdote – the right fable at the right time – they could lift their children’s moods, motivate them to great achievements and simply change reality. There was no point in telling them that life was more complicated than that and words less magical than they presumed.” (Shafak, 2021, p.336/novel)

However, the magic of words is deconstructed for those who perceive and compare the multiplicity of narratives. Some of the discourses might even take over minds, but remain unspoken, as suggested by the reflexive attitude of the character Ada reproduced above, who perceives life much complicated than what can be encompassed by words. The quote above, as extracted from the novel certifies what linguistic scholars affirm: language “[l]oses its innocence as just a benign medium of communication [and must be] analyzed in terms of the different roles it plays in creating social meaning in an unequal world where the struggle over meaning and power intersect with social and cultural elements” (Pennycook, 2000; 1994; Ricento, 2005; Tollefson, 2013 *apud* Khan, *et.al.*, 2021, p.258).

5.10. Past, post-memory, truth, and identity quest in novel

As highlighted by scholars, when approaching the subject of memorizing the past, when related to force migration “Memories [...] do not only relate to nostalgic view of the past but also brings back memories of trauma and violence” (Ramsey-Kurz, 2018 apud Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022, p.64). Concept as historical memory, language and identity were considered inextricably related to each other (Katsigianni, 2019, p. 33).

“You don’t share a language, you think, and then you realize, grief is a language. We understand each other, people with troubled past’. [...]’But we have to remember in order to heal,’ Defne objected” (Shafak, 2021, p.215/novel)

While working for the Committee on Missing Persons in London, character Defne starts visiting Cypriot immigrant communities settled in London, as we find out from the text she acknowledges *“deep drifts between family members of different ages. Way too often, the first generation of survivors, the ones who had suffered the most, kept their pain close to the surface, [...] Meanwhile, the second generation chose to suppress the past, both what they knew and did not know of it. In contrast, the third generation were eager to dig away, and unearth silences. How strange that in families scarred by wars, forced displacements and acts of brutality, it was the youngest who seemed to have the oldest memory.”* (Shafak, 2021, p.315/novel). Through Ada, Elif Shafak shows how intergenerational trauma is lived, while projecting the pain suffered by parents on a daughter struggling with her sense of self (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022, p.65).

In a study focused on giving voice to the Turkish Cypriot women who were subject to displacement during the war, memory of the past was appreciated to be more than „a passive depository of facts but rather an active process of creation of meanings” (Portelli 2010, p.37 apud Aliefendioğlu & Behçetoğulları, 2019, p.1473). The painful experience of the past acquires a fatalistic character in the case of the character Defne. Feeling abandoned by the one she loved, pregnant in times of war, trying desperately to have an abortion, Defne gives birth to a child that needs to be given up for adoption, only to lose his life 1 year later. During the war, she lost her lover, her child and her two close friends – Yusuf and Yorgos. To cope with these memories, Defne becomes an archaeologist in which she dedicates her life to ‘unearthing the past’ and finding the skeletons of war victims. Digging for the past comes with a price which could translate into a constant recollection of painful memories even after the events that

caused it had ended. Defne falls prey to the habit of drinking which shortens her life substantially, leaving behind the second child, Ada, which will have to fight with the trauma of the past, and eventually healing it. At least part of this child's identity is already defined by the painful legacy of the past.

5.11. The power of historical narrative and subjectivity in cultural identity formation

Tenembaum pertinently questioned if there is such thing as objective truth in history, by concluding that historical truth is objective by its nature and waits to be discovered; however, the inability of discovering it could not deny its objective nature (Tenembaum, 2020). Tenembaum draws an important distinction between Historical truth and interpretation while highlighting that the first is objective, while the latter is subjective (*Ibid.*). Interpretation is ‘an explanation or opinion of what something means’ (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). The lack of historical truth may result in ‘an act of inference’, where interpretation plays the role in assessing what the truth might have been (Tenembaum, 2020). Building on this observation, Tenembaum states that ‘narratives’ should be at best considered as „attempts at explaining historical events from a subjective perspective”:

„A historical narrative may be based on historical truth, but to believe that historical truth may not be objectively determined and thus one is left only with historical narratives is to confuse the objective existence of truth with its subjective interpretation.” (Ibid.)

This distinction between historical narrative and historical truth shouldn't minimise the influential role of narrative on international relations, although neither should be synonymised with historical truth, as the latter stands on its own, independently of the interpretation given to it. The purpose of historical narrative, through which its influential power is justified, lays in its attempt to justify what happens in the present (*Ibid.*), rather than to rigorously certify what happened in the past. In Eco's deconstructive vision, not only fictional assertions, but also historical ones are *de dicto* assertions; excepting those judgments which depend on direct experience, judgments which depend on cultural experience transmitted on the basis of a writing are based on textual information; even if they seem to be *de facto* truths, they are only *de dicto*. (Eco, 2015, 105).

A definitive discourse over the past is impossible to be established (Domínguez González, 2009, p.267). Exactly this seems to be the idea derived from the novel, transmitted through the voice of the Narrator Fig Tree in Part III – *Trunk*: “By the end of that interminable summer, 4,400 people were dead, thousands missing. Around 160,000 Greeks living in the north moved south, and around 50,000 Turks moved north. People became refugees in their own country. [...] It must all be written in history books, though each side will tell only their own version of things. Narratives that run counter, without ever touching, like parallel lines that never intersect” (p.190/novel).

Throughout the text of the novel, The Fig tree embodies the role of a wise *axis historicus*, who seems to hold the secrets of the past, to penetrate the relativity of discourses almost like a poststructuralist philosopher, by analysing cultures: “I have always wondered if this is why islanders, just like sailors in olden times, are strangely prone to superstitions. [...] Both Turkish and Greek children are taught to show respect if they see a piece of bread on the pavement. It is sacred, every crumb. Muslim kids pick it up and touch it to their foreheads with the same reverence they would kiss the hands of their elders on the holy days of Eid. Christian kids take the slice and make the sign of the cross, putting their hands over their hearts, treating it like it was the Communion bread made from pure wheat flour and of two layers, one for heaven, one for earth. Gestures, too, mirror each other, as though reflected in a dark pool of water. [...] While religions clash to have a final say, and nationalisms teach a sense of superiority and exclusiveness, superstitions on either side of the border coexist in rare harmony”

It was shown by scholarship that poststructuralist critiques of language use particularly deconstruction to highlight “how language operates to produce very real, material and damaging structures in the world” (St. Pierre, 2002, p. 481). The conflicting perspectives encountered in the novel have the power to shape discourses, and through them, people’s identity. As stated by scholarship, “[t]he concepts of discourse, power, culture, and language are dialectically interrelated [and] they complement one another. Discourses, in turn, are shaped and informed by practices, [where] discourse and practices then enter into power relations” (Foucault, 1977 apud Gürbüz, 2019, p. 133). Later, any attempt of getting outside of an ideology might prove to become a struggle or even culminating in intergenerational trauma.

In the novel, the power of the narrative discourse may be divided into several threads. Firstly, the relativity of the historical truth is recurrently acknowledged by the Fig Tree – both narrator and character, through which the author projects an alternative vision of history, may it be documented or imaginary. However, there is also the voice of a second narrator which does not participate in the action of the novel but reproduces the events and the atmosphere in which they happened like a cosmic eye, always knowing more than the characters. The voice of the narrator seems the most objective. Thirdly, the voice of characters has the power to offer a clear overview of Cypriot society and culture marked by ethnic division (or to put it in an optimistic, ethnic diversity).

Recurrently, The Fig Tree recognizes the narrative power of historical/political discourses, as well as its own subjectivity:

Fig Tree - „*What I tell you, therefore, 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. Truth is a rizome – an underground plant stem with lateral shoots. You need to dig deep to reach it and, once unearthed, you have to treat it with respect.*” (Shafak, 2021, p.190/novel)

Fig Tree – „*Better to keep some distance from all collective beliefs and certainties, I always remind myself*” (Shafak, p.190/novel)

Here, The Fig Tree’s ‘radical indeterminacy’ and “questioning of anything that seems ‘natural’ (that is, fixed, obviously true, etc.) is what poststructuralism is all about.” (Quiogue Andrews, 2022). Accepting its own limits in accessing the truth also becomes an invitation to ambiguity, to the deconstruction of existing discourses marked by imposed certitude. What should be the reason for this exhortation? Maybe the fact that before judging self-identity as well as that of others based on what one is told, one should follow an interrogative process, listen to multiple perspectives, and finally accept that discerning with certainty what is true becomes impossible.

These interpretation was also publicly stated by Elif Shafak for the Nexus Institute: “*we grew up in cultures with narratives that tell us who we are by ways of simplification and this is happening everywhere [...] and all identity politics is based on exclusion, [...] on a distinction between ‘us’ versus ‘them’ [...] we must be critical of that [...] we have to resist this tendency*

of simplify things because as human beings we are so complex, we are composed of multiple selves” (Shafak, 2021)

This is also the case of Ada who, meeting her aunt, interrogates her regarding the multiple perspectives/narratives that circulated in her family, due to the ethnic heterogeneity of its members, so that the information passes through her thinking filter where it is interpreted subjectively. Subjectivity is nothing else but a construct “at the intersection of different socially available discourses that determine to some extent how we see ourselves as individuals and as members of a community” (Khan I.U., 2021, p.258).

The narrative has, therefore, the power to deconstruct ideas about historical truth through presenting an alternative face of it. By delving into the fictional universes of the book, the line between fiction and historical reality becomes blurred. Many narrative sequences seem to be cut out of a history book and woven into the story.

5.12. Identity articulation and Otherness in the novel

The problem of identity, so important for Poststructuralism, leaves its marks on the central characters to a considerable extent, and is constantly associated with struggle. Sometimes, knowing who one is does not come as a facile question to answer, while the path towards satisfying this ardent inherent curiosity about oneself becomes a journey in search and definition of identity. The inquisitive journey that Ada takes, borrows the characteristics of a *bildungsroman*⁶, where the emotional loss she had experienced gives a strong incentive for a discovering her cultural roots.

The fact that one of the central characters of the novel is the teenager Ada might be not accidental at all. Studies have shown that identity had been considered as a core developmental milestone of adolescence for more than half a century” (Erikson, 1959 *apud* Berman *et.al.*, 2020, p.275). Therefore, the course of the character Ada in the definition of identity amplifies the action of the novel as well as the idea of identity as a fluid, marking at the same time the beginning of the individual's curiosities related to the question "Who am I?". This process

⁶ The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms defines the concept of '*Bildungsroman*' as being “[a] kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity (Baldick, 2015a).

appears to be sinuous, since questions of identity can result in personal crisis were traumatic experiences and identity influence one another (*Ibid.*).

In analysing poststructuralist reflections over identity, Dolan shows that „Identity becomes a site of struggle, at which the subject organizes and reorganizes competing discourses as they fight for supremacy” (Dolan, 1989, p.60). Ada’s personal experience with both Greek-orthodox and Turkish-Muslim leads to a psychological skirmish inside its consciousness, not necessarily to establish one’s supremacy over other, but to restructure the binary influence and reveal a new identity, which nevertheless accepts the duality of its roots. Ada must face opposite discourses of her family, which in the end are deeply rooted in the societal conceptions for years. This confrontation between two inherited parts of her identity reminds of the Jungian coined notion of ‘collective unconscious’, also referred as the ‘objective psyche’, which relates to the idea that a segment of our deepest unconscious mind is genetically inherited from past collective experiences of humanity, encompassing images of mythology and other cultural symbols are inherited and present at birth (Fritscher, 2023).

Poststructuralism recognises that the question of representation is important for politics, since representation is constitutive (Thomassen, 2017, p.541). Every character is representative for a category, although the central character Ada is the exponent of multicultural emigrational identity on the path of its self-constitution. The translation of Ada’s immigrant identity links up different cultural elements, Belsey remarked that “immigrants may suddenly find the prohibitions they have grown up with suspended as the power of the symbolic order is lifted. They become ‘liberated’, other than they are.” (Belsey, 2002, p. 63) and pertinently questioned “But are they freer? Or more solitary?” (*Ibid.*). As in other novels written by Elif Shafak, *The Island of Missing Trees* highlights how “opposites can be blended in one individual and lead to a formation of a third culture or a multicultural nature” (Gürbüz, 2019, p. 134)

The identity of humans and trees is interconnected in the novel. Not only are human affected by displacement and generational trauma, but also trees are sharing the same experiences: „ *If families resemble trees, as they say, arborescent structures with entangled roots and individual branches jutting out at awkward angles, family traumas are like thick, translucent resin dripping from a cut in the bark. They trickle down generations. [...]* (p.128/novel). Part five of the novel, entitled *Ecosystem*, turns attention to the collateral damage of the war on the environment, as well as on the many babies who died during that period due to a wave of mosquitoes. From this part we also learn something important about the identity of the narrator

Fig tree, which grew up in London from a cutting taken from the old, dying Fig tree in the devastated Nicosia tavern.

The personification and metaphor through which the story of the tree is approached are important, since many of its feelings are projections of the one who emigrated. The tree branch hidden in the luggage shares the same fate as Ada, who was in the mother's womb at the time the family emigrated to London. A strong insight on how immigrational identity is shaped in diasporic settings is revealed by reference to the fate of the tree: „*If this cutting from Cyprus were to take root in England, it would be genetically identical but not all the same*” (Shafak, 2021, p. 300/novel).

Ada's identity deconstructs the opposition Greek-Orthodox vs. Turkish-Muslim, exactly how “psychoanalysis deconstructs the opposition mind-body” (Belsey, 2002 p. 68). Her character is not only maternal orphan, but she embodies what Belsey called ‘cultural orphan’, “never *at one* with anyone anywhere” (Belsey, 2002, p.63). The aspect is illustrated at the beginning of the novel when the narrator introduces the character: Ada is rather an introverted person who prefers isolation, often feeling misunderstood, and who has “*no intention of giving her classmates yet another reason to conclude that she – and her family – were weird*” (p.10/novel). The sudden scream Ada launches in class reminds of a famous expressionist painting – ‘The Scream’ of Norwegian painter Edvard Munch, suggesting a primal, overwhelming anxiety and existential angst (Sooke, 2016). Lacking visions on his/her own identity, the subject becomes ‘confused, incoherent, depressed’ and if psychoanalysis is right about the unconscious, it comes rather difficult for one to know what “I” really mean (Belsey, 2002 p. 67-68).

The screaming incident, video-captured by a colleague and uploaded on social media, gives rise to a movement under the hashtag *#doyouhearmenow*, which seems to be the voice of those forgotten by history or even the echo of a fragmented, uprooted identity. Since in the end of the novel, Ada returns to school as like nothing happened and life goes on, without paying too much attention to the event that Ada augmented in her anxious mind, a review of the novel observed that “[t]he project of giving voice to the losers of history turns out to be an empty promise that isn't delivered on”, as we can hear the voice, but we still don't understand its message. (Ünlüönen, 2021).

Since “the binary thinking of ‘self’ vs. ‘other’, or ‘us’ vs. ‘them’, is a core principle of othering.” (Noor E. & Syed, 2022, p.311), as Drzewiecka observed “the formation of national

identities involves rejection, or abjection, of those who are not like us, [and] [o]nce they are abjected, they become the defining Other” (Drzewiecka, 2017, p.895). Belsey also noted that „we become subjects as a result of cultural construction and what culture represses, namely the lost but inextricably real” (Belsey, 2002 p.67). Similarly showed by another author, „identity is ultimately constructed by establishing opposites between *us* and *others* and that each age and society recreates its ‘Others’” (Said, 1978 *apud* Ichim, 2022, p.77).

VI. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1. Chapter preamble

The focus of this chapter is to outline the main findings of the research and the way they engage in answering the problem formulation. For this purpose, the main observation resulted from the research will be outlined. The two hypotheses which have been launched are:

- 1. Novel writing represents an alternative discourse which can illuminate realities in world politics.*
- 2. The power of historical narrative has the potential to shade light on complex facets of IR phenomena including international migration and migrants’ trajectories and identities.*

These hypotheses were elaborated to give a better and structured explanation to the overarching problem formulation, which may seem a compounded one: to understand immigrant identity formation under generational trauma, as portrayed in the novel, we had first and foremost to demonstrate that novel writing could be seen as a form of alternative discourse able to illuminate on important issues of IR.

6.2. Findings on novel writing as alternative discourse in IR

First approach was to demonstrate that novel writing represents and alternative discourse which has the power to illuminate over realities and issues in global politics.

A modern concept, IR developed as a sub-discipline of political science after 1940, and further beginning with 1980 is started to engage with other disciplines in a sustained way (Ashworth,

2009, p.16). Fictional writing can be used as a methodological tool to deal with IR questions (Sungju, 2015, p.366), because through their underlying meanings, pursue the power of storytelling and the influence of narrative. Blurring the distinction between fiction and non-fiction could open a path towards creative practices in IR (Edkins, 2013; Muecke, 2002, p.108), this approach being already ‘eloquently’ questioned through Fictocriticism, which along with ethnobiography and autobiography represents an alternative way of writing imported into IR (Sungju, 2015, p.368).

Way too often, these types of writings converge in a powerful literature „written under the heavy footsteps of history” (Katsigianni, 2019, p. 29). Considering these findings, the usefulness of fictional stories should be given a special attention in a wider IR context, since writers of these stories are witnesses of the times or cultures who, by not being captive of the political discourses, seek through the mastery of words to reach the minds and hearts of the readers in an attempt of challenging limitative, shady official discourses.

Barthes pertinently interrogates if the narrative of past events, as commonly presented in our culture, and placed under the imperious warranty of the real, justified by principles of rational exposition, is different from the imaginary narrative, as we find it in the epic, novel, drama (Barthes, 1967, p.65). As Edkins showed, for some time, international relations scholars have been investigating different forms of narratives and discussing ways of writing that might evade the structures of academic conventions (Edkins, 2013, p.281). Moreover, an aesthetic turn in IR has been claimed by scholarship. Frost concluded that *“aesthetic experience has a double character where artworks render thought foreign to itself and invite reflection on a range of political and discursive predicaments and thereby also engage issues pertinent to International Relations”*. (Frost, 2010, p. 433) The same had been suggested by Bleiker in his book *‘Aesthetics and World Politics’* where he defends the idea that aesthetic practices contribute to the study and practice of the IR as they can provide *“models for rethinking political global predicaments”* (*Ibid.*)

Through the novel *„The Island of Missing Trees”*, the author Elif Shafak, by using mainly the voice of the character-narrator Fig Tree, accompanied by that of other characters, deconstructs the power of single narratives, and invites for expansion and multiplicity of views on truth and identity. As noted by Katsigianni, *„[t]he diasporic character of Turkish-Cypriot writing, the multiplicity of languages, the appropriation of ancient myth, the focus on “Cypriotness” pose once more the question of national-cultural identity boundaries and hybridity”* (Katsigianni,

2019, p. 32). Such aesthetic interventions “are political because they disrupt the accepted order of things” (Frost, 2010, p. 435). Through flashback techniques, the novel provides from the very first pages, insights on how the Cypriot society affected by war looks like, inviting the reader to inhabit the space and reflect:

“Whispers of distrust and conspiracy rippled in the dark. For the island was riven into two pieces – the north and the south. A different language, a different script, a different memory prevailed in each, and when they prayed, the islanders, it was seldom to the same god [...] The partition that tore through Cyprus from one end to the other, a buffer zoned patrolled by United Nations troops, was about one hundred and ten miles long, and as wide as four miles in places while merely a few yards in others. [...] Nicosia, the only divided capital in the world. [...] Nicosia was no exception, one more name added to the list of segregated places and separated communities, those consigned to history and those yet to come. At this moment, though, it stood as a peculiarity. The last divided city in Europe”. (Shafak, 2021, p.2-3/novel)

The resuscitation of identity and historical truth through fiction presents the unique advantage of creating a space which enables the reader to process and reflect over historical events through an empathetic approach. Often, by sympathizing the characters, it becomes easier to understand the destructive social impact associated with the events and the struggles behind (re)shaping of migrant's identity.

6.3. Findings on the indeterminacy of identity and truth, shaped by narratives

The subsequent hypothesis which we were trying to analyse to find those insights able to illuminate on the problem formulation starts by the assertion that: *the power of historical narrative has potential to shade light on complex facets of IR phenomena including international migration and migrants' trajectories and identities*. The findings resulted in a concordance of the image and the identity of the immigrant, as outlined in the novel, with scholarship conclusions resulting from interdisciplinary approaches which entwine the field of IR with psychology, sociology, philosophy, or intercultural communication.

In those circumstances where groups belonging to different cultures coexist together, „[t]he sense of national corresponds to a historical identity with relative stability (tradition) and an

always dominant instability, as well as a given localism (subject to continuous evolution)” (Kristeva, 1997 *apud* Katsigianni, 2019, p. 30). Ultimately, the identity represents a cultural product induced by the signs and symbols of a culture. Therefore ‘signs represent prior realities’ and “what was been thought or declared natural is in fact a historical, cultural product, [where] [...] the supposedly natural or given identity is a cultural role, an effect that has been produced within culture.”(Culler, 2011, p.14)

Sometimes the fluidity of identity could be “ensconced within the notion of multiculturalism” (Khan T., 2020). This affirmation is demonstrated by the construction of the character Ada in the novel. Although born and raised in London in an immigrant family, for Ada the multicultural aspect of her identity is given by her very genetic roots, belonging to two different, clashing ethnicities.

Immigrants acquire a multicultural identity, which, however, is formed by the force of circumstances and the trajectories they had to take, while overcoming certain struggles. They become what Katsigianni called ‘identities on the go’ (Katsigianni, 2019). When it comes to explaining the attribute of ‘multicultural’, it was stated that:

“Broadly speaking, those who are mixed-race and mixed-ethnic, those who have lived in more than one country (such as expatriates, international students, immigrants, refugees, and sojourners), those reared with at least one other culture in addition to the dominant mainstream culture (such as children of immigrants or colonized people), and those in inter-cultural relationships may all be considered multicultural.” (Berry, 2003, *apud* Gürbüz, 2019, p.133)

In analysing the underlying themes of the novel, two authors have pertinently remarked that occurrence of conflicts in the 21st century not only force people to abandon their homelands, but also significantly affect the natural environment (Sabbah & Ayuningtyas, 2022). The analysed novel invites to multiple possibilities of analysis which are relevant for development and international relations, not only from a multicultural perspective, but also Ecocritical⁷ perspectives, since this novel entwines mythology, politics, zoology, and lepidopterology

⁷ ‘Ecocriticism’ or environmental criticism is an emerging field of literature study focusing on the relationship that human beings have to the environment and those human behaviours affecting the environment (e.g. deforestation, air pollution, endangered species, wetland loss, animal right and rampant consumerism) (Environmental Humanities Initiative, n.d.)

(Ünlüönen, 2021) or feminist theories. From this point of view, the present thesis paper could arouse the appetite to further look at the themes and leitmotifs of the novel from other perspectives, highly relevant for global development and IR.

The novel represents what White named as “an artistic treatment of a real event in his past which transcends the truth – reality distinction” (White, 2005, p. 149). The resolution of the main conflict corresponds to the moment when Ada embraces her Cypriot roots and start feeling an „*islander*”. The example may suggest that identity of the immigrant in IR, as portrayed by historical fiction, far from being quiescent, is evolutionary and fluid, shaped by circumstances and narratives. But the identity formation is also subject of one's own choice in relating to these, as observed by Khan: “the identity of the immigrant will always be one of perpetual choice. Be it in their country of origin or their host nation. And this choice is what ultimately will define immigrant identity. Or help it to continually evolve.” (Khan T., 2020).

In relation to generational trauma, although there are studies that show that it can be inherited, as the story of the novel also reflects, in the end the subject has the free will to choose to understand and contribute to the process of healing and adjusting his own identity. Berman stated that “identity can also be a lens through which trauma is perceived and interpreted, helping to determine whether a traumatic experience results in posttraumatic stress disorder or posttraumatic growth” (Berman *et.al.*, 2020, p.275).

By applying a poststructuralist lens, the findings of the research showed that there is a fine line between fiction and non-fiction, which requires to take so-called ‘truths’ with a grain of salt. For Derrida, there is “no absolute distinction between fiction and non-fiction, testimony, and literature”, since one is undoubtedly haunted by the other:

“Just as memory makes no sense without the notion of forgetting, so testimony makes no sense without the concept of fiction. One is the constitutive outside of the other; they are also, importantly, in a hierarchical relation: one is regarded as primary, the second as derivative, and hence less valued. If, at present, it is the academic argument that is valued form in international relations, I would suggest that a phase of overturning is surely necessary – a phase where fiction writing is valued over the claim to objectivity” (Derrida, 1987 *apud* Edkins, 2013, p. 283).

Exploring the arguments of Derrida, for Edkins both academic writing and the novel are recognised to have political potential (Edkins, 2013, p.283).

For example, fictional writings like this could play a potential influence on identity policy movements from politicians or social activists. Fiction creates a cathartic space of empathy and understand of global issues and, by delving into the deepest feelings of the forced immigrant character, one could better understand and accept the impact of negative events on people's identity. Moreover, an understanding of 'the Otherness' and its manifestation in the process of identity formation could enhance a responsibility of inclusion, and sometimes it can even contribute to blurring barriers between cultures and identity constructions.

The power of narrative could be seen from two angles, inter-related. On the one hand, in the novel, the power of narrative is practised with the voice of characters for influencing each other perceptions (e.g., after meeting her aunt, Ada gains new perspectives over her own identity). On the other hand, the power of narrative acquires influence for the reader, giving space for reflection (e.g., the narrator Fig Tree convey the story directly to the reader).

Carrying out this research led to an even more simplified understanding of what Poststructuralism means. Although a postmodernist critical approach or philosophy, the way poststructuralism relates to truth and variable meanings presents similarities to what was proposed at the beginnings of philosophy through Socratic questioning. By applying poststructuralists underpinnings, the study shows that with the multiplication of narrative discourses about past and culture, the possibility of interpretation also multiplies. This will eventually spur different meanings having potential to shape identity or what one considers as truth.

To conclude with, poststructuralism takes an approach to research "that questions fixed categories or structures, oppositional binaries, closed systems, and stable truths and embraces seeming contradictions" (Duff, 2012, *apud* Khan et. al., 2021, p. 258).

VII. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this work is to analyse and answer the research question: ***How historical fiction, as alternative discourse in IR, contributes to the understanding of immigrant identity and generational trauma?*** In conducting the research, two hypotheses represented the pivot of the

work, which were also tested and proved in the paper, by means of scholarly articles research and literary analysis applied to the chosen novel: *The Island of Missing Trees*". For hypothesis 1, the researched proved that novel writing could play the role of an alternative discourse able to illuminate on relevant issues of IR. Regarding the second hypothesis, the findings showed that in the identity of immigrant is perceived as fluid and modulated by narratives, subject to transformation in which the generational trauma, hybrid influences or multicultural peculiarities plays a significant role.

The thesis concludes that through historical fiction we can understand current IR issues, as the immigrant identity formation and struggles, beyond what we are told by official discourses or analysis employing mainstream theoretical means. From this perspective, novel writing appears as an alternative discourse which can illuminate on past, contemporary, and future global issues. As showed by Demetriou in relation to the Cypriot migration crisis after the ethnic wars, "[t]his history of displacement in modern history is important to the reception of refugees today because it has put in place structures and discourses that have an impact on such reception on both sides, to this day" (Demetriou, 2019, p. 5).

Elif Shafak's novel could be included in what Katsigianni called "a diachronic mirror of the formation of (national and hybrid) identities" where the concept of 'Cypriotness' appears as unstable, diverse and plural" (Katsigianni, 2019, p. 40). The novel's subject is included in the list of concerns raised by Elif Shafak to campaign for future international dynamic based on inclusion, in which human rights and differences or multiplicity of identities are respected. Through the voice of the characters, the author blames military conflicts, and campaigns for promoting peace and the understanding of a past which should not be repeated. The Cypriot conflict is currently relevant for the international society because it is a protracted conflict. As highlighted by an author, "the parties remain locked in an adversarial frame that is self-perpetuating and mutually destructive, and that might only be altered through a comprehensive and sustained unofficial track of conflict analysis and resolution" with the aim of overcoming the trauma of the past (Fisher, 2001, p.307). Ultimately, peace processes can only be achieved by addressing identity issues and identifying instrumental means to reach resolution (Pearson, 2001 apud Fisher, 2001, p.307).

Therefore, the presented study also aims to launch an invitation and an incentive for further research to look at historical fiction as well as other categories of fiction, from an international

relations perspective, by identifying and analysing those attributes with didactic potential in regard of issues and events of global politics.

VIII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books:

Belsey, C. (2002), *Poststructuralism: A very short introduction*, Very Short Introductions, Oxford University Press.

Culler, J. (2011). *Literary theory. A very short introduction*, 2nd ed., Very Short Introductions, Oxford University Press.

Campbell, D., Bleiker, R. (2021), Poststructuralism, in *International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity*, Edited by Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, Steve Smith, 5th edition, Oxford University Press, pp. 197-219.

Davies, M.B. (2007). *Doing a successful research project: Using Qualitative or Quantitative Methods*, Palgrave Macmillan.

Drzewiecka, J.A. (2017). Identity, Poststructuralist Approaches. In *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*, Y.Y. Kim (Ed.). <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0221>.

Eco, U. (2015). *Confesiunile unui tânăr romancier*, (in English: *Confessions of a Young Novelist*), Polirom.

Hoffmeister, F. (2006). *Legal Aspects of the Cyprus Problem: Annan Plan and EU Accession*. BRILL, <https://doi.org/10.1163/ej.9789004152236.i-290> .

Mc Morrow, A. (2017). Poststructuralism, in *International Relations Theory*. Edited by Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters & Christian Scheinpflug, E-International Relations, pp. 56-62.

Noor, E. N.; Syed M. (2022), Othering, in *Showing Theory to Know Theory*. Edited by Patricia Ballamingie, David Szanto, Showing Theory Press, pp. 308-317, <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/showingtheory/chapter/othering/> .

Quiogue Andrews, K. (2022), Poststructuralism, in *Showing Theory to Know Theory*. Edited by Patricia Ballamingie, David Szanto, Showing Theory Press, pp.351- 354, <https://ecampusontario.pressbooks.pub/showingtheory/chapter/poststructuralism/> .

Schrift, A.D. (2018), "Foucault and Poststructuralism.", in *A Companion to Literary Theory*. Edited by David H. Richter, Wiley Blackwell, pp.167-187.

Shafak, E. (2021). *The Island of Missing Trees*, Penguin Random House.

Articles:

Alatas, S. F. (2000). An Introduction to the Idea of Alternative Discourses. *Southeast Asian Journal of Social Science*, 28(1), 1–12. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24492996>

Aliefendioğlu, H. & Behçetoğulları, P. (2019). Displacement, memory and home(less) identities: Turkish Cypriot women's narratives, *Gender, Place & Culture*, 26:10, 1472-1492, DOI: 10.1080/0966369X.2018.1556613

Ashworth, Lucian M. "Interdisciplinarity and International Relations." *European Political Science*, vol. 8, no. 1, 2009, pp. 16–25, <https://doi.org/10.1057/eps.2008.11>.

Barthes, R. (1967). "Le discours de l'histoire." *Social Science Information*, vol. 6, no. 4, pp. 63–75, <https://doi.org/10.1177/053901846700600404>.

Berman, S. L., et al. (2020) "Trauma and Identity: A Reciprocal Relationship?" *Journal of Adolescence (London, England.)*, vol. 79, no. 1, p. 275–78, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adolescence.2020.01.018> .

Boaz, C. (2020). How Speculative Fiction Can Teach About Gender and Power in International Politics: A Pedagogical Overview. *International Studies Perspectives*, Vol. 21, No. 3, pp. 240 – 57.

Carroll, T. (2002). Writing My Way to Poststructuralism, *Outskirts*, The University of Western Australia, vol. 9, <https://www.outskirts.arts.uwa.edu.au/volumes/volume-9/carroll>.

Damrosch, D. (2011) "World Literature as Alternative Discourse." *Neohelicon (Budapest)*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 307–17, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-011-0115-8> .

Demetriou, O. (2019). Migration into the Cyprus Conflict and the Cypriot Citizenship Regime, *PRIO Cyprus Centre Report*, 2. Nicosia: PRIO Cyprus Centre.

Dolan, J. (1989). "In Defense of the Discourse: Materialist Feminism, Postmodernism, Poststructuralism... And Theory." *TDR: Drama Review*, vol. 33, no. 3, pp. 58–71, <https://doi.org/10.2307/1145987>.

Domínguez González, D. J. (2009). "Reconstrucción discursiva del pasado y reescritura de la historia." *Bajo palabra (Madrid, Spain)*, no. 4, pp. 257–268.

Frost, L. (2010). "Aesthetics and Politics." *Global Society: Journal of Interdisciplinary International Relations*, vol. 24, no. 3, pp. 433–43, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13600826.2010.485560> .

Edkins, J. (2013). "Novel Writing in International Relations: Openings for a Creative Practice." *Security Dialogue*, vol. 44, no. 4, pp. 281–97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0967010613491304> .

Ergun, D., *et al.* (2008). "Comparing Psychological Responses of Internally Displaced and Non-Displaced Turkish Cypriots." *Torture*, vol. 18, no. 1, pp. 20–28.

Ertorer, S. E. (2014). "Managing Identity in the Face of Resettlement." *Identity (Mahwah, N.J.)*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 268–85, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15283488.2014.944695> .

Fisher, R.J. (2001). "Cyprus: The Failure of Mediation and the Escalation of an Identity-Based Conflict to an Adversarial Impasse." *Journal of Peace Research*, vol. 38, no. 3, pp. 307–26, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343301038003003> .

Gerring, J. (2004). "What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 98, no. 2, pp. 341–54, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404001182> .

Gürbüz, N. F. (2019). "The Perception of Multicultural Identity in Elif Shafak's *Honour*." *The Journal of International Social Research*, vol. 12, no. 62, 2019, pp. 130–34, <https://doi.org/10.17719/jisr.2019.3034> .

Harcourt B.E., An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Poststructuralism?'. *University of Chicago Public Law & Legal Theory Working Paper*, No. 156, 2007, pp.1-34

Heale, R. & Twycross A. (2018) "What Is a Case Study?" *Evidence-Based Nursing*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 7–8, <https://doi.org/10.1136/eb-2017-102845> .

Holmes, A. G. D. (2020) “Researcher Positionality -- A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research -- A New Researcher Guide.” *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, p. 1–10.

Ichim, M. (2022), “Cultural Images of the East and West in Elif Shafak’s Novels.” *Linguaculture (Iaşi)*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 75–86, <https://doi.org/10.47743/lincu-2022-2-0316> .

Jackson, J. (2017). Identity, Bilingual and Multilingual. In *The International Encyclopedia of Intercultural Communication*, Y.Y. Kim (Ed.), p. 831-839, <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118783665.ieicc0035>

Katsigianni, A.-M. (2019), “Identities on the Go: Homelands and Languages In Balkan And Turkish–Cypriot Literature.” *Revista Hiperborea*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 29–44, <https://doi.org/10.5325/hiperborea.6.1.0029> .

Khan, I.U., *et al.* (2021). “Poststructuralist Perspectives on Language and Identity: Implications for English Language Teaching Research in Pakistan.” *Sjesr*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 257–67, [https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021\(257-267\)](https://doi.org/10.36902/sjesr-vol4-iss1-2021(257-267)) .

Muecke, S. (2002), “The Fall: Fictocritical Writing.” *Parallax (Leeds, England)*, vol. 8, no. 4, pp. 108–12, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1353464022000028000> .

Olssen, M. (2003) “Structuralism, Post-Structuralism, Neo-Liberalism: Assessing Foucault’s Legacy.” *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 18, no. 2, pp. 189–202, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0268093022000043047>.

Ramsbotham, O. (2005). “The Analysis of Protracted Social Conflict: a Tribute to Edward Azar.” *Review of International Studies*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 109–26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210505006327> .

Sabbah, S., & Ayuningtyas, P. (2022). The issues of diaspora and displacement in Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees*. *Rainbow : Journal of Literature, Linguistics and Culture Studies*, 11(2), pp. 62-69.

Sharma, N., & Jha, S. (2023). “Memory Shot Through Holes”: The Idea of Postmemory in Elif Shafak’s *The Island of Missing Trees*, *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, DOI: 10.1080/00111619.2023.2195994.

St. Pierre, E. A. (2000). "Poststructural Feminism in Education: An Overview." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, vol. 13, no. 5, 2000, pp. 477–515, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518390050156422> .

Sungju, P.-K. (2015) "Fictional IR and Imagination: Advancing Narrative Approaches." *Review of International Studies*, vol. 41, no. 2, pp. 361–81, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210514000291> .

Thomassen, L. (2017) "Poststructuralism and Representation." *Political Studies Review*, vol. 15, no. 4, pp. 539–50, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478929917712932> .

Volkan, E., & Hadjimarkou, M. (2022) "Undivided Trauma in a Divided Cyprus: Modified Emotional Stroop Study." *Psychological Trauma*, vol. 14, no. 6, pp. 989–97, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tra0000527> .

White, H. (2005). "Introduction: Historical Fiction, Fictional History, and Historical Reality." *Rethinking History*, vol. 9, no. 2-3, pp. 147–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642520500149061> .

Website links:

Baldick, C. (2015a). *Bildungsroman*. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 3 May. 2023, from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/display/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-129>

Baldick, C. (2015b). *historical novel*. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 3 May. 2023, from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-544> .

Baldick, C. (2015c). *novel*. In *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms*. : Oxford University Press. Retrieved 3 May. 2023, from <https://www-oxfordreference-com.zorac.aub.aau.dk/view/10.1093/acref/9780198715443.001.0001/acref-9780198715443-e-788> .

Brewton, V. (n.d.). *Literary Theory*, In Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, available at: <https://iep.utm.edu/literary/> .

Cruz, I. (n.d), *What is Poststructuralism and Deconstruction?* <https://www.enotes.com/homework-help/what-is-post-structuralism-and-deconstruction-2631125> .

Environmental Humanities Initiative, (n.d.), *What is ecocriticism?* available at: https://ehc.english.ucsb.edu/?page_id=2388 .

Fritscher, L. (2023). Carl Jung's Collective Unconscious Theory: What It Suggests About the Mind, available at: <https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-the-collective-unconscious-2671571> .

Gilespie, C. (2023). *What is generational trauma?*, in Health, Available at: <https://www.health.com/condition/ptsd/generational-trauma> .

Henriques, M. (2019). *Can the legacy of trauma be passed down the generations?*, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20190326-what-is-epigenetics> .

Imperial Wars Museums (n.d), *What caused the division of the Island of Cyprus*, <https://www.iwm.org.uk/history/what-caused-the-division-of-the-island-of-cyprus> .

Inskeep, S. (2021). *"The Island Of Missing Trees" is Elif Shafak's latest novel*. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2021/11/15/1055749057/the-island-of-missing-trees-is-elif-shafaks-latest-novel> .

Khan, T. (2020), *Is it possible to define immigrant identity? An immigrant's perspective*, Oxford Migration Conference 2020, available at : <https://www.routemagazine.com/omc2020-1-immig-identity> .

Lee, R. (n.d.). *Guide: our definition of historical fiction*, Historical Novel Society, <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/guide-our-definition-of-historical-fiction/> .

Ross, L. (2021). *The Island of Missing Trees by Elif Shafak review -superlative storytelling*, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2021/aug/06/the-island-of-missing-trees-by-elif-shafak-review-superlative-storytelling> .

Salmon, P. (2021). *How Derrida and Foucault became the most misunderstood philosophers of our time*, available at: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/ideas/philosophy/40952/how-derrida-and-foucault-became-the-most-misunderstood-philosophers-of-our-time>.

Shafak, E. (2020). *We need to tell different stories, to humanise the other*, in The Guardian, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2020/aug/13/elif-shafak-we-need-to-tell-different-stories-to-humanise-the-other>

Smith, C. (2014). *Cyprus divided: 40 years on, a family recalls how the island was torn apart*, in The Guardian, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/jul/06/turkish-invasion-divided-cyprus-40-years-on-eyewitness-greek-cypriot-family> .

Smith, H. (2017), *In Nicosia, the world's last divided capital, a spirit of reconciliation is stirring across the fence*, in The Guardian, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jan/15/in-nicosia-cyprus-spirit-of-reconciliation-is-stirring>

Sooke, A. (2016). *What is the meaning of The Scream?*, available at: <https://www.bbc.com/culture/article/20160303-what-is-the-meaning-of-the-scream>

Tenembaum, Y.J. (2020), *Truth and History: Historical Truth and Historical Narrative*, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/174493> .

Texas A&M University Writing Center, (n.d.), *Analyzing Novels & Short Stories*, available at: <https://writingcenter.tamu.edu/Students/Writing-Speaking-Guides/Alphabetical-List-of-Guides/Academic-Writing/Analysis/Analyzing-Novels-Short-Stories> .

The Historical Novel Society (n.d), *About*, <https://historicalnovelsociety.org/about-us/> .

Ünlüönen, S. (2021). *The Island of Missing Trees*, Harvard Review Online, <https://www.harvardreview.org/book-review/the-island-of-missing-trees/> .

Vinz, S. (2022). *What Is a Theoretical Framework? | Guide to Organizing*. Scribbr. Retrieved May 4, 2023, from <https://www.scribbr.com/dissertation/theoretical-framework/>

Wong, J. *et al.* (2020), *'Love, loss and longing': the best books on migration, chosen by writers*, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/feb/05/migration-book-recommendations-american-dirt> .

Interviews:

Shafak, E. (2021). *Garantat 100% cu scriitoarea Elif Shafak (@TVR1)*, YouTube, Uploaded by TVR, January 2021, available in Romanian language at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=awoYG8ph0ls> .

Shafak, E. (2020). *Elif Shafak on multiple identities and radical humanism*, YouTube, Uploaded by The Nexus Institute, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4bVqldzCtHE>

IX. APPENDIX

APPENDIX 1:

Note to the Reader

Many of the stories of the missing mentioned throughout the novel are based on true accounts. *Beneath the Carob Trees: The Lost Lives of Cyprus* by Nick Danziger and Rory MacLean, launched by the Committee on Missing Persons, UNDP, is a profoundly touching resource for those wishing to read further.

While I was researching this novel the exhumations carried out in Spain and Latin America were of great importance to me. The story about the cab driver is fictional, but inspired by a real account – a chilling remark made to Red Cross representatives by their Francoist guide – that I came across in Layla Renshaw's excellent book *Exhuming Loss: Memory, Materiality and Mass Graves of the Spanish Civil War*.

The story of Kostas's grandfather being shot by soldiers during curfew echoes a similar tragedy that took place and is mentioned in *The British and Cyprus: An Outpost of Empire to Sovereign Bases, 1878–1974* by Mark Simmons. Another insightful book is James Ker-Lindsay's *The Cyprus Problem: What Everyone Needs to Know*.

The article Kostas read in August 1974 was inspired by an article published a year later, on 8 August 1975, in *Science*, 'Are we on the brink of a pronounced global warming?', by the US climate scientist and geochemist Wally Broecker, who was one of the first people to warn us about the connection between human-induced carbon emissions and rising temperatures.

The information on floral farms and wreaths for dead British soldiers, as well as several striking details about the island, are drawn from Tabitha Morgan's wonderful *Sweet and Bitter Island: A History of the British in Cyprus*. Lawrence Durrell's *Bitter Lemons* is an illuminating, personal and perceptive take on Cyprus

between 1953 and 1956. Andrekos Varnava's *British Imperialism in Cyprus: The Inconsequential Possession* provides a spectacular account of the period between 1878 and 1915, while the anthology *Nicosia Beyond Borders: Voices from a Divided City*, edited by A. Adil, A. M. Ali, B. Kemal and M. Petrides, brilliantly represents the voices of both Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot writers. For personal anecdotes, myths and history, Colin Thubron's *Journey into Cyprus* offers a compelling narrative.

I came across the letter sent out to guests of Ledra Palace (published in the *Observer* on 15 September 1974) in Kenneth Morrison's *Sarajevo's Holiday Inn on the Frontline of Politics and War*.

In researching mosquitoes, one particular book that stayed with me was Timothy C. Winegard's *The Mosquito: A Human History of Our Deadliest Predator*.

For detailed instructions on how to bury a fig tree, visit <https://www.instructables.com/Bury-a-Fig-Tree/>

The comment about 'optimism' and 'pessimism' in plants was inspired by an article co-authored by Kouki Hikosaka, Yuko Yasumura, Onno Muller and Riichi Oguchi in *Trees in a Changing Environment: Ecophysiology, Adaptation and Future Survival*, edited by M. Tausz and N. Grulke. On the thought-provoking subject of epigenetic heredity and how memories can be passed down from one generation to the next, not only in plants but also in animals, see *What a Plant Knows: A Field Guide to the Senses* by Daniel Chamovitz.

The section on humans not seeing trees was filmed at the TED Countdown on the climate crisis and ways to build a world with net zero greenhouse emissions.

For further reading on experiments with trees, visit <https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/07/110711164557.htm>

For precious insight into the remarkable world of fig trees, see Mike Shanahan's *Gods, Wasps and Stranglers: The Secret History and Redemptive Future of Fig Trees*. *Figs: A Global History* by David Sutton, *The Cabaret of Plants* by Richard Mabey and *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature* by D. G. Haskell also provide great

companion pieces. The title of one of Kostas's books in the story was inspired by Merlin Sheldrake's *Entangled Life: How Fungi Make Our Worlds, Change Our Minds and Shape Our Futures*.

So many things in this novel are based on historical facts and events, including the fate of Varosha/Famagusta, the mysterious deaths of British babies and the illegal hunting of songbirds . . . I also wanted to honour local folklore and oral traditions. But everything here is fiction – a mixture of wonder, dreams, love, sorrow and imagination.