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# Narrating the Silenced: The 1953 Coup and Postcolonial Storytelling in Marjan Kamali's *The Stationery Shop*

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines Marjan Kamali's *The Stationery Shop* as a postcolonial narrative that recovers the silenced voices surrounding the 1953 Iranian coup and its long-term emotional, historical, and political reverberations. By centring Iranian subjectivities and the intimate consequences of political rupture on ordinary lives, the novel challenges orientalist frameworks that have shaped western interpretations of Iran and its history. Through an analysis of narrative silences, fragmented communication, and the symbolism of destroyed spaces such as the stationery shop, this study argues that Kamali reconstructs erased histories and foregrounds the experiences of those positioned as subaltern by geopolitical power structures. The paper further explores how diaspora, reflective nostalgia, and intergenerational trauma shape identity formation and narrative agency.

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## Introduction

*The Stationery Shop* (2019) by Marjan Kamali is a tender yet politically charged novel that weaves a teenage love affair into Iran's fraught political history of the 1950s. The novel, set mostly in Tehran on the eve of the 1953 coup, explores the life of Roya, a high-achieving and perceptive young woman whose existence is defined by one summer of promise, political turmoil and unyielding disconnection. Kamali's layered narrative is a personal and political exploration of memory, trauma, diaspora and historical silence, all of which are marked strongly by the scholarship of the postcolonial era.

This paper argues that *The Stationery Shop* is a deliberate counter-narrative to Western political discourse about the 1953 coup, reclaiming subaltern Iranian voices by three interwoven narrative strategies: symbolic destruction of cultural spaces, weaponisation of epistolary silence, and non-linear reconstruction of traumatic memory. Previous scholars have focused on the novel's diasporic and romantic dimensions but it has not sufficiently explored how the personal modes are formally bound up with the novel's political critique or how Kamali's formal decisions such as omissions of letters, time jumps, and erasures of space are an organised act of postcolonial resistance. This study will take up this void by Said's concept of Orientalism and Bhabha's hybridity, adding Hirsch's post memory and Caruth's trauma theory.

These stakes need to be understood in the context of history. The CIA August 1953 coup was then told almost entirely in the language of Western geopolitics, which as Suri reaffirms Said's argument that Western democratic rhetoric routinely cloaks deeper orientalist assumptions (353). Kamali challenges exactly this narrative of power that dominates, taking the intimate ruptures of the coup: cold relationships, shattered meeting spots, stolen letters as the primary means to frame its experience. By doing so, *The Stationery Shop* asserts that the human price of imperial intervention cannot be understood politically, from a Western perspective, and that literature is one of the most effective means for finding what official histories lose.

## Critical Context: Postcolonial Silence and Existing Scholarship

The 1953 coup in Iran forms the historical backbone of the novel and the emotional structure of its characters. In the early 1950s, Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh's nationalisation of Iranian oil triggered a political crisis that heightened tensions both within Iran and internationally (Soghomonyan 111). Britain, whose economic interests were threatened, initiated extensive propaganda and covert planning, later joined by the CIA under the Eisenhower administration (Gasiorowski and Byrne 182). Internally, Mossadegh's policies divided the nation: frustrations over economic hardship, conflicts with the clergy, army dissatisfaction, and parliamentary instability created an atmosphere of deep political fragmentation and public anxiety (Azimi 45). The coup of August 1953, driven by both foreign intervention and domestic discontent, ultimately reshaped Iran's political trajectory and intensified a climate of fear, uncertainty, and social distrust (Herbin 39). Additionally, Gasiorowski claims that the 1953 coup was a decisive turning point in Iranian history. Had the coup not occurred, Iran's future would undoubtedly have been vastly different (279).

The foreign intervention was not simply strategic but deeply ideological. Suri argued that Western involvement in Middle Eastern politics carried implicit assumptions of superiority and paternalistic control. Suri notes, one strand of Cold War scholarship argues "American anti-imperialist claims masked deeper orientalist assumptions about racial superiority, economic dominance, and

political paternalism" (354). Situating the coup within this framework reveals that Western Powers exercised narrative and political dominance that silenced Iranian voices and shaped the global memory of the coup through their own ideological lenses. This turbulent backdrop is not merely a setting in *The Stationery Shop*, but it actively shapes the emotional landscape of the characters. Roya's life mirrors the nation's fractured state. Her love story with Bahman is interrupted by street violence (Kamali 98), political misinformation (Kamali 78), and the collapse of the world she knows (Kamali 100). The sounds of gunfire, the burning of familiar places, and the sudden disappearance of loved ones leave lasting psychological scars. As the novel shows, political upheaval is never distant; it seeps into every aspect of daily life, altering relationships, silencing voices, and leaving behind memories that persist long after the events themselves. In this sense, the coup functions as both a national trauma and a personal turning point, disrupting what might have been and echoing across decades of Roya's life.

Within this charged historical moment, the stationery shop becomes a crucial symbolic and thematic site. More than a physical location, it represents a refuge of imagination, intellectual possibility, and emotional clarity, a place where Roya and Bahman discover literature, exchange ideas, and envision futures untouched by political instability. The shop symbolises the fragile sanctuary where personal dreams coexist with looming historical forces. Its eventual destruction parallels the fracturing of their relationship and the collapse of pre-coup optimism.

The shop resonates with broader postcolonial themes: silenced voices, broken communication, and the violence of historical erasure. Letters that never arrive, missing messages, and interrupted conversations mirror how political systems suppress truth and distort memory. The shop thus becomes a condensed metaphor for Iran's lost possibilities, an archive of unrealized futures, cultural resilience, and the emotional cost of political intervention. It reflects the tension between intimate lives and national turbulence, capturing how personal histories are often the first to be sacrificed in moments of political crisis.

The literature on the silenced narration in postcolonial contexts has focused on the recovery of the "marginalised" history and personal experiences that have been covered up, misrepresented or ignored by the political power. Postcolonial studies scholars agree that control is affected by imperial and neo-colonial powers by not only intervening politically, but also by controlling the narrative, that is, by choosing which stories are told and which are ignored (Ashcroft et al. 6). In *The Stationery Shop*, Iranian voices, memories and political realities are brought to the fore to challenge and subvert hegemonic western narratives about Iran. The novel helps reconstruct the suppressed pasts in a postcolonial manner by depicting the 1953 coup, which is frequently misunderstood in Western political debates. This phenomenon has been explored by Edward Said's seminal work, Orientalism, which provides a critique of the West's use of historical discourses to present the East as irrational, inferior and incapable of self-governance (Said 7). The novel depicts the coup as a violent disruption of the personal sphere, the sphere of personal life such as those of Roya and Bahman as a barrier to communication, a barrier that severs personal communication and communication in private spheres: the spheres in which people live and thereby demonstrates the political silencing of the private sphere. As a result, *The Stationery Shop* avoids the orientalist tradition of portraying the East as a monolithic "other" (Mohanty 53), which relies on outside influences and abstractions or reductive stereotypes of Iranian people. Rather, it attempts to render the historically silenced, complex, agency and subjective (Bhabha 4). The novel thus becomes a space of resistance, a recuperation of a suppressed national memory, and assertion of multiple identities, relationships, emotional truths and lived realities in the East (Ashcroft et al. 173).

While *The Stationery Shop* has been widely appreciated for its depiction of love, exile, and Iranian culture, very few scholarly works examine the novel through a postcolonial framework that

foregrounds silence, marginalisation and narrative erasure. Existing discussions tend to prioritise its diasporic or romantic dimensions without interrogating how the 1953 coup functions as a mechanism of political silencing or how personal ruptures mirror national ones. The intersections of trauma, lost communication, narrative gaps, and the symbolic function of destroyed cultural spaces remain critically underexplored. This study addresses this gap by offering the reading of the novel through Said's Orientalism and Bhabha's hybridity supported by Hirsch's post memory and Caruth's trauma theory, to illuminate how Kamali constructs a counter-narrative to Western political discourse. This research focuses on the stationery shop not only as a setting but as a symbolic narrative device that allows Kamali to "narrate the silence" surrounding the 1953 coup. Postcolonial scholars argue that Cold War historiography often erases the agency of non-Western peoples by framing events solely through western geopolitical interests. As J. Suri observes, "decolonisation in Cold war terms silences non-Western peoples and recreates the orientalist dominance of Western elites" (354). This insight strongly aligns with the novel's central concern that political violence not only disrupts nations but also suppresses individual narratives, leaving stories incomplete and emotional truths unspoken. Roya's silence, her lost letters, and her emotional withholding in later life echo the larger pattern of historical erasure. By examining the stationery shop as a symbol, this study aims to uncover how Kamali restores agency to silenced voices, particularly those marginalised by Western political narratives of the coup. In "A Conversation with Marjan Kamali," Kamali recalls that after the 1979 Revolution, she had to "'defend' being Iranian" against the negative images of Iran circulating among her American classmates and teachers (Nowruz Journal). The shop becomes a lens through which personal and political forms of erasure are exposed. It also reveals how individuals reconstruct meaning through memory, nostalgia, and emotional resilience. Understanding this symbolism contributes to a deeper reading of the novel's non-linear structure and illuminates how fractured storytelling reflects the fragmented experience of trauma and exile.

Kamali's use of a non-linear narrative is central to understanding the novel's engagement with silence, trauma, and memory. Shifting between Roya's youth in 1950s Tehran and her older self in the United States, the narrative mimics the unpredictable movement of memory, where certain moments resurface with painful clarity while others remain suppressed. This structure reflects Neumann's view of memory as a form of "fiction of memory," in which recollection is reconstructed over time and shaped by present emotional needs (335).

Through these temporal shifts, the lasting impact of the coup on Roya's identity is demonstrated. Past and present collide as she revisits the events that shaped her life, attempting to reconcile unanswered questions and unhealed wounds. In an interview published in Nawroz Journal, "A Conversation with Marjan Kamali" on her novel *The Stationery Shop*, Kamali says, "Like Russian nesting dolls with different versions of ourselves encased within, we carry all the ages and stages of ourselves all the time. The timbre of a particular voice, a specific scent, a tiny piece of melody can trigger in us memories we thought we'd lost or buried forever." The fragmented narrative in the novel not only mirrors Roya's psychological state but also symbolises the disjointedness of Iranian historical memory, particularly in relation to the coup that Western accounts have often distorted or diminished. In this way, the novel's form becomes a powerful tool of postcolonial storytelling, exposing silenced histories while acknowledging the difficulty of narrating trauma.

## Reading Silence, Trauma, and Diasporic Memory

This research is anchored in postcolonial theory, drawing primarily on the works of Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Marianne Hirsch, and Cathy Caruth. Said's concept of Orientalism provides the foundation for examining how Western political discourse has historically misrepresented Iran (Said 7) and how Kamali's novel resists these hegemonic narratives by restoring Iranian agency, cultural specificity, and emotional truth. Complementing this, Bhabha's theory of hybridity offers insight into Roya's diasporic identity formation, particularly her negotiation between cultural worlds and the ambivalent in-between state that shapes her lived experience (Bhabha 151). These primary lenses are supplemented by Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, which illuminates the intergenerational transmission of trauma, nostalgia, and unspoken histories, and Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, which helps interpret Roya's fractured memory, recurring silences, and the novel's non-linear reconstruction of past events. Taken together, these frameworks reveal how Kamali narrates the unsaid, reconstructs suppressed histories, and critiques the power structures that determine whose stories are preserved and whose are silenced.

This study employs a qualitative, interpretive research methodology grounded in close textual analysis. The primary method evolves examining the novel's narrative strategies such as silence, fragmentation, epistolary gaps, and metaphorical spaces to uncover how they encode political trauma and suppressed histories. Secondary scholarly material from postcolonial theory, trauma studies, diaspora studies, and memory studies is incorporated to contextualise and deepen the literary interpretation. The analysis focuses on identifying narrative moments that illuminate political silencing, memory rupture, and diasporic tension, and interpreting these through the theoretical frameworks of Said, Bhabha, Hirsch, and Caruth. By situating the novel within broader postcolonial conversations about imperial narration, marginalised voices, and cultural displacement, this methodological approach foregrounds subjective experiences and emotional textures while demonstrating how literature reclaims erased histories.

## Exile after Rupture: Diaspora and Displacement

Diaspora is often theorised not merely as geographical displacement, but as a continuous emotional dislocation that shapes identity, memory and belonging. Roya's sudden emigration from Iran in the wake of political unrest reflects the experience of many Iranian migrants whose journeys were shaped not by opportunity but by rupture (Das 745). Similarly, Roya's reflection, later in the novel, as described by Kamali, "We had been twenty when the world had turned on us. Love is not always enough. Sometimes it is the timing, the circumstances, the choices we make in the moment that shape our destinies forever" (Kamali 262) captures the emotional consequences of political displacement. This passage illustrates how personal histories are derailed by historical events which are beyond one's control. The symbolic stationery shop owned by Mr. Fakhri represents a place of solace and possibility amidst the upheaval. Roya and Bahman's love relationship starts from the very place, exchanging not only the books and ideas but the glimpses of a shared future. Later in the novel, when the shop is lost both physically and symbolically, Roya's dreams also collapse along her youth in Iran. Its destruction echoes Brah's (1996) assertion that "diaspora space is inhabited not only by those who have migrated but equally by those who are constructed and represented as indigenous" (208). Consequently, that place collapses leaving the ashes of memories behind that must be lived by

physical return for Roya. This is further strengthened by Chakraverty's assertion that diasporic writers explore "the trauma of forced migration and the subsequent loss of cultural roots," delving into "the psychological and emotional struggles faced by individuals caught between multiple worlds, grappling with a sense of displacement, and longing for a lost homeland" (323). This is precisely Roya's life in which Tehran exists as a never-ending, unfulfilled dream. Roya's emotional landscape illustrates Edward Said's assertion that exile is both "an experience of discontinuity" and a "privileged insight" into the tensions of belonging and estrangement (173). Her fragmented memory and deep silences exemplify the exilic condition as a state of both internal rupture and narrative opacity.

After migration, Roya experiences sudden flashbacks of her old neighbourhood, the shop, and sometimes her diasporic experience. She builds a whole new life in the United States, marrying an American man, pursuing higher studies, and eventually building a family. Her external adaptation and internal dislocation are illustrated through Kamali's words, "Sometimes, in the quiet of her suburban house, she would think of Tehran's bustling streets, the scent of freshly baked noon, the warmth of her father's voice, and it would hurt like an old bruise pressed too hard" (Kamali 144). This passage captures the ache of cultural displacement, depicting how memory functions not only as a comfort but also in the form of unresolved grief. Therefore, Tololyan's framing of diaspora as "a state of being that reflects a continual negotiation between the here and the elsewhere, the now and the then" (13) resonates with Roya's diasporic identity. While she integrates into American society, she is still haunted by her past, Iranian cultural, linguistic, and emotional dimensions she left behind. Her dreams are a pendulum of two worlds, both not hers. Her "compartmentalisation of life" (Kamali 270) reveals the long-term psychological impact of migration and the way these diasporic subjects suppress the parts of one's self to move forward. The suppression of this kind is one of the hallmarks of intergenerational trauma that Chakraverty points out is a constant theme in diasporic writing, in which the search for identity and belonging is constantly bound up with the "tension between assimilation and cultural preservation" (323), a tension that Roya never manages to resolve even in her old age.

Ultimately, *The Stationery Shop* reveals how displacement is not a finite event but a sustained condition. It affects not only one's geographic orientation but also emotional and narrative continuity. Kamali's portrayal of Roya's interrupted love, her fraught assimilation, and her lifelong negotiation with memory illustrates that diaspora is not merely a demographic category but a lived experience of disjunction, longing, and resilience.

## Memory, Nostalgia and Postmemory

Memory in Kamali's novel is an agonising force that shapes Roya's identity in exile. Kamali's novel relies heavily on memory both personal and inherited, as the primary means of narrating the coup. Roya's memories of the stationery shop, of Bahman, and of the national chaos function as counter-narratives. The violent political upheaval ruptures not only Roya's life but also the lives of an entire generation whose dreams, relationships, and futures were destabilised. The stationery shop, once a cultural sanctuary offering intellectual freedom, emotional safety, and shared community identity, becomes a symbol of that rupture.

Although Roya directly experiences the coup, the effects ripple into later generations, particularly her children, who inherit her emotional silences, unresolved grief, and fragmented narratives illustrating the concept of postmemory described by Hirsch. Hirsch puts it, postmemory "describes the relationship that the 'generation after' bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before" (5. In Kamali's novel, this investment in memory is evident not

only in Roya's own reflections but in how her life becomes shaped by the absence and silence surrounding her youthful romance and departure from Iran. Indeed, post memorial work seeks to "strives to reactivate and reembody more distant national and archival memories structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression" (Hirsch 111). Kamali's novel does this reactivation as it foregrounds the intimate emotional experience of Roya, making the 1953 coup 'human' in all the textures the political and orientalist discourses have consistently erased. This aligns with Neumann's observation,

Numerous texts portray how individuals and groups remember their past and how they construct their identities on the basis of the recollected memories. They are concerned with the mnemonic presence of the past in the present, and they illuminate the manifold functions that memories fulfil for the constitution of the identity. (Neumann 333)

Much nostalgia attached to the Roya's memories of her childhood in Tehran, particularly those at the stationery shop. But nostalgia in this novel is not given a sentimentalised treatment, but one that is effective. Yet in this novel, nostalgia is not just remembered sentimentally but as an effective treatment, one that afflicts pleasure and pain. According to Boym nostalgia is "a longing for a home that no longer exists or has existed" (7) that can be either restorative, which is an attempt to recreate the last home by idealising the past, or reflective, which is a reflection on the ambivalences in human longing and belonging (8). Roya's reflective nostalgia is neither literal nor imaginative desire to return to Iran, nor to recapture the past, but rather a constant re-examination of it, an attempt to make sense of its breaks. This introspective attitude comes across strongest when Roya says, "I never forgot. Not really. I buried it in myself, in the questions I asked, in the silences I carried, in the choices I made..." (Kamali 219). Her life is inhabited by the sombre presence of memory, and Kamali has used these pauses to reveal the trauma in the unsaid, especially the trauma of exile. Powerful theoretical vocabulary, such as Hirsch, offers for understanding these silences, in which the person's exile and diaspora, as a traumatic rupture, "sever the normal chain of memory transmission, creating gaps" (111) that are filled by the post memorial narrative. This is the story that labour does in *The Stationery Shop*: the unopened letter of Bahman's discovery is the emotional impetus that brings Roya's slippery memory into some kind of focus, an ability to recall, which is always incomplete, malleable, and open to reinterpretation. This moment simultaneously confirms her memories and revises them, revealing how recollection is always partial, unstable, and subject to reinterpretation. As Michael Rothberg argues, memory is not a passive archive but "a field of contestation, negotiation, and possibility" (Rothberg 3).

This is also reinforced by Matheka, who builds on the work of the German philosopher, writer, and historian of ideas Aleida Assmann and asserts that "episodic memories are never isolated but are linked to a larger network of other memories and, what is more significant, the memories of others" (Matheka 46. Thus, Roya's personal memories are never solely her own; they also represent the memory of a generation, a community, and a nation whose history was violently interrupted. In Kamali's novel, this dynamic is realised by memory as a burden, for characters to carry (loss, displacement, historical rupture) and memory as a resource for them to reclaim in order to find emotional truth. In the absence of complete memory, the memory serves as a structure that allows Roya to make peace with her past and her present. In this way, *The Stationery Shop* positions material objects as transformative vessels of memory, bridging the distance between personal trauma, collective history, and diasporic identity.

## Personal Trauma and Intergenerational Silence

In *The Stationery Shop*, Kamali's attention focuses on the personal trauma in Roya's ruptures, lack of love, and the lifelong responsibility for unhealed memories. But due to the political unrest, misinformation and the loss of their common safe space, they are suddenly forced to part ways, leaving a wound in Roya's heart that follows her all the way into her adulthood. This trauma is manifested in not only her lingering attachment to the past, but in the fact that she cannot make the loss of the past clear. As outlined in Trauma and Recovery (1992), by Judith Herman, traumatic events "overwhelm the ordinary human adaptations to life" and have a "fundamental disruption" of systems of safety, connection, and meaning in which identity is shaped (33). This silence that Roya keeps about events of 1953 gives meaning that she had not told her American family the full story of her childhood, which seemed to have gaps, as if trauma had left some pieces of the narrative unspoken, unheard, decades on. The psychological effect of politically caused drama is especially long lasting, Herman says, because it's "not only psychological, it's also socially and politically imposed" and recovery is stymied not only by the trauma's internal pain but the external barriers that do not recognise or validate the trauma survivors experience (74). With Roya, her American upbringing and the Western narrative of Iranian history work against her to ensure her trauma is not adequately witnessed.

Otherwise, "the very thing psychological trauma strips away, autonomy, trust, intimacy, and meaningful urgency are the elements of healing experience" (Herman 133). When the novel ends, the rediscovered letter is a symbolic battle with Roya's own trauma, a confirmation, complication, and re-modification of the memories that she has lived with in silence. This moment of narrative recovery corresponds with Herman's third stage of the healing process from trauma: reconnecting with everyday life and piecing together a personal narrative of the traumatic experience. Matheka also supports Herman's model to suggest that healing from trauma involves forming new "healing relationships" that were disrupted by the trauma, including trust, autonomy, initiative, competence, identity, and intimacy (Matheka 48. The ending, tentative and bittersweet as it is, points towards just this sort of partial, imperfect healing.

However, Roya's trauma is not limited to her own life, it spreads out, leaving a subtle imprint on the consciousness of those who will follow as the novel goes on, the injury that starts out as one woman's private wound involves into one that is passed down through the generations. Intergenerational trauma, according to Chakraverty, occurs when "psychological and emotional distress is passed down from one generation to the next" without the next generation having actually endured the traumatic event. This transference can happen in several ways, such as "family dynamics, cultural practices, narratives and collective memory" (323). She argues that the trauma of exile, cultural dislocation and marginalisation "may be internalised in generations of diasporic communities, influencing their world views and self-understanding" (Chakraverty 323). This framework addresses the novel's concerns with the legacy of the 1953 Iranian coup, which creates a cycle of inherited losses, lost memory and lost identity that does not immediately confront Roya's children in their lives but ultimately diffuses how they perceive themselves and their history.

Similarly, the concept of postmemory, by Hirsch (2008), adds a significant contribution to this statement. While the next generation of trauma survivors is not directly faced with the trauma, she claims its relationship to inherited experiences is "transmitted so deeply and effectively that it appears to be a memory in itself" (106), as it is constructed through "stories, images and behaviours" among which they live. In *The Stationery Shop*, Roya's children live just such a postmemorial life, lives that are vitalised by her silences, the distances between her and her children, and the intangible weight of

an unspoken past. Dramatic rupture, which also involves ruptures of exile and diaspora, "severs the normal chain of memory transmission, creating gaps" that post memorial work attempts to fill, (Hirsch 111). In fact, Kamali's novel performs this reconstruction through its gradual recovery of the suppressed history of 1953, offering Roya, her children, and the Iranian diaspora a path toward re-engagement with the past. Within Roya's sense of self, her relationship to language is more dislocated, and her dislocation of language itself is a place where personal and intergenerational trauma intersect.

Cathy Caruth's concept of trauma as a recurring, fragmented narrative centres on the idea that trauma is an event that fundamentally fractures consciousness and disrupts direct linguistic representation. This tension tends to be more noticeable in her relationships with Walter and her children as there are some expressions, idioms, or cultural reference points from her Iranian heritage that cannot be easily translated. Persian poetry is not only "untranslatable", but significantly emotional. As Gayatri Spivak holds in her work on "translation and subalternity" that "language is not everything, but it is a lot" (179). *The Stationery Shop* in which it is hard to translate nuances from Persian to English, represents, in general, a difficulty of making diasporic subjectivity legible within the western frameworks. As Chakraverty notes, "many diasporic communities have a history of silenced histories and suppressed narratives" and "diasporic writers are concerned with illuminating these silence traumas, interrogating the dominant narratives, and filling in the gaps of historical accounts" (323). Roya's silence, then, is not just personal but cultural as well, and in a way, is part of a pattern that is more than just communal. When the nation is plagued by political violence, the individual is burdened with the weight of the tragedy, and the burden falls silently to the next generation through just the gaps in language that cannot be closed.

Roya's interactions with her sister Zari, and later with her own children, demonstrate how women often bear the responsibility of cultural preservation and emotional caretaking within diasporic families. Despite physical and emotional distances, Roya and Zari's correspondence illustrates the labour women perform to maintain familial connections across borders. In this way, *The Stationery Shop* resonates with the arguments of Chandra Talpade Mohanty, who notes that women in the diaspora are frequently positioned as "cultural carriers," tasked with upholding traditions even as they are constrained by them (87).

## Conclusion

This study has argued that *The Stationery Shop* is not only a book about love that is broken up by history, but a formally and politically conscious postcolonial counter-narration as well. In three interrelated approaches: symbolic annihilation of the stationery shop as a cultural archive, weaponisation of epistolary silence, and non-linear reconstruction of the "traumatic memory", Kamali constructs a sustained critique of the orientalist frames that have dominated Western discourses on the 1953 coup. All of these strategies are, however, at the level of the novel, and not just the level of theme; they are at the level of the novel's form, meaning that the novel's structure is closely related to its political argument.

The stationery shop functions as a postcolonial archive, showing how imperial violence destroys intimate cultural spaces where intellectual freedom, shared identity, and future possibilities reside. It is not a side-effect of the story but it is a representation of the wider coup-induced erasure of Iranian agency. The novel's epistolary lacunae (letters diverted, hidden, and sent decades later) serve as more than impediments to romance, too. Together, they illustrate how political systems not only shut down

public dissent but private truth and how ordinary people cannot speak, be heard, or be believed in their own historical moment. Roya's silence is thus a political state as it was personal. This is why Roya's silence is not just personal, but political as well.

Further, the narrative is non-linear, an analysis of which is made through the work of Caruth's trauma theory and Hirsch's postmemory, reflecting Kamali's formal decisions that reflect the psychological experience of living under a suppressed history. This novel does not forget, it reappears, revises and destabilises the present, like a painful memory. This form of structure also points to the next generation, meaning that the unspoken by one generation is received in a fragmented and distorted manner by the next.

*The Stationery Shop*'s contribution to postcolonial literary scholarship is a proof of its working on both personal and structural levels which cannot be divorced from one another without loss of political power. It has been discussed previously in terms of its diasporic and romantic aspects, and the historical context has been relegated to the background. In this analysis the intimacy of the novel is projected back on to the political, the ruptures that are so intimate in the novel, the lost letter, the burned shop, the silenced woman, are the very political arguments that have been lacking in the western geopolitical historiography. In this way, Kamali's novel not only supplements the historical record but also critiques the political conditions that produced its silences.

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