



The Diasporic Struggles of Arab Women in a Patriarchal Society: A Study of Etaf Rum's *A Woman Is No Man*

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Abstract

This paper provides a thoughtful analysis of Arab American literature and its significance in raising awareness, particularly regarding the experiences of Arab Women in the diaspora. It highlights how Arab American writers use their narratives to address complex issues of identity, social rights, and the challenges faced by women, countering stereotypes and offering a more nuanced understanding of their realities.

The reference to Etaf Rum's novel serves as a focal point for discussing generational differences among Arab Women, illustrating how each character embodies unique struggles and perspectives shaped by their experiences. The three generations—Farida, Israa, and Deya represents a continuum of cultural preservation and adaptation, showcasing the tension between tradition and modernity.

Farida's character is particularly compelling as she navigates her identity within a patriarchal framework that imposes limitations on her and her family. Her journey reflects the broader themes of loss, resilience, and the quest for self-expression that many Arab women face. The mention of the Nakba emphasizes the historical trauma that informs their experiences, while also highlighting the importance of cultural heritage in shaping identity.

Keywords: Westernization; Diaspora; Subaltern Theory; Marginalization, Cultural Identity, Patriarchy.

Introduction



Throughout history, men have held the power to make decisions in all aspects of public and private life. Women's participation in the decision-making process has been limited under a patriarchal system that imposes itself at all levels. In the Arab world, this traditional patriarchal system is characterized by a strict hierarchy of roles and authorities, where adults hold power over youth, men over women, the wealthy over the poor, and the majority over minorities.

Since the outcomes of societal decisions, made at all levels, reflect the existing distribution of power, policy decisions cannot be neutral. Contrary to prevailing notions that policies "do not consider gender differences," it is clear that these policies in fact discriminate against women. They work directly and indirectly to maintain the status quo of unbalanced relationships as reflected in economic, political, and social indicators.

These policies are intertwined with the prevailing culture. While they reinforce existing social roles within that culture, they are justified as a means of preserving societal balance and continuity. Thus, discrimination, particularly in decision-making, becomes an essential part of an integrated culture that must protect itself by keeping women in their "natural place" within the social reality. In this mix, where patriarchy intersects with economic, institutional, and cultural factors, "social religiosity" plays a crucial role in rationalizing and normalizing the process of discrimination against women, providing cognitive and rational justifications for the discriminatory reality.

Under this system, men gain the freedom to make decisions. They do so at all levels according to what society considers right, religious, and lawful, relying on the protection of the existing social organization. At the same time, men employ various means to either entice women or to subjugate them through direct force or social pressure.

Arab Women as Marginalized Beings

During the twentieth century, Arab women faced a complex series of challenges. One of these challenges is the great injustice rooted in patriarchal societal structures that have limited their rights and opportunities in life. Patriarchal societies have imposed gender discrimination represented by male dominance in all areas of life and the exclusion of women as a source of shame and deficiency. This is considered an inherited social and cultural disease and it has been examined according to the social and cultural construction of gender.



In most of these societies, the social norms and culture of gender are dominated by a biased and unjust patriarchal system, which has led to the constant subjugation and manipulation of women. Women's actions and behavior are closely linked to a male honor system, leading to complete social alienation and imprisonment. This traditional moral system is highly patriarchal and gives male family members authority and control over subordinate members, women and children, who are expected to respect these norms and modify their behavior to maintain these rules. Furthermore, any violation is severely punished, restricting women's access to education, employment, political participation, and other forms of participation (Jazairy).

The systematic inequality is exacerbated by personal status laws governing marriage, divorce, and inheritance, often at the expense of women's rights and dignity. The prevalence of gender-based violence, fueled by harmful traditional practices and societal impunity, has highlighted the extreme risks women face, yet movements have emerged that challenge these injustices and advocate for women's rights within an Islamic framework, demonstrating the resilience and agency of Arab women during this turbulent period. Together, these factors illustrate the complex scene of injustice faced by Arab women in the twentieth century. This scene can be addressed through several axes, as mentioned below.

Social Alienation and the Suffering of Social Discrimination of Arab Women in the twentieth century. This section deals with the issues that are related to various historical, political and cultural circumstances that greatly affected the position of Arab women within their societies, such as colonial influence, the rise of national movements, economic and social changes, and the influence of the modern intellectual renaissance. At the beginning of the twentieth century, several Arab countries were under foreign occupation. This period contributed to strengthening patriarchal hegemony (traditional male heritage) within Arab societies as a result of colonial practices that exploited traditional systems to support their control, where Arab women were treated as a cultural symbol that must be protected from "Westernization" which limited their movement and rights in the name of national identity. Where, this resulted in their social alienation by marginalizing them from participating in national movements, even though women played important roles in the struggle against colonialism (Jazairy).



In fact, the idea and the cultural changes that discussed women's issues in literature and thought, clearly encouraged women's education and liberation, and was in the interest of women. However, it was strongly resisted by the traditional elites who saw any change as a threat to religious, family and social values. This resulted in a feeling of social alienation as a result of the contradiction between the new aspirations and the restrictions imposed on them. On the level of women's movements and the emergence of legal awareness, in the middle of the twentieth century, with the independence of several Arab countries, local women's movements emerged calling for the liberation of women "a liberation" in line with Islamic culture and not as is the case in the discourse of women's liberation imported from West, which implicitly stipulates the ease of access to women and empowerment over them, not their liberation in a way that preserves their dignity.

The discrimination and injustice of Arab Women were not limited to their discrimination in social roles, but extended to include their discrimination on the economic level after many women were forced to work in agriculture and factories due to the harshness of the economic conditions. The discrimination was clear in the harsh treatment as well as the wages. Although women have made some progress in education, employment, and public participation, societal constraints and systematic discrimination have kept them alienated from their traditional identity and their hopes for a more just future.

Cultural Alienation and the Suffering of Arab Women under Cultural and Traditional Restrictions in the Twentieth Century, this era witnessed several different developments resulting from the political, social, and economic changes that swept the Arab world. With the emergence of the modern nation-state, colonialism, independence, and feminist movements, women found themselves in a state of conflict between inherited cultural traditions and the demands of modernity. This conflict often led to what was known as "Cultural Alienation" where women felt a separation or contradiction between the values of their traditional societies and new patterns of life. Some of them found themselves between two worlds: the first is the world of tradition, which dictated loyalty to their society, and the second is the world of modernity, which denied them the ability to fulfill their identities. This duality produced a sense of psychological and social pressure and a sense of isolation and cultural fragmentation represented by heritage and modernity. In terms of traditions and customs. These traditions led to the marginalization



of their role in public life, which contributed to their feelings of isolation and psychological alienation especially, with the contradiction between her Individual aspirations and the restrictions imposed on her, and this in itself represents the conflict between modernity and tradition (Mubarak).

The Family Environment also shows that women suffered from several challenges represented by domestic and social violence, as the family in several cases was considered a source of protection for women, but it was also a place for physical and psychological violence where the forms of this violence included forced marriage, control over her personal decisions, and gender discrimination in treatment. In addition, social norms played a major role in normalizing violence against women by applying a culture of silence in the face of what happened to them, in order to preserve the family's honor which increased the aggravation of their suffering. Passing through Media and learning as a tool of change, increased educational opportunities and the spread of media have opened new horizons for women to express their suffering. It has also provided an opportunity to raise women's issues on a wide scale, which has helped raise community awareness about issues of violence and discrimination.

Family Alienation of Arab Women in the Twentieth Century and their Suffering Under the Challenges of Education and work in The Twentieth Century, the twentieth century witnessed profound social, economic and political changes that greatly affected the status of Arab Women. Although women have historically been an integral part of the social fabric of Arab societies ,however, the transformations that came with colonialism, the emergence of nation-states and modernization processes cast a shadow over their traditional roles and status within the family and society that resulted what is called "Hypird Culture" which may led to an identity crisis, feelings of inferiority and cultural fragmentation.

On the other hand, that the challenges can be seen in education, as in the early twentieth century, women's access to education was a major challenge for them, and conservative families often saw girls' education as a threat to their traditional role. Despite the expansion of education in the middle of the century, as women began to enter schools and universities, but they faced societal disapproval and family pressures that questioned the usefulness of their education. Consequently, women who chose to work or study outside the family framework faced severe challenges, such as social isolation,



psychological pressure, discrimination in a male-dominated society, and a feeling of alienation within and outside the family (Bradley).

In Economic Alienated conditions can be seen that many Arab countries during the twentieth century, women faced several economic discrimination resulting from several factors, for instance: the traditional role of women. As we mentioned earlier societies . The Arab world at that time was based on the distribution of traditional roles that confined women to domestic work, which limited their participation in the labor market. In addition, poverty and weak economic development, as many Arab countries were affected by colonialism that drained resources, led to the deterioration of local economies and narrowing opportunities for everyone, especially women. It is necessary to mention their deprivation of education and professional qualification, as women were deprived of their rights to education in several countries until the middle of the century (Mansouri).

The Early Marriage of girls was seen as a means of protecting them from "shame" or "deviance". In addition, to reduce family responsibility aimed at reducing the financial burden on the family. On the other hand, traditions encouraged some rural communities to consider early marriage as an opportunity to improve the social or political status through family alliances. No attention was paid to the serious negative effects on women's lives, as these effects were represented in aspects of physical health. Where early pregnancy may lead to serious health complications such as preeclampsia and premature birth. This is related to physical health. As for education and empowerment. As well as, early marriage often leads to girls dropping out of education, which deepened the cycle of poverty and limited their ability to improve their conditions. In addition, deprivation of childhood, as marriage is in consecrating women's suffering, it reinforces traditional culture in the Arab world. Which leads to social expectations of having a large number of children, especially males, to ensure the "continuation of the lineage" or to achieve a prestigious social status for the family. Early age deprives girls of completing their childhood and their basic rights, and all of this is the pre-marriage stage, while in the post-marriage stage comes Reproductive pressure and the role of women as wives and mothers, These pressures were reflected in women's physical and psychological health, as repeated childbirth in short periods, exhausted their bodies and exposed them to health risks, such



as severe bleeding during childbirth, or premature death as a result of malnutrition or health care (Shalaby).

Ultimately, Eitaf Rum is a Palestinian-American novelist, New York Times bestselling author, educator, and entrepreneur. Rum's nuanced approach addresses difficult questions of individual and cultural identity. In the original editions of the book, Eitaf Rum wrote a personal note explaining that some details of the story were "inspired by reality," but she used fiction to expand the narrative and make it representative of the broader struggles of women in her environment. The author's life is reflected through the struggling with her past, including early marriage and displacement from Palestine to refugee camps in the United States. She also suffered from the treatment of her grandmother and was denied an education at an early age due to her early marriage. Her circumstances and life are reflected in the novel *A Woman Is No Man*. In *A Woman Is No Man*, Israa, the main character of Eitaf Rum's novel, struggles to break the code of silence prevailing in the close-knit Palestinian-American community in Brooklyn, where she grew up and then left. Israa was born in Palestine but moved to Brooklyn when her family arranged her marriage to Adam, who runs a fast-food restaurant across the river in Manhattan. The narrative eventually shifts to Deya, their eldest daughter, who is left to tell her mother's story—a story that embodies generations of women in that community, and one that goes back to Eitaf Rum's arranged marriage. "I didn't have many options growing up," she says, "so marriage and motherhood were the paths that were laid out for me".

One of the most significant struggles she faced while writing *A Woman Is No Man* was the perpetuation of stereotypes about Arab people and society, images that included oppression, domestic violence, and terrorism. This hindered her ability to express herself freely and without fear, especially at the beginning of the novel. It took her a long time to overcome these fears and realize that in order to speak for and tell the stories of abused and oppressed women, she had to overcome her own fear and tell this authentic story. As author Eitaf Rum says, "My grandmother would often ask me this question—I would say, 'Well, why can't I do this and that? Why can't I do what a man does? And she would say, you can't do this because you're not a man". The more I thought and wrote about this topic, the more I realized that women are not equal to men in their responsibilities in many things—such as maintaining family relationships, ensuring their children's education, and



instilling values in them—and that, in fact, they are more resilient and stronger than men. So I wanted to make this title understandable from both sides: through the oppressive and restrictive ways we use it, and also through the ways in which women are able to realize their own resilience, awareness and strength.

Literature Review

The writer Aya Mossaddiq mentioned that women in the past suffered greatly under the burden of customs and traditions that surrounded them and squeezed their necks in a predominantly male society. And what legitimizes the oppression of women based on their inferiority and deficiency, where religious texts are interpreted in some societies in a way that restricts women, even though the Islamic religion is a religion of justice that calls for treating women well, and all of this is the result of the ignorance of that society. For instance, women are deficient in mind and religion - a woman's place is in the kitchen - a woman only thinks about marriage and beauty - a woman does not keep a secret - hits a woman if you want her to obey you - girls are a concern until death - a woman's mind is small - do not argue with a woman - if your daughter grows up, fear your sister - do not trust a woman even if she is on the back of a stick - a girl who does not marry is like a tree that does not bear fruit - educating a woman spoils her and so on of this type, but despite this, the male society used religion and customs to fight women and demean them by making them one of the complements of men and not a human being with dignity and rights.

In addition to reducing honor crimes to them alone and excluding the man who is a party to the crime or the perpetrator himself, so that the woman finds herself as a disgrace, she must be hidden behind walls without knowledge or decision, just like a piece of furniture that decorates the house until she moves from the patriarchal system to the marital one and the suffering continues. Despite the slogans of reformers calling for changing the status of women, such as Qasim Amin, Abdul Aziz Al-Thaalibi and others faced those rooted in the traditional environment stressed the need to preserve the status of women as it is to protect the morals of the family and society from deterioration, and reform must not be accepted under the pretext that it is a Western plan to strike values and Islam and other arguments (Musaddiq).



A question is raised here, which is: Have women gotten rid of the shackles of the past and gained their freedom and dignity, or is their liberation just an illusion? It can be seen that the Arab Woman at present is still shackled by the same chains, all that happened is that these chains were cleaned and polished, to delude her with the idea of liberation and development, and the concept of feminism arose to make her believe this lie more. In addition to that, another question is raised, which is what this lie (feminism) is and who created it?

It can be explained by the fact that there is no doubt that we live in an era of globalization and the development of communication media par excellence, and there is no doubt that advertising plays a major role in shaping culture and public taste, but how does this advertisement succeed, first? And how do people accept social media without thinking, second? Where the principle is based (if you want to catch a fish, throw it bait) and the bait here is the woman, or rather her body. Where images of women are used in seductive and bold ways in the process of promoting various products, from clothes, shampoo, perfumes, etc. The spotlight is on her body, attractiveness and beauty, to attract attention, or let's say sexual instincts for men, and jealousy and the desire to imitate the woman who watches that advertisement. The result is increased sales. The same applies to social media sites. Either the woman's body is exploited, or the woman exploits herself with her body to get a greater number of likes and views. This is also what we find in TV shows, where a beautiful woman with a well-proportioned body and revealing clothes is brought in, while her ideas and achievements are ignored. Thus, the Arab woman becomes part of the game of greedy "Capitalism", and advertisers use her as a tempting factor to make profits. The model of a woman with a well-proportioned body and a beautiful face is spread, which reinforces the feeling of inferiority among other women. They develop a desire to reach that model through plastic surgery and wearing the same clothes. Her ideas, interests and issues are excluded, and she becomes just a body and an appearance. Then, the woman's dignity is trampled on with her high heels, and she passes with confidence thinking that she is free, just because she wears what she wants and does what she wants, without knowing that she is just a part of the game of obliterating her dignity and respect as a human being (Musaddiq).

Hamza Alghanimi mentioned on the same site the effect of oppression and repression on the oppressed, where he claims that oppression and repression in our society



take a pyramidal form, starting from the top of the pyramid and going down until it reaches the bottom, so you find many of the oppressed and repressed oppressing those below them until the matter stops with those at the bottom, and when they do not find anyone to oppress them, they resort to vandalizing public property or oppressing animals. This behavior, even if it seems primitive, expresses a person's rejection of oppression and repression, because when a person cannot resist and push away those pressures exerted on him, or even identify his real enemy, he resorts to fighting his imaginary enemy, so the oppressed person satisfies his anger in those below him, then the real oppressor and persecutor escapes punishment. He also believes that when a woman is oppressed by society, she often resorts to persecuting her children or herself, or even her own sex, and when that does not satisfy her anger, she resorts to persecuting religion and attacking it. He also mentioned that a woman is born a woman and remains a woman, not as Simone de Beauvoir said: "A female is not born a woman, but rather becomes a woman." There is no difference between her and a man because they were created from one thing, they are like the limbs of a human being, there is no superiority between them, but rather their union is complementary.

It is not denied that women in our society in particular suffer the woes of torment as a result of the practice of the male society that was created by both parties together, and this generates an inferior view of women and that they are of a lower status than men. What makes matters worse is that if society by its nature justifies these practices through religion, which is misused in some societies, especially if this user is a male, then the woman makes that man is first opponent, and forgets or pretends to forget; that the nature of society is what made him think with that male mentality, whether she receives those ideas ready-made in his lived life, or it has accumulated over the years through those judgments and stories that we receive every day. When a woman is oppressed, she wants to take revenge for that, so she resorts either to suppressing and abusing her children, and she may sometimes resort to teaching her daughter this discrimination that she suffered from because she is a female in patriarchal societies and cultures that distinguish between males and females, as she works to raise her daughter to accept that discrimination and to raise her brother to practice it against her or she resorts to suppressing herself, whether she hides under the veil in the name of freedom while she is ignorant of the reason for wearing the veil, or she undresses in the name of freedom while she does not know the



meaning of freedom due to the wrong upbringing through which one of the things was imposed on her. In both cases, she falls into the trap of reducing herself to a mere body, and through this, the woman in these practices hates her daughter, herself, and all the girls of her gender as well. When her anger was not satisfied by the persecution of her sons and herself, she wanted to fight, but she found the closest wall in front of her is the man who is the cause of many of the calamities she goes through (Al-Ghanimi).

Since most of these men's arguments are religious texts that were not understood for what they are and were misused, she has a wrong concept about religion and that it is the reason for restricting her freedom, so she resorts to attacking it and its texts, and this is not her fault but the fault of society as a whole, whether male or female, jurist or ruler. Because most of those who attack religion often enter through those loopholes that scholars have left and have not spoken about or highlighted, as well as in our incorrect interpretation of religion and its texts, we as a whole must make women aware of their role, educate them, and empower them to know their value in all aspects of life, because women's real enemy is ignorance and incorrect social upbringing, and women's real friend is awareness and knowledge. Even the slogan of women's liberation used by feminist movements that consider their goal to be women's liberation, and which mostly include only women, does not extend beyond their scope because they place women in confrontation with men, such that they have made a mistake in identifying the real opponent, even if they express emotion and a desire for liberation and may sacrifice for that, but in the end they remain unable to achieve their goal with their view that does not extend beyond their feminist environment, because in reality men and women must participate in liberating society from oppression that does not differentiate between male and female, and we do not want to detract from the value of Arab women more than to enlighten them on the right path to be liberated, because they must expand the circle of interest of Arab women working in all magazines, especially female writers, since most of what they write is based on the feminist idea, and such writings remain confined to their circle, and since true liberation lies in liberating society, they must delve into those topics that have long been the preserve of men only, not to take refuge under imaginary slogans while they are within a circle that society has fenced off with its traditions (Al-Ghanimi).



Violence against women is a violation of women's rights, preventing them from enjoying their human rights and basic freedoms, such as the right to life, security, health, education, housing, and the right to participate in public life. This has health and social consequences and economic costs. It contributes to poor physical and reproductive health, and women who have been assaulted show poor mental health and a deficiency in performing their social functions. Women who are exposed to violence are often more likely to abuse alcohol and drugs and attempt suicide. Although women do not participate in wars in most cases, they are exposed to various types of violence because they are women. They are exposed to trafficking, forced prostitution, exploitation, rape, torture, and kidnapping, which leads to their infection with HIV and forced pregnancy. Many studies show that domestic violence increases in armed conflicts. With the development of the political situation in the Arab region, which witnessed conflicts and disputes in some countries during the past decades, Arab women bore the greatest burden as a result of violence, displacement and migration and played prominent roles in steadfastness and struggle. It was necessary to guarantee the right of Arab women to protection from all forms of gender-based violence in times of war and peace to obtain their full rights without discrimination and to enhance their role in a society governed by justice and equality (Ghazaleh).

The role of women is important in times of armed conflict, war, and deteriorating social conditions; As they work hard to maintain the social order amid these conflicts, women also make an effective and important contribution inside and outside the home to teach children the principles of peace, but this contribution is often invisible, but the opposite can be seen in the majority of victims of armed conflicts in the world were not combatants and were mostly women and children, and women's bodies have become part of the battle scene for those who use intimidation as a war tactic, as they resort to raping them, humiliating them, forcing them to become pregnant, sexually exploited and enslaved, and the crime of rape is considered one of the most serious crimes of assault on honor, and it constitutes at the same time an attack on public freedom, and an attack on the immunity of the human body. It may be harmful to physical, psychological or mental health; It is an assault on honor, and may reduce the chances of marriage or affect family stability in society. It may also impose illegitimate motherhood, causing both material and moral damage. It is therefore a crime that affects the security of society (Alraziqi).



In Palestine, reports issued by human rights organizations indicate that the manifestations of violence against women are unparalleled there because they are in reality purely internationally prohibited crimes, “such as the deportation and exile of the families of martyrs who carried out martyrdom operations, the destruction of their property, and the demolition of their homes. Women are subjected to humiliating body searches and are deprived of necessary treatment, to the point that many of them have met their deaths as a result of the Israeli army preventing medical convoys. All of this has led and is leading to women and children losing their families, in addition to the increase in the number of Palestinian female martyrs as a result of the barbaric Zionist raids over the past years, which are still ongoing in the besieged Gaza Strip. The number of women giving birth at Israeli military checkpoints has also increased, in addition to the decrease in health services, as well as the increase in the number of home births due to the difficult circumstances and the lack of appropriate health conditions in homes and the decrease in the number of women who receive postpartum care. This is in addition to the brutal arrests of women, which place them under difficult conditions in which all the conditions of normal human life are absent in prisons. Women are exposed to extremely poor health and environmental conditions and other painful conditions, in addition to what they face in terms of repression, beatings, continuous humiliation, and threats of rape by prison guards and attacks on their lives. The same applies to Iraqi women. Due to the lack of security and stability and the spread of chaos, Iraqi women and girls have been exposed to kidnapping, robbery, and assault, and they have been prevented from going to their schools or workplaces for fear of being assaulted or kidnapped (Ghazaleh).

A 13-year-old settler hit me with a stone on my shoulder. I tried to defend myself and grab him, but he came and started kicking me, hitting me with his hands, spitting on me, cursing me, and threatening me. Then the settlers started chasing me, so I ran to my uncle's house and they gathered around the house. Since the day I was beaten, I have not gone to school or left the house alone with my brothers. I feel bored with the life I live. We are deprived of going out freely, and even on Eid we cannot leave the house. I feel like I am in a prison because the whole house is surrounded by mesh and we cannot go out (Ghazaleh).

Palestinian Women have suffered from double oppression, national and because of the Israeli occupation, as they constitute half of Palestinian society, but this has not



prevented them from being a vital part of the Palestinian national movement. Rather, it exploited the struggle against the occupation in order to improve its position, so it established its own associations and institutions in the 1920s. Perhaps the real breakthrough in the level of women's participation in political life occurred after the formation of the Palestine Liberation Organization in 1964, which was followed by the formation of the General Union of Palestinian Women. The wall constitutes the biggest dilemma in separating Palestinian areas and population centers and dismantling the network of social relations, which affects women and all family members. Pregnant women cannot move between villages and cities - especially between the city of Jerusalem and its suburbs - to reach the hospital except by obtaining a permit from the occupation authorities, which is difficult to obtain, and the validity of the permit provided to pregnant women is only valid for one or two days. Palestinian women are also routinely harassed, intimidated and harmed by Israeli soldiers at checkpoints and gates, and are subjected to humiliation and sexual violence by soldiers and settlers in front of their families (Ghazaleh).

El Saadawi addressed the subject of women from the beginning and more precisely, from upbringing and education, when a girl is born, and even though she cannot speak or express herself, she can realize through the looks of those around her that she is not like her brother, the boy, and from the time the girl begins to crawl or walk and is raised to be cautious and fearful of the consequences of crossing those boundaries drawn for her in advance and before her birth, which are boundaries that are mostly illogical, such that they dwarf and limit her existence and role in life and make her existence not fulfill the purpose of the intended existence, so the girl lives in a society full of intimidation and warnings from every step she takes, unlike the boy who is mostly free in most of his actions and expressions, which leads to planting this view and this feeling in the girl from the beginning of upbringing and making her involuntarily interpret the boy's dominance over the girl at this stage. Nawal El Saadawi also mentions that the reason for the dominance, injustice, oppression and marginalization that women suffer come from childhood and incorrect upbringing based on intimidation Warnings in childhood and adulthood. This idea is supported by evidence that children at such ages play innocent games and their actions do not carry any explanation for any idea of intimidation and warning in education. Additionally, psychological and mental growth is a movement



towards more independence of personality, ability to choose, personal freedom and responsibility. This growth is necessary and essential to liberate man from the will of others and their imitation, but society with its systems, laws, influences and pressures repress women, and this repression hinders their intellectual and psychological growth, and prevents their liberation from negativity and dependence on others, and they remain like a child in their early stages of growth, unable to be independent, positive and free to act, but they differ from children in that their body is not a small child, but rather has become a large, mature body. Perhaps this is the reason why we see large women who are mature in their bodies (Saadawi).

Their souls and minds are still in a backward stage of development, and this backwardness is the most important reason behind most of the deviations and social, psychological or sexual problems, and if not, immaturity is the main reason behind most of these problems, the immaturity of women as well as the immaturity of men; although men are more fortunate than women in freedom and opportunities for maturity, they are also exposed to social pressures that hinder their psychological and mental maturity, and the great discrimination between men and women in society and the severe pressures on women increase men's sense of positivity; Then it turns into exaggeration in control and a tendency towards selfishness and sadism and also increases the woman's sense of negativity to become an exaggeration in submission and masochism (the desire to feel pain). Thus, Al-Saadawi summarizes the above by saying that women's negativity and feelings of inferiority are characteristic resulting from the pressures of society and its suppression of their growth. Whereas most of the inherited customs and traditions are customs that are instilled in them the feeling of being a sex and service tool and killing every creative aspect of them. In addition to that, the upbringing that the girl receives, whether at home or in society, causes many psychological problems and complexes (Saadawi).

The girl is trained from a young age to be preoccupied with her body, clothes and adornment all the time, and does not find time or interest to read or develop her mental and psychological abilities and the girl endures the troubles and pains of beautification and is trained to hide her nature and truth. How many girls suffer from anxiety and various psychological illnesses because of their extreme keenness to meet the established standards of beauty, and the girl feels that her future in life is determined by the length of



her nose, the width of her eyes, and the fullness of her lips, and when the girl finds that her nose is longer or shorter than necessary, she may live in constant anxiety, and she may feel ashamed of her nose and try to hide it with her hand from time to time with an involuntary movement, and the girl may mistakenly imagine that she must hide her natural body odor or that this odor is not fragrant as it should be, so she wets herself with perfume several times every day, and some see that their teeth are protruding or larger than they should be, so they prevent themselves from smiling or laughing, and if she happens to laugh, she purses her lips or puts her hand over her mouth. No one can imagine how much girls are preoccupied with trivial matters, and how a few millimeters short of the eyelashes from their usual length become a severe problem in the life of a girl, how many girls are terrified by a few drops of rain..

It can be seen that the previous academic studies have implicitly examined the similar struggles in Eitaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man*, highlighting its profound portrayal of the suffering of Arab Women within a strictly patriarchal society. They have relied on feminist and cultural approaches to analyze the text. For example, they have analyzed the mechanisms of intergenerational oppression and the inheritance of silence among Palestinian-American women. Furthermore, they have discussed the struggle of identity and alienation, focusing on the impact of cultural expectations related to honor and obedience. They have also focused on the role of language and silence in constructing marginalized identities, noting that Rum's novel highlights the voices of women who are often silenced in immigrant communities. Although these studies have highlighted important aspects, most have relied on sociological or feminist analysis, without delving into postcolonial theoretical structures or the problematic representation of marginalized female voices. While previous studies have examined the novel *A Woman Is No Man* from feminist and social perspectives, this study is unique in its application of the theory of the "subaltern" by the theorist Gayatri Spivak, who, in her famous essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", questioned the possibility of oppressed groups expressing themselves within a male-dominated cognitive system. Through this theoretical framework, this study demonstrates that Arab Women in the diaspora, as depicted in the novel, are not only victims of traditional oppression but also victims of modern discursive structures that reproduce their marginalization under the slogans of freedom and liberation. It also analyzes the mechanisms of silencing Arab women in the diaspora in a position of silence



and subordination, as women's marginalization stems not only from patriarchy, but also from the discursive and institutional systems that confiscate their ability to express themselves, even within contexts that are supposed to be liberating.

Thus, this paper does not limit itself to narrative analysis, but rather seeks to deconstruct the system of silence imposed on Arab Women within diaspora communities and the dual male dominance. This gives the study a new critical dimension, untouched by most previous literature, by describing the novel as a narrative space for the struggle between appearance and disappearance, between representation and invisibility. Additionally, feminist characters are presented not only as victims, but as subjects suspended within a cognitive gap produced simultaneously by the structures of colonialism, masculinity, and migrant patriarchy. In this way, this paper reframes our understanding of the meaning of "liberation" by reading what is called "impossible representation" through narrative, social reality, and diaspora, demonstrating how migration and current methods do not necessarily represent a shift towards liberation, but may rather reproduce previous patterns of oppression in new forms. In this context, the novel can be seen not only as a space for feminist experience, but also as a symbolic resistance structure for the voice of the "other," which has long been denied. In addition to the above, this paper uniquely proposes a critical reading that sheds light on the dilemma of the "impossible representation" of Arab Women in postcolonial and diasporic spaces, opening the way for a broader discussion on the issues of agency, knowledge, and voice in Arab American feminist narratives. This contribution not only adds to feminist literary studies, but also constitutes an extension of the dialogue between postcolonial criticism and transnational cultural studies. Ultimately, this study seeks to transcend the fragmentary nature of some previous feminist studies by adopting an intersectional reading that integrates gender studies, postcolonial criticism, and discourse theory.

The Theoretical Framework

Gayatri Spivak remains undoubtedly a prominent postcolonial theorist, who has attained international fame and eminence. In fact, her writings and fields of interest are diverse, starting from her engagement with the Marxist critique of capitalism, through her critique of imperialism and colonial discourse, to her feminist perspective on



deconstruction. Since the discussion of the concept of subalternity is overriding and central to Spivak's work. There is no doubt that Gayatri Spivak is one of the most remarkable and outstanding theorists in the postcolonial theory. Along with Said and Bhabha, she is a prominent pillar of the so-called "the postcolonial trilogy".

Additionally, Spivak is one of the foremost feminist critics who have attained an international fame and eminence in many fields especially in postcolonial studies. Postcolonialism is the study of theory and literature which analyses the after effects of the colonial era, that is, the effects of the coloniser on the colonised. One of the essential threads in the realm of Postcolonialism is the Subaltern, a term coined and adopted by the Marxist philosopher and theorist, Antonio Gramsci. The term is used as a reference to the colonised continents and encompasses an area in the study of culture, history, human geography, sociology, anthropology and literature. This deals with the history of Subaltern Studies in India pioneered by Ranajit Guha and focuses on the work of Gayatri Spivak who had developed this idea a step further and asks the question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" and sheds light on the comprehension of historical narratives of women's resistance in India.

Passing through "Postcolonialism" which is the study of theory and literature as it speaks about the colonizer and the colonized experience. It studies the after-effects of the colonial era, that is, the effects the colonizer had on the colonized people. Postcolonial studies is defined as the "critical analysis of the history, culture, literature and modes of discourse that are specific to the colonized continent. It deals with the studies and the theory of "Subalternity and Subaltern Studies". Due to the discussion of subalternity is overriding and central to Spivak as a postcolonial critic who harshly critiques the imperial, colonial, and even postcolonial discourse and practices, so I shall study the Spivakian notion of subalternity, endeavoring to offer an insightful analysis of Spivak's conception of the subaltern at least, from her influential and significant essay "Can the Subaltern Speak".

First of all, this section will begin with a general definition of the concept 'subaltern' and its origin. Subaltern as it is mentioned before, is a concept first used and coined by the Italian Marxist activist Antonio Gramsci to refer to those groups who are subjects to the hegemony of the dominant classes. For Gramsci, the term designates non-elite or subordinated social groups. Gramsci was interested in the subaltern classes'



historiography as he claimed that the history of the subaltern is as complex as that of the ruling classes. The realization of such history results in a fragmented and episodic history since the subaltern don't have the means whereby they might control their own representation and because they have less access to cultural and social institutions. The term has been subsequently adapted to postcolonial studies from the work of Guha's group of Subaltern Studies, who aimed at launching a systematic and fruitful discussion of subaltern themes. For Guha and his followers, the term 'subaltern' refers to any sort of subordination whether it is expressed in terms of age, gender, caste, and class. When Gayatri Spivak first critiques the conclusions of the Subaltern Group in her monumental article "Can the Subaltern speak?" the notion of the subaltern has become a central and overriding issue in postcolonial studies. Her criticism is directed to Guha's fundamentally essentialist assumptions; since for her, no way for determining who or what might constitute the subaltern group can escape such essentialism.

In general terms, Subaltern refers to the group that is excluded from society's established structures for political representation and therefore denied the means by which people have a voice in their society. It literally refers to any person or group of inferior rank and station, whether because of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity or religion. Some thinkers used it in general sense to refer to marginalized groups and the lower classes – "a person rendered without agency by his or her social status. It was the Marxist philosopher and theorist, Antonio Gramsci, who adopted the term 'subaltern' to refer to the working class people that is, proletariat class, who are subject to the hegemony power of the dominant ruling classes. Gramsci used the term Subaltern to underline an inferior or subordinate place in terms of class, caste, gender and culture. Gramsci opined that though the history of the dominant class, that is, the bourgeoisie class, is considered as 'official' history, the history of subaltern classes was just as complex as the history of the dominant groups. According to Gramsci, the history of the subaltern groups is sporadic, periodic and disintegrated as they are subject to histories of the dominant classes. the term 'Subaltern' is being used as a reference to colonized people, and it now encompasses an area in the study of culture, history, human geography, sociology, anthropology and literature. All those who were denied access to hegemonic power such as peasants, labourers, workers and such other groups were considered as subaltern classes. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak developed the idea of Subaltern Studies a step further



such as representation, self-representation, political strategies and so forth. "I am not erudite enough to be interdisciplinary but I can break rules".

Spivak has always questioned the conventions and margins of literary criticism by shifting the attention towards the cultural texts of those who were pushed away towards the periphery and treated with indifference by the dominant western culture. She focused on the working class, women and the postcolonial subjects. In doing so Spivak challenges the mainstream prominent ideas of the contemporary society and culture. She also anchors on the theme of 'Otherness', a prominent concern in post-colonial studies. Sartre used the term, 'Other' in 'Being and Nothingness' to define the relations between self and others. One finds that it is extensively used in existential philosophy. In the postcolonial studies, the theme of Otherness has always been of prime importance. Edward Said's 'Orientalism' discusses the theory of the Other- the treatment given by the so called privileged west to the east. Said argues that the Orient is one of Europe's 'deepest and most recurring images of the Other'. Western thought and culture has defined certain people and concepts as 'other' throughout their historical narratives. The poor and powerlessness were considered as the other that threatens the values of the so called civilized society. According to Stephen Morton, "In the structure of western thought, the 'Other' is relegated to a place outside of or exterior to the normal, civilized values of western culture; yet it is in this founding moment of relegation that the sovereignty of the Self or the same is constituted. This led to the act of 'Othering', a term coined by Gayatri Spivak to speak about the process by which the western dominant narratives create their 'others'. Spivak tries to shake the foundations of the rigid Self - other dichotomy while describing the lives and struggles of the Third World marginalized subaltern women.

According to Stephen Morton, Spivak in her essay 'Imperialism and Sexual Difference' "criticizes some feminists for ignoring the specific experiences of 'Third World' women when they construct a universal feminist subject. Thus, she brings to light the errors of the practical truth- system and knowledge which claim that all women of the world suffer the same set of problems, oppression and resistance transcending geographical, social, cultural and linguistic boundaries simply because they are women. Spivak writes that the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.



Spivak rightfully opines in an interview with the journal, *Polygraph*-”I like the word ‘subaltern’ for one reason. It is truly situational. She emphasizes that the subaltern womens' voices and agencies were completely silenced under the political, social and cultural hegemony of patriarchal codes of moral conduct and their representation as victims of a barbaric culture in British colonial narratives. In the male dominated culture, though these subaltern women attempted to voice their narratives, their voices were not recognized that led their silence in the dominant political systems of representation even if they are listened to, it will be phrased differently.

In her influential article “Can the Subaltern speak” Spivak problematizes the production and retrieval of subaltern speech in the light of its dependence on controlling and dominant discursive practices, which define the modalities of expression of the subaltern subjects and. In the course of her essay, there is a profoundly genealogical delving into whether the subaltern can speak for him/herself or whether the subaltern is minimized to be represented, known and heard in a very ideologically falsifying fashion. In fact, the main aim of Spivak here is to learn to speak to the historically silenced subjects of the non-elite rather than to listen to or speak for such muted subjects. In other words, Spivak does not endeavor to problematize the authority of colonial discourse; rather she is interested in the ways whereby imperialism has constructed narratives of history, gender, and class of the hegemonized subjects according to a single axis of differentiation (the centrality of Western History and Man). According to her, the subaltern’s actions are inscribed and read in terms of dominant codes of colonial imperialism and the nationalistic eliticism.

Despite the fact that Spivak will rely heavily on Foucault in her latter discussion of epistemic violence and the worlding of the world and notwithstanding the fact that he actually tried to decentre human subjects, Foucault still believes that the oppressed (the subaltern) can speak for themselves, which Spivak does not approve. Consequently, she accused him in her article “Can the Subaltern speak?” of not having any conception of the repressive power of colonialism (Loomba 233). To find a way out from this labyrinth, she starts with the critique of both Gramsci’s and Guha’ treatment of subalternity; in this critique she focuses mainly on Guha’s analysis of the social structure of postcolonial societies by means of what he called ‘dynamic stratification grid’. The terms ‘people’ and ‘subaltern classes’ are used as synonymous throughout Guha’s definition.



The social groups and elements included in this category represent the demographic difference between the total Indian population and all those whom we have described as the ‘elite’ In the grid given by Guha’s group, the subaltern refers to under-represented group of people, their hidden histories, and even to the historiographers who study them, which Spivak critiques harshly. Therefore, Spivak does not endeavor to write another history of the subaltern, but rather unearths the assumptions and workings of that representation "the way the subaltern is represented in colonial and elitist historiography. Therefore, she believes that the subaltern should not be represented as well as they do not have the ability to represent themselves. This very idea leads her to give as an example of the silenced subaltern the rite of widow-sacrifice on a husband funeral pyre (*sati*), and here she again brings the feminist and postcolonial criticism together. For Spivak, the *sati* is silenced by both the British and the nationalistic indigenous colonial elite. For instance, the fact that the British banned this practice leads to the conclusion that ‘white men are saving brown woman from brown man,’ which is an imperial practice *par excellence* since it inscribes and imposes certain sort of history on the colonized. Where the strength of these self-sacrificing women reveals clearly the patriarchal nationalistic position that ‘the women want to die. Spivak concludes that there is no possible alternative history to be written from the subaltern position. Therefore, postcolonial critics must learn not to seek the subaltern voice, but to point to the silence. The figure of *sati*, for instance, disappears between what is constructed to her by others; we are given two versions of the *sati*’s free-will and the act’s meaning. Indeed, this gendered subaltern is repeatedly re-written, but absent between the discourse of imperialism and patriarchal nationalism.

Subalternity and agency are intrinsically related. Subalternity can be characterized by the lack of agency and “the recognition of agency. “subaltern is not just a classy word for “oppressed”, for [the] Other, for somebody who’s not getting a piece of the pie” rather than the definition of the subaltern, is more concerned with the conditions and mechanisms that keep people in the position of subalternity “Clearly, if you are poor, black and female, you get it in three ways”.

Widely speaking, reasons that lead to subalternity can be listed as the social hierarchy, the denial of access to public resources, strict restriction for upward social movement, social and economic inequality, and limited or no access to authorized political speech or institutional validated language. Spivak considers intellectuals as the mediators



and a means of institutional access for the subaltern. Thus, without the help of intellectuals, the subaltern cannot speak, even when they speak, they are not heard in the institutional discourse. The state of female as a subaltern is worse, Spivak claims: "If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow, "the oppressed, if given the chance can speak and know their conditions.

She tries to do is to deconstruct the patriarchal constructions of male and female identities and their subjectivities .As Peneau states, "Women are prisoners of their own accord and they are partly responsible for their doom". Instead, they should embrace art and use it as a way to express their own voice and resist patriarchal discourses".The subaltern is silenced by epistemic violence which is one of the constitutive elements of subalternity. What Spivak means by "epistemic violence" is that those who are in power such as western intellectuals assume that they have the knowledge of the Other of the society, and they regard themselves as entitled to speak for and about the Other by forming knowledge, which leads to essentializing and muting the Other.Spivak argues that knowledge can never be innocent, impartial or disinterested; on the contrary, it expresses the interests of its producers. She defines subalternity not as an identity but as a position where there is oppression and a lack of access to power .In this sense, the subaltern points out to an outside, outside the discourse, outside the power structures, outside the center, outside the dominant culture, and cultural and economic modes of production.Since subalternity is a position of the non-speaking and non-represented.

Spivak also supports Foucault's idea that "To make visible the unseen can also mean a change of level, addressing oneself to a layer of material which had hitherto had no pertinence for history and which had not been recognized as having any moral, aesthetic, or historical value". Furthermore, she states that 'subaltern' is not a specific term for only 'oppressed', 'other' and 'deprived' groups. But instead, she puts her idea through a postcolonial perspective; she writes that everything with no or limited access to the cultural imperialism is 'subaltern'. In addition, Spivak underscored that female as a subaltern has no history and is even more deeply in shadow.

Based on Spivak's vision, which highlights the tragedy of marginalized groups as they attempt to find a foothold within systems of cultural and historical control, we can discern a fundamental similarity to the phenomenon of culture shock, where individuals



arriving in new cultural environments find themselves in a state of alienation and forced separation from the dominant center. Both experiences expose the mechanisms that drive the marginalized to flounder in the spaces of alienation, and reveal the suffering of the human being when stripped of the tools of understanding and recognition within authoritarian structures that do not acknowledge their existence. More precisely, Culture Shock refers to feelings of uncertainty, confusion, or anxiety that people may experience when moving to a new country or experiencing a new culture or surroundings. This cultural adjustment is normal and is the result of being in an unfamiliar environment. It can occur when people move to another city, country, go on vacation, travel in retirement, for business, or study abroad for school. For example, international students studying abroad for a semester in another country may experience a cultural adjustment due to an unfamiliarity with the weather, local customs, language, food, values and so on.

Although the timing of each person's adjustment process can be different, there are specific phases that most people go through before they adjust to their new environment. Culture shock can be quite stressful and lead to anxiety. However, it's possible to overcome it and grow as a result. Typically, no single event causes culture shock, nor does it occur suddenly or without reason. Instead, it gradually builds from a series of incidents, and culture shock can be difficult to identify while struggling with it. The feeling is particularly intense at the beginning and can be tough to overcome, but it's important to remember that the cultural adjustment usually dissipates over time as a person becomes more familiar with a place, the people, customs, food, and language. As a result, navigation of surroundings gets easier, friends are made, and everything becomes more comfortable. The adjustment process due to culture shock can get better over time, leading to growth and an appreciation of the new environment.

By employing Spivak's subaltern theory, *A Woman Is Not a Man* reveals the depth of the oppression faced by Arab Women, as their stories are characterized by silence and marginalization under the combined weight of patriarchy and alienating culture. The characters' inability to express themselves reflects the essence of Spivak's assertion that "the subaltern cannot speak" intersecting with the concept of cultural shock, which increases their internal alienation. Thus, the three theories "subaltern marginalization, patriarchal hegemony, and cultural alienation come together to form a critical framework



that reveals the multiplicity of oppression which surrounds Arab Women between the borders of the homeland and those of exile.

The Analysis and Discussion

This chapter aims to provide an in-depth critical reading of the selected literary text, *A Woman Is No Man* basing on the perspective of subaltern theory that was developed by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. This theory represents a crucial theoretical framework for understanding the mechanisms of marginalization and exclusion faced by vulnerable groups, particularly women, within patriarchal and colonial structures. Spivak views the "subaltern" as a social and political entity that is marginalized to a degree that renders it unable to express itself within dominant discourses, an idea that clearly resonates with the suffering of the female characters portrayed in the novel.

In this context, Eitaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man* explores the reality of Arab American Women in the face of strict traditions and oppressive social systems, both in their homeland and in the diaspora. By tracing the paths of multiple women across different periods, the novel reveals internal conflicts, inherited traumas, and imposed forms of silence, making it ideal material for applying subaltern theory concepts. Therefore, this chapter aims to establish a systematic link between theory and text by analyzing how the concepts of marginalization, silence, and resistance are embodied in the experiences of the novel's characters. Through a detailed analysis of the text, it will reveal how the novel works to dismantle the structures that seek to silence Arab women and how it allows its characters to reclaim their voices and identities in the face of attempts at exclusion and basing on this theoretical framework, this chapter will offer a meticulous analytical presentation of a set of key themes that shed light on the diasporic experience of Arab Women as depicted in the novel. In addition, it will focus on key themes that intersect with the concept of the marginalized, such as forced silence, loss of identity, the struggle to assert oneself, and hidden manifestations of resistance. In other words, the reading will be based on carefully selected textual evidence, while linking it to the theoretical context, to ensure a comprehensive critical analysis that combines academic depth with methodological rigor.



When I opened my mouth to ask for what I wanted and realized no one could hear me. Where I come from, voicelessness is the condition of my gender, as normal as the bosoms on a woman's chest, as necessary as the next generation growing inside her belly. But we will never tell you this, of course. Where I come from, we've learned to conceal our condition. We've been taught to silence ourselves that our silence will save us. Where I come from, we keep these stories to ourselves. It is only now, many years later, that I know this to be false. Only now, as I write this story, do I feel my voice coming (Rum 8).

The diaspora experience is one of the most complex and influential experiences for Arab women's cultural and social identities. This experience reflects the challenges women face in new societies, where they find themselves trapped between multiple cultures and divergent expectations. Arab women in the diaspora aspire to the rights to education, equality, self-representation, and freedom of thought. Many Arab American women writers also seek to counter negative stereotypes by offering counternarratives that reflect their pride in their culture and religion and demonstrate their loyalty to the land to which they have moved. The report aims to explore the challenges and opportunities facing Arab women in the societies in which they live, with a focus on the impact of patriarchal structures on their lives and experiences (Hatem).

Additionally, this section will explore the concept of diaspora, the concept of patriarchal society, how patriarchy affects women in general, and the relationship between patriarchal society and the diaspora experience. It will also examine the factors that lead to diaspora, the impact of these factors on Arab women, the challenges they face in this diaspora, and the role of culture and education in addressing these challenges. It will also present the experiences of Arab women who have experienced diaspora and have been able to overcome it thanks to their knowledge and culture. The concept of diaspora refers to all displaced people living outside their homeland.

Diaspora has three main characteristics, the first relates to the cause of migration, which is rooted in the Palestinian experience; the second relates to the transnational experiences between the homeland and the destination; and the third relates to the



integration of migrants or minorities into their countries of settlement. This concept highlights how diaspora is not merely a geographical condition, but a human experience that includes pain and loss. The experience of the Palestinian diaspora, for example, is rooted in the ongoing conflict between Arabs and Israel, which has led to the displacement of many Palestinians. The term "refugee" applies to all Palestinians forced to leave their homeland. The novels of Eitaf Rum who was born in refugee camps, reflects on experience by depicting women who attempt to resist their vulnerability and seek power within their surroundings. Arab women in the diaspora face societal and cultural restrictions that add to their suffering. Arab American women play multiple roles as teachers and leaders, but social restrictions prevent them from fully fulfilling these roles (Gannam).

It's hard to explain. . . . I still struggle to accept myself and it would have been better if I'd started sooner, much sooner. It's hard to belong anywhere, truly belong, if we don't belong to ourselves first."(Rum 138). It becomes clear that women in the diaspora face dual challenges: first, the challenges associated with integrating into a new society; and second, the challenges stemming from patriarchal traditions that haunt them even in their host countries. The diaspora experience contributes to shaping the identity of Arab women, as they find themselves between two different cultures. Eitaf Rom's novel reflects how women attempt to adapt to life in the United States while maintaining their cultural roots. However, social pressures and cultural legacies can hinder them from expressing their true identities (Rum).

The novel shows how moving to a new community can be a complex experience. The main characters face internal and external struggles related to identity and belonging. This struggle demonstrates how diaspora can lead to feelings of separation and isolation, even with the new opportunities available. Arab American literature is an effective means of raising awareness and strengthening ties to the homeland. It also contributes to combating the discrimination faced by Arab women in Western societies. Studies indicate that Arab American writers seek, through their writings, to highlight issues of identity and social rights for women. Arab women in the diaspora face multiple challenges, often



categorized by American feminists as those in need of "saving" from the oppression they face. This view reflects a profound lack of understanding of their real experiences, as American feminists also suffer from an imperialist patriarchal system that impacts their movement. Any feminist movement other than American feminism suffers from some deficiency, reflecting an internal discrimination among feminists. This discrimination is part of the stereotype that defines Arab women as "harems" and "covered creatures" which limits understanding of the more complex issues they face (Alraziqi).

The issues that concern Arab women in the diaspora are much broader than those addressed by American feminists. Arab women aspire to the rights to education, equality, self-representation, and freedom of thought. Many Arab American women writers also seek to counter negative stereotypes by presenting a counternarrative that reflects their pride in their culture and religion and demonstrates their loyalty to the land to which they have moved. When discussing the experiences of women in the diaspora, we must take the example of the lives of three Arab women in the diaspora. The novel presented by Etaf Rome addresses the pain and turbulent experiences of living as Arab and Muslim women in the United States, highlighting cultural and identity conflicts.

How could she make Sarah understand what it was like back home, where no woman would think to call the cops if her husband beat her? And even if she somehow found the strength to stand up for herself, what good would it do when she had no money, no education, no job to fall back on? That was the real reason abuse was so common, Isra thought for the first time. Not only because there was no government protection, but because women were raised to believe they were worthless, shameful creatures who deserved to get beaten, who were made to depend on the men who beat them. (Rum 147)

The novel is divided into three parts, each representing a different generation: Farida (the grandmother), Israa (the second generation), and Deya (the third generation) (Mikić). This distribution reflects the diversity of women's experiences in the Arab context. The author analyzes these characters. The novel begins by introducing Deya third-generation Arab-American woman, who was "born without a voice." This phrase expresses feelings of isolation and lack of identity. Deya later realizes that she has been



silent about her feelings and desires, which gives her the strength to express her experiences (Andaleen). Here, the patriarchal system emerges throughout the novel in the character of Farida, who suffered under patriarchy and was an example of the suffering women endure under this system, which is not limited to violent men but extends to women as well. Farida was ashamed of her gender and imposed restrictions on her family members to meet societal expectations. After experiencing the Nakba in Palestine, Farida seeks to preserve her culture in the diaspora. She expects the values and traditions she lived by in her homeland to continue. However, Farida struggles internally as she realizes that culture is not static and that change is needed. Her experience reflects the pain and suffering she endured in refugee camps and understands how this pain affects both men and women.

Farida's character serves as an example of the conflict between tradition and modernity. Despite her attempts to preserve her culture, she realizes that clinging to tradition can be harmful. She expresses this conflict by saying, "When it takes more than one woman to do things differently, it takes a world of them." This statement reflects Farida's growing awareness of the role of women in changing reality. The "Nakba" was a turning point in Farida's life, leaving a profound impact on her personality and perceptions. She expresses her understanding of the pain men experience after the Nakba, which makes her more sympathetic to Khaled (her husband), who represents the traditional model of masculinity. However, his violent behavior toward her cannot be justified, creating a contradiction within her personality.

The novel shows how family relationships impact the diaspora experience. Farida burdens her eldest son with great responsibilities at the expense of his dreams and ambitions, reflecting the social and cultural pressures faced by families in the diaspora. She also expects her daughters to be obedient and submissive, demonstrating how the patriarchal cycle continues across generations. Each generation represents a different experience of diaspora. Israa, the second generation, reflects the conflict between tradition and modernity more strongly than her mother. Dia, meanwhile, represents the third generation, which seeks to challenge the restrictions imposed on it. The development of the characters across generations shows how identities and experiences change over time (Alraziqi).



As for Israa, she is a character belonging to one of three generations in the novel. She longs to experience love and adventure without being restricted by her family's traditions. Through her novel, Rum seeks to critique the illusory idea of a free life in America, where the main characters suffer from silence and the inability to express their rights. The novel reveals that the three generations deal with social pressure in different ways, but all suffer from painful silence.

Sari's study highlights the patriarchal oppression experienced by the main characters in Rum's novel, where women are placed behind men in a patriarchal society. A woman is expected to marry the man of her family's choosing and raise her children without access to education or other opportunities. Some women experience domestic violence but find themselves unable to report it for fear of social repercussions. Patriarchal culture is based on a set of values and beliefs that elevate men's status and devalue women. In Arab societies, shame is considered an integral part of social identity and is used as a means of controlling women's behavior (Mikić).

Rum's novel shows how Arab American women carry the burden of shame while also participating in the process of shaming others, reflecting the complex dynamics of power and gender. The novel offers a comprehensive view of how the culture of shame is transmitted across generation (Abdelrazek). Each generation deals with shame in different ways, reflecting the social and cultural changes taking place in the Arab American community.

The novel revolves around the character of Farida, a grandmother who grew up in Palestine and suffered displacement during the conflict. Her experience in the Palestinian camps reflects women's struggles with oppression and violence. After moving to the United States, Farida imposes her traditional values on her daughter and daughters-in-law, increasing the pressure on the younger generations (Aldama).

The novel's female characters face immense cultural pressures, where education and work are viewed as unnecessary for women. Women endure physical and verbal violence in silence, and early marriage and frequent childbearing are considered part of their duties (Abdelrazek). These pressures reflect how patriarchal culture can restrict women's freedom and thwart their ambitions. Each generation deals with shame and social pressure in different ways. While Farida's first generation suffers from the restrictions imposed on them, subsequent generations begin to realize their self-worth and strive for



more fulfilling lives. These dynamics reflect how social and cultural changes can lead to shifts in women's identity.

Books and stories are an essential part of the lives of characters such as Israa, Deya, and Sara. Reading represents a means of escape and self-expression, helping the characters understand their experiences and connect with the outside world. This reflects the importance of literature as a tool for liberation and social change. Domestic violence is one of the four types of patriarchal tyranny, where women are beaten by their husbands. Women move from the trauma of their fathers to the trauma of their husbands, which increases their suffering. The novel shows how some women attempt to resist patriarchal rules by obtaining an education and rejecting suggestions made to them by their families.

Education is one of the essential factors women seek as a means of countering social pressures. Some of the characters in the novel attempt to obtain an education and read books without family permission, reflecting their desire to break free from the restrictions imposed on them (Sari). This demonstrates how education can be a powerful vehicle for empowerment and social change.

Eitaf Rum highlights the crucial role of education as a powerful tool for women to combat various forms of patriarchal oppression. She argues that women who have access to education and a source of income possess greater power and independence than those who do not. The main characters in *A Woman Is No Man* embody this struggle as they navigate the strict boundaries set by their patriarchal societies, which often view them as "others." These societal perceptions aim to confine women to traditional roles, limiting their potential and ambitions (Rum).

Rum explains that Arab American Women face unique diasporic dilemmas, their dreams often stifled by the lingering traditions and expectations of their homeland, even while living in what is considered the land of the free. This duality of existence reveals their continued oppression, as they remain bound by the unwritten rules of patriarchy that shape their behavior and decisions (Rum). The narrative emphasizes that parenthood is not confined to specific geographic locations; rather, it appears in both Arab countries and diaspora communities. However, through education and creative projects, these women can challenge and defeat the oppressive structures that seek to restrict their decision-making power. By pursuing knowledge and expressing themselves creatively, they



reclaim their identities and assert their rights, paving the way for empowerment and social change (Sattar).

In short, Ram's exploration of education as a means of resistance illustrates the resilience of Arab American women in the face of patriarchal restrictions, emphasizing that liberation is possible through self-empowerment and the pursuit of personal ambitions.

You know you're not allowed to speak to boys! What were you thinking? You're an Arab girl. Do you understand? An Arab girl." But Deya didn't understand. "Listen to me, Deya. Open your ears and listen." Her voice lowered to a tight whisper. "Just because you were born here, that doesn't make you an American. As long as you live in this family, you will never be an American (Rum 164).

The themes of alienation and diaspora have lately been widely acknowledged since the diasporic generation embraces Homi Baba's belief that "nations are narrations". For them, displacement and alienation combine the notions of de- and re-inhabitation that are often regarded as related yet distinguishable processes of memory and identity formation. Not surprisingly, the displacement experience has given rise to their consciousness of the importance of constructing a counter-narrative. Most of the displaced resort to writing about their experience of migration or about the hardships they face in their new destination, especially in challenging the stereotypical image that has been "consciously" formed in the West. Arab- American diasporic women, in particular, have given rise to their voices in an attempt to overdue the injustice caused by the Western gaze on their cases. Literature has been their arena to call for presenting themselves and their own narratives to overdue the injustice caused by both the patriarchal and the Western discourse. Eitaf Rum, an Arab- American writer, wrote a novel in 2019 depicting the lives of the three generations of a diasporic family. She zoomed on the lives of the female characters while she was representing her own experience. The purpose of this paper is to examine whether Eitaf Rum, in her 2019 – novel *A Woman is No Man*, corrected or reinforced the stereotypical image of Arab women constructed in the Western minds (Andaleen H. Al-Khateeb and Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi).



Noticeably, the struggle of Arab American women intensified in their diasporic sphere and their alienation where they found themselves also labeled by American Feminists as the ones who need to be "saved" from the oppression practiced on them. Though, ironically enough American feminists have long been suffering from a similar imperial, patriarchal system that operates their movement and causes it to "be". Arab-American women found themselves excluded from the Feminist movements in America under the claim that their problems and demands were far from the American's. Okin believes in the imperfection of any other feminist movement than the American feminist. She justifies this by claiming that "the liberal Western culture had departed far from its patriarchal past than others" which causes its superiority to other minor, inferior cultures (p. 82). Okin's belief suggests that discrimination is also practiced among American feminism, as they believe in their superiority over any "Others". Not surprisingly then American feminists have limited the problems of Arab and Arab American women to being "Harem", "covered" and "passive creatures"; their flaw is that they fall into what they stand against: categorization, limitations and exclusions. To provide a counter-narrative, Arab-American feminists comment that the "main problems according to American feminists are - the veil, the harem and the female circumcises that don't represent the only important issues for Arab and Arab-American women" (Abdelrazik 3). While for Arab-American and Arab Feminists the concerns are larger and wider; they look forward to having "writing-woman" not "written-woman", to getting the right of education, equality self representation and freedom of thoughts. Hatem (1998) in her essay "The Invisible American Half: Arab American" states that the core of Arab American feminism is "to increase public awareness of issues affecting Arab American feminists and to eliminate negative stereotypes of Arabs" (p. 19).

This section is a feminist analysis that concentrates on the novel *A Woman is No Man* (2019) Etaf Rum. Starting from Spivak's question passing with the consideration of women's marginalization as the "second sex" proposed by Simone De Beauvoir and arriving at the other ideas. Rum depicts a society where religion is a cover for men's claims for ownership. The novelist's biography, her social and political background including the Arab diaspora, alienation, oppression and injustice that influenced her writing are surveyed. Since Rum is oppressed and suffered from the restrictions of her patriarchal society that threatened revolutionary women, she portrays oppression against



diaspora women who live in America. It is concluded that patriarchy is not related to any geographical location. Whether Arab-American women reside in Arab countries or the diaspora, still they are oppressed and alienated. Even in the land of freedom, they are controlled by the traditions of their homeland and are under the dominance of patriarchy which forces them to obey the rules written by men and for men and dictated to women.

During this chapter, it will be focused on analyzing the theme of women's alienation in Etaf Ram's novel *Woman Is No Man* employs Gayatri Spivak's subaltern theory, as well as Edward Said's ideas on Orientalism and Homi Bhabha's ideas on Hybridity and cultural alienation. Etaf Rum published her novel *A Woman is no Man* in 2019 depicting the life of three generations of diasporic Arab American females. She explored the agonies and the turbulent experiences of being an Arab, Muslim woman in the United States. Hence this chapter aims to investigate whether Etaf Rum, in her novel, negates or asserts the stereotypical image of Arab American women. In addition, to get an answer to Spivak's question "Can The Subaltern Speak?"

Etaf Rum is a brave writer. She says as much in a Dear Reader note in an advanced reader copy and the preface to her debut novel, *A Woman is No Man*, confiding she was "constantly swallowed by fear" writing it, yet she broke a "culture of silence." She must be brave to create a dark plot about arranged marriages in strict, conservative Arab families that isolates Palestinian women with emotional and physical abuse, risking perpetuating negative stereotypes about Rum's own immigrant community at a time when hate crimes and anti-immigrant sentiments are sharply on the rise in America and globally. "Surely I'll only upset people and fuel further discrimination already stereotyped by a single story. It would be the ultimate shame," Rum says. Yet she dares to do so anyway (Etaf Rum and HarperCollins/Harper).

Her compelling novel is set in Brooklyn, where Rum was born and lives, perhaps in the same Bay Ridge multicultural community where characters dwell. Bay Ridge is depicted as close-knit. "It was as if all the Arabs in Brooklyn stood hand in hand, from Bay Ridge all the way up to Atlantic Avenue, and shared everything, from one ear to the next. Rum's objective, she says, is to highlight the "strength and resiliency" of Arab women. You may see this in one or more of her four main female characters. On the other hand, you may feel overwhelmed by the weakest one, Isra, so battered by loneliness, despair, identity loss, and relentless physical assault that she descends into such



“paralyzing shame” she becomes ashamed of even existing. Isra endures over the years, but the cost is a shell of a human being, an empty heart (Etaf Rum and HarperCollins/Harper).

Fareeda came to the US from a Palestinian refugee camp. Survived poverty, married off in her teens, mother of three sons and a daughter (see Sarah below.) Her influence intensifies as the plot does. She clings to a narrow view of women restricted to the home, that a daughter’s sole purpose is to cook, clean, serve, and become a mother who will give birth to boys; girls are a disgrace, a burden and a curse. Men bear burdens too, financially obligated to support their families. Adam, her eldest, bears the brunt, reflecting immigrants “working like dogs,” which plays out destructively when he goes to Palestine and brings home eighteen-year-old Isra through another arranged for marriage. It’s their marriage, their sad, abusive story that overpowers the others.

Isra is unhappy when we met her at 17. Forced to leave her homeland, her parents, and her pastoral home overlooking fig and olive trees. Raised by a traditional mother who subscribed to the same beliefs about women as Fareeda; a mother who expressed no love or warmth, also like Fareeda. Isra grabs our hearts, so quiet and submissive all she can do is hope that in the land of the free, she’ll find love and freedom. Not so when she keeps giving birth to daughters – four in all. She’s the victim of Adam’s anger, angst, and exhaustion. Sometimes he unexpectedly hits her over the slightest thing; other times Isra knows when he’s coming for her.

Sarah is Fareeda’s only daughter. Supposedly married off but no one has heard from her. She befriended Isra when she and Adam came to live under Fareeda’s dark roof, in a depressing basement.

And yet even as she heard this old voice in her head, she could still feel the shift that had just occurred inside her. The old voice was no longer strong enough to hold her back. Deya knew this now. She knew this voice that she had always taken as the absolute truth was actually the very thing preventing her from achieving everything she wanted. The voice was the lie, and all the things she wanted for herself were the truth, perhaps the most important truth in the world. And because of this, she had to stand up for herself. She



had to fight. She had to. The fight was worth everything if it meant finally having a voice. (Rum 239)

Deya is Isra's oldest daughter, the youngest of the four. It's her melancholy/distraught/confused/questioning narrator's voice we hear. Yet it's Isra's voice from the past that haunts the novel, haunting Deya too. She misses her mother who died when she was eight. That's ten years ago by the time she tells us these tangled stories. Told her parents died in a car accident, Deya yearns to know more about Isra so she can remember her beyond recalling how unhappy she seemed. If only Fareeda would tell her something perhaps she wouldn't feel so abandoned and unloved. Fareeda's silence turns the novel into a mystery as we become suspicious of what really happened to Isra. One wonderful exception: books are life savers for these women (except Fareeda). Books are literally the only source of their happiness, dreams, and sense of love. Through literature, they "dreamed of bigger things – of not being forced to conform to conventions, of adventure, and most of all love." But reading is a major feat, acquiring books and then having to hide them (Etaf Rum and HarperCollins/Harper).

Deya's world is insular, yet she fights to change it. She wants to go to college, and refuses Fareeda's constant attempts to marry her off. (Note: while Isra didn't have any choice about Adam, today's Deya does, though her life was miserable by Fareeda.) Deya's story is an uphill battle to challenge stereotypes, aware there are other "Arab families who firmly believe in educating their women.

She is confused though. She's taught in her Islamic studies class women are meant to be respected. But she (and her female classmates) can't understand her teacher when he asserts that heaven lies under a mother's feet. They can't even answer his question: What is the role of women in their society today?. So Rum's answer is revealed here: it's changing. But in order for women to feel they belong in this country they need to "belong to themselves first," otherwise, "it's hard to belong anywhere. It seems fair to say belongingness is complicated to navigate for most immigrants. For these women (except Fareeda), it's made tougher because they feel unwanted and alienated in their own home (Etaf Rum and HarperCollins/Harper).

American literature of the late 21st Century has witnessed and undergone various changes by becoming more culturally inclusive; it started to be written by writers of different cultures, ethnic groups and genders. This is largely due to the rising



consciousness of the importance of knowing "the other". This understanding enriches the American literature and makes it more marketable. Not surprisingly, one of the profound influences on the literature in the USA traced back to the women's movement of the 1970s which called for being invisible and accredited by entering the public sphere and stopping the "silencing" of women's voices (Serry).

These questions investigate what it means to be an Arab- American woman, who is not totally Arab nor fully American. What does it also mean to hold a hyphenated identity and not to belong? And what does it mean to "appear" as an Arab as lensed by the West? Some writers have furthered their writings to question their restricting Arab culture compared to the "seemingly" promising American culture, only to find out that women are culturally in- structured and whenever women go, they have to meet the expectations of their cultures in terms of appearance, duties, behavior and opportunities allowed. It is worth mentioning that Muslim Arab- American women's identity is rather complicated in Western culture due to their attempts to defy the stereotypical image of Muslim Arab women, who are seen as "veiled, uncivilized, uncultured, abused" creatures. These writers have asserted that cultural practices –worldwide- and the dominating imperial patriarchal gaze are the reasons for cultivating and nourishing such images and not religious doctrines. It appears that the burden of Muslim Arab-American writers is a heavy one due to the intersections of the issue – as mentioned previously (Andaleen H. Al-Khateeb and Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi).

Arab- American women resort to writing as a form of resistance, Abdelrazik clarifies that women use their writings to resist the East, with its fundamental, oppressive regimes as well as the West, which sees them as domesticated, and/or unenlightened other" (p. 2). Therefore, writing is seen as a double resisting method. Moreover, their writing is a way to define what it means to "be" and to depict their "being" journey by creating what Homi Bhabha called a "third- space"; a place where "the negotiation of the incommensurable differences creates a tension peculiar to borderline existence" (p. 218). Bhabha envisages a cultural space in which cultures clash and differences are respected and advocated without any attempt to homogenize. Trinh T Min-ha whose work defies national borders and resists singular definitions, has developed Bhabha's concept of the "third-space" in her essay "Other Than Myself / My Other Self."



Feminism finds its third space "a healing process" since it recognizes that you can live as an Arab or as an American without losing your true self to one culture. Here, they resonate with Said's (1998) argument in *Culture and Imperialism* that "no one today is purely one thing. Labels like Indian woman, Muslim, or American are not more than starting points, which if followed into actual experience for only a moment, are quickly left behind... just as human beings make their own history; they also make their culture and ethnic identities" (p. 330) and "the rendezvous" of the meeting culture would spring into a more distinct, powerful and fluid identity. However, Arab Feminism in its way to establish a best understanding of what it means to be a feminist, has not neglected the fact that they are misrepresented not only by the phallogocentric discourse but rather by the American feminists who consider Arab and Arab-American women as "passive victims of patriarchal oppression who need saving" (Abdelrazik 2).

As readers, it is expected that Rum is reinforcing the stereotypical image of the Arab culture that oppresses, alienates and silences women. However, in an interview with Amman, Rum clarifies that she intends to represent the three generations of only one family to assert that the life of this family doesn't necessarily represent the whole Arab community and culture. In so doing, Rum attempts to "voice" the unvoiced and to zoom in on one of the practices of the Arab patriarchal system that she hopes her novel will put an end to by raising awareness of the sufferings of some women and men, too. This patriarchal system has not only breaded Khalid and Adam, who used to beat their wives and submit to societal expectations, but also it breaded Fareeda, whose "shame of her gender is engraved in her bones". She is practicing power over the other members of her family – mainly Adam, Isra and Sarah to meet the expectations of her culture and to preserve it (Al-Nouri).

Fareeda has experienced, is the hope to inspire women to stand up for their own rights. Fareeda's recognition of her "wrong" practices of culture shows her resilience and this makes her "a true warrior". For a better understanding of Fareeda's character, the reader has to link her behaviors to what she has been through in the refugee camp in Palestine where the "tragedy of Nakba bulging in her veins... She knew that the suffering of women started in the suffering of men... and it was this awareness of the hurt behind the hurt that had enabled her to see past Khaled's violence over the years and not let it destroy her" (p. 41). Fareeda is by definition, a considerate character because she



understands well the powerlessness and the weakness men felt after the Nakbah. She believes that what redeems Khaled's past actions is the setbacks he has undergone during the Nakbah. No wonder then that Rum depicts two parallel characters of Khaled.

One in the memories of Fareeda, where he is presented as an abuser, a stereotypical male who favored sons over daughters and who believed that the only duty of a woman is to care for a family. Whereas, Khaled of the present time is someone who thinks that reading books can enlighten a girl's mind and that "what is wrong is forbidding books" not reading them. He also believes that there is no difference between sons and daughters. He even regrets failing his daughter earlier in her life. I think that Rum has had the responsibility of bringing all the dimensions of the characters, despite the difficulty of this mission, to assert that diasporics are fluid characters and that they are not easily categorized. Accordingly, one cannot label Fareeda or Khaled because women sometimes are oppressors and men are victims and vice versa (Andaleen H. Al-Khateeb and Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi).

Rum, in an attempt to reinforce her intention of shedding light on one family, not the whole community, has introduced the character of Umm Ahmed. Umm Ahmed, an Arab American Muslim woman, appreciates her daughters and values their presence in life. "What would we have done without our daughters? Fatima and Hannah do everything for me. I wouldn't trade them for thousand sons" (p. 64). She is also a considerate, helpful and a friendly mother-in law. She helps her daughter-in-law and gets her served. She sympathizes with her because she is alone in America "you all remember how it felt coming to America? We came without a mother or a father. Just a husband and a handful of kids. Do you remember how it felt when our husbands went off to work in the morning leaving us alone? My daughter-in-law is here alone. The same way I was. The least I can do is help her" (p. 65). Moreover, when her eldest daughter Fatimah was getting divorced because of ill-treatment she received, the whole family supported her decision and the only thing they cared about their daughter's safety and her peace of mind. They didn't pay much attention to "reputation" in a cultural sense.

The difficulties that Arab- American women face are variant, starting from confronting both the private and the public spheres, to telling their stories of this confrontation. Telling one's story is the power of female writers. Thus, they employ the iconic, symbolic figure of Scheherazade in their own writings and Etaf Rum is no



exception. In the novel, Scheherazade is the role model for Isra; she likes the notion that this female character was capable of narrating stories for her life because this shows " the strength and resilience of women. Scheherazade's stories were resistance. Her voice was a weapon – a reminder of the extraordinary power of stories, and even more the strength of a single woman (p. 44). By definition, "Scheherazade represents one of the strongest and cleverest heroines in world literature. Scheherazade triumphs because she owns endlessly inventive and artistically creative talent... the spirit of Scheherazade persists in Arab-American women who use their art and storytelling as a powerful means of resistance, naming their experience and teaching others how to heal and kill the beast of doubt in them" (Abdelrazik 104).

This has empowered Isra, towards the end, to sacrifice herself in order to save her daughters' future and to open the door for them to pursue their dreams. Her eldest daughter, Deya learns the lesson of the importance of self-love and telling one's story. Deya who describes herself as voiceless and mute, ends up telling her own story and owning the narratives of the three generations. Not only does Deya function as a transitional, and a voiced character but also as a character to defend Arab Feminism against American Feminism. She alludes to "The Yellow Paper", written by Alice Walker, to clarify that not only Arab women suffer from cultural expectations and discrimination, but American women as well. Rum, in her novel, allows Deya to read "The Yellow Paper"; one of the most influential, radical stories in the archive of American feminism. In her reading of "The Yellow Paper", Deema Ammari examines "Bed Rest" as "an oppressive psychological method which carried negative connotations ... being exclusively practiced on women" (p. 2). In "The Yellow Paper", the protagonist is in the status of "awakening" as she realized being imprisoned within the patriarchal patterns and this awakening is "abnormal" according to the social norms as this indicates a rebel against and a question of who is to determine what is normal and what is not, what is accepted and what is not, what is "feminine" and what is "masculine". A threat that would shake the solidity of the ground on which the patriarchal system stands. Hence, a treatment should be offered to "mad" women, who attempt to scramble the image of women as " Angels of the House "to enter the public sphere (Al-Khateeb).

This treatment is known as "The Bed Rest" for women. In *A Woman is No Man*, Fareeda accused Isra of being possessed and of suffering from a mental disorder only



because she started to question her status in the world. It seems that Rum wants, by allowing Deya to read "The Yellow Paper" which represents "The Social Imprisonment", to stress that the concepts of mental health and normality are part of the constructed norms and values which are read in the light of culture. For centuries, madness and instability have been gendered and have been metaphorically considered a female attribute. Throughout history, images of mental illness in women send the message that women are weak, dangerous, and require containment. These images are destabilized by women represented in cinema, visual arts and literature for better understanding of "madness" as a state of in-between that women want to overcome. Doing so, Rum writes back to the American Feminists as well as to the patriarchal system that confines Arab American women.

Being a Muslim has intensified the agonies of Arab American women, and Rum has depicted the inconvenience Isra and Deya have gone through because of their veils. For instance, Isra has been advised not to wear her hijab the public sphere because she would be easily recognized as an outsider and this would cause her problems. Years later, her daughter Deya confronts the public sphere and the American society wearing hijab and she was easily pointed. Definitely, Rum was writing in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks that have escalated the difficulties that minorities have endured.

Finally, the doctrines of Islam have been long accused of motivating the sufferings of Arab American women and Rum finds it necessary to defend Islam and to provide others with a better authentic image of Islam. She presented Brother Hakeem, the teacher of Islamic studies, who asserts that "mothers carry the entire family- arguably the entire world – on their shoulders. That's why heaven lies under their feet. That is how we are told to treat women in the Quran" (p. 141). Rum, undeniably, reminds us of the important position women have in Islam and how the doctrines of Islam are more respectful to women everywhere. She even hints to the idea that daughters are means of salvation (Al-Khateeb).

To sum up, although Etaf Rum has presented a stereotypical image of Arab women, however, she has successfully managed to enter the dark territory and to make her female characters speak up their minds and decide on their future. She has not presented a black- white story because no culture or nation is purely one thing. She has made the transition in the first generation's attitude an opening door for the third



generation to search for their own identity and to narrate their own stories. A female character at last owned the narration and was able to tell her own story and this is definitely the value of self- representation (Andaleen H. Al-Khateeb & Mahmoud F. Al-Shetawi, September 2023).

Since the concept of "Alienation" is the main topic of this chapter, this part will address it in detail as well as deal with its repercussions on individuals. Alienation is considered one of the most dangerous social phenomena prevalent in contemporary life, affecting various developed and developing societies to the point that the modern era has been described as the era of alienation. This reflects the prevalence of feelings of separation and isolation among family members in modern societies. The phenomenon of alienation has crystallized over many decades, and its severity has increased with the development of material civilization. This development, especially technological civilization as well as the patriarchal systems have led to the complexity and decline of the social network in favor of virtual relationships. This creates individuals alienated from their social and cultural reality, making them feel disconnected from themselves and their society (Al-Nouri).

Alienation carries several indicators in individuals, represented by negative feelings and behaviors such as feelings of helplessness, lack of norms, meaninglessness, rebellion, rejection, objectification, loss of freedom, isolation, and detachment from the external environment. In other words, Alienation is a general psychological and social phenomenon that has gained increasing attention in recent years due to its symptoms, which have begun to threaten people in various aspects of their lives, especially since it is linked to the rapid development experienced by human society. It is a multidimensional phenomenon, consisting of: helplessness, meaninglessness, aimlessness, non-normativity, social alienation, and cultural alienation. Alienation occurs in all areas of human existence, and in each area, it represents a different type. There is economic, political, religious, psychological, and social alienation. Alienation can be confronted if we are unable to prevent it through several methods, the most important of which is working to provide an atmosphere of familiarity, understanding, and trust in oneself and others, and paying attention to the educational and spiritual aspects of the human being (Alwuraafi).

In order to understand the depth of the concept of alienation, it is so significant to trace its linguistic roots and original meanings in different languages. Therefore,



alienation in Language, in Arabic it is said "gharb" meaning to go away and withdraw from people. "Al-taghrub" means distance. "Al-ghraba" and "al-ghrub" mean to leave one's homeland, and "al-gharib" means someone far from one's homeland. The word "alienation" is a translation of the English word "alienation" and the French word "aliénation," both of which are derived from the Greek root "alienatio," which refers to the transfer of ownership of something to another, its seizure, or its removal. The word "alienatio" is derived from the verb "alienus," meaning to belong to someone else.

Alienation as a term, the concept of alienation has received considerable attention in attempts to define it. This is due to the complexity of this concept and its multiple perspectives and dimensions, on the one hand, and its close connection to its philosophical roots, from which its use is relatively new. Hegel considers alienation to mean the separation of the human self as a spiritual entity from its existence as a social being. He also considered it, in another proposal, to mean the human being's renunciation of his autonomy and his unification with the social essence. The use of the term "alienation" in these two senses is closer to philosophy than to scientific specialization, given that Hegel used it in the early days of interest in as an indicator of research (Zuleikha).

The phenomenon of alienation, then, is a general state of turmoil, despair, a sense of helplessness, and separation from oneself and others. All efforts in various fields of development, care, and rehabilitation, indeed in every field in which a person exists, must work to eliminate the factors that cause alienation. For instance, Media and stereotypes, domestic and societal violence, interpretation of extremist religious discourse, marginalization, and the conflict between tradition and modernity, education, Social restrictions and traditions, unfair laws, paternal authority and so on.

Finally, it can be seen that Spivak In her critique of colonialism and Western discourse on the marginalized, she argues that alienation is not simply a separation from society or culture, but rather a loss of the ability to express oneself due to the dominance of colonial and patriarchal forces.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be said an answer to Spivak's famous question emerges: that the problem lies not in the ability to speak or in listening to the speaker, but rather in how that discourse is reshaped and interpreted according to dominant power and prevailing



systems. More precisely, the problem is not that the subaltern has no voice, but rather that the prevailing epistemological and authoritarian system does not allow their narrative to be heard or understood independently of Western or colonial interpretation. Where it can be seen that any discourse emanating from the subaltern is considered as being interpreted through systems of power, rendering it non-autonomous. It is clear that even some thinkers who claim to advocate for the marginalized often speak for them, not with them, thus reproducing subordination. Ultimately, we arrive at a single conclusion: the subaltern can "produce discourse," but they cannot speak independently in a way that is heard as it is, without reinterpretation or distortion by dominant systems of power. Thus, when the subaltern attempts to speak, their voice is reshaped according to the dominant system, and their expression is therefore inauthentic. That is why the discourses that obscure it must be dismantled and knowledge made more comprehensive and just.

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