

## SILENCE TO VOICE: TRACING INTERGENERATIONAL TRAUMA IN ETAF RUM'S *A WOMAN IS NO MAN* (2019) AND *EVIL EYE* (2023)

**Hadia Sarfraz**

*M.Phil English Scholar, The Women University Multan*

*E-mail: [sarfrazhadia70@gmail.com](mailto:sarfrazhadia70@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*This article explores the intergenerational transmission of trauma and journey from trauma to recovery in Etaf Rum's novels *A Woman is No Man* (2019) and *Evil Eye* (2023), drawing on the theoretical work of Alan L. Berger and Victoria Aarons. By adopting a textual analysis, the research analyses the ways in which trauma is passed on, embodied, and placed in question throughout three generations of Palestinian-American women. Survivors and witnesses, particularly the first generation, are subjected to displacement, patriarchy and cultural silence, which frequently results in emotional suppression. The second generation inherits this trauma, which they express via cycles of silence, shame, and internalized terror while attempting to meet the contradictory demands of their society and themselves. The third generation, often represented by younger characters, begins to question and fight this trauma, indicating a possible shift towards healing and breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma. A clear transformation from trauma to recovery demonstrated in both works in the form of reclaiming the past.*

**Keywords:** *Trauma, Intergenerational Trauma, Palestinian Diaspora, Patriarchy, Recovery*

### **1. Introduction**

#### **1.1 Background of Study**

Trauma research is becoming increasingly important due to contemporary global events that influence people's and communities' lived experiences everywhere. The ramifications of significant events like the 9/11 attacks, the never-ending wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the political and social upheavals during the Arab Springs, Russia-Ukraine war and the long-term effects of the Covid-19 pandemic are the most vivid examples of the psychological and societal effects of trauma on all of its victims. Such traumatic events create both short-term and long-term psychological suffering, making ongoing research necessary to comprehend and process their experiences.

Trauma theory might be seen as a crucial resource for providing answers to their queries. According to Marder (2006), trauma is a very peculiar kind of wound, that lacks precise physical manifestations and frequently has consistent, unpredictable, and turbulent consequences.

The effects of traumatic experiences may linger beyond a person's lifespan unanticipated effects on their descendants. Trauma events and their psychological and physical repercussions are passed down through generations. This type of trauma termed as Intergenerational or transgenerational trauma, was emerged from work of Abraham and Torok (1994), who extended the psychoanalytic understanding of trauma by exploring its transmission among the descendants of Holocaust survivors. According to Abraham, childhood repression has a role in the formation of unknown secrets, and symptoms are passed down through family generations as well as individuals. The original concept has expanded into a completely new approach that explains trauma's transfer through generations even when individuals have not personally experienced the original events. Danieli (1998) a clinical psychologist, defined Intergenerational trauma as a term used to describe the signs of trauma that appear in descendants of trauma survivors without a direct trauma experience, such as an overactive stress response, mental health symptoms or diagnoses, and relational and interpersonal issues.

Palestinian diasporic fiction, a narrative genre, emerged from the 1948 Nakba, a period of communal pain and political relocation. Trauma, deeply ingrained in family structures and affecting people's lives, is a major issue in Palestinian diasporic writing. Since trauma affects people's lives both locally and globally, it is a major issue in Palestinian diasporic writing. In addition to being acute, the trauma that people endure in politically unstable or war-torn environments is also ingrained in family structures and transmitted through the generations.

Palestinian-American writer Etaf Rum is well-known for examining issues of generational trauma, silence and identity in her writings. Her first book, *A Woman Is No Man* (2019), and her second book, *Evil Eye* (2023), both centre on Arab-American women's lives as they deal with inherited sufferings and cultural expectations. Because they demonstrate how pain brought on by patriarchy, relocation and silence is transmitted from one generation to the next, these books are ideal for researching intergenerational trauma. Rum emphasises how unhealed wounds from the past continue to impact the present via the emotional problems of her characters. The goal of the study is to broaden the conversation on trauma literature and its applicability to oppressed people by analysing trauma incidents in Rum and looking at how each character responds to trauma and their coping mechanisms.

### 1.2 Statement of Problem

Literature studies trauma, focusing on the emotional and psychological effects of painful events. However, there is a need to explore intergenerational trauma, which is transmitted from one generation to the next. This type of trauma often remains unknown and affects individuals in silent but powerful ways. In Palestinian diasporic literature, this trauma is important as families have faced war and strict patriarchal structures shaping their lives and identities throughout generations. To fill this gap, research on Etaf Rum's novels *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023) aims to explore representation and transmission of trauma across generations.

### 1.3 Research Objectives

1-To explore the transmission of trauma among three generations of women in Etaf Rum's *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023).

2-To analyze the portrayal of transformation from trauma to recovery by three generations of women.

### 1.4 Research Question

1-How is trauma passed down among three generations of women in Etaf Rum's *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023)?

2-How do the generations of characters show the transformation from trauma to recovery?

### 1.5 Significance of Study

This research is significant because it shifts the focus from traditional approach of personal trauma to intergenerational transmission of trauma across families and communities. Research raises the awareness of long term effects of war and strict patriarchal structures and gives voice to underrepresented groups, especially women, who are usually ignored in the larger conversation on social and political issues. Despite being relatively recent, Etaf Rum's study provides profound understanding of the challenges Arab-American women face due to societal structures, cultural displacement and hereditary trauma. It advances diaspora literature by analysing Rum's works' themes of pain and silence in the context of larger social movements.

## 2. Literature Review

Freud(1913) started applying this idea of trauma to the study of psychology. Although Freud did not specifically address the topic of intergenerational traumas, his writings provide the foundation for this notion. The book *Totem and Taboo*(1913) discussed the unconscious

transmission that occurs between generations. According to this theory, collective guilt and suppression are caused by primordial events like the death of the primal father. This shame shapes the psychology of subsequent generations by being ingrained in cultural taboos and rituals. Thus, the behavior and beliefs of descendants are influenced by inherited memories and unresolved emotions.

Studies conducted on the offspring of Holocaust survivors reveal some of the numerous unconscious mechanisms involved in preserving the memories of the past. Abraham & Torok(1994) talked about the Phantom effect, which is a term used to characterize the impression that an encrypted communication leaves behind after a painful and emotional experience. Trauma is passed down from one generation to the next, where it comes to the surface. Two groups may be affected by trauma: the first-hand survivors and subsequent generations. According to research, children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors do not exhibit higher rates of mental diseases or personality problems than the general population.

According to Auerhahn and Laub (1998), who reviewed a large body of research on Holocaust victims and their descendants, “We have found that knowledge of psychic trauma weaves through the memories of several generations, making those who know it as secret bearers. (p. 22). Researchers describe how survivors' children develop a sense that their parents often view their separation, differentiation, and individualisation behaviours as a resuscitation of the original trauma.

Whitehead(2004) in her work *Trauma Fiction* confirms that trauma is passed down through the mental crypt that is, without “ever having been spoken” and that the impacted subsequent generations bear the unresolved matters of the preceding generations as “a phantom or silent presence”. The subsequent generations psyche is impacted and changed by the “phantom,” and as a result, the psyche becomes ‘crypt,’ a container that houses the seemingly unthinkable and unrepresentable residue of the past”(p.14).

Schwab (2010) describes the experience of Holocaust survivors in Austerlitz in her work *Haunting Legacies: Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma*. She makes the claim that traumatic memories are transmissible. According to this book, inherited trauma is the unresolved matter that is a legacy of the previous generation. Later-generation trauma symptoms are caused by psychological disputes between parents, relatives, or the community, as well as traumas or secrets, and have nothing to do with personal experiences.

Brave Heart et al. (2011) developed the historical trauma theory particularly for American Indian and Alaska Native communities, and her study served as the foundation for comprehending the intergenerational trauma theory. According to this study, historical trauma is defined as the persistence of psychological and emotional harm inflicted on members of a group as a result of very traumatic events such as forced integration, colonialism, displacement and persecution by the government.

Hirsch(2012) describes the postmemory of generations in her book *Generation of Postmemory*. Hirsch defines postmemory as “the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right”(p.103), and asserts the role of photography as a powerful medium of transmission.

In summary, the history of trauma theory, starting with Holocaust studies and Freudian study demonstrates unequivocally that its relevance has endured. In trauma theory, interdisciplinary perspectives are constantly being introduced to address the influences of age, history and culture.

## 2.1 Intergenerational Trauma in Fiction

Mohsin, Hayat, & Akhter (2021) examines how Susan Abulhawa's *The Blue Between Sky and Water*(2015) depicts the transgenerational pain that Palestinians endure. Palestinians have been subjected to severe persecution since the 1948 Nakba, as a result, the majority of them have PTSD and terrifying anxiety about the future. Using generational trauma method, the research examines how trauma is passed down through generations, demonstrating how colonization keeps Palestinians' victimization fresh in their familial and cultural memory.

Wehling-Giorgi (2024) examined a transnational tradition of trauma narratives written by women that focus on the ways in which broader power structures impact women's lives. This research follows the maternal protagonists in Toni Morrison's *Beloved*(1987), Elsa Morante's *History: A Novel*(1977), and Elena Ferrante's Neapolitan Novels(2012-2015) to track the legacy of trauma that is intergenerational and socially transmissible. Based on a comparative analysis, the study finds a number of literary devices used by the authors to successfully describe trauma.

Hussain & Imtiaz (2024) looked at *The Map of Salt and Stars*(2018) by Jennifer Zeynab Joukhadar and *Salt Houses*(2017) by Hala Alyan as part of their investigation of intergenerational trauma in Arab diasporic literature. The approach looks at how trauma associated with displacement and war affects not just the lives of immediate victims but also those of future generations. The study highlights the contextual reality of trauma in different Arab states, illuminating the widespread and inherited nature of trauma in families.

Chaudhary & Munnawar(2023) examine the effects of trauma on generations in *The Island of Missing Tree*(2021) by Elif Shafak, particularly the passing down of individual and societal sorrow stemming from the partition of Cyprus and the hostility between Greeks and Turks. Although it offers short-term solace, this stillness allows unresolved trauma of parents to infiltrate into their daughter's mind. The novel emphasizes the intricacies of silence as a defense mechanism and a factor that ultimately impedes recovery.

Chakraverty (2023) defines Intergenerational trauma refers to the psychological suffering that is passed down through generations, often resulting from past traumas like colonization, war, relocation, and cultural erasure. In the setting of intergenerational trauma novels such as *The Kite Runner* (2003), *The Joy Luck Club* (1989), and *Beloved* (1987) illustrate the effects of trauma on individuals, their families, and even the entire community. Examples demonstrate how trauma affects society and how a close relationship between personal and collective memory is developed in many cultural contexts.

Goudie(2006) investigates the literary heritage of the Japanese diaspora in North America, and discovers the signs of intergenerational trauma as a result of the incarceration of Japanese Americans in the WW II period. Her research reveals how community's shared psychology, and language is imbibed with this trauma. The dissertation provides a chronological analysis of tanka poetry from the immigrants, first-generation American works highlighting confinement effects, and third-generation works influenced by its legacy.

Aniqua (2023) stated that the causes of transgenerational trauma are diverse and cannot be limited to single incident, in contrast to the instantaneous and obvious devastation brought about by physical bombs. Four novels are the subject of this research, which focuses on the transmission of trauma via families and society: *A Thousand Splendid Suns* (2007), Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* (2005), Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner* (2003), and *The Diary of Anne Frank* (1947). These works explore the Holocaust and Afghan Wars, highlighting the lasting legacy of suffering and the impact of trauma on future generations through the examination of characters.



Schick (2011) highlights trauma as a crucial aspect of international security, challenging the marginalization of mediated violence. The study deconstructs assumptions about trauma's impact on social and political frameworks, highlighting its personal, communal, and political effects. It also explores trauma performance through mythic narratives like heroic soldiers and moral wick lung.

El Ajjani & Moumni(2025) explained generational trauma, passed down through generations, can cause emotional anguish and shame in women. This essay explores the relationship between sexuality and trauma in Palestinian-American diaspora communities, using Etaf Rum's book *A Woman is No Man*(2019). The study examines how unresolved trauma is passed down through mother-daughter interactions and family lines, affecting women's autonomy and empowerment. Acknowledging and facing the past are essential for healing and recovery.

Literature review analyzed development of trauma theory, from its earliest psychoanalytic origins to more sophisticated interpretations, has greatly broadened the field of literary trauma studies. Review also assessed the academic studies examining intergenerational transmission. This research seeks to close that gap and advance our knowledge of agency in the tales of diasporic Arab women.

### 3. Theoretical Framework

The theory of intergenerational trauma is opted from the work of Alan L. Berger and Victoria Aarons entitled as *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History and Memory*(2017) which uses literature to show how three generations of families have been affected by the Holocaust's horror and transmit it to coming generation. First-generation Holocaust survivors personally experienced the horrible events. Survivors' experiences, marked by silence and disconnected memories often remain unspoken, transferring traumatic effects. The second generation of survivors' offspring develops attitudes about identity development before birth, making it challenging to accurately capture traditional trauma experiences in historical accounts they transfer trauma through silence. The third generation, consisting of survivors' grandchildren, approaches the past deceptively, learning about it unprompted and unguided. They actively seek to understand their roots and family history, often motivated by a desire to connect with their lineage and comprehend trauma to break the cycle.

#### 3.1 Method of Analysis

To examine the selected narratives to identify instances of intergenerational trauma and healing, this study uses textual analysis as a method of research. In an essay titled *Textual Analysis as a Research Method* (2013), Catherine Belsey argues that "textual analysis as a research method involves a close encounter with the work itself" (p.160). According to Belsey, textual analysis necessitates a thorough examination of the text through interaction, which ultimately results in an interpretation. Moreover, Belsey contends that "there is no such thing as pure reading"(p.163). Interpreting the meaning of a text is always required contextual information. Consequently, I utilize secondary literature to bolster this subject.

#### 4. Intergenerational Transmission of Trauma in *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023)

The analysis is done by exploring transmission of intergenerational trauma in novels by Etaf Rum, *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023), as the inheritance, embodiment and negotiation of trauma from one generation of Palestinian-American women to the next.

#### 4.1 Transmission of Trauma in *A Woman is No Man* (2019)

##### 4.1.1 First Generation: The Witness

The novel *A Woman is No Man* (2019) explores the ongoing emotional distress which has affected three successive generations of Palestinian women. Women belonging to the first generation accepted traumatic experiences as part of their gender identity because they survived displacement and battles alongside strict patriarchal culture. Isra's parents, first generation trauma survivors, live in Palestine, witnessing violence firsthand in their personal and public lives. They live in Birzeit under Israeli occupation, surrounded by trauma from conflict and political unrest.

Yaqoub is the head of household, is an abusive character due to strong patriarchy. In the novel Isra's mother, who belongs to the first generation in this trauma cycle not only due to war but cultural expectations, internalized patriarchy. She submits to the social system for personal survival, becoming an agent of approval rather than resistance. In this way she transmits her own trauma to her daughter.

Yaqoub holds the authority to decide about major decisions like Isra's marriage. He engaged her with Adam who belonged to a Palestinian family living in American diaspora. Isra's mother experienced emotional authority and physical abuse, does not fight against arranged marriage to protect her daughter from a cycle of abuse.. Isra inquired about the value and respect of women in American culture, Mother responded with deep rooted cultural beliefs, "No matter how far away from Palestine you go, a woman will always be a woman."(p.16) Mother fulfills cultural obligations by preparing her for her future role as a wife and mother. And advised her, "Marriage, motherhood—that is a woman's only worth."(p.16)

Another most important character, Fareeda embodies the most vulnerable character in *A Woman is No Man*(2019) by playing the role of Isra's mother-in-law. Isra moved to America after marriage and controlled and influenced by traumatic experiences of Fareeda. Fareeda shows an exceptional example of a woman who experiences emotional injury through unexpressed grief. Etan Rumi describes Fareeda's childhood experience of Nakba that is cause of her sufferings, She was not surprised when her father came home and beat them mercilessly, the tragedy of the Nakba bulging in his veins.(p.98)

Fareeda, a Palestinian immigrant, has endured trauma from war, displacement, and gender-caste hierarchy, leading to a harsh attitude and rigid traditions. She fears losing her lifestyle and ancestral past due to war disruptions. Fareeda's experiences influence her parenting methods, as she lacks the ability to provide safety and comfort for her children. Fareeda advised her sons, "Forget all this American nonsense about love and respect, You need to make sure our culture survives, and that means teaching a woman her place"(p.114). Fareeda's insecurities stem from her past experiences with suffering, which she interprets as noble spirit.

The narrative investigates the boosting system that measures women through childbearing capabilities which originates from Palestinian customs and personal sorrow. Fareeda considers daughters to be a loss compared to sons who represent the best assurance for family perpetuation through cultural preservation. After a year of marriage Isra got pregnant. Fareeda shows great anticipation before knowing the gender of Isra's child. At one point when Fareeda tried to convince Isra by saying this "A boy is better, trust me. They'll care for you when you're older, carry on the family name"(p.82)

##### 4.1.2 Second Generation: The Inheritors

The second generation character, Isra faces severe consequences from parental trauma. Isra faces the trauma coming from her mother and mother in law, who experienced harm through

approved customs and quiet practices. Trauma and suffering came from pains and insecurities of parents as well as Isra's own experiences for survival in an unknown space. Others dominate every area of her existence by subjecting her to arranged marriage with Adam and basement imprisonment as well as continuously demanding a male heir. The authorities recast her body to become duty-serving tools that were before dedicated to personal ambition or desires. Step by step Isra loses control of her actions and deteriorates until she resembles an empty spirit or shadow of her previous self. The overwhelming fear that keeps Isra from speaking drives her to stay silent as a protective survival mechanism. "Her words always caught somewhere between her mind and her mouth" (p.199).

The trauma experienced by Isra becomes explicit when she begins to develop negative thoughts about herself alongside her life's actual events. She takes responsibility for Adam's violent temper and Fareeda's disdain and her own sadness together with her inability to bear a son. She discards any doubts about receiving pain for being female while accepting that she deserves suffering. This leads her to believe she is weak and damaged with no worth. Her thoughts betray this conditioning "She didn't deserve his love. She wasn't worthy"(p.138). In this situation the lines between identity and injustice become indistinguishable because Isra shift her belief from being an abuse victim to becoming an abuser.

Isra has a deep sense of emptiness and despair upon realizing that her fantasies of freedom are unrealistic within the parameters of her patriarchal world. Isra grows more conscious as she endures this trauma in secret; she worries that her children will also experience the same suffering. This realization deepens her grief, leaving her feeling shattered, as if her misery is a generational heritage that cannot be avoided. Rum depicted her situation as, "Worse was that her daughters would repeat it, and she was to blame.(p.199)

After birth of her fourth daughter, Isra finds the strength to speak up after experiencing trauma that influenced her own life. Isra requested Adam about their daughters "I just wonder if they'll be expected to be married at a young age"(p.216). She begs Adam to give their girls an alternative future, one based on education and autonomy rather than early marriage. She dares to question the very system that has silenced her in this act, demonstrating persistence desire for change. Adam responds humiliatingly, calling her a shermouta(whore) and violently hitting her in front of their girls, rather than listening. In this moment of inherited trauma, Isra's daughters are made to see the brutal response to her opposition that emotionally scars them and reinforces the pain.

She is unable to provide her kids with the warmth, security, or connection they require because of her unresolved trauma, which makes her emotionally aloof and distanced from them. When Deya asked Isra to play with her but emotionally absent isra snapped deya's arm away "I don't have time to play(p.251). Untreated and unsaid, Isra's long-standing trauma becomes a silent legacy that is transmitted via her incapacity to connect, heal, and shield her kids from the exact suffering she wishes to protect them from.

Gradually Isra became like her Mother and mother in law. She saw Deya waving at a boy after school. She reacted harshly, "she had yelled at Deya, called her a sharmouta."(p.258)

#### **4.1.3 Third Generation: The Questioners**

Deya, representative of the third generation in *A Woman is No Man*(2019) who maintains distance from original trauma yet remains deeply affected by it. Deya faces more cultural openness and diverse ways of living because she spent her childhood in Brooklyn unlike her mother Isra and grandma Fareeda. Deya, the eldest daughter of Isra and Adam, was raised by her grandparents after her parents' death, which was shrouded in mystery and shame. Deya struggles

with the harsh restrictions that come with being a girl and to suppress her desire for knowledge and autonomy. Deya endures ongoing distress because of her parents' unsolved murders and vague secrets held by others and the uncomfortable feeling she has lived with since childhood.

Deya rejects every suitor despite receiving several marriage proposals—not out of rebellion, but rather because she believes that marriage would take away her independence if it were to take place under the parameters set by her society and family. Despite not knowing the whole truth of Isra's life and death, she refuses because she fears that she will suffer the same terrible destiny as her mother. At one point when she is forced to meet a suitor, Nasser by her grandmother and he politely inquired about the things that make her happy and Deya replied, "I don't believe in happiness." (p.33) Her silent self-deception that suggests an unconscious internalization of trauma is her inability to acknowledge that her parents are the source of her sadness.

Deya struggles with fragmented memories, an experience that is intimately linked to intergenerational trauma. As if they were half-remembered dreams, her memories are distorted, which is typical of psychological instability in someone who was raised in an environment of quiet and repressed realities. Therefore, she must fill in the blanks on her own as she has been denied complete access to her family history, including the circumstances surrounding the lives and deaths of her parents.

Deya attempts to deal with traumas by rewriting the memories into a reassuring tale. Deya had played this memory again and over until she could see it clearly: At the bus station, Mama was waiting for her and Nora, while her sisters were dozing off in the stroller. Mama had smiled more when she announced, they are going to the park. They reached at a train station and get into it. She saw a light at the end of the tunnel, approaching quickly. Adam was there as the doors opened and the train arrived in front of them. He hurried over there and took her in his arms. Then, as a family, the six of them went for a walk in the park. Deya admits that, "For all I know, I could've made it up. Maybe I've even made everything up. That would explain why nothing makes sense" (p.180). It was a handy protective mechanism created to fill in the emotional voids and offer an explanation for a history that was so complex and traumatic.

Deya ultimately ends the cycle of generational trauma by choosing to speak up and take charge of her life. She consciously breaks from the cultural and domestic norm that has since been used to silence women in her society by refusing to marry and instead submitting an application for college. She confronts her history and understands the truth of her parents' deaths in this way; in other words, she understands the cause of her trauma, resolves it, and ends the cycle of trauma.

## 4.2 Transmission of Trauma in *Evil Eye* (2023)

### 4.2.1 First Generation: The Witness

Etaf Rum's *Evil Eye* (2023) explores the continuous trauma, repressed communication and conventional roles that take place in Palestinian-American households. Incidents of trauma in the family history initiate with Yara's grandmother who experienced Palestinian patriarchal culture during wartime. These scars from emotions and inherited ideas are passed on to the next generation by Teta and other first-generation trauma sufferers. The third generation character, Yara encounters the painful inheritance from her mother and grandmother and traditions and stories.

Teta, Yara's grandmother, is the origin of intergenerational trauma, weakly bearing the cultural and psychological wounds of patriarchal shaping, relocation, and conflict. Her temperament stems from her experiences during the 1948 Palestinian exodus, known as the



Nakba, during which she became extremely afraid of loss, violence, and instability. These fears serve as the foundation for rigid beliefs and behaviours that she then passes on to her kids and grandkids. Her experiences of the loss of her homeland and living in exile shape her feeling of insecurity and mistrust in the world around her. Safety for Teta becomes the ultimate good, more important than personal happiness or expression of emotions. Teta married off her daughter, Meriem in American-Palestinian family for her better future in America.

Teta firmly believes in myths and superstitions rather than believing in political issues and personal errors. Teta participates in the custom of reading the coffee cup, a customary fortune-telling technique that is prevalent in many Arab societies. She examines the cup of her daughter, Meriem who was about to move abroad after marriage. And after keenly looking inside cup she said, "There are mountains, Five, maybe six. Mountains symbolize hardships, obstacles"(p.12).

Teta frequently tells stories about the life in Palestine, prior to the displacement, where she talks about the village, the community and lost traditions. These stories are nostalgic but they are also depressive, frightening, and longing. As Yara remembered her Teta's stories about Nakba, "Can you imagine someone breaking into your home, on land you've lived on for generations, and forcing you to leave?"(p.182). Teta is unintentionally binding her descendants and particularly her women to a cycle of fear, exclusion, and restriction by insisting that they retell these tales to her.

As a first generation character, Teta keeps the trauma alive. She makes sure her progeny do not forget, but when doing so, she leaves them with the heavy emotional burden of exile and unfinished sorrow. The key is not only an object depicting memory, but also an implement through which trauma is passed down, generation from generation, by way of physical and emotional inheritance.

#### **4.2.2 Second Generation: The Inheritors**

The second generation who inherited the war trauma through their own and their parents' memories and relocation holds essential keys for understanding the origins of family trauma. Yara's mother, Meriem and mother-in-law are two main characters of second generation of trauma survivors. Meriem, a Palestinian immigrant woman in America, is shaped by a traumatic experience passed down from her mother and her abusive husband. Despite her dreams of becoming a singer, her experiences remain unarticulated.

Meriem inherited superstitious beliefs from her mother. Yara hears a woman refer to her mother as cursed after she has seen the fortune teller. Her mother's reaction, "I've been cursed most of my life, ever since I left Palestine," (p.197). Meriem's use of curse indicates how a social culture has trained her to avoid real emotional understanding by avoiding specific terms like trauma or gender violence.

Yara experienced a deep emotional burden from her mother, displaying exhaustion and hidden suffering. Her mother's traumatized behavior separated her emotionally, as seen in a park memory where she repeatedly called for sweets but was slapped by her mother. and her mother said "How many times do I have to tell you? Stop calling for me endlessly. All I ever do is mother you, It's all I ever do!"(109). Meriem was emotionally absent mother and inflict shame upon her daughter in this way she perpetuate the legacy of trauma.

Meriem is depicted as a woman struggling to cope with unprocessed trauma, resulting in a sudden emotional collapse. Meriem's turmoil stems from years of emotional isolation and cultural pressure. Yara, a younger person, sees her mother's behavior as a personal flaw rather than a serious injury. Yara wrote in her journal when she was confronting her past to escape

from continues pain, “You standing with your hands on your hips one moment, then collapsing to your knees and slapping your own face the next.”(p.209)

Nadia as a Palestinian woman belonged to a generation which faced difficulties in confronting traumatic experiences without words since modern Palestine lived through war alongside location changes and rigid patriarchal rules. Control and stillness as well as her devotion to tradition were her adopted means of survival. Nadia displays misogynistic behaviors which originated from patriarchal standards that once oppressed her while she now uses these same practices to rule others notably Yara. She asked Yara to dress for Fadi and said “Pleasing your husband is your duty”(p.20). Through her words, Nadia forces Yara to follow traditional gender norms.

Meriem and Nadia as second generation characters do not want to repeat the trauma cycles but they did it unintentionally. Though they fight against it, the inherited pain surfaces in parenting, relationships and inner voice, showing how trauma can live on even without words.

#### **4.2.3 Third Generation: The Questioners**

Etaf Rum Yara's *Evil Eye* (2023) explores the struggle of third-generation trauma victims, who inherit unseen duties from their mother, grandmother, and mother-in-law. As an American-born Palestinian immigrant, Yara navigates the psychological and cultural trauma from her family's past, relying on emotional scarring and gender barriers. Yara's mental condition manifests heavily because her mother maintains an aloof personality even though she maintains silence and keeps demanding Yara to adhere to specific behavior standards. Yara reflects her childhood memory when her mother cursing her, stating, “What did I do to deserve a selfish, ungrateful daughter? She ruined my life. I wish she was never born. May God curse you with a terrible life, a punishment for being a terrible, terrible daughter”(p.172). In Yara's case she is in intense shame because she is not a good daughter for her mother. So she started blaming herself instead of knowing about her mother's trauma.

Yara, a woman who defies her family's expectations, pursues a career in teaching at a university, despite facing opposition from her mother-in-law Nadia. Her journey aims to regain autonomy and challenge the notion that her value is determined by fitting into stereotypical gender norms. Yara's travel desire stems from her desire to break free from the limitations of previous female generations. She watches her mother and grandmother confined by cultural traditions, expressing her loneliness and inherited identity. Travel serves as an emotional and psychological liberation process, allowing her to overcome her stifled existence. Yara's pre-marriage life is marked by guilt, resignation, and a sense of denial of freedom. Her brother's support and freedom in pursuing his goals further fuels her desire to explore other countries. However, her husband, Fadi, and Nadia's patriarchal control destroy her hope for a 12-day Scandinavian cruise.

Yara's untreated lifelong psychological trauma leads to panic attacks and a major emotional breakdown, causing her to doubt her ability to be a mother. “It's a small voice that keeps me uncertain, insecure, afraid. A voice that always turns me against myself. Sometimes it's my mother's voice, her ideas about me.”(p.280) This instance exemplifies a prevalent sign of generational trauma: the incapacity to control emotional reactions as a result of the prior generation never modeling or allowing the necessary processing skills.

Yara Murad undergoes a profound metamorphosis as she grapples with the psychological wounds of her Palestinian immigrant family. Despite her societal success, her mental health deteriorates, and she struggles to articulate her feelings. Fadi, her childhood friend, dismisses her

feelings, similar to her childhood experiences. Despite her professional achievements, Yara finds herself trapped in a cycle of tyranny and concealment.

Yara begins treatment at Dr. Esther's clinic, initially hesitant due to cultural norms and fears. She realizes her family's silent trauma and the emotional detachment she feels. She seeks therapy to escape generational feelings and break down cultural boundaries. Journaling is a part of her rehabilitation process, allowing her to confront and resolve her fears and experiences. Yara's decision to file for divorce from her husband, Fadi, demonstrates her triumph over the anguish experienced by other women in her family. Fadi's emotional inflexibility and dominance keep her under control, downplaying her feelings and requiring her to conform to societal expectations. Yara's openness about her desire for a divorce is a courageous act of love and desire for escaping from intergenerational trauma. She chooses to develop a narrative that emphasizes individual autonomy and mental wellness.

### 5. Transformation from Trauma to Recovery

In *A Woman is No Man*(2019), the first generation of women, Fareeda and Isra's mother, who inherited the effects of the war, displacement and the strong patriarchal rule are the trauma survivors. They only repress their pain and deal with it by remaining silent, shaming others, and complying; they never confront their experience. For instance, Fareeda believes that the only way to live is to be in complete control and to follow men and, so she instills these same ideas in her daughters-in-law and children. The piece of the puzzle that suffers the most from abuse, frequent visits, and neglect is Isra. She finds herself in a society that values duty and silence, where she assumes that her voice and desires are unimportant. Her mental breakdown and eventual fate demonstrate the terrible effects of untreated trauma and the inability of women to escape a society in which they lack autonomy. However, readers learn that there is a gleam of change through Deya, the third-generation, granddaughter. In addition, Deya questions a tale that has been told to her, enquires about her parents, and starts to imagine what life would be like without cultural constraints. Her journey might be characterised as the first step towards recovery, understanding, resistance and courage to take charge of her own story.

In *Evil Eye*(2023), Rum delves deeper into this generation's interpretation of the trauma, viewing it through a more psychological lens in terms of healing, therapy, and educational engagement. Teta, whose experience of surviving under the cover of tyranny and dominance, embellished by patriarchal brutality, represents the first generation. Her daughter Meriem inherits the issue and without addressing the underlying causes, replicates the same behaviour. Meriem instills such cultural traditions in her Sdaughter out of fear and humiliation. Because of the unspoken suffering and the things that are handed on, the second generation is emotionally imprisoned. However, as Yara demonstrates, the third generation begins to tamper with this circle. Instead of being a helpless victim like Isra, Yara is speaking out about her suffering. She talks about her family background, seeks therapy and uses education and art as ways to open up and discover. Even though she struggles with shame, rage, and cultural conflict, her experience will serve as an example of a more obvious and intentional path to recovery.

The road to trauma or healing may finally demonstrate that trauma is not unresolved even when it is deeply ingrained and ancestral. Every generation must deal with the past, yet a cycle of change may be started by awareness, introspection, and action. The transition from quiet and suppression to voice and self-discovery is enlightening and inspiring, demonstrating resilience. Even if the memory of suffering is acknowledged rather than erased, and the willingness to reject its impact on the future is not generated, restoration is feasible by the third generation.

## 6. Conclusion

The investigation of *A Woman is No Man*(2019) and *Evil Eye*(2023) through the lens of intergenerational trauma transmission and trauma theory exposes diasporic Palestinian families' long-lived psychological and emotional problems, which are passed down generations. In both works, the traumas of forced displacement, patriarchal aggression, and unresolved sorrow become embedded in familial systems and are passed down through behaviors, phobias, and wordless suffering. It has been made evident by structuring this study around many generations that trauma impacts every family member and becomes a factor in determining their identities and lifestyles. The findings show a clear generational shift from and going from quiet to consciousness. The pursuit of cultural and emotional relief is evidence of a broader narrative about breaking cultural and emotional cycles that might repair diasporic groups.

## References

- Aarons, V., & Berger, A. (2017). *Third-generation Holocaust representation: Trauma, history, and memory*. Northwestern University Press.
- Abraham, N., & Torok, M. (1994). *The shell and the kernel: Renewals of psychoanalysis*, Vol. 1. (N. T. Rand, Ed.). University of Chicago Press.
- Alyan, H. (2017). *Salt Houses*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- American Psychiatric Association.(2013). *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5*. American psychiatric association.
- Aniqua, T. H. (2023). *Analysing transgenerational trauma through the lenses of contemporary texts by Anne Frank, Markus Zusak and Khaled Hosseini* (Doctoral dissertation, Brac University).
- Belsey, C. (2013). Textual analysis as a research method. *Research methods for English studies*, 2, 160-178.
- Brave Heart, M., Chase, J., Elkins, J., & Altschul, D. B. (2011). Historical trauma among Indigenous Peoples of the Americas: Concepts, research, and clinical considerations. *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs*, 43(4), 282–290.
- Chakraverty, A. (2023). Intergenerational trauma studies in diasporic writers: Unveiling the literary narratives of inherited wounds. *International Journal of Humanities Social Science and Management*, 3(3), 323-328.
- Chaudhary, F., & Munawar, A. (2023). Un-burying the Buried: Exploring Silence and Generational Trauma in Elif Shafak's *The Island of Missing Trees*. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 43(2), 203-215.
- Danieli, Y. (Ed.). (1998). *International handbook of multigenerational legacies of trauma*. Springer Science & Business Media.
- El Ajjani, C., & Moumni, O. (2025). Diasporic sexualities and generational trauma in Etaf Rum's *A Woman is No Man*. *African Identities*, 1-14.
- Felman, S. (2002). *The juridical unconscious: Trials and traumas in the twentieth century*. Harvard University Press.
- Felman, S., & Laub, D. (1992). *Testimony: Crises of witnessing in literature, psychoanalysis, and history*. Taylor & Francis.
- Freud, S. (1971). The aetiology of hysteria (1896).
- Freud, S. (2012). *Totem and taboo*. Routledge.
- Freud, S. (2024). *The Revised Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Rowman & Littlefield.



- Goudie, T. M. (2006). *Intergenerational transmission of trauma and post-internment Japanese diasporic literature* [Murdoch University].
- Hirsch, M. (2008). The generation of postmemory. *Poetics today*, 29(1), 103-128.
- Hosseini, K. (2003). *The kite runner*. Riverhead Books.
- Hussain, H., & Imtiaz, R. (2024). Intergenerational Trauma in Joukhadar's *The Map of Salt and Stars* and Alyan's *Salt Houses*. *Qlantic Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 5(2), 194-202.
- Joukhadar, Z. (2018). *The Map of Salt and Stars*. Hachette UK.
- Marder, E. (2006). Trauma and literary studies: Some enabling questions. *Reading on*, 1(1), 1-6.
- Mohsin, S., Hayat, M., & Akhter, S. (2021). A study of transgenerational trauma in Abulhawa's *The blue between sky and water*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 5(2), 716-728.
- Morrison, T. (1987). *Beloved*. Alfred A. Knopf.
- Rum, E. (2019). *A woman is no man*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Rum, E. (2023). *Evil eye*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Schick, K. (2011). Acting out and working through: Trauma and (in)security. *Review of International Studies*, 37(4), 1837-1855.
- Schwab, G. (2010). *Haunting legacies: Violent histories and transgenerational trauma*. Columbia University Press.
- Shafak, E. (2021). *The Island of Missing Trees*. Viking Press.
- Shahid, L., Riaz, F., & Faheem, M. A. (2024). Orchestrating a Palestinian Holocaust: Navigating Trauma and Healing through Subversive Storytelling in *Gaza Writes Back*. *Pakistan Languages and Humanities Review*, 8(3), 294-302.
- Wehling-Giorgi, K. (2023). Unspeakable Things Spoken: Transgenerational Trauma, Fractured Bodies and Visual Tropes in Toni Morrison, Elsa Morante and Elena Ferrante's Works. *Romance Studies*, 41(4), 248-266.
- Whitehead, A. *Trauma Fiction*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.