

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

In recent decades, gender equality, particularly in relation to women's rights, has become an important issue in society. This argument is supported by the feminist movement, which largely responds to issues within patriarchal society. According to Gilarek (2012), in a patriarchal society, women are frequently perceived as “the other”, and as such, they are subject to discrimination and marginalization. Marginalization itself happens when individuals or groups are pushed aside because of certain dominant ideas, such as patriarchy, ethnocentrism, and imperialism. These dominant discourses determine certain experiences to be peripheral. Therefore, marginalized people occupy a position that can be best defined in terms of the limitations of a subject's access to power (Ansari *et al.*, 2023).

In patriarchal societies, marginalized women often experience limitations on their rights and freedoms. The right to speak is one of the rights often restricted for women. One of the rights most frequently restricted is the right to speak. As explain by Mahkrukh, *et.al* (2017) Men often act as the primary contributors of this silencing, dismissing women's voices as trivial or irrational. This perception often leads them to make fun of women when they try to speak up. Given the reactions they receive when they speak, women often choose to remain silent.

Therefore, according to Firdausyiah, *et.al* (2025) They not only silence women by looking down on their opinions but also dismiss them as irrational. In addition to silencing and dismissing women's voices, men also attempt to control women's voices through physical and sexual violence. Such patriarchal attitudes cause women to lose their sense

of identity. Consequently, women may become unable to express themselves because their voices have been repeatedly dismissed.

Based on Mohammad *et al.* (2025), The power of patriarchal society have silenced women. However, through the feminist movements and postcolonial discourse, women have been risen to speak up. In addition, the shadow of silence and repression has been gradually dismissed by women through the literary works. Women complexity, autonomy, and agency have been celebrated by these works, which stand in contradiction to narratives that restrict female characters. Women resistance against the societal society suppress them has been potrays in the literature. Women's real life struggles for life, equality, freedom and self expression have been depicted in the literature this is making the movement impactful to society.

Similar themes of oppression and disbelief toward women's voices can also be found in Nicci French's novel *The Unheard* (2021), which becomes the central focus of this research. In the novel *The Unheard* (2021) by Nicci French, Tess, a single mother, lives with her daughter, Poppy Hallam, after divorcing her husband, Jason Hallam. One day, Tess notices strange behaviour in Poppy, starting with how Poppy draws unsettling pictures and does strange things. She acts increasingly strangely, unlike other children her age. Poppy often uses foul language and has many other strange habits. This confuses Tess and leads her to believe that something is wrong. After investigating Poppy's strange behavior, Tess becomes convinced that Poppy has witnessed something terrible. However, when Tess shares her concerns with other people around her and reports it to the authorities, everyone dismisses her claims, as she is perceived to be paranoid. In order to find the truth about the murder case connected to her daughter, Tess investigates the murder case and eventually obtains valid evidence. However, when she reports back to

the authorities, she is still rejected. After that, the people around Tess suggest she seek professional help. Nevertheless, Tess does not give up and continues to fight for justice, driven in part by her concern for her child. Ultimately, Tess steadfastly attempts to overcome the stigma of paranoia and continues to prove that there is a murder case that must be solved.

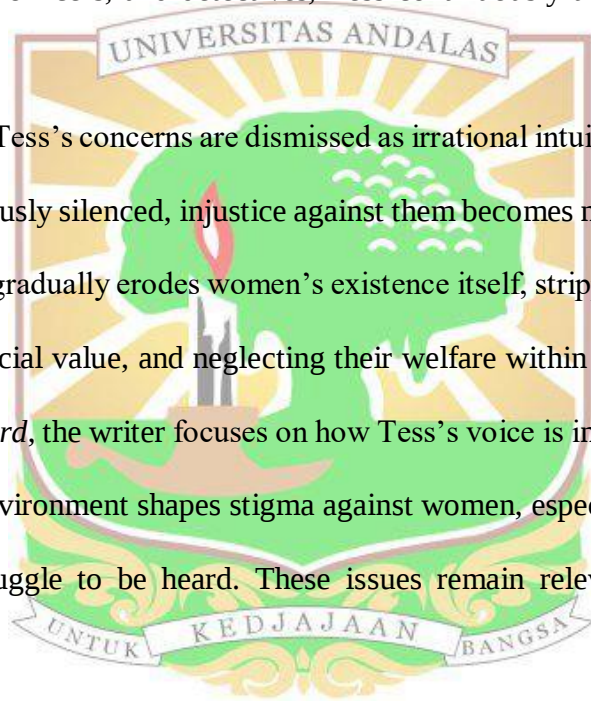
The novel illustrates society's mistreatment of a single mother, either in domestic or public spheres. Through this research, the writer will examine the existence of single mothers from a feminist perspective. Due to the perception that women are weak and defenseless, mothers frequently encounter situations in which they are not trusted. This condition is exemplified by Tess, who is a single mother. Because of the stigma or belief that women tend to think emotionally rather than rationally, single mothers frequently become the targets of injustice, especially those who occasionally rely too much on their intuition. This study can lead to further discussion about the rights of single mothers, like Tess Morreau, and the topic of women as equals to men in society.

For additionally information, the name Nicci French is a collaborative pseudonym used by the married couple Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. Nicci Gerrard and Sean French. Their contributions to contemporary literature are not limited to *The Unheard* (2021). Throughout their writing careers, this author duo has built a solid track record by publishing acclaimed novels such as *The Memory Game* (1997), *The Safe House* (1998), *Killing Me Softly* (1999), and *Beneath the Skin* (2000). This productivity has continued for more than two decades through subsequent works such as *The Red Room* (2001), *Secret Smile* (2003), *The Lying Room* (2019), and *House of Correction* (2020), before finally culminatin in *The Unheard* (2021).

1.2 Identification of the Problems

In *The Unheard* (2021), Nicci French presents how social patriarchy unfairly stigmatizes women, especially mothers, through the main character, Tess Moreau. As a mother, Tess expresses her aspiration to speak up in order to protect her daughter, Poppy, due to her concern about Poppy's peculiar behaviour, which is unusual for a child of her age. Poppy repeatedly draws disturbing pictures and says things that are not appropriate for her age, and she exhibits emotional instability and aggressive behavior. Through psychiatrists, police officers, and detectives, Tess continuously tries to make her voice heard.

However, all of Tess's concerns are dismissed as irrational intuition. As a result, when women are continuously silenced, injustice against them becomes normalized. Over time, such normalization gradually erodes women's existence itself, stripping away their rights, diminishing their social value, and neglecting their welfare within patriarchal structures. Through *The Unheard*, the writer focuses on how Tess's voice is invalidated and how the patriarchal social environment shapes stigma against women, especially mothers, as well as how women struggle to be heard. These issues remain relevant in contemporary society.



1.3 The Review of Previous Studies

To support this research, the writer reviews and analyzes articles that discuss women's marginalization and silenced voices. Some of these articles offer different perspectives and highlight earlier studies on the topic. So far, the writer has not found any research that focuses on Nicci French's *The Unheard* (2021). However, many articles and theses discuss similar topics to the one discussed in this study.

The first is a thesis entitled “Feminist Messages: Women’s Oppression, Empowerment, and Identity as Seen in *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie” by Wahyuni (2019). This thesis analyzes the main character, Olanna, who struggles against patriarchal cultural oppression. In this thesis, Wahyuni applies Jane Freedman’s feminist literary criticism theory, which explores women’s freedom within patriarchy. Furthermore, the thesis also draws on Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist theory. Wahyuni uses qualitative methods in conducting this research. The thesis depicts how oppression affects women and demonstrates the impact of education on female characters, which contributes to the formation of modern female identities. The relevance between Wahyuni’s research and the writer’s work highlights that there are multiple ways to resist patriarchal culture. If Olanna uses her intelligence as an educated woman to fight patriarchal culture, then Tess, as a mother, uses her awareness and experience of motherhood to express her voice in front of society. Moreover, it is important to note that both the thesis and the writer’s research reinforce the position of modern women, who strive to rise from their marginalized status and become empowered.

The second is a thesis entitled *Women’s Struggle Against Patriarchal Society in Four Selected Short Stories by Kate Chopin* by Gabriella (2017). In this thesis, Gabriella analyzes how women struggle against injustice in a patriarchal society through the works of Kate Chopin, specifically examining the following four works: “*Désirée’s Baby*,” “*A Respectable Woman*,” “*Her Letters*,” and “*A Pair of Silk Stockings*.” In her research, Gabriella applies feminist theory from Elaine Showalter’s perspective, specifically the theory of gynocriticism. Additionally, Gabriella incorporates Hélène Cixous’s theory of the patriarchal binary. In her analysis of the story “*Désirée’s Baby*,” Gabriella examines the role of women in politics. This story also reveals how women are unable to speak up

and express their true selves, as well as how women are viewed as inferior and distrusted, which puts them at a disadvantage. This connection between Gabriella's thesis and the writer's research lies in the existence of women who are distrusted when they speak up in public.

The third article is entitled "Challenging the Marginalization of Women in the Korean Drama Because This Is My First Life (From the Perspective of Helene Cixous's Binary of Patriarchy)," written by Eka Herlina et al. (2022), the authors explain how the Korean drama Because This Is My First Life portrays women. In this study, the authors employ Helene Cixous's theory of binary opposition. This study aims to depict the reality of women in their struggle against patriarchal culture. The results show that the Korean drama Because This Is My First Life illustrates how Korean women in the 21st century are beginning to rise from the oppression of traditional patriarchal values. This article Uses Cixous' binary opposition theory as the theoretical framework, which is also applied in the writer's current research.

The fourth article is entitled "Resistance to Phallogocentrism in *The Storm* by Women's Writing," written by Xia Zhang (2022), the author analyzes Kate Chopin's *The Storm* from the feminist perspective of Hélène Cixous through the concepts of "women's writing" and resistance to the phallogocentric system. This article demonstrates that *The Storm* represents a resistance against the repression of women's bodies in patriarchal culture, one aspect of which is the liberation of sexual desire as a primary tool for deconstructing masculine dominance. The similarity between the writer's research and the study based on this article is that both utilize Helene Cixous's theory; however, they have different research focuses. *The Storm* centers on the liberation of sexual desire and the concept of "women's writing" in the classic short story, whereas this study will

focus on narrative structure and the deconstruction of patriarchal binary thinking in the character of Tess Moreau in the contemporary novel *The Unheard* by Nicci French.

The fifth article is entitled “Living on the Edge: Women in Khaled Hosseini’s *A Thousand Splendid Suns*” by Shameem (2014). In this article, Shameem states that women’s behavior is restricted due to the patriarchal culture embedded within the social rules and norms. This patriarchal culture is also reinforced by conflict, which often brings about social change. Women become one of the victims of this social change, as their rights are severely restricted and regulated. In this article, Shameem particularly examines the impact of patriarchal culture itself. Throughout this article, Shameem analyzes examples of patriarchy, such as male control over the household and how women’s behavior and clothing are directly regulated by rules based on patriarchal culture. Additionally, women’s powerlessness makes it difficult for them to speak up in public, along with the violence and injustice that also occur due to patriarchal culture. It can be concluded that Laila and Mariam represent women who are victims of patriarchy. Meanwhile, Rasheed serves as an antagonist who represents a society that uses masculinity to oppress women and makes them suffer. This article is relevant to the writer’s research because both works reveal how men exert their dominant power to oppress women. As a result, this male dominance forces women to live under the shadow of power and fear, which indirectly silences their voices.

The sixth article is entitled “Portrayal of Marginalized Women in Atwood’s *The Handmaid’s Tale*” by Sahu (2016). In this article, Sahu reveals how Margaret Atwood, through her work *The Handmaid’s Tale* (1985), exposes the oppression of women under a totalitarian regime that marginalizes and subjugates them. Under the patriarchal rule of Gilead, women’s space and rights are limited in order to maintain patriarchal control over

them. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, handmaids under Gilead's rule are not allowed to use their own names. Another form of women's subjugation can be seen when the rulers of Gilead divide women into various categories. This categorization system further benefits the patriarchal system by weakening solidarity among women. Some women find this system unfair, while others feel it benefits them. Moreover, women under Gilead's patriarchal rule are not allowed to have privacy or security for themselves. As marginalized beings, they are constantly under surveillance. Besides that, the article also states that women in Gilead are used merely as objects to bear children. In the patriarchal system portrayed in *The Handmaid's Tale*, women are greatly disadvantaged to the extent that they are no longer valued as fully human beings.

The seventh article is entitled "The 'Marginal Woman' Anna in Doris Lessing's *The Golden Notebook*" by Danqi Li (2023). Li analyzes the character of Anna in *The Golden Notebook*. Anna is described as a novelist and an independent woman who is active in politics; however, she is a victim of marginalization by her environment, as seen in her relationship with Michael. Michael dominates Anna and treats her in a patriarchal manner, causing her to lose her identity and feel marginalized. This is exacerbated by the fact that Michael never acknowledges Anna's achievements. Additionally, Anna is marginalized by her own political group because her views differ from those of her political environment, making her feel isolated. In this article, Li indirectly suggests that women must be brave in pursuing freedom and rising above marginalization, as Anna does after being oppressed by her own partner. Anna decides to end her relationship with Michael and withdraw from her political activities, which have contributed to her increasing isolation. This article highlights the importance of women rising up against

marginalization, as Tess does by continuing to speak out through her actions despite the distrust of those around her.

The eighth article is entitled “Representation of Women as Subaltern in *Girls of Paper and Fire* by Natasha Ngan”, analyzed by Ramdi Ramadhan (2024). In his study of subaltern women, Ramadhan analyzes the impact of subalternity in the novel *Girls of Paper and Fire* (2018). In the article, Ramadhan explains the relationship between feminism and subalternity, which is rooted in patriarchal culture and attitudes. Ramadhan employs qualitative research methods and draws on Spivak’s (1985) theory of subalternity. In this article, the main character Lei, her mother, and her seven friends live in the Kingdom of Ikhara, where women are forced to accept their destiny. As long as they live under this destiny, they cannot freely express themselves due to the oppressive rules of their society, exacerbated by the patriarchal culture of the surrounding community. As a result, Lei tries to escape as she feels oppressed and threatened, but unable to do so because of the kingdom’s rigid rules. This article is relevant to the writer’s research as it applies a feminist approach to highlight the powerlessness of women in exercising their right to speak due to patriarchal culture and explores the psychological effects of gender oppression experienced by the main character. This article can be used to support the analysis in the writer’s research.

The ninth article is entitled “The Unheard Voices of Marginalized Motherhood in Every Day Is Mother’s” by SEMERCİOĞLU (2024). Duygu discusses the psychological pressure faced by a mother, Evelyn Axon, who is portrayed as gradually losing insanity due to patriarchal pressure from her surroundings. In this article, SEMERCİOĞLU utilizes Simone de Beauvoir’s feminist theory as the theoretical framework for analysis. SEMERCİOĞLU explores how a mother is marginalized by society because of her

unstable psychological condition, which stems from a tragic event that happens to her. Evelyn's condition is also influenced by her failed marriage and the burden of raising her mentally disabled child, Muriel, who is also a victim of sexual violence. According to SEMERCİOĞLU's article, Evelyn's psychological distress and criminal actions can be seen as a form of indirect protest against the oppressive system around her. This article shows a pattern similar to the writer's research, which also focuses on single mothers who are vulnerable to marginalization due to neglect from their surrounding communities.

These theses and articles address the existing research gap by exploring Women's Silenced Voices in Nicci French's Novel *The Unheard: A Feminist Reading*. The novel has not yet been examined in academic discussions. However, the subjects and themes in this study are reflected in various previous works that discuss patriarchal oppression and women's marginalization. These studies conclude that patriarchy is the main source of restrictions on women's rights. The persistence of patriarchal culture makes it difficult for women to gain freedom, particularly the freedom to express their voices. Therefore, by referring to previous research, this study aims to represent the silenced voice of women through the main character, Tess Moreau, a single mother in Nicci French's *The Unheard* (2021), as a symbol of women's struggle to reclaim their identity and voice within a patriarchal society.

1.4 Research Questions

1. What unfair treatment does Tess Moreau experience as a single mother in Nicci French's *The Unheard*, which can be considered as a form of silencing in both domestic and public spheres?
2. What are the factors that contribute to the unfair treatment experienced by Tess Moreau within her social environment?

1.5 The Scope of the Research

Since this research focuses on the main character, Tess Moreau, and how society treats her, the scope of this research is limited to intrinsic elements only. It particularly focuses on the main and minor characters and the physical and psychological conflicts experienced by Tess in her social environment.

1.6 The Objective of the Research

This research aims to analyze how a society discriminates against women, particularly through the main character Tess Moreau as presented in *The Unheard*. It specifically examines the kind of treatment Tess receives from society which can be classified as unfair and silencing. To provide a deeper analysis, this research further examines the factors behind society's unfair and silencing treatment toward Tess.

