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## **From Being to Becoming A Woman: A Feminist Study of Rum's *A Woman Is No Man***

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### **Abstract**

This study aims at exploring Etaf Rum's novel through a feministic perspective, by applying a mixed theoretical framework. The novel has been analyzed using the theoretical postulates from Simone de Beauvoir (The Other, Ethics of Ambiguity), Judith Butler (Theory of Performativity) and Chandra Mohnaty (Third-World Woman) have been applied. The study carries discussion over intersectionality of class, culture and gender, along with the traces of resistance and subversion against the male dominance and cultural stereotypic assumptions. The study demonstrates how women are made to believe that it is their duty to prioritize societal expectations over individualistic desires, perpetuating their subservience, how men have privilege and control over women minds and bodies, and how women struggle to resist and revert the male dominance. The research is significant as it sheds light on the persistent struggle of female individuals, highlighting the powers of patriarchal society, forcing them to behave in a certain way.

**Key Words:** Cross-culture, Diaspora, Feminism, Intersectionality, Middle-East, Muslim, Patriarchy, Palestinian-American, Performativity, The Other, Third-World Woman

### **Introduction**

Commonly, in colonized countries a man is brought up with the ideology that he is dominant and woman is considered to be subservient. Dominance is given to the man (Ali & Nawaz, 2017). Arab American women aim to dismantle dichotomies such as male/female, Arab/American and Muslim/non-Muslim. They seek to challenge the stereotypical image of Arab women as compliant, mediocre, and inferior. However, their struggle intensified in the diasporic sphere, where American feminists labeled them as 'needing' saving from oppression. Ironically American feminists face similar patriarchal system. Arab American women found themselves excluded from feminist movements in America, with their problems and demand deemed "other" (Okin, 1999).

Simone de Beauvoir's iconic phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949) serves as the foundation for this research topic. Beauvoir's existentialist feminism posits that women are not inherently inferior



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to men, but rather, societal expectations and norms shape their experiences and identities. Beauvoir's is of the view that women as often treated as "the Other", responsible maintaining social norms and expectations.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) proposes that gender is not an inherent trait, but rather a performance that is repeated and reinforced through social and cultural norms. The Butler's ideas can be used to analyze how the protagonist in *A Woman Is No Man* performs and negotiates her gender identity, highlighting the tensions between societal expectations and individual agency. Judith Butler's theory of performativity suggests that gender is a performance, a repeated act that reinforces societal expectations. Women are socialized to perform their gender roles in a way that is acceptable to society.

Beauvoir's concept of "Ethics of Ambiguity", which leads to the idea that humans are intrinsically equivocal, entangled between freedom and oppression. The acknowledgement and embracing of that ambiguousness is, in fact, the key to inject courage to defy and stand against oppressive mechanisms. Resistance, in terms of feminist critique, is any sort of attempt to give voice to women, or bring their hardships and sufferings on the surface, and strengthening the idea to resist against the stereotypical mindset, set by patriarchal society.

Intersectionality is an idea which illustrates that how diverse aspects of an individual's identity (such as race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation etc.) pass through an intersection and overlapping process, leading to the unique feelings of discrimination and marginalization. It aids to comprehend how individuals experience different tyrannical and oppressive acts, occurring concurrently, shaped by the convergence of diversified identities.

Postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988) highlights the intersectionality of gender, race, and colonialism. This theory may lead to the examination of the experiences of Palestinian-American women, like the protagonist in the novel, which are shaped by the intersections of patriarchy, colonialism and cultural expectations.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Concept of the "Third-World Woman" critiques the Western feminist notion of a universalized, homogenous "Third-World Woman" who is victimized and silenced. The prologue section also carry this concept of Mohanty's theoretics which can be taken as a reference to the specific cultural and social context (the Muslim-Arab culture running on the module of Patriarchy) that shapes her experiences. The narrator's voicelessness isn't just a personal issue but also a reflection of the societal and cultural norms that silence women.

Etaf Rum a renowned feminist fiction writer, who had Palestinian lineage but was born and raised in America (Brooklyn- New York). Her parents were immigrants in U.S, coming from Palestine. They played an important role in shaping her ethnicity. She started her professional career as an English literature teacher because of her love and passion for reading and writing. At present, she is in North Carolina along with her two children, and career as a teacher and writer is in progress.

Etaf Rum's novel, *A Woman is No Man*, challenges stereotypes surrounding Arab culture and patriarchy. The prologue introduces Deya, a third-generation Arab-American women, who discovers her voice and confronts the shame silenced by her community. The novel is divided into three parts, each chapter titled after one of three main female characters: Fareeda (grandmother), Isra (mother), and



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Deya (daughter). This narrative structure prioritizes female perspectives. Rum clarifies that she aims to represent one family's experiences, not the entire Arab community. By doing so, she humanizes the struggle of Arab-American women and men within patriarchal systems.

The study aims at diving into the analysis of Etaf Rum's, *A Woman is No Man* (Rum, 2019) from the postcolonial feminist lens. Research seeks to understand and analyze the traumatizing experience of women in a patriarchal society and how social norms and conditions shape their identity. The study also aims to acknowledge how gender performativity has become a trouble for female strata of society and how they try to resist it.

Commonly, in colonized countries a man is brought up with the ideology that he is dominant and woman is considered to be subservient. Dominance is given to the man (Ali & Nawaz, 2017). In Eastern cultures, especially in South Asian and Middle Eastern Muslim countries, female voice is always supposed to be suppressed, and have no or less space as compared to men, in terms of food, clothes, education, freedom of speech and action, choice and decision-making. So, there always a need arises to talk about and advocate the rights of the marginalized groups, like the one in the study, the women. Etaf Rum's masterpiece *A Woman Is No Man* portrays the experiences of such women, particularly in relation to the societies like Palestinian American, gender performativity and resistance. There is also an account of challenging the stereotypical patriarchal mindset prevalent in Arab cultures.

The study tries to answer the following research questions.

- How does the author portray gender performativity and resistance?
- How has Etaf Rum portrayed the fixed social role of women by comparing females from two different Generations and regions?

The research significantly contributes to the body of knowledge by offering a nuanced examination of Female experiences through the lens of literature combined with language analysis. Additionally, the unique perspective of “one is not woman but rather becomes a woman” by a feminist author, Simon de Beauvoir adds authenticity and depth to the portrayal of Isra and Deya.

### Literature Review

As per Slezek (2018), Judith Butler challenges the conventional notion that gender is inextricably linked to biological sex. Instead, she believes that gender is comprised of the cultural connotations attributed to the sexed body. The widespread assumption that sex determines gender is, in reality, a product of societal conditioning, and it perpetuates a binary gender system and restricts the potential for gender diversity and expression. Slezek (2018) in his thesis on Gender Performativity in Wilkie Collins, Sarah Waters, and Tana French's works concludes exploring how three authors portray gender as a performance in their novels. Through an analysis of Collins' *The Woman in White* (1860), Waters's *Fingersmith* (2002) and *Tipping the Velvet* (1998), and French's *In the Woods* (2007) and *The Likeness* (2008), the thesis highlights the ways through which these authors illustrates the power dynamics and consequences of gender performative acts. It leads to the illustration of gender identity's fluid nature and socio-cultural constructions. The study has been divided into three parts based on the authors' way of dealing the idea of performativity such as; fashion, body and identity associated with the gender performativity.



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Judith Butler's theory of Gender performativity has been utilized to analyze a text. The study focuses on finding how the female protagonist is subjugated by the male character. Tehmina Durrani's novel *Blasphemy* courageously tackles gender discrimination and religious exploitation in Pakistan's patriarchal society. The study examines how the main character, Pir Sain, exploits traditional gender roles to subjugate his young wife, Heer, and explores the paradox of Heer's resistance against oppressive measures. *Blasphemy* is a heart-wrenching narrative of religious corruption, women's subjugation, marital rape, child abuse, and psychological disintegration. The novel sheds light on the harsh realities of life, where individuals' dreams are crushed by social injustices and oppression. Her novels, *My Feudal Lord* and *Blasphemy*, courageously question powerful institutions like clergy and feudalism. The research utilizes performative theory and gender roles to analyze Heer's complex path to resistance against Pir Sain's socially accepted attitude. It explores Heer's transformation from a feminine to a masculine figure, challenging traditional gender roles (Zafar, et al., 2023).

Chandra Mohanty's Post-colonial feminism highlights the intersectionality of gender, race and colonialism. This theory gives an insight in to examine how the experiences of subjugated women, like the protagonist in the selected work are shaped by the intersection of patriarchy, colonialism and cultural expectations (Mohanty, 1988).

A research employs a Postcolonial Feminist lens to analyze Daniyal Mueenuddin's short story collection, *In Other Rooms, Other Wonders*. Mohanty's concept has been utilized for the analysis. The study is based on the concept that subjugated women dually yearn for the identity. Through a qualitative textual analysis informed by Chandra Mohanty's concept of sisterhood, the study examines the impact of patriarchy and oppressions on Pakistani women's lives. The selected short stories highlight the struggles and injustices faced by women in Pakistan, illustrating their fight for equal rights and identity as postcolonial subjects. The analysis explores the psychological effects of oppression on women and their varied responses, ranging from resistance to acceptance. Daniyal Mueenuddin's characters are examined to understand how they navigate different situations and react to patriarchal norms, shedding light on the complexities of women's experiences in postcolonial societies. Through his stories, the writer highlights the stark inequality between men and women, perpetuated by patriarchal traditions and exacerbated by the dominant. Women are subjected to physical abuse, emotional torment, and denial of basic human rights, reducing them to mere objects. The stories illustrate how women are treated as commodities within marriages, stripped of agency and autonomy. Multiple wives are often viewed as possession, rather than partners. Women's education is frequently neglected, limiting their roles to domestic duties (Yousaf, et al., 2023).

Simon de Beauvoir's phrase "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" plays the role of foundation for the study. Beauvoir's existential feminist argues that women are not inherently inferior to men, but rather societal expectations and norms shape their experiences and identities (Beauvoir, 1949). A research paper examines his seminal novel, *Things Fall Apart* which explores the cultural clash between Igbo traditions and Western colonialism in Nigeria. Although not explicitly feminist, the novel offers valuable insights into women's role in Igbo society. The paper investigates the treatment of African communities under





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British colonial rule and the impact of patriarchal norms on African women's role in society. By analyzing the selected text, the study aims to understand how patriarchal structures within African communities affected women's positions during the colonial period. Achebe's works offer nuanced perspectives on women's role in Igbo society. In *Things Fall Apart*, women face limitations and discrimination, including exclusion from governance and arranged marriages. Achebe argues in the role of women in the Igbo society that traditional Igbo women were not inherently subservient, but rather oppressed by a patriarchal system. He advocates for reevaluating traditional gender roles and empowering women. The novel illustrates how women are treated as commodities within marriages, stripped of agency and autonomy. Multiple wives are often viewed as possession, rather than partners. Women's education is frequently neglected, limiting their roles to domestic duties (Babu & Chaudhary, 2023).

According to Beh & Yong (2021) Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Ferdinand Oyono's *Houseboy* portray women in three distinct phases: as victims of operation by men, as complete agents in their own subjugation, and as empowered individuals. While critics often focus on women's operation, overlooking their role in perpetuating societal norms, a study argues that women in the selected novels possess agency. Women's subjugation is attributed to both indigenous patriarchy and colonial patriarchal customs. Findings reveal that women often accept and reinforce their assigned roles, while those who challenge these norms are silenced or marginalized. This analysis employs Postcolonial Feminist theory, which highlights women's marginalization, exclusion, and misrepresentation. The study concludes that women's empowerment requires recognizing and challenging these intersecting patriarchal structures. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* and Oyono's *Houseboy*, women's roles are multifaceted, reflecting both their agency and subjugation.

A study delves into the representation of violence against women in Etaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man*, examining the intricate web of deeply ingrained beliefs, cultural norms, and traditions that perpetuate such violence. The narrative follows the lives of three generations. Through a multidisciplinary approach, drawing on gender studies, anthropology of culture and postcolonial literary theory, the research investigates how the characters negotiate the intersections of ethnicity, family obligations, and individual agency. A detailed analysis of characters interactions, conversations, and narrative development reveals the resilience and agency exhibited by the female characters as they confront oppressive forces and resist the constraints imposed upon them. Furthermore, the study illuminates the complex relationship between cultural norms and the perpetuation of violence against women, demonstrating how traditional values and societal expectations can contribute to the silencing and marginalization of women. By examining the nuances of Rum's storytelling, the research highlights the importance of culturally sensitive and nuanced approaches to addressing domestic abuse and promoting gender equality (Khan, et al., 2024).

Etaf Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* explores the complexities of shame within Arab American patriarchal culture. Through the emotional narratives of Arab American women, Rum examines the intricate relationship between shame and gender in this cultural context. The research study indicates that the novel sheds light on the lived experiences of a marginalized ethnic group, highlighting how



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gender-based shaming perpetuates patriarchal culture and male dominance. The study reveals the profound impact of shame on the mental and physical well-being of Arab American women across three generations. It also elucidates the psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape the experience, expression, and regulation of shame. By examining the intersections of shame, gender, and culture, Rum's novel provides a nuanced understanding of the complexities of Arab American women's experiences (Mikic, 2021).

The closer reading of the researches and book reviews held on *A Woman Is No Man* infers a need for research study through the perspective of feminism and patriarchal oppression. So, this research aims to fill that gap and add to the academic researches on feminism in general and specifically on Etaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man*.

### Theoretical Framework

The study is based on the qualitative research. The first phase of this research process consists on the close review of existing literature on selected literary text and theory, which leads to the extraction of main ideas, terms and themes. These extracted data has been used to analyze the text and to synthesize it along with the reviewed literature. On the basis of this synthesis, the conclusion has been drawn.

A multifaceted feministic approach is being applied to the research topic "From Being to Becoming a Woman: A Feminist Study of Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* by mixing Simone de Beauvoir's Existentialist Feminism, Judith Butler's Gender Performativity and Mohanty's Postcolonial Feminism. The reason for choosing a mixed-framework is to offer a unique perspective on the complexities of womanhood, identity and oppression.

Simone de Beauvoir's iconic phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949) serves as the foundation for this research topic. Beauvoir's existentialist feminism posits that women are not inherently inferior to men, but rather, societal expectations and norms shape their experiences and identities. Beauvoir's theoretical postulates emphasize the role of social and cultural constructs in shaping women's lives and identities.

de Beauvoir's concept of "the Other" is relevant for an insight to Isra's experiences as a woman in a patriarchal society. Isra is constantly reminded of her role as a wife and mother, and her desires and aspirations are marginalized. Beauvoir's emphasis on freedom and choice is also relevant in the novel. Isra's struggles to assert her independence and autonomy are reflective of the tensions between individual desires and societal expectations.

Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity (Butler, 1990) proposes that gender is not an inherent trait, but rather a performance that is repeated and reinforced through social and cultural norms. The Butler's ideas can be used to analyze how the protagonist in *A Woman Is No Man* performs and negotiates her gender identity, highlighting the tensions between societal expectations and individual agency.

Butler's Queer Feminist Framework is relevant in understanding the ways in which Isra performs her gender and cultural identities. Isra's decision to wear the hijab, for example, is a performance of her cultural identity, but it also reflects her own desires and aspirations. Butler's discussion on the subversion of norms is also relevant in the novel. Isra's struggles to challenge patriarchal norms and



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expectations reflect the tensions between individual desire and societal norms. Postcolonial feminism (Mohanty, 1988; Spivak, 1988) highlights the intersectionality of gender, race, and colonialism. This theory may lead to the examination of the experiences of Palestinian-American women, like the protagonist in the novel, which are shaped by the intersections of patriarchy, colonialism and cultural expectations. Mohanty's framework critiques the universalization of Western feminist experiences, highlighting the need for a more nuanced understanding of women's experiences in different cultural contexts. Postcolonial feminism emphasizes the need to consider the historical and cultural contexts of women's lives, particularly in the context of colonialism and imperialism. Mohanty's framework highlights the importance of intersectionality in understanding women's experiences. In the novel, Isra's experiences as a Palestinian-American woman, wife, and mother are shaped by intersecting factors such as culture, class and gender.

### Data Analysis and Discussion

This chapter presents an in-depth analysis of the data collected from Etaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man*, a poignant and thought-provoking exploration of the complexities of womanhood, identity and cultural expectations.

The very first passage of the prologue can be taken as the gist of the whole novel. It can be divided into pieces, on the basis of words and phrases reflecting the theoretical postulates of the selected theorists like the *Otherness, Performativity, Third-world Women, Resistance and Intersectionality of Class, Gender and Colonialism*. Simone de Beauvoir's concept of "The Other" refers to the way society views and treats women as secondary to men. The idea of otherness can be sensed in a number of textual lines from the novel, as the very first section "*Prologue*" starts with this notion. There is an evidence of narrator's voicelessness which serves as the metaphor for silencing of women's voices and perspectives. The narrator's condition is "as normal as the bosoms on a woman's chest (p. 1)", indicates that how societal expectations of women's roles and behaviors are internalized and normalized.

"Mama's voice in her ear, reminding her: *A woman belongs at home*. Even if Isra left, she wouldn't know where to go." (p. 4). The statement "...*A woman belongs at home...*" reinforces the societal expectation that women's roles are limited to the domestic sphere. This lay emphasis on the idea of their status as "The Other" whose lives are defined by their relationships with others. This line of thinking is a classic example of Beauvoir's concept of otherness, where women are thought to be secondary to men in each and every way, and their roles are defined by societal expectations.

Another solid example of women's subordination is there on page 5 of the novel where there is a complete passage about the arrival of a suitor for Isra, her mother's shortcomings in not serving the *chai* in antique set of teacups, Yacob's (Isra's father) yelling at her mama, silence by Isra's mother, Yacob's remarks about the value of sons and daughter (being a temporary guest and a burden). The passage highlights how Isra, as a daughter, is seen as a temporary guest in her own family, awaiting marriage and transfer to another man's household, into another man's autonomy and authority. Another phase of subordination for a woman. This infers how women are treated as "The Other", secondary to men, along with suppressed voice and desires, without any agency or autonomy of her



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own. In Patriarchal society, daughters are taken as a financial burden and a means of securing economic stability through marriage. These lines, "Yacob was so eager to marry off Isra. His sons were the ones who helped him plow the fields and earn a living, and who would one day carry on the family name. A daughter was only a temporary guest, quietly awaiting another man to scoop her away, along with all her financial burden." (p. 5), strengthen Beauvoir's concept of "The Other", about the socialization of women to prioritize the needs and desires of others (men, children, family) over their own. It further reinforces women's status as secondary and inferior.

Judith Butler's theory of performativity suggests that gender is a performance, a repeated act that reinforces societal expectations. As per Slezek (2018), Judith Butler challenges the conventional notion that gender is inextricably linked to biological sex. Instead, she believes that gender is comprised of the cultural connotations attributed to the sexed body. The widespread assumption that sex determines gender is, in reality, a product of societal conditioning, and it perpetuates a binary gender system and restricts the potential for gender diversity and expression. The notion of inculcating performative mindset runs through the veins of the selected text, from start to the end. As in the prologue, the narrator's statement "...we've learned to conceal our condition...(p. 1)" and "...we've been taught to silence ourselves, that our silence will save us...(p. 1), illustrate how women are socialized to perform their gender roles in a way that is acceptable to society. The narrator's silence is a performance that reinforces the societal expectation of women's voicelessness.

There is another example of *Performativity* where in Chapter 1, Etaf Rum narrates as, "Though Mama was only thirty-five years old, Isra thought she looked much older, the lines of labor dug deeply into her face (p. 3)." Here, it is quite evident through the lines that the older look of a 35 years old lady is much suggestive of the performativity and reinforcement of her projected role, as a housewife limited to the domestic chores only because in a patriarchal society all that is the duty of women. That sort of labor has no reward or encouragement, men take it as their due right to be served by women. The women, in such cultural context, are trained to adopt that role.

Resistance, in terms of feministic critique, is any sort of attempt to give voice to women, or bring their hardships and sufferings on the surface, and strengthening the idea to resist against the stereotypical mindset, set by patriarchal society. In simple words, it's about speaking of women rights.

The first passage of the prologue of the novel *A Woman Is No Man* ends with a note of resonance of woman voice and a touch of resistance. The narrator's act of writing and telling her story can be seen as a form of resistance against societal and cultural norms that have silenced her. The narrator's statement "only now, as I write this story, do I feel my voice coming" points towards the empowering effect of self-expression and the reclaiming of one's voice.

On another occasion, there have been found a track of resistance, though meek in strength but worthy of discussion. It is as, "So she only defied in secret, mostly with her books." (Rum, 5). The fact that Isra only defies her parents "in secret, mostly with her books" suggests that she has found ways to resist and subvert the societal expectations placed upon her, but only in private and hidden ways. This reinforces Beauvoir's idea that women are often forced to live in a state of "bad faith", where they publicly conform to societal expectations while privately





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resisting and rebelling against them.

Intersectionality is an idea which illustrates that how diverse aspects of an individual's identity (such as race, ethnicity, social class, sexual orientation etc.) pass through an intersection and overlapping process, leading to the unique feelings of discrimination and marginalization. It aids to comprehend how individuals experience different tyrannical and oppressive acts, occurring concurrently, shaped by the convergence of diversified identities.

The intersectionality of culture, class and gender starts to work from the prefatory section of the novel, which highlights narrator's experiences as a woman, a member of a specific cultural community, and someone whose voice has been suppressed, who has been oppressed and marginalized. This sense of converging identities is present on different occasions in the novel as Fareeda and Deya are in a discussion over getting choice and opportunity to have a chat with the suitor before getting engaged in a proper way. Deya (who is a freedom-lover, annoyed at the idea of quitting studies after school level and getting married in an early age) tries to get rid of that kind of stuff, but her grandmother who seems to be an advocate of patriarchy and Arab culturalism, wants her to get married as early as possible. Their discussion carries the words as:

"Think about it? What's there to think about? You should be thankful you even have a choice in the matter. Some girls aren't that lucky—I certainly never was."

"This isn't a choice," . . .

"Why, of course it is!" . . . "My parents never asked me if I wanted to marry your grandfather. They just told me what to do, and I did it." (p. 27)

The above mentioned lines depict the intersections of gender, culture, ethnicity and nationality where Deya experiences a multiplicity of oppression as a Palestinian-American woman. As a woman, she is subject to patriarchal norms and expectations that limit her choice and autonomy like her grandmother. As a Palestinian-American, Deya's experiences are shaped by the cultural norms and expectations of her community, which are in clash with the culture where they're living right now, the culture of dominant. At ethnicity level, her experiences are also shaped by the historical and ongoing processes of racism and marginalization faced by Orient cultures in America like her Palestinian Arab roots. On nationality level, as an American, Deya is caught in a tension between her present culture (American-Modern) and her parents' country of origin (Palestinian Arab-Conservative).

All these intersections shape up Deya's confused identity where she finds herself swaying between modernity and conservatism, between male and female, between American nationality and Arabic roots. It produces a unique experience for women being sidelined and excluded, leading to the projection multiple identities among them.

Chandra Talpade Mohanty's Concept of the "Third-World Woman" critiques the Western feminist notion of a universalized, homogenous "Third-World Woman" who is victimized and silenced. The prologue section also carry this concept of Mohanty's theoretics as the narrator's statement "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 (Rum, 1), can be taken as a reference to the specific cultural and social context (the Muslim-Arab culture running on the module of Patriarchy) that shapes her



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experiences. The narrator's voicelessness isn't just a personal issue but also a reflection of the societal and cultural norms that silence the women.

All of the women in the novel like Isra, Deya, Fareeda, Sarah, Nadine, Umme Ahmad, bear that condition, in one way or other. Even while living in a different culture (in America), quite opposite to that one (Palestinian), the Third-World mindset persists, as the women in that culture from the school age are brainwashed to the extent that they are just there to be women; silent, obedient, housewife materials.

Mohnaty's remarks on "Third-World Woman" serve as a critique on the dominant Western mindset which draws the picture of women from non-Western backgrounds as they are immovable, consistent to their roles, suppressed and needed to be rescued from all that. The following textual lines highlight the severity of Isra's apprehension as a Palestinian woman, sailing for her life with multiple cultural directions, proving all those assumptions of West about women from Eastern cultures. As:

Isra was unsure how she felt about moving to America, . . . hat Western culture was not as rigid as their own. This filled her with both excitement and dread. What would become of her life if she moved away to America?

How could a conservative girl like her adapt to such a liberal place?" (p. 5)

The above mentioned passage points out a sense of uncertainty and ambivalence spurting in Isra's mind, about shifting to an unknown land. Her perceptual experience about Western culture as "not as rigid" as her own indicates that she has personally incorporated the overwhelming occidental mindset about oriental cultures being suppressive and inflexible. There is also an evidence of tension working in Isra's mind about a comparison between her conservative background and liberty of American culture where she would live after her marriage.

This study is based on the examination of Etaf Rum's novel *A Woman Is No Man*, by applying the ideas of Judith Butler (Theory of Performativity), Simone de Beauvoir (The Other and Ethics of Ambiguity), Chandra Mohanty (Third-World Woman) and Intersectionality of gender, religion and culture. The analysis reveals that the story of the novel perceptively captures the feministic ideas of performativity, otherness, third-world woman, convergent identities influenced by gender, religion and culture, resistance and subversive elements. The comparison between the findings and existing studies on selected domain indicates supporting parallels and significant deviations that add to our understanding of feminism and gender disparities, especially in Middle Eastern, Arabian and Muslim settings.

Simone de Beauvoir's iconic phrase "One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (Beauvoir, 1949) serves as the foundation for this study. Beauvoir's existentialist feminism posits that women are not inherently inferior to men, but rather, societal expectations and norms shape their experiences and identities. Beauvoir's theoretical postulates emphasize the role of social and cultural constructs in shaping women's lives and identities. Babu and Cahudhary (2023) deals with the subject of treating women as marginalized and other in African society where their analysis of Achebe's masterpiece *Things Fall Apart* affirms this idea. The writer highlights the stark inequality between men and women, perpetuated by patriarchal traditions and exacerbated by the dominant. Women are subjected to physical abuse, and denial of basic human rights, limiting their positions to mere objects.



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As per Slezek (2018), Judith Butler challenges the conventional notion that gender is inextricably linked to biological sex. Instead, she believes that gender is comprised of the cultural connotations attributed to the sexed body. The widespread assumption that sex determines gender is, in reality, a product of societal conditioning, and it perpetuates a binary gender system and restricts the potential for gender diversity and expression.

My work aligns with the ideas of Butler (1990) and Slezek (2018) as the under study text carries a number of evidences supporting Judith Butler's idea of performativity as in the prologue, the narrator's statement "...we've learned to conceal our condition..." and "...we've been taught to silence ourselves, that our silence will save us..." illustrate how women are socialized to perform their gender roles in a way that is acceptable to society. The narrator's silence is a performance that reinforces the societal expectation of women's voicelessness. In Chapter 1, where there is a description of Isra's mother who looks much older than her age, it points towards the performativity because she works in kitchen and household work under male oppression leads her complexion to that level as she admits her role defined by the socio-cultural setting. Similarly, Isra's mother advises her to adjust her *hijab* before the arrival of the suitor and his family, because it is assumed that women are supposed to stay in hijab and cover their head and bodies completely in Palestinian-Arab culture. The religion of Islam orders the female gender to observe this limitation before an unknown person (*a ghair-mahram*). This idea of associating it with a specific gender leads to the idea of gender identity and performativity. In another example where Isra has got a mind map of the customary and societal expectations of a woman's role, through observing her mother who repeats those actions and performances silently and skillfully. In Patriarchal society, all that is the life duty of a woman to serve and entertain the others. It refers to the idea of transferring of those performative traits from mothers to the daughters, through repetition and imitation. That's what makes a good woman, an embodiment of obedience and slavery.

Chandra Mohanty's Post-colonial feminism highlights the intersectionality of gender, race and colonialism. This theory gives an insight in to examine how the experiences of subjugated women, like the protagonist in the selected work are shaped by the intersection of patriarchy, colonialism and cultural expectations (Mohanty, 1988). Yousaf et al. (2023) analyze Daniyal Mueenuddin's short stories, exploring the psychological effects of oppression on women and their varied responses, ranging from resistance to acceptance. Daniyal Mueenuddin's characters are examined to understand how they navigate different situations and react to patriarchal norms, shedding light on the complexities of women's experiences in postcolonial societies. Through his stories, the writer highlights the stark inequality between men and women, perpetuated by patriarchal traditions and exacerbated by the dominant. Women are subjected to physical abuse, emotional torment, and denial of basic human rights, reducing them to mere objects. The stories illustrate how women are treated as commodities within marriages, stripped of agency and autonomy. Multiple wives are often viewed as possession, rather than partners. Women's education is frequently neglected, limiting their roles to domestic duties.

As in my work, the prologue section also carry this concept of Mohanty's theoretics as the narrator's statement "Where I come from, voicelessness is the



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condition of my gender, as normal as the bosoms on a woman's chest, as necessary as the next generation growing inside her belly" (p. 1), can be taken as a reference to the specific cultural and social context (the Muslim-Arab culture running on the module of Patriarchy) that shapes her experiences. The narrator's voicelessness isn't just a personal issue but also a reflection of the societal and cultural norms that silence the women. All of the women in the novel like Isra, Deya, Fareeda, Sarah, Nadine, Umme Ahmad, bear that condition, in one way or other. Even while living in a different culture (in America), quite opposite to that one (Palestinian), the Third-World mindset persists, as the women in that culture from the school age are brainwashed to the extent that they are just there to be women; silent, obedient, housewife materials.

The research studies from Sambharwal & Yadav (2022), Ahmad (2017), Ahmed & Nasir (2022), and Iftikhar (2022) affirm the idea of third-world woman. All of these studies support my idea of discussing Etaf Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* through under the ideas of Chandra Mohanty. It proves to be a valuable addition to the academic researches on post-colonial feminism.

To sum up, the present research study is an endeavor to analyze the novel *A Woman Is No Man* under feministic theoretical postulates, proposed by Butler, de Beauvoir and Mohanty. In the light of above synthesis of data analysis and literature review, the study aligns with the proposed theoretical framework, research aim, objectives and tries to answer the research questions.

### Conclusion

The analysis of Rum's *A Woman Is No Man* elucidates the permeated motif of "The Other" in Palestinian patriarchal culture. In the light of feministic thoughts of Simone de Beauvoir, this study demonstrates how women are made to believe that it is their duty to prioritize societal expectations over individualistic desires, perpetuating their subservience. The protagonist in the novel, Deya, is a true manifestation of the tension between the performative nature of womanhood and the authentic self. This reinforces Beauvoir's concept of "The Other", where women are positioned as subordinate to men, with their lives defined by their relationships with others. This study points towards an urgency to counter such narratives and erase those structures, promoting a more inclusive and equitable society.

Judith Butler's concept of "Performativity" has been skillfully inculcated in the novel, *A Woman Is No Man*. The protagonist Isra comes across the intricacies of expectations associated with the women in a male-dominant culture like Palestinian. Throughout the novel, Isra's experience serve as the demonstration of women's acts of socialization to perform their gender roles in a way that is set by the males, who wants them to be repeated in an acceptable ways. The analysis indicate the traces of events where there is a true manifestation of the control over women's bodies and minds. The analysis puts forward the importance of Butler's theory of performativity to have insights to the procedures through which gender identities are constructed and performed in the societies like the one presented in the novel.

Along with the detailed descriptions of patriarchal oppression over women, women's performative acts, men's treatment to the women as inferior, secondary or submissive, the novel carries the rich traces of resistance and courage among women against such cruel practices. The analysis refers to the characters of Isra





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and Deya, as resisting and subverting figures. Etaf has justified the writing of this novel by giving voice to the individuals. Their acts of reading books, longing for education, taking stances against their arranged marriages and Sarah's elopement, somehow reflect Beauvoir's concept of "Ethics of Ambiguity", which integrates the value of embracing ambiguity and certainty.

Through the lives of its female characters, particularly Isra and Deya, the novel illustrates the ways in which women's lives are policed and controlled by societal expectations, cultural norms and patriarchal values. Chandra Talpade Mohanty's concept of "Third-World Woman" is particularly relevant here, as it highlights the ways in which women from non-Western cultures are reduced to a set of essentialized characteristics that define their identity. The novel challenges these simplistic and homogenizing representations, instead portraying complex and multidimensional characters who embody both traditional and modern values.

The intersectionality of culture, class and gender is evident in the novel's portrayal of the tensions between cultural identity and the ways in which women's lives are shaped by socio-cultural expectations. The characters' experiences are shaped by their cultural background, social class and gender.

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