



## Otherring of Women in *The Wasted Vigil*: A Muted Group Theory Perspective

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### Abstract

#### Article Info

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In this research article, the Otherring idea of Women is focused on *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), from the perspective of Muted Group and Patriarchy Theories. In this article, qualitative research method is used. The objective aims to scrutinize the aspects of gendered otherness and social marginalization. MGT, pioneered by scholars like Ardener and later elaborated by Kramarae, serves as a crucial lens through which the silencing of women was examined. Simultaneously, the patriarchal tenets discussed by Connell and hooks offer a space to explore the systemic hierarchy that marginalizes women. The findings reveal that the women characters in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) depict muted groups whose attempts at resistance were both courageous and paradoxically constrained by patriarchal discourse. Secondly, the portrayal of oppressive factors ranged from physical violence to institutional forms of control. Whereas the resistance's acts were observed, they often fell within the margins established by the male's dominant society, thereby questioning the effectiveness of such resistance.

### Introduction

The research article highlights the idea of othering in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) by Nadeem Aslam. 'othering' means any action by which either an individual or a group becomes mentally clustered in the mind of somebody as 'not one of us' (Said, 1978). The study researches the internal and external conflicts faced by women in Afghan society. Muteness term is demarcated as "the quality or state of being mute; especially inability to speak" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.), or muteness is well-defined as "viewing or treating a person or group of people as intrinsically different from and alien to oneself" (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). In a sociocultural setting, the term signifies a silencing of voice via structural discrimination and societal norms. This form of muteness constrains people parting them without viable platforms for enunciating their experiences or advocating for change.

The study of the text shows the turmoil and disorder endured by individuals in Afghanistan. The setting of the novel is Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the story is spread over a long period after 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center. Readers are led to understand the social, political, religious, and economic conditions predominant throughout the civil war of Afghanistan. There is character Marcus, a British doctor, who accepts Islam in order to marry Qatreena, an Afghan doctor. They are parents to a daughter, Zameen who finds love with a young man who visits their home frequently. The plot takes a twist when Zameen and her love's interest stumble upon a cleric burying his eldest wife amidst trees. Zameen is exposed to numerous episodes of sexual violence until she is liberated by a Soviet soldier, Benedict. In spite of her traumatic experiences, Zameen, while travelling to Pakistan, give birth to a son under a tree. Upon reaching Peshawar, she feels a burdensome weight has been removed from her shoulders.

Hence, women in the most settled social orders of the world and essentially all classes' social orders have encountered abuse, persecution, self-assurance's loss and low status on the basis of such oppressed behavior, they are even expelled from the society and considered as others (Paula, 1998). According to Ayres (2007) society embodies women and men as distinct identities, and the gender reality develops from cradle to grave. Traditions and stereotypes adversely affect any society, and it's a disadvantage in the development of a society. Through ages, the dominant

features are generalizations of male strength, self-esteem, power, arrogance, and female enslavement and persecution. The dominance of male in every aspect of human existence has pushed the female to the peripheral of society, considering them as inferiors and unimportant elements on the planet, even that the correspondence arrangement of that very culture is overwhelming by manly language.

The mistreatment of women along with other marginalized groups is a prevalent problem that exists in numerous societies and social hierarchies across the globe. According to Paula (1998), women, due to their oppressed position experience a diminished social status, unfair treatment and victimization leading to a loss of self-assurance and self-recognition. This state of affairs can lead to them being marginalized from society and labelled as others. In *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), social structures and the chauvinistic actions of male characters are seen to contribute to disparities related to aspects such as gender, race, class, religion and ethnicity.

As per Klein (2016), 'othering' involves the dismissal, oversimplification, and refusal to acknowledge humanity of a different culture, geographical region, or group. Beauvoir (1949) first proposed concept of the "other" in her work, *The Second Sex*. On the other hand, 'Othering' is characterized as a process where entities maintain unequal relationships, with one entity asserting dominance and the others left powerless. In societies marked by patriarchy, being a woman creates a dynamic of dominance and submission, which often results in women being labelled as the "other".

Othering is the disregarding, essentializing and denuding the humanity of another culture, people or geographical region (Klein, 2016). In a patriarchal society, being a female has established a relationship of subordination and dominance, which basically leads to outline a female as the other. Within the norms of a social group, 'Othering' is a phenomenon in which some individuals or groups are well-defined as not appropriate and fitting. It is an effect that influences how people perceive and treat those who are viewed as being part of the in-group versus those who are seen as being part of the out-group. It is a way of thinking, i.e., "us vs. them" about human relationships and connections. This process basically encompasses looking at others and saying, "they are not one of us" Or "they are not like me." 'Othering' can be taken as an antonym of belonging. Here, belonging suggests all people's inclusion and acceptance, whereas 'othering' suggests exclusion and intolerance.

#### **Problem Statement**

Male-controlled customs in Afghanistan continue to persist that led to unequal treatment and subjugation of women in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In spite of some focus on oppression, muteness, alienation and suppression of women in Afghanistan, a comprehensive dissection of the ingrained theme of 'othering' impacting women in this context remains lacking. This research aims to address the above-mentioned deficiency by employing Muted Group Theory and Patriarchy Theory to scrutinize Nadeem Aslam's novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008). The present research is carried out to probe into the elements of 'othering' depicted in the narrative and examine the portrayal of female characters, underscoring the urgency of elevating women's voices. In doing so, this study sheds light on the cultural, societal and political forces influencing Afghan women is enriching the ongoing discourse on gender disparities in the area.

#### **Research Objective**

- i. To investigate women's portrayal as others within a male-controlled context in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008).

#### **Research Question**

- i. How are women depicted as others within a male-controlled context in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008)?

#### **Delimitation of the Study**

The present study focuses on analyzing the concept of 'othering' as portrayed in the novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) through the lens of Muted Group Theory and Patriarchy Theory. However, the current study is limited to focusing on the novel, *The Wasted Vigil* (2008), and does not extend to a broader examination of the topic. The scope of the study is to constrain the accessibility of resources linked to the novel.

#### **Literature Review**

The concept of marginalization and 'othering' of women is an irritating and challenging matter of human life. Though works have been done on the women's subjugation, othering, etc. by other researchers, yet the women's life is in darkness and is not considered equal to men, even though many other researchers have targeted the point of marginalization and othering. Different writers' works have been studied and summarized for showing the perilous condition of women. Shakespeare (1606) says, "As flies to wanton boys are, we to the gods; they kill us for their sport". Similarly, Hardy (1886) says that life is in the grasp of a cruel, sightless, and tyrannical unknown will.

Funderburke (2012) explored gender and social roles in dialogue in American Classic the Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The researcher assessed the novel's rhetorical analysis from the perspective of muted group theory. Edwin and Shirley Ardener established the muted group theory after discovering that a culture's standards and societal

structure are expressed via rhetoric. According to the concept, power in specific groups prevent others from communicating effectively and successfully.

Khan (2020) explored othering, hegemonic masculinity, and silence of the feminine in *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khalid Husseini. Marginalization and Dominance are mutually exclusive ideas and are inversely proportion of each other. Marginalization is a sign of powerlessness and impotence while Dominance is a demonstration of strength. In Pashtun society, man represents dominance and female marginalization. For the conceptualization of the above-mentioned concepts and words, many different methods are employed in society. The most effective tools men employ to oppress and rule women in society are authoritarianism, tradition, faith and linguistics.

Staszak (2012) researched that these are not the differences of others from the perspective of perceivers to make them other, but rather the perceivers' perspective and the discourse in which they are absorbed. Only a dominating group has the power to execute their categories in the situation. Labeling potential targets as Barbarians, Savages, Others, or People of Color eliminates them from a conventional society and makes them subjugate or destroy. (Kukkonen, J. 2020).

Drydyk (2021) conducted research on Capability and Oppression. In this exploration, he articulated the belief that understanding oppression and its damaging impact on the ability of an individual to live a comfortable life can be enlightened by the capability approach. Research of the author stays to brighten how this approach can portray the refined ways in which oppression strips people of their liberty and autonomy, which can foster a more inclusive future for everyone. Drydyk (2021) presented the concept of "second-order freedom to live well," which captures the idea that oppression entails being confined to unfavorable living conditions. However, he argues that examining this concept within the competence space may not fully cover the sundry and diverse dimensions of oppression. To address this, the author proposes delving deeper into the agency dimension. For example, not only women but also indigenous people are deprived of opportunities to advance their skills, resulting in a restricted range of selections. Women face constraints imposed by gender biases, societal expectations, and structural limitations in the workforce. On the other hand, indigenous people face a two-fold oppression: first, they are dispossessed of their traditional lands, and then they confront cultural oppression that undermines their experiences and a traditional way of life. According to the researcher, an agency acts a decisive role in shaping the limited choices experienced by oppressed individuals. Some individuals' actions and capabilities curtail the actions and capabilities of others, even if it is done unintentionally. The relationship between these individuals is vital in understanding how oppression works and affects individual liberty and independence.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is qualitative in nature. The models selected for this study are the Muted Group Theory (MGT) and Theory of Patriarchy. We apply a descriptive review of the work and pay close attention to how language is employed to underline the idea of 'othering'. Through this research, the researcher has aimed to shed light on the effective application of the Muted Group Theory and the Theory of Patriarchy in understanding and critically examining the portrayal of 'othering' in the novel, *The Wasted Vigil*.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This research study finds its roots in well-known theories, i.e., the Muted Group Theory (MGT) and the Patriarchy Theory.

The "muted group theory" was invented by Edwin and Shirley Ardener in their 1975 book *Belief and the Problem of Women*. Muted Group Theory posits that underrepresented groups in society, especially women, are muted and marginalized due to the dominant group's control of language. This theory argues that language reflects, shapes, and perpetuates power dynamics, leaving certain groups at a communicative disadvantage (Ardener and Ardener, 1975).

Originally articulated by anthropologists Edwin Ardener and Shirley Ardener, Muted Group Theory (MGT) propounds that marginalized communities find themselves linguistically 'muted' within the parameters set by dominant groups (Ardener and Ardener, 1975). Central to MGT is the notion that language predominantly serves the interests of hegemonic strata, which in many societies equates men. Consequently, the lexicon and grammatical structures often inadequately capture the realities and nuances of subjugated groups, thereby effectuating their muteness (Kramarae, 1981).

Patriarchy Theory emerged from feminist discourse and posited that societies are structured in ways that empower men at the expense of women (Millett, 2016). It examines the web of institutionalized male dominance that permeates various societal dimensions, from familial roles to workplaces. The theory elucidates the power differentials manifested through the arbitrary and socially constructed nature of gender roles (Connell, 1987).

By employing MGT, this study aims to dissect the modes and strategies via which female characters are portrayed as silenced entities. From narrative spaces to a dialogic engagement, MGT assists in highlighting the

nuances of how women's voices become subjugated in the novel. Such an investigation keenly aligns with the theory's overarching premise concerning linguistic and narrative marginalization.

Simultaneously, Patriarchy Theory assists in unearthing the socio-cultural edifice that perpetuates such 'othering' and 'muteness'. It provides the scaffolding to interrogate the power structures and gender dynamics that relegate women to a subaltern position. Consequently, MGT and Patriarchy Theory operate in tandem to furnish a comprehensive analysis that satisfies the first research objective.

Therefore, an examination of *The Wasted Vigil* through the amalgamated lens of MGT and Patriarchy Theory yields a scenario of complex, multifaceted oppressions. It offers a hermeneutic architecture for investigating both the insidious and overt strategies employed by patriarchal societies to mute, marginalize, and othering of women. The research, in effect, aims to conjoin these theories to amplify their analytical potency.

Thus, this research, articulated through the prism of MGT and Patriarchy Theory, contributes, substantively, to the broader understanding of gender-based oppression within patriarchal societies. In essence, the usage of these two theories synergizes our scholarly inquiry, enriching our understanding of the textual world of *The Wasted Vigil*, a narrative set in post-9/11 Afghanistan. The characters in *The Wasted Vigil* (2008) serve as an exemplary playground for our theoretical frameworks. Female protagonists within this narrative domain demonstrate an embodiment of the challenges and inhibitions posited by both Patriarchy Theory and MGT. Marginalized, often sequestered from corridors of influence, their experiences offer a vivid tableau, confirming the theories' validity and applicability in contemporary gender studies.

### Textual Analysis

In the context of Patriarchy Theory, Hill and Allen (2021) emphasized the pervasiveness of patriarchal norms and their devastating effects on women. Through this theory, one might argue that social oppression stems from systems where male dominance is both rooted and normalize. This oppression becomes discernible in *The Wasted Vigil*, where female characters face marginalization, their lives bounded by an overwhelmingly male-centric worldview. The constraining societal structure, wherein men take on leadership roles while women are suppressed, aligns well with the Patriarchy Theory's postulates (Benstead, 2021).

The work of Buiten (2022) also mentions, particularly his focus on how patriarchal values correlate with the endorsement of gender-based violence. The novel, serving as an arena of psychological and physical constraints, illustrates these very values. Female characters often face devastating societal conditions, in part because they live in an environment where their subjugation is not just accepted but encouraged, thereby perpetuating the cycle of oppression and 'othering'.

Similarly, Muted Group Theory, initially formulated by Shirley Ardener and further developed by Kramarae (2011), offers keen insights into the manifestation of social oppression in the text. MGT proposes that women, often muted due to linguistic inequity and systemic suppression, develop alternate means of expression. However, their altered communicative strategies, born out of necessity, rarely offer them the societal standing or influence that the dominant male group enjoys (Kramarae, 2011). Such mechanisms of muting cultural, linguistic, or even economic are palpable in *The Wasted Vigil*. These factors contribute to the environment of oppression and 'othering' experienced by women, rendering them voiceless in a male-dominated discourse.

The text of the novel portrays other forms of 'othering' that go beyond gender. These include ethnicity, religion and even geopolitical origins, facets that scholars have often considered essential in discussing social oppression within patriarchal structures (Hill and Allen, 2021). It is crucial to realize that these oppressive norms are not merely relics of a bygone era but are actively sustained through both explicit and subtle means (Benstead, 2021).

In this discourse, it is vital to recognize that both theories suggest not just the existence but the perpetuation of these oppressive systems. They serve not as static conditions but as ever-evolving dynamics, continually reinforced by those who hold power and privilege in society (Buiten, 2022). By studying *The Wasted Vigil* through the dual lenses of Patriarchy Theory and MGT, one deals with the perplexed nature of social oppression and 'othering'. The two theories synergistically help in diagnosing and explicating the factors responsible for this phenomenon, making the novel a rich site for scholarly interrogation. Therefore, this section promises an intellectually rigorous examination of the social constructs that engender oppression and 'othering' in the narrative.

He now asks about the nailed books, and Marcus tells him it had been done by his wife, the unfortunate woman losing her hold on reality in her concluding days. Using her long hair to dust surfaces. He remembers to make appropriately sympathetic noises, though of course being female, it must have been easy for her to fall into madness. (*The Wasted Vigil*, p. 161)

The passage vividly illuminates key aspects of social oppression and othering, and a meticulous dissection of its contents elucidates the manifold ways these phenomena manifest within the narrative. Marcus, a character laden with entanglements, divulges to a character that his wife had nailed books to the ceiling during her last days, her mental state slowly unraveling. The character reacts with perfunctory sympathy but opines, "being female it must have



been easy for her to fall into madness." This observation reveals entrenched patriarchal attitudes that warrant unpacking through theoretical frameworks such as Patriarchy Theory and Muted Group Theory (MGT).

In this regard, the assumption that women are prone to "fall into madness" solely because of their gender embodies the essence of patriarchal biases (Hill and Allen, 2021). The statement trivializes the wife's struggles, thereby reducing her experience to mere gendered preconceptions. This attitude, as Buiten (2022) emphasizes, perpetuates male dominance and reinforces societal norms that inhibit women from breaking free from oppressive conditions. Moreover, the wife's act of nailing books a subversive act, indeed can be perceived as a desperate attempt to reclaim agency within a restricted environment, as Benstead (2021) suggests.

Muted Group Theory (MGT) also suggests pertinent view of the above passage. The wife resorts to nailing books because traditional avenues of expression are inaccessible to her. According to Kramarae (2011), women are muted not because they are inherently incapable of articulation but because dominant linguistic structures stifle their voices. In the wife's case, the muteness manifests as an almost surreal form of self-expression: nailing books and using her long hair for cleaning. These actions are seen as muted, unorthodox strategies for conveying despair and disquiet, thus aligning with MGT's premise that suppressed groups develop alternative forms of expression. Hence, this is also one of the factors responsible for women as others and socially oppressed.

It is worth noting that the wife is absent in this conversation, silenced by her demise and further muted by men discussing her. She becomes a subject of their discourse, a mere object to be talked about. The othering is thus complete she is cast as "the unfortunate woman," marginalized both in life and memory (Kramarae, 2011). The passage encompasses more than just the woman's silence; Marcus also contributes to this patriarchal dynamic. His revelation that his wife used her "long hair to dust surfaces" typifies a feminization of domestic labor, which, as Hill and Allen (2021) suggest, is a feature of patriarchal societies. Marcus does not appear to question these traditional roles but passively recounts them, thus becoming complicit in the system that silences and oppresses women.

As a matter of fiction, the excerpt acts as a condensed display of the oppressive and 'othering' mechanisms inherent in a patriarchal society. Analyzed through Patriarchy Theory and MGT, the passage elucidates how societal structures both explicit and implicit contribute to the ongoing marginalization of women. This section, hence, offers a compelling vista for scholarly investigation into the pernicious yet deeply rooted systems that perpetuate oppression and 'othering'.

Casa had longed to arrive at the moment when he'd see her... teachers had told the children that women's guile was immense, their mischief noxious, that they were evil and mean-spirited, that all the trials and misfortunes and woes that befell men came from women (The Wasted Vigil, p. 166)

The passage exhibits a range of elements that reveal societal notions on gender, thereby giving rise to social oppression and othering. Casa, who "had longed to arrive at the moment when he'd see her," grapples with a worldview heavily tinged by patriarchy and subjugation. He has been schooled to perceive women as bearers of "immense guile," "noxious mischief," "evil and mean-spirited," and as an origin of "all the trials and misfortunes and woes" (The Wasted Vigil, p. 166). Patriarchy Theory functions as an ideal lens for decoding these sentiments. The teachings Casa absorbs uphold a narrative that diminishes women's complex identities, reducing them to repositories of negative traits (Lorber, 2019). The passage echoes the notion that women exist merely as stumbling blocks in men's lives a deeply flawed perception that fosters an environment where misogyny thrives, and patriarchal ideologies hold sway. Such objectification of women supports what Hill and Allen (2021) argue: in patriarchal societies, women's objectification is often institutionalized through education, media, and social structures.

Muted Group Theory (MGT) also supplies a valuable angle for analysis. In this context, women are collectively silenced by a discourse that paints them as inherently flawed and malicious. According to Kramarae (2011), women become the 'muted' group when their voices and experiences are diminished by dominant, often male-centric, narratives. Casa's teachers, presumably male, epitomize this dominance by shaping young minds with their own skewed perceptions. This act of indoctrination validates their own belief systems and perpetuates an enduring cycle of female marginalization.

The 'othering' here is potent. It goes beyond casting women as the 'other' and attributes them qualities that ostensibly justify their inferior status. This is significant because othering does not just perpetuate difference; it legitimates inequality (Tatum, 2017). By framing women as sources of "all the trials and misfortunes and woes," the passage elevates them to an almost mythical status as destroyers, but only within a framework that limits their roles in society. Casa's inner conflict is also telling. He yearns for a meaningful encounter with a woman. Yet, remains ensnared by a destructive educational paradigm that depicts women as treacherous. This internal dissonance marks the erosion of Casa's individuality. It illustrates how societal norms and beliefs can intrude upon personal emotions and relationships, wreaking havoc with our natural inclinations.

Last month Gul Rasool was among the dozens of male politicians who had hurled abuse at a woman MP as she spoke in parliament, shouting threats to rape her. "Harassed and fearful she changes her address regularly and owns burkas in eight different colors to avoid being followed. (The Wasted Vigil, p.171)

The passage above citing the grim experiences of a woman member of parliament, undoubtedly functions as a chilling representation of the inter-sectionality of social oppression and 'othering'. Specifically, it focuses on the distressing state of affairs in parliament, where Gul Rasool leads a group of male politicians in openly harassing a female MP, a characterization of real-life parliamentarian Malalai Joya. Diving into Patriarchy Theory, the above text aptly signifies the dynamics of institutional patriarchy. According to Walby (2010), patriarchal systems perpetuate male dominance by exerting comprehensive control in public and private domains alike. The horrific threats hurled in the sacred halls of governance go beyond mere prejudice, serving to consolidate male supremacy. Additionally, the locus of this abuse is significant. It occurs in parliament, where laws are made, societal structures are debated, and the very fabric of democracy should be upheld. However, ironically, it functions as a hotbed for gender inequality.

Kramarae's Muted Group Theory (MGT) is starkly relevant here. The female MP must employ intricate survival techniques: changing residences and using a diverse range of burkas to obfuscate her identity, which inevitably muffles her presence in both the public and private spheres (Kramarae, 2011). These coping mechanisms demonstrate how women are systemically silenced, further affirming Hill and Allen's (2021) assertion that patriarchal constructs can lead to such acute levels of physical and psychological abuse.

The text's mention of the MP being "harassed and fearful" resonates strikingly with Judith Butler's ideas on the performativity of gender (1990). For Butler, gender becomes an enacted social construct, often performed under duress. Here, the victim must consistently change her residential address and disguise herself, these acts becoming involuntary performances enforced by her grim reality. Thus, her identity becomes something she must continually hide and modify, reinforcing her mutedness and marginalization.

To discuss 'othering', hooks (2000) provide a significant perspective, stating that 'othering' serves as a tool to preserve the hegemony of dominant groups. In parliament, the epitome of a democratic institution, the process of 'othering' doesn't merely function through exclusion; it operates via intimidation and threats of extreme violence, thus making the female MP the 'Other,' to be subjugated and silenced. The disquieting episode is an appalling testament to the rampant social oppression and 'othering', as fueled by patriarchal norms and power imbalances. Political settings, rather than serving as a beacon for justice and representation, can be twisted into arenas that fortify systemic gender disparities. Scholars of patriarchy and MGT provide the conceptual tools to understand the ominous implications of such social phenomena, highlighting how deeply ingrained and destructive these issues can be.

### Conclusion

As the analysis revealed, The Wasted Vigil characters exist within a structure heavily influenced by male-controlled systems. Dilemmas of female characters like Zameen, Qatrina, Dunia, Lara, and Casa were not just individual accounts but form part of a broader portrayal, pointing a collective female experience. These experiences were bound by the chains of cultural objectification, dehumanization, and what one could describe as subjugation based on gender. However, while the narrative paints a grim portrayal, it also functions as a call for scrutinizing the multifaceted levels of patriarchy that suppress women's agency.

Moreover, social structures, instead of challenging or dismantling these dynamics, often facilitate them. The findings also highlight the inherent contradictions within democratic institutions, which paradoxically contribute to social oppression. In what should be citadels of equality and fairness, the persistent behavior suggests a worrying disconnect between the principles these institutions claim to represent and their real-world implications. It is not merely that these settings allow for inequality; they act as catalysts that escalate the gravity of social malaise. Crucially, one of the most remarkable insights garnered was the way women are frequently rendered as 'Others.' In other words, they found themselves categorized into a separate, inferior social group, systematically excluded from the mainstream. It is a division that stretches beyond mere disempowerment, to a level where the marginalized become almost non-human, worthy of receiving inhuman treatment. The process of 'othering' does not only occur via explicit acts of discrimination or blatant disregard but also subtly, through threats, intimidation, and imposed invisibility. The phenomenon transcends the bounds of immediate physical or emotional harm, engendering a pernicious social climate that affects everyone within it, whether directly oppressed or not.

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