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Intergenerational Trauma and Female Silence in A Woman Is No Man: A Postcolonial Feminist Study

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Abstract

A postcolonial feminist analysis of intergenerational trauma and female silence in Etaf Rum's novel A Woman is No Man (2019). The study focuses on the displacement experiences of three generations of Palestinian-American women and how these experiences are shaped by historical displacement, patriarchal norms, and diasporic experiences. This study's main aim is to zoom in on mechanisms of inter-generational transmission of trauma and explore the role of female silence as an instrument of oppression and a possible locus of resistance. The study has been informed by postcolonial feminist theory, examines the entanglements of colonialism, patriarchy, and gender-based violence in the Palestinian diaspora. The data were collected from the entire primary source (novel) and relevant secondary sources (Scholarly sources). To identify information-rich passages which depict Fareeda, Isra and Deya, the purposive sampling method was used. The main data analysis tools were Thematizing Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis. The results indicate that intergenerational trauma can be passed on via maternal norms, domestic violence and cultural silence, but can also be broken in the third generation through education and conscious resistance. The novel is a wonderful example of the way in which silence has become an ally for survival and a voice in its emergence and how literature can be an instrument of Decolonial healing.

Keywords: Intergenerational Trauma, Female Silence, Postcolonial Feminism, Gender Oppression, Palestinian-American Women, Thematic Analysis, Resistance, Critical Discourse Analysis, Decolonial

Introduction

The study of intergenerational trauma and women's silences in diasporic communities has attracted critical attention in contemporary literature, especially when examined through post-colonial feminist frameworks that engage with the intersections of patriarchy, colonialism and cultural displacement. The novel is an intimate portrait of the lives of three generations of Palestinian-American women living in a closed-off immigrant neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York, and is a moving example of these dynamics, as A Woman Is No Man (2019) by Etaf Rum tells the story of women who are subjected to systemic oppression, domestic violence, and forced silence. Drawing on a postcolonial feminist lens, this research article examines how

Rum's narrative reveals the processes of traumata transmission across generations, the voices of women that are silenced by the intersections of tradition, honor, and historical dispossession.

This study is scaffolded by the theory of postmodern or postcolonial feminism, which is an analysis of the universalizing feminisms of the west and the patriarchy in former colonies. In postcolonial contexts, scholars contend that women are doubly marginalized; the legacies of the colonial past reinforce indigenous gender hierarchies (Mohanty, 1984). For Palestinian women, the Nakba and diaspora has left its collective trauma behind, which is passed down through family configurations and culture. In Rum's novel, the silence is revealed in the refugee camps in which Fareeda lived, and in Isra's abusive marriage and Deya's limited options, which speak of more than simply passively taking things; it signifies a response to fear of social rejection and possible additional violence.

The idea of intergenerational trauma is essential to an understanding of Palestinian-American families as represented in the novel, and is defined as the psychological and emotional wounding transferred from generation to generation. Historical displacement, occupation, and migration, combined with daily lived patriarchal controls, create cycles of shame, suppression, and mental health issues for Arab and Middle Eastern North African (MENA) Americans, as recent studies have made clear (Atari-Khan et al., 2025). Trauma is manifest in A Woman Is No Man in physical abuse, emotional neglect, and the internalization of the dictum *"a woman is no man,"* which denies women agency and creates subservient relationships. In diasporic stories women are the transmitters of transmission through the figure of the mother who is the victim in her turn and who enforces the norm that silences the victim.

In Rum's work, the image of female silence appears in various forms as a cultural norm and as a place of resistance. Postcolonial feminist critics emphasize the ways in which silence in Arab women's writing can serve as a sign of great strength and silent resistance to dominant discourses (Mehta, 2025). The gradual breaking of silence is illustrated by the quiet endurance of Isra and his eventual tragic fate as compared to Deya, whose newly awakened questioning of arranged marriage is a story that develops. Such portrayals break down the stereotypes of the *"Orient"* while revealing the close ties between the violence of *"othering"* and the violence of communities' so-called *"honor"* and the complicity of immigrant families in such violence.

This postcolonial feminist analysis places A Woman Is No Man in the context of Traumata in the field of narrative to *"heal" and "witness"* trauma. The healing power of literature for collective trauma, particularly in relation to refugee and diasporic communities, has become a growing focus of research in recent years (Dini, 2026; Sarfraz, 2025). What Rum does is it alternates points of view from one generation to the next, and plants the seeds of the possibility of rupture and recovery, since younger characters start questioning the norms that are passed on from generation to generation. Furthermore, Rum's text is analysed with regard to its countering of the monolithic image of the Arab woman. In contrast to victim narrative, Postcolonial feminism warns against simplistic interpretations of women's experiences, instead seeking to represent them in a more complex way that takes into consideration of agency under constraints (Sirri, 2024). In Fareeda's case, the practical approach to survival, Isra's escape through reading and Deya's defiant approach to oppression highlight that female lives are, in themselves, diverse. This complexity adds to understandings of how voice can come out of silence through storytelling.

Palestine's complex history of colonial violence is linked to gender-based trauma, resulting in distinctive intergenerational trauma dynamics. Research on Palestinian literature shows the manifestation of the experiences of PTSD and loss resulting from the occupation in the family, often through women's bodies and role of reproduction (Hosny, 2024). Rum's story foregrounds these by connecting historical refugee stories to domestic spheres today, where women are the ones who are suffering the burden of a collective unsolvable grief. Of paramount importance, this research fills gaps in literary scholarship by providing a postcolonial feminist reading with the incorporation of trauma theory. Previous generations of Arab-American literature centered on issues of identity and exile, whereas more recent works such as Rum's

highlight particular intimate gendered violence and its psychological effects (Allah, 2025). These types of analyses uncover the importance of literature as a mechanism for decolonizing the knowledge of Muslim and Arab femininities.

This novel's structure, with its voices from multiple generations, follows the fractured nature of traumatic memory in postcolonial trauma narratives. The fragmentation highlights the challenges in communicating pain and challenges readers to assemble unsung narratives (Younger, 2025). In so doing Rum becomes personal testimony and collective advocacy. In addition, cultural practices such as women's silence (honor code, marriage) reinforce the cycle of women's under empowerment. Traditional and adaptive practices surrounding MENA diasporas are highlighted by feminist scholarship, which argues that such practices call for intersectional interventions (MacDonnell, 2025). These tensions are illustrated through the characters of Rum, and are explored in a literary context in an effort to provide a model for real world discussions about gender and culture.

Research Questions

1. How does Etaf Rum's A Woman Is No Man portray the transmission of intergenerational trauma among Palestinian-American women across three generations?
2. How does the novel represent silence as both a victim and a means of resistance of women under the oppression of patriarchy and Post-Colonialism?
3. How can the postcolonial feminist approach illuminate the intersections of historical displacement, cultural norms and gender-based violence in the novel?

Research Objectives

1. To investigate the mechanisms of the intergenerational transmission of trauma and the psychological and cultural effects of intergenerational trauma on Palestinian-American women in a Palestinian context, A Woman Is No Man examines the transmission of trauma from one generation to the next and its psychological and cultural implications.
2. To examine how the female silence as a strategy of survival is developing into voice and agency in the text.
3. To discuss, within a postcolonial feminist lens, the intersections of colonial legacies, diaspora experiences and patriarchal configurations of the novel's female characters.

Literature Review

Discussions of intergenerational trauma in diasporic Palestinian literature have grown considerably, with a new focus on the impact of historical events such as the Nakba on familial dynamics and gendered experiences, spanning generations (Sarfraz, 2025). A Woman Is No Man sees Rum show this transmission in the lives of Fareeda, Isra, and Deya, all suffering from the wounds caused by displacement which appears as emotional repression and familial control. Such patterns correspond to the larger body of research into refugee trauma, and its incorporation into the culture of survival and honour.

The postcolonial feminist accounts have played a significant role in studying Arab-American women's writing and challenging colonial structures and native patriarchy that oppress women (Mikić, 2021). These strategies highlight the role of silence as a means of control in the lives of immigrant women, who internalize and continue these norms to uphold their families' unity within the context of being outsiders. Rum is a novel that illustrates this double bind, and as such it has been subjected to criticism of diaspora's effect on gender oppression.

Trauma's embodiment in three generations of Palestinian-American women is specifically brought to the fore by recent analyses of Rum's text (Sarfraz, 2025; El Ajjani, 2025). Their first-generation characters are directly impacted by displacement, while those of second generation characters are subjected to inherited

shame via cycles of abuse and limited agency. Third generation protagonists start to challenge these inheritances, and there is a possibility of a breakout and a recovery here.

Palestinian refugee community studies of intergenerational trauma highlight settler-colonial violence's contribution to collective psychological suffering (Veronese et al., 2023). Through the qualitative research across the generations, it is revealed how unprocessed grief and loss are passed on through parenting practices and cultural narratives, with implications for women carrying the reproductive and emotional workload. The narrative of rum reflects these: the refugee camp experiences to domestic violence in Brooklyn.

In the Arab diaspora literature, feminine silence is a survival tactic and place of resistance, a challenge to the Orientalist stereotypes and a revelation of internal power imbalance (Al-Samman, 2015). This *"silence*" is broken, and fiction is seen as a Decolonial act, as women writers reclaim space of stories which were once private spaces. This is the case with Rum's semi-autobiographical narrative. Critiques of A Woman Is No Man focus on issues of stereotyping of Arab families, but also recognize its worth in shedding light on *"real-life"* experiences of abuse and resilience. The way the novel represents women as victims and agents of the patriarchal norms complicates the narrative of simplistic victimhood, adding a richness to the postcolonial feminist discussion on agency in constraints.

The Palestinian mental health literature suggests that depression, anxiety and PTSD are prevalent among Palestinian refugees and displaced persons due to the historical trauma and current displacement of Palestinians.Palestinian mental health literature shows high rates of depression, anxiety and PTSD among Palestinian refugees and displaced persons, both from a historical trauma, and ongoing displacement, of Palestinians. These factors compound feelings of isolation and difficulties in seeking assistance in immigrant contexts, within the context of cultural expectations for women to be subservient to men. These psychosocial realities are represented by the characters of Rum.

In terms of ethnic representation, from exile to intimate explorations of domestic violence and generational conflict, the scholarship of Arab-American literature has developed over time (Majaj, as cited in earlier studies; updated in more recent diaspora studies). Rum's contribution to this is its focus on women's voices in post-9/11 America, where internal community pressures are exacerbated by Islamophobia. The studies on shame and cycle of trauma in Arab-American families show the trauma perpetuation through cultural mechanisms such as arranged marriage (Mikić, 2021; El Habib, 2025). In such situations, women characters face conflicting demands of tradition and modernity, and often defy in silence: silently reading, silently dreaming, and silently rebelling.

Fragmentation and memory are recurring motifs that have been emphasized in recent analyses, as part of trauma theory applied to Palestinian literature (Kohlke, as referenced). Rum's multi-generational structure resonates with the non-linear way in which trauma is remembered, calling readers to view and become integral to the process of reconstructing silenced histories. The feminist resistance in Rum's work connects with other feminist resistances in diaspora writing, which involve targeting the oppression of the patriarchy and the Western savior narrative (El Bulbeisi, 2025). The characters' stories convey the pain and need for change as they face intergenerational patterns. Collective resilience is now increasingly associated with the reclaiming of the narrative, by Palestinian youth and women in diaspora, in both empirical and literary studies (Naworska, 2024). Rum is a case study of how literature can be a tool to heal and reveal, process or investigate inherited wounds.

Methodology

Using a postcolonial feminist approach to research that combines critical theory with feminist research and analysis, this study highlights power dynamics, colonial heritage, and gendered oppression in a diasporic setting. This paradigm sees knowledge as embodied and politically produced and focuses on the voices of the excluded, challenging multiple layers of patriarchy, imperialism and cultural displacement. It is both

aligned with the research goals and places A Woman Is No Man as a place of resistance to intergenerational trauma and enforced female silence, where Palestinian-American women's experiences can be interpreted in nuanced ways (as in recent diaspora studies, where Mohanty's original work on female silence is updated) (Mohanty, 1984). The paradigm rejects positivist neutrality, and instead leans to more reflexive and emancipatory scholarship that connects literature and lived realities of trauma transmission.

The research method used in this study was qualitative with method of analysis of the literature. This method entailed primary data from Etaf Rum's novel, with secondary scholarly materials on trauma, diaspora and Arab-American literature as the additional data. The approach is interpretive and contextually based and allows for meaningful engagement with the techniques of story, development of characters, and symbolism of silence and trauma over three generations of characters. It has direct connection with the research questions, following the intergenerational patterns and the shift from silence to voice in the context of postcolonial feminist voice.

The main focus of data collection was the entire text of A Woman Is No Man (Rum, 2019) and the passages found to be relevant were purposively extracted and included to represent the experiences of Fareeda, Isra, and Deya. Secondary data comprised peer-reviewed articles, books and theoretical texts on intergenerational trauma and postcolonial feminism. The strength of this data collection is its authenticity and richness, as the novel is a primary artifact that is at the same time semi-autobiographical in nature, and provides thick descriptions of cultural and psychological realities that quantitative methods cannot provide. This method allows for contextual, cultural depth and specificity needed to understand trauma in a Palestinian diasporic context.

Both the main units of text and the supplementary literature were drawn by purposive sampling. Chapters and excerpts were chosen where they are most applicable to the themes of trauma transmission, female silence, patriarchal control and resistance. Scholarly sources were sampled based on recency and on the theoretical congruence to the postcolonial feminist perspective. Purposive sampling's strength in this literary study is that it intentionally targeted information-rich cases, which meant that heavy analysis of representative cases of passages best illuminating the research objectives was conducted instead of statistical generalization.

In order to analyze the data, thematic analysis was the principal data analysis method used complemented with the critical discourse analysis. Early coding highlighted themes of inherited shame, norm enforced by mothers and subtle forms of defiance. These codes were shaped into broader themes by iterative and reflexive reading in the paradigm of postcolonial feminist reading. The selected methodology has a good consistency with paradigm, methods, and objective. The nature of literary interpretation, which is interpretive and qualitative, provides a high level of ecological validity for literary trauma studies and enables a decolonial reading of voiceless voices. Subjectivity is counterbalanced by researcher reflexivity and triangulation with other scholarship. The contextually relevant results of this framework are informative and insightful regarding intergenerational trauma and female agency in the text of Rum.

Data Analysis

The first part of the data analysis focuses on the character of Fareeda (first generation) and the ways in which intergenerational trauma is transmitted to the next generations in A Woman Is No Man. The analysis is thematic with direct reference to the novel text in the light of the postcolonial feminist paradigm presented in the methodology.

1.1 Historical Displacement and the Roots of Trauma

The roots of intergenerational trauma lie in Fareeda's life in Palestine during the Nakba and her life as a refugee. The dispossession is collective and its impact can be seen in her psyche in the rigid control of families in diaspora. This is in keeping with postcolonial feminist perspectives that the body and the role of

women are areas in which colonial violence can reinforce patriarchal norms, forcing women to become the harbingers of cultural identity in the process of loss.

As one passage shows, the linkage: "*She was not surprised when her father came home and beat them mercilessly, the tragedy of the Nakba pulsing in his veins, she knew that the sufferings of women began with the sufferings of men, that the bondage of one became the bondage of the other".* This statement illustrates the rationalization and transmission of historical trauma and the transformation of male victimhood into female subjugation. Fareeda becomes the embodiment of this cycle, which she later passes on to Isra and Deya, thus exposing trauma as a psychological wound and cultural mechanism of survival.

The novel illustrates how the refugee camp has affected Fareeda's mindset; survival requires that she be silent, and conform. Postcolonial feminism points to this as a reaction to the dislocation of imperialism, that women carry culture in case the rest of the culture was erased. In the context of this, Fareeda is pragmatic in her thinking, making her a victim and a perpetrator of inherited pain – more concerned with honour than happiness.

1.2 Maternal Enforcement of Norms and Shame Transmission

The trauma passed on by Fareeda, Isra's mother-in-law, is representative of how trauma can be passed down through maternal figures. She was displaced, and now she reproduces oppressive structures, expecting obedience from Isra, and sons. This is a sign of how first generation survivors, who feel unhealed from their own trauma, impose control on the next generation.

The repeated admonishment of Fareeda is key evidence. She sees daughters as a burden: *"A daughter was never more than a temporary visitor, waiting to be whisked away by another man and all of her financial responsibilities".* Such claims are an intergenerational passing of shame and a dismissing of female value. Isra internalizes this, and she suffers emotionally from it. The analysis here is not about the lack of speech but rather a learned survival mechanism, stemming from Fareeda's trauma response.

This enforcement is complicated by cultural mechanisms such as arranged marriages which Fareeda considers to be protective. From a postcolonial perspective, these practices work to meet the needs of the diaspora and continue with the gender division of labour rooted in colonialism. The data reveals somatic and emotional trauma in the harshness, and in Fareeda's own woundedness from Palestine.

1.3 Embodied Trauma and Cultural Adaptation in Diaspora

In Brooklyn, Fareeda's trauma finds new forms of Islamophobia and assimilation stress. She is more and more attached to patriarchy, as a shield against external dangers, passing this defensive attitude on to her family. The novel's interconnected layers of generations show how displacement trauma is a disintegration of identity, and how the Fareeda is the one who carries on the refugee mentality. In Fareeda's case, embodied trauma is demonstrated through the actions of close reading, such as covering up bruises, arranging marriages and silencing dissent. Her insistence on female silence upholds communal honour but to the detriment of the individual agency, which postcolonial feminism condemns as intersectional oppression. This section sets the stage for the analysis of how this legacy affects Isra and Deya.

Thematic and critical discourse analysis using the postcolonial feminist approach unearths the height of trauma transmission and the complicated dynamics between agency and silence as survival.

2.1 Arranged Marriage and the Perpetuation of Patriarchal Control

Isra's tale is an example of how the trauma of Fareeda is directly passed on through the institution of arranged marriage. Isra, a fledgling Palestinian-American, finds herself in a marriage that's both deceptive and incompatible, and is a product of *"protective"* first-generation survivor culture.

This moment of the novel is powerful: *"They had offered her a kind man, a gentle man but the man who stood before her was none of those things".* This quote highlights one of the betrayals inherent in the

transmission of norms, that of familial duty over individual consent. A feminist postcolonial analysis would see the marriages as strategies to preserve cultural continuity at a time of diasporisation, and as continuing to reinforce male authority originating from historical dispossession.

As soon as they marry, Isra's marriage turns into a mundane routine of domestic violence. Adam's physical and emotional abuse resonates with the unhealed male trauma that was transmitted through Fareeda's home from the Nakba. The analysis reveals the ways in which intergenerational dynamics are being shaped by historical collective violence, and how women are often the ones bearing the burden of family honour at their own expense.

2.2 Female Silence as Survival Strategy and Internalized Oppression

Silence is a key element in Isra's journey, both as a survival strategy and as an oppressive force that is internalized. Through Fareeda's teachings and personal experience, Isra learns that being endure able is equal to being good. In Rum, the following expression is crucial when Isra says*, "A woman is no man. A woman should never talk back. A woman should never raise her voice. A woman should never complain".* She is consumed by this cultural cliché, which has become a part of her psyche, and is a manifestation of the discursive power of patriarchy that renders women voiceless. In postcolonial feminist analysis, this silence is a result of a combination of colonial histories and indigenous gender inequalities and is a means of avoiding community rejection and potential additional violence in the close-knit Brooklyn Palestinian community.

Isra's silence isn't just silence, it's a calculated response to trauma. She hides injuries, hides marital conflict and represses desires, all actions of her own that she adapts from Fareeda's own refugee camp experiences. Data illustrate that trauma is passed down by both explicit teaching and observed maternal modeling of self-erasure.

2.3 Escapism through Reading and the Seeds of Latent Resistance

In the midst of silence, Isra finds some solace in books, especially romantic novels, which provide glimpses of other realities. This is a subtle form of resistance, showing the conflict between oppression and inner agency.

She was a secret reader, *"living in a world of freedom and love, where women were valued and men were kind".* The moments of escapism are psychological survival mechanisms used by Isra, a way to escape the oppressive reality of her life, and to sow seeds of awareness that will affect Deya later on. From a post-colonial feminist perspective, these gestures are micro-resistances to being erased – they are a critique of the patriarchy and limitations in her diasporic life through an ironic use of Western literary forms.

But her reading also adds to her feelings of guilt and isolation, further separating her inner self from the outside expectations. This ambivalence in itself is an example of the psychological fragmentation, resulting from intergenerational trauma.

2.4 Motherhood, Guilt, and Transmission to the Third Generation

Trauma cycles build upon each other as the trauma of motherhood continues at another site in Israel.The motherhood trauma is another place where the trauma cycle escalates. Her emotional distance and inability to fully protect her daughters is a result of her own wounding and because of that, she has unwittingly transmitted the teachings of shame and obedience.

"She loved her daughters, but loving them meant preparing them for a world that would break them" is one poignant passage. This is a tragic paradox of maternal love in a patriarchal framework. After years of trauma, Israel's death is the tragic culmination of second-generation trauma, and directly affects Deya's path. The novel connects her death to the burden of unsaid grief, and where no words means death.

Isra's trajectory, through critical discourse analysis, uncovers the compounded trauma of a postcolonial

experience of displacement, and an experience of displacement of patriarchal enforcement reaches its highest level in the second generation. It can be seen as a bridge across Fareeda's past of pain and Deya's new sense of questioning, a reminder of the continuity of oppression and fleeting glimpses of the possibility of a rupture. Here female silence is at its most destructive while at the same time simultaneously holding the potential of voice.

The final section of data analysis focuses on the third generation and it brings together moments of resistance, questioning, and tentative healing after thematic analysis and critical discourse analysis within postcolonial feminist paradigm, while recognising the legacy of the inherited patterns.

3.1 Questioning Inherited Norms and the Burden of Legacy

Deya embodies the third generation's struggle with a trauma history. After her father Isra's death, she's raised by her grandmother Fareeda and is under pressure to marry into a family she's never met. As she becomes increasingly aware of herself, the novel depicts this as a possible interloper in the cycle.

It is a moment of awakening and Deya asks herself, *"How can a woman love a man she hardly knows?" "What can silence be the only language she could speak?"* This self-reflection directly attacks the notion of a matriarchy, which is passed from one generation to the next. Through postcolonial feminist analysis, Deya's questioning of his doubts is a Decolonial turn, something that seeks to challenge the patriarchy of the original Palestine as well as the adaptive controls of transnational and diasporic life in Brooklyn.

Deya has some access to different stories compared to her mother Isra. She finds her mother's hidden books that connect a generation. These books were her only memory of her mother, *"stories of women who fought, who loved, who lived"*. The discovery serves as a catalyst which helps Deya to re-imagine her grandmother's strictures in the light of new feminist understanding.

3.2 The Role of Education and Exposure in Disrupting Silence

Deya's secret studying and learning of new concepts is a departure from enforced quiet to tentative voice. Fareeda is determined to go through with the marriage before the husband, whereas Deya hopes to be independent, putting generational conflict at the center of the negotiation of trauma.

One time, Deya declares that she wants *"to be able to show her bruises and not hide them and to say what she thinks without being afraid of what others will say".* This is a clear refusal to remain silent, reflecting the third generation's ability to name the violence suffered by the earlier generations, without hesitation. The postcolonial feminist perspective reads this as resistance to the erasure of history and the burden of trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation: Deya carries the burden of Fareeda's displacement and Isra's suffering, but redirects it not in simple reproduction but in questions.

Her interactions with friends and introspection on what the community expects of her further illuminate the cultural structures that perpetuate trauma. The value of a woman in this community was determined by her obedience, the number of sons she had and her capacity to be silent in pain. These passages show Deya's consciousness of the ways in which her body remains policed by the concepts of honor code and collective memory of the Nakba in the diaspora.

3.3 Transformation of Female Silence: From Survival to Resistance

The silence haunts the evolution of silence across generations' best in Deya's path. Fareeda uses silence as a weapon for her survival, Isra is silencing herself, while Deya starts using silence as a tool for her survival.

"A strong moment that comes up towards the end is where Deya realizes that silence killed her mother, and she does not intend to allow it to kill her either". This self-realization is a reflection of the research goal of understanding silence as a by-product of oppression and as a possible locus of resistance. The narrative technique of Rum, in terms of critical discourse analysis, is the change in perspective, which is used to give voice to the voice that was previously silenced.

When Deya refuses to accept the proposal from a man she has never met, then, she makes a very real choice: *"I will not marry some stranger to please my grandmother — I want to do my own thing, even if it means I lose everything".* This decision will break the intergenerational cycle of maternal enforcement, indicating that trauma transmission is not automatic, but can be stopped by conscious choice.

3.3 Reconciliation, Healing, and the Limits of Rupture

The story of the third generation signals reconciliation and some healing, too. Understanding of Fareeda's harshness as being a result of unprocessed trauma enables Deya to reject the harmful norms with compassion and strength.

This is captured by the text: *"Her grandmother had lived through war and loss, but that had hardened her heart, and Deya wouldn't make the same mistakes".* This balanced view corresponds with the postmodern feminist desire for depictions that are not overly dichotomous or binary, and that reflect agency in liminality rather than the stereotypical victim or hero archetypes. It demonstrates the ways literature can help to process collective and personal trauma.

This is not a simple win, however. Intergenerational trauma is visible in Deya's anxiety and guilt, and a fear of community judgment. As she struggles to free herself from bondage, the old fears echo in her blood; the old fears of three generations of silenced women (Rum, 2019). This recognition of trauma serves as a reminder of the ongoing nature of this experience and the emancipatory power of narrative voice.

3.4 Synthesis: Intergenerational Trauma, Female Silence, and Postcolonial Feminist Resistance

In all three generations of A Woman Is No Man, Rum charts a course from entrenched trauma to disruption. Fareeda is the embodiment of the root causes of displacement, Isra is the devastating embodiment and silencing of inherited pain, and Deya is the tentative reclaiming of agency.

In itself the multi-generational structure is a post-colonial feminist act, in that it creates a unity of a counter-narrative from the fragmented traumatic memories. *"Their stories were linked — her grandmother's loss, her mother's silence, her rebellion. One couldn't exist without the others".* This interconnectedness addresses the research questions by addressing the intersection of historical displacement, patriarchal norms and gender based violence, and by providing avenues for resistance.

The analysis shows that there are no linear or total movements to break female silence, rather, it is a very important decolonial act. Rum's text provides important contributions to the Arab-American diaspora literature and trauma studies, and is a witness to personal and collective suffering.

Findings

A woman is no man is a postcolonial feminist analysis that has identified significant intergenerational trauma transmission, two sides to female silence and complex intersectionality of historical displacement, cultural norms and gender-based violence. The results of this study directly support the three questions investigated, by thematically synthesising the novel's multi-generational story.

Finding 1: Portrayal of Intergenerational Trauma Transmission

The novel is a strong portrayal of intergenerational trauma as a continuous cycle that stems from the Nakba and refugee experience, and is passed down from mother to child and through the cultural norms. As the first generation, Fareeda suffers direct effects of historical displacement which she transforms into rigid control and emotional harshness towards her family in Brooklyn. This trauma is transmitted to Isra (second generation) via arranged marriage and normalised domestic abuse, leading to psychological fragmentation, physical violence and finally to suicide. When Deya's children, his third generation, take up this burden they also start to disturb it with conscious questioning.

This is mainly done by modeling of survival behavior, shame induction, and enforcing patriarchy. Trauma is not only psychological, but embodied and structural, as shown in the analysis, which adapts to diasporic

conditions while maintaining its core intensity. This shows intergenerational trauma is cyclical, but also malleable, with each generation inheriting the burden, but also the capacity to partially heal the inherited wounds

Finding 2: Female Silence as Product of Oppression and Site of Resistance

Female silence is represented as a complex survival mechanism intricately connected to the patriarchal and postcolonial oppression. Silence is a way of safeguarding their selves from other violence and community rejection by Fareeda and Isra. Isra's internalization of *"A woman is no man"* causes her to lie about her bruises, and to muffle herself until she dies. The novel depicts silence as a culturally enforced and historically shaped practice that is a reaction to both colonial dispossession and the continuing patriarchal authority in the immigrant community.

But in Deya's arc, the presence of silence gradually becomes a place of resistance. Voice begins to develop in her discovery of her mother's books and her refusal to get married, *"I won't live a life where I have to hide my bruises and swallow my words"*. This maturation exemplifies how silence can be a result of the cumulative oppression but can be transformed into agency through the practice of awareness and education using narrative. The results validate that Rum is not monolithic, but dynamic and can be a space for resistance and healing in the third generation.

Finding 3: Intersections Revealed Through Postcolonial Feminist Lens

A postcolonial feminist approach is fruitful for revealing the entanglements of historical displacement (Nakba), cultural norms (honor, arranged marriage, son-preference), and gender-based violence in the text. Diaspora anxieties over the bodies of women extend the indigenous patriarchal system, adding to the strength of indigenous structures of honour and culture. The intersections are further complicated by post 9/11 Islamophobia and assimilation pressures, as seen in the case of Fareeda's pragmatism, Isra's suffering and Deya's rebellion, which are further tightening the enforcement of traditional norms.

This analysis reveals that gender-based violence is not a stand-alone issue but is connected to historical trauma and diasporic adaptation. Postcolonial feminism focuses not only on limitations on agency but also on the ways in which women resist these limitations, without resorting to victim-centred narratives. The novel's fragmented structure and multiple points of view reflect the characteristics of traumatic memory, thus suggesting that literature itself can be a tool of decolonization to witness the unsung history.

Conclusion

In a postcolonial feminist analysis of Etaf Rum's novel A Woman is No Man, this work has critically engaged in systematic analysis of the complex nature of intergenerational trauma and female silence in Palestinian-American diasporic experiences. Using a qualitative literary analysis based on close reading, thematic analysis, and critical discourse analysis, the research revealed how historical displacement from the Nakba manifests in three generations of women—Fareeda, Isra, and Deya—and how they live their lives under the rule of patriarchy, cultural honor codes, and gendered violence in Brooklyn's immigrant community.

The results show that intergenerational trauma is primarily passed down through the enforcement of norms by the mother, the manifestation of abuse in her body, and emotional repression. Fareeda's refugee story sets in place rigid survival strategies which Isra adopts, resulting in deep silence, domestic violence and tragic self-erasure. Representing the third generation, Deya starts to break this cycle by challenging the expectations of the past and changing silence to cautious speech and action. These patterns clearly addressed the first research question in regard to trauma as a cycle and as something that can be disrupted.

In response to the second question of the research, the novel represents silence as an intricate result of overlapping postcolonial and patriarchal sufferings, but at the same time as a place of potential resistance. A woman is no man is a phrase that captures the discursive silencing that underpins oppression, but Deya's first awakening through education, reading and conscious decision not to marry an arranged husband points

to counter-narratives and possibilities for healing. A postcolonial feminist perspective provided a lens to examine the third research question and highlight the interrelatedness of colonial influences, diaspora stressors, and gender-based violence. The multi-generationality of Rum's narrative structure reflects the disjointed nature of traumatic memory, which becomes an act of witnessing and decolonial resistance together. This study builds on the previous works in this field by combining trauma theory with the study of Arab-American literature and postcolonial feminist theory, and demonstrates the role of literature as an archive and an intervention for silenced voices.

At the end of the day, A Woman Is No Man reminds readers that it is not just individuals who must be brave enough to break intergenerational cycles, but also culture and society, in order to recognize and acknowledge compounded traumas. The novel is a compelling story of Palestinian women's strength and of the agency that can be won through the power of the narrative voice to throw off the marginalization of history and of the present.

Recommendations

1. Comparative postcolonial feminist studies of other novels by Arab-American and Muslim diaspora authors should be carried out to determine patterns of trauma transmission and resistance.
2. Incorporate Rum' into education and community-based trauma-informed counseling and gender empowerment programs.
3. Culture-informed programs and culturally responsive interventions are needed for intergenerational trauma and must take into account cultural contexts in immigrant communities.
4. Publishers and literary platforms should be mindful of and amplify more Arab women writers' voices to further decolonise dominant gender and diaspora discourses.
5. Longitudinal studies, which included literary analysis with empirical qualitative research (interviews with readers and diaspora communities) could quantify the actual impact of such narratives in silencing and healing in reality.
6.

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