



# Radical Empathy Book Club

## Discussion Questions for *A Woman Is No Man* by Etaf Rum – October 2024

**‘Radical empathy...means putting in the work to educate oneself and to listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. Radical empathy is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will. It is the kindred connection from a place of deep knowing that opens your spirit to the pain of another as they perceive it’ – Isabel Wilkerson in *Caste***

1. The novel starts with quotes from Maya Angelou and Audre Lorde and the opening chapter opens with the narrator (Deya) sharing a preview of her family's story. Among other things she says; "I was born without a voice", "Where I come from voicelessness is the condition of my gender", and "You've never heard this story before." What was your initial reaction to these quotes? Did your feelings change as you read the book? Why/why not? What was your reaction to the following:
  - a. Fareeda telling Isra; "There is nothing out there for a woman but her house and home. Marriage, motherhood – *that* is a woman's only worth" (p 11 of the paperback edition).
  - b. Deya asking Sarah to find her a book "about someone like me...I want to read a book about what it really means to be a woman" (p 223).
  - c. The double standard between men and women portrayed throughout the story.
2. What did you learn about the portrayal of Palestinian culture? How does it compare to your own culture? How did the character's thoughts, words, and actions toward family, love, and relationships compare to yours? Isra tells Deya; "Just because you were born here doesn't make you an American" (p 216). Do you agree with this? Why/why not?
3. What did you learn about generational trauma and/or passing trauma to other family members? Have you experienced this in your life and how has that impacted you? Did learning more about Khaled and Fareeda's story change the way you felt about their actions later in life? Why/why not?
4. Choice, or lack thereof, was a theme throughout the novel. Which characters were you able to empathize with regarding their decisions and why? Which were you not able to empathize with and why? What is your reaction to Deya telling Nasser, "Just because I'm offered options, that doesn't mean I have a choice...A real choice doesn't have conditions. A real choice is free" (p 163).
5. Radical Empathy encourages us to "listen with a humble heart to understand another's experience from their perspective, not as we imagine we would feel. It is not about you and what you think you would do in a situation you have never been in and perhaps never will." How does this book help you understand:
  - a. What it's like to be a refugee living in America? A child of a refugee living in America?
  - b. What it's like to be a Palestinian woman living in America?
  - c. What it's like to experience physical/emotional/sexual abuse from a family member?
  - d. How has this book changed you? What will you do differently after reading it?