


Terbit online pada laman web jurnal : <http://e-journal.sastra-unes.com/index.php/JILP>

 Fakultas Sastra Universitas Ekasakti	JURNAL JILP (Jurnal Ilmiah Languge and Parole) Volume 9 Nomor 2	
	ISSN : 2581-0804 (Media Cetak)	E-ISSN : 2581-1819 (Media Online)
Received: 15-04-2026	Revised: 09-05-2026	Available online: 01-06-2026

The Struggle For Female Autonomy In Leila Slimani's In The Country Of Others

¹Amelia Yuli Astuti, ^{*2}Amelia Zulfi

¹Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Ekasakti, ameliayuli127@gmail.com

^{*2}Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Ekasakti, ameliazulfi@gmail.com

*Corresponding Author

Amelia Zulfi

Fakultas Sastra, Universitas Ekasakti, ameliazulfi@gmail.com

Abstract

*This research examines the struggle of the character Mathilde in asserting her right to speak and the forms of resistance she shows against the patriarchal structure within her husband's family in Morocco. The research also highlights Mathilde's independent attitude, demonstrated through her refusal to submit to her husband's authority and her ability to make her own decisions. This research uses a qualitative approach with content analysis as the method, in which the researcher analyzes written sources such as novels, articles, and relevant books. The main focus of this study is to identify and classify the forms of Mathilde's resistance against patriarchy, as well as actions that reflect her independence. The analysis reveals 9 data points representing Mathilde's resistance to patriarchal structures and 7 data points showing her independent behavior in the novel *In the Country of Others* by Leïla Slimani. This study applies feminist theories by Tong (2014) and Djajanegara (2000) as the theoretical foundation to identify and explain the issues being analyzed. Data were obtained from written sources such as books, articles, and literary texts, and then analyzed to explore gender dynamics and women's struggles within the context of patriarchal and colonial cultures. This research contributes to the understanding of how female representation in postcolonial literature reflects complex social realities, and opens up discussion about the importance of women's voices and independence in facing oppressive systems.*

Keywords: Women, Patriarchy, Independence, Resistance, Feminism

© 2026Jurnal JILP

I INTRODUCTION

This novel, which takes up the theme of classic war fiction, depicts the struggle for identity and territory amid violence, courage, and sacrifice. It also depicts Mathilde living in a patriarchal system. "In the Country of Others" focuses on women's experiences and shifts attention away from traditional narratives that often place men at the center of the story. In the first part of a planned trilogy, loosely based on the life of Slimani's grandparents, the character Mathilde reveals her intimate and painful experiences of war and the trauma it caused. Bestselling author Leïla Slimani's latest novel tells the story of her grandmother's struggle in rural Morocco during the post-war period. Married to a Moroccan officer, this French woman struggles with the cultural differences between them, while both face increasing hostility from French settlers and nationalists demanding Moroccan independence. Volker Kaminski reads this book

This book tells the story of Mathilde, a French woman who married a Moroccan soldier, Amine, after World War II. They moved to Morocco, where they faced cultural conflicts and personal struggles amid the country's struggle for

independence. Mathilde fought against loneliness, poverty, and the constraints of patriarchy while trying to form her identity in a foreign land.

This struggle encompassed emotional, social, economic, and ideological aspects. Mathilde not only rejected patriarchal norms that limited women's roles in the household, but also fought to maintain her personal values amid conservative local cultural and religious pressures. She showed courage in expressing her opinions, making decisions regarding her children's education, fighting for access to economic resources, and building social relationships with other women in her community. Mathilde's journey from being marginalized to becoming a powerful figure in the domestic and social spheres illustrates the gradual process of achieving women's autonomy. In addition, the findings show that the most relevant feminist approaches to analyzing the characters and themes in this novel are radical feminism, Marxist feminism, and postcolonial feminism.

II RESEARCH METHODS

This method uses a qualitative approach with a text analysis method. As explained by Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach aims to understand the social meaning contained in a text or phenomenon. The main focus of this research is to examine how feminism is represented in Leïla Slimani's novel *In the Country of Others*, especially in Mathilde's struggle to gain rights as a woman in her husband's country. In this research, the feminist theory used is Rosmarie Tong's theory (2014) and Djajanegara (2000) which provides a perspective on the concept of feminism. The analysis process is carried out by identifying quotations in the novel that reflect women's struggles and ideas about gender equality. Each chapter in the novel is analyzed

systematically using a content analysis approach, which allows researchers to interpret the meaning in the text based on the concept of feminism.

Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in depth through systematic analysis of the text or data collected Khotari (2004). Therefore, this study uses a qualitative approach with a text analysis method to examine the representation of feminism in the novel *In the Country of Others*. Documentation techniques were used as a data collection method, as explained by Kothari, which allowed the researcher to identify and classify relevant quotes for further analysis.

III RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Forms of patriarchy in Mathilde's life

Data 1:

Mathilde would try to convince Mouilala that education could provide her daughter with the means to gain her independence, her freedom. But the old woman would only frown. Her expression, normally so affable, would darken, and she'd grow angry with the nassrania—the Nazarene—for preaching to her. "Why do you let her miss school? You're endangering her future." What future was this Frenchwoman talking about? What did it matter if Selma spent her days at home, if she learned to stuff intestines and sew them back up instead of covering the pages of an exercise book with ink? Mouilala had had too many children, too many worries.

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 14)

This excerpt illustrates how Mathilde attempts to encourage her mother-in-law, Mouilala, to send Selma to school, warning her: "You're endangering her future." However, Mouilala resists, asking, "What did it matter if Selma spent her days at home, if she learned to stuff intestines and sew them back up instead of covering the pages of an exercise book with ink?" This rhetorical question reflects the deeply internalized belief that a girl's primary duty lies in domestic work, not in intellectual or educational pursuits.

Mouilala, shaped by generations of patriarchal tradition, views domestic skills as more valuable than formal education for women. This aligns with the radical feminist perspective that patriarchy is a system deeply embedded in every social institution, including the family, which regulates gender roles in ways that perpetuate male dominance. As Djajanegara (2000) explains, women are not given the opportunity to pursue higher education, hold certain positions, or pursue certain professions.

However, Mouilala does not oppose but rather perpetuates these patriarchal norms. Mouilala's actions illustrate how women can become agents of patriarchy, especially when they lack access to alternative worldviews or social mobility. Mathilde's challenge to these

norms places her as a threat not only to Mouilala's authority, but also to the larger structures that define gender roles within their cultural context

Data 2 :

But Mathilde was naturally contrary and she couldn't resist the temptation to argue with him. Some evenings, when Amine came home exhausted after a day in the fields, hollowed out by worries, she would speak to him about Selma's future, about Aïcha, about all those young girls whose fate was not yet sealed. "Selma should study," she would tell him. If Amine kept calm, she would go on. "Times have changed. Think about your daughter too. Don't tell me that you intend to raise Aïcha as a submissive woman!" Then Mathilde would quote, in her Alsace-accented Arabic, the words of Lalla Aïcha in Tangier, in April 1947.

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 69)

This quote illustrates Mathilde's resistance to the patriarchal system that places men at the center of authority in the household. Through her conversation with Amine, Mathilde expresses her concerns about the future of her children, especially Selma and Aïcha, and encourages her husband to recognize the importance of education for women.

Mathilde's actions reflect her opposition to the patriarchal structure that has long limited women's roles to the domestic sphere. She does not remain silent but actively claims a voice in household decision-making, which in a patriarchal structure should be monopolized by men. This aligns with radical feminist perspectives, where the family is seen as the primary space of oppression against women (Tong, 2014). When Mathilde says, "Don't tell me you intend to raise Aïcha as a submissive woman," she rejects the social construct that views obedience as a natural trait of women and demands recognition of their right to develop intellectually and personally.

Data 3 :

and Mathilde liked to remind him of this. Didn't the nationalists themselves make a direct link between the desire for independence and the need for women's emancipation? More and more Moroccan women were educating themselves, wearing a djellaba or even European clothes. Amine would nod and grunt but make no promises

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 69)

This quote shows Mathilde's protest against gender inequality in the family, explicitly reminding Amine that women's emancipation is an integral part of the struggle for national independence. This view opposes the patriarchal construct that places women in a subordinate position, both in the domestic sphere and in the broader socio-political narrative.

The goal of feminism is to place women on an equal footing with men (Djajanegara 2000). Mathilde rejected the passive role of wife and instead put forward political views that demanded women's involvement in the process of social change. Furthermore, the postcolonial feminist approach is also relevant here, as Mathilde challenges nationalism that tends to be masculine and does not provide space for women as subjects of struggle. She shows that true independence must involve liberation from local patriarchy, which is still deeply rooted. This view is in line with postcolonial feminist thinking as discussed by Tong (2014), that the liberation of women in the non-Western world cannot be separated from the historical and cultural context that shapes it.

Data 4 :

Inside the house, the lighting was feeble and Aïcha lived in permanent dread of a power cut. Often she had to grope her way along the corridor like a blind person, hands patting the walls, cheeks wet with tears, calling out, "Mama! Where are you?" Mathilde, too, dreamed of brightness and she nagged her husband about it. How could Aïcha do her homework if she ruined her eyes trying to read in this gloom? How could

Selim run and play when he was shivering with fear?

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 45)

This quote illustrates Mathilde's resistance to the patriarchal system, in which she continues to urge her husband, Amine, to meet the household needs, particularly those related to lighting and access to electricity. Within a patriarchal structure, as explained by Tong (2014), decision-making authority lies with men, while women are often placed in passive roles, merely accepting decisions without the power to challenge them. However, in this case, the character Mathilde resists this construct. She actively voices her needs and those of her children, and refuses to remain silent about the dangerous and unsuitable conditions of her home. Mathilde's actions reflect a form of female resistance to patriarchal power in the domestic sphere, as criticized by radical feminists.

Data 5 :

Standing in the doorway of the living room, she would wait for the men faces still creased after their nap to break the bread, peel a boiled egg, and lean back against a cushion before she would finally return to the kitchen and start eating. Mathilde could not understand this at all. "It's slavery!" she said. "She spends all day cooking and then she has to wait until you've eaten! I can't believe it." Selma, sitting on the kitchen windowsill, laughed at this and Mathilde took offense.

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 15)

This quote is evidence of Mathilde's resistance to the patriarchal system embedded in her household structure. When she exclaims, "That's slavery!", Mathilde shows her rejection of the norm that requires women to wait until men have finished eating before they themselves can eat. This practice reflects an unequal division of domestic roles and ignores women's work and existence as equal subjects. Mathilde's rejection reflects a critical awareness of the injustices that have been normalized in everyday life.

Within the framework of radical feminism, as explained by Tong (2014), this is a form of resistance against a social environment that places women in a subordinate position,

particularly through domestic practices that fail to recognize women's work as productive and worthy of recognition. By explicitly voicing her disagreement, Mathilde challenges the patriarchal value system that has taken root in household culture, and shows that the domestic sphere can also be a battleground for women to achieve equality.

2. Independent Mathilde

Data 1 :

“Stupid phone, stupid farm, stupid country!” Mathilde threw the telephone against the wall and asked Tamo to lay her sister down on the living room sofa. They lit candles around Rabia; she didn't move, and in that light she looked like an adorable corpse, ready to be buried. The only reason Tamo and Aïcha said nothing—the only reason they didn't hurl themselves down on the ground and weep—was because they feared and admired Mathilde, who was now rummaging around in her medicine cabinet. She leaned over Rabia and time stopped. (In the Country of Others, 2021: 66)

This quote reflects Mathilde's emotional independence and decision-making in critical situations in the domestic environment. When Rabia was in an emergency, Mathilde did not show panic, but immediately organized the children and acted quickly to save the situation. Her assertiveness and self-control demonstrate her leadership capacity, something that is often denied to women in patriarchal systems. Within the framework of radical feminism (Tong, 2014), this reflects women's liberation from subordinate stereotypes that only place women as followers and caregivers without authority.

Furthermore, Mathilde's actions also challenge her social position as a foreign woman in a postcolonial environment that is masculine and full of cultural boundaries. Despite being in a vulnerable position, she takes full control and leads with confidence. Even children like Tamo and Aïcha hold back their emotions not out of fear, but out of admiration for their mother's

determination, showing that Mathilde's leadership is clearly recognized within the family structure. This reinforces the idea that women's independence does not always manifest itself in economic terms, but also in the ability to manage situations, take over domestic spaces, and become respected authoritative figures.

Data 2:

Aïcha had been asleep for a long time, her heart crushed by fear, when Amine came home. Mathilde started crying and screaming. She cursed this house and said she couldn't go on living this way, like savages. She refused to put her children's lives in danger for one minute longer. (In the Country of Others, 2021 : 66)

This quote explains Mathilde's rejection of her living conditions and her desire to make decisions for the safety of her children. In this scene, Mathilde opposes the domestic conditions she deems dangerous and openly expresses her rejection of an inhumane life. She refuses to live “like savages,” a phrase marking the breaking point of her patience with the situation she has endured in silence.

This rejection is not merely a momentary outburst of anger but a form of emotional and moral independence. Mathilde is no longer merely a submissive wife following her husband's decisions but begins to assert her authority over values, setting boundaries that can no longer be tolerated in her role as a mother and as an individual. She demonstrates that women have the right to reject harmful domestic structures and the power to voice their own will.

From a radical feminist perspective, as explained by Tong (2014), this action reflects resistance against the patriarchal system that places women in a subordinate position through the normalization of suffering in the domestic sphere. By explicitly stating her refusal, Mathilde not only challenges her husband, but also challenges the social order that demands women to be patient, silent, and submissive. This attitude is proof that women's independence is not only evident in physical

actions, but also in the power to determine the value of life and the courage to protect what is most important to her: her children.

Data 3:

In a confident voice, she asked: "Should I change or isn't it necessary?" Amine was speechless. Then he mumbled something about it being a night out with friends, that it wasn't suitable for a woman. "If it's not suitable for me, I don't see how it could be suitable for you." And without understanding what was happening, Amine let Mathilde follow him outside after leaving her jacket on the back of a kitchen chair and pinching her cheeks to give herself some color.

(In the Country of Others, 2021 : 22)

This quote illustrates Mathilde's independence, as she does not wait for her husband's explicit permission to express her wishes directly. When Amine says that the evening is "not suitable for a woman," this statement reflects patriarchal thinking that seeks to restrict women within certain social norms and spaces. However, Mathilde rejects this logic with a critical response "If it's not suitable for me, I don't know how it could be suitable for you." This statement challenges the double standards often imposed on women in domestic and social life.

Mathilde's attitude in this moment shows her independence of thought and courage to take an equal position in her relationship with her husband. She not only voices her objection but also successfully takes control of the social interaction something rarely given to women in a patriarchal system. Amine's passive reaction, which ultimately allows Mathilde to go out without objection, reinforces Mathilde's position as an individual who is sovereign over herself.

Within the framework of radical feminism, patriarchy limits women's mobility through cultural norms about what is considered "appropriate." When Mathilde rejects these limitations, she is freeing herself from passive domestic roles and reclaiming her rights over her body, time, and social decisions. Tong (2014)

states that the most obvious form of resistance emerges when women dare to challenge the value system that oppresses them, both verbally and symbolically as Mathilde does in this excerpt.

Data 4 :

She knew that her husband would be angry. He didn't like the way she was raising the children, her indulgence toward their feelings. He accused her of making them weak, spoiled whiners, especially their son. "That's no way to educate a man. You have to give him the resources he'll need to deal with the realities of life." In this remote house, Mathilde was afraid.

(In the Country of Others, 2021: 33-34)

This excerpt illustrates Mathilde's independence in terms of values and emotions in her role as a mother, even though it conflicts with her husband's authority. In a patriarchal system, as depicted through the character of Amine, women often have no power in determining how to raise their children. The education of boys is considered primarily a male domain, as it is related to the construction of masculinity and future public roles. Amine believes that strict education will shape boys into "true men" who are strong and emotionally resilient.

However, Mathilde maintains her own approach more empathetic and based on love. Although she knows that her actions will anger Amine, she chooses to uphold the values she believes in, namely that boys also have the right to be treated with emotional humanity. This shows that Mathilde does not fully submit to patriarchal logic in her household and dares to create an alternative educational space for her children.

From a radical feminist perspective, as argued by Tong (2014), patriarchy oppresses women not only through physical or economic power, but also through control over how women raise and educate their children. When Mathilde rejects her husband's masculine and harsh parenting style, she is freeing herself from patriarchal norms that require women to submit to male logic in shaping the family. Her attitude reflects value independence, a form of

independence in which women dare to uphold personal principles that contradict social pressure and unequal power relations.

Data 5 :

But then he began to have doubts. What madness was this? How could he think he could live with a European woman as free as Mathilde? Thanks to her and her contradictory nature, he felt as if his life was governed by a pendulum, swinging him from one hysterical crisis to another...

(In the Country of Others , 2021 : 70)

This quote explains how Mathilde's independence creates tension within the patriarchal structure of the household, particularly from the perspective of her husband, Amine. Amine describes Mathilde as a woman who is "free" and "rebellious," two traits that directly clash with patriarchal expectations of a submissive, obedient, and loyal wife. He considers Mathilde's freedom to be a form of "madness" rather than an expression of personal agency. This reflects how, in a patriarchal system, women who display independence are

often labeled negatively, as bringers of chaos or sources of disorder.

Amine wants a woman like his mother: passive, silent, intuitively understanding of her husband, and fulfilled only by feeding him. This ideal image reflects the traditional patriarchal structure that confines women to the domestic sphere and makes them servants of men's emotions and needs. Amine's desire for submission shows that Mathilde, with all her courage to speak, argue, and think critically, has stepped outside the patriarchal cultural framework that Amine is trying to maintain.

Within the framework of radical feminism, as explained by Tong (2014), the patriarchal system will always feel threatened by women who dare to take an equal position or refuse to submit to the roles imposed upon them. Mathilde not only demonstrates independence in her thoughts and actions, but also shakes her husband's value system, to the point that Amine longs for the "ideal" model of a submissive and silent woman. This shows that women's independence is not only a form of personal freedom, but also a political act that challenges the structural dominance of patriarchy.

IV CONCLUSION

Based on an analysis of Leïla Slimani's novel *In the Country of Others*, it can be concluded that women's struggle for autonomy is depicted through various forms of resistance by the main character, Mathilde. This struggle encompasses emotional, social, economic, and ideological aspects. Mathilde not only rejects patriarchal norms that limit women's roles in the household but also strives to uphold her personal values amid the pressure of conservative local culture and religion. She demonstrates courage in expressing her opinions, making decisions regarding her children's education, fighting for access to economic resources, and building social relationships with other women in her community. Mathilde's journey from being an outcast to becoming a powerful figure in the domestic and social spheres illustrates the gradual process of achieving women's autonomy. Furthermore, the findings show that the most relevant feminist approaches to analyzing the characters and themes in this novel are radical

feminism, Marxist feminism, and postcolonial feminism. From a radical feminist perspective, Mathilde's resistance to her husband's dominance and traditional gender norms reflects women's efforts to challenge the patriarchal system. Marxist feminism is evident in her struggle against economic inequality within the household and how women's domestic work is not valued equally. Meanwhile, the postcolonial approach highlights the complexity of Mathilde's position as a foreign woman who must negotiate local cultural values, religious pressures, and national identity. These three approaches reveal that women's struggles are not only personal but also involve broader social and political structures.

Mathilde's journey depicts the transformation of a woman striving for independence in a patriarchal society. Her choice not to fully rely on traditional structures demonstrates that independence is not merely a personal choice but a form of resistance against

oppressive norms. Mathilde's character challenges the decisions made by her husband, Amine, for the sake of their children. Her independence is also evident when she tries to protect her family from Amine's anger. Additionally, her independence is shown when

she attempts to teach the local community how to care for their children.

This research reveals that the novel *In the Country of Others* contains complex representations of women's struggles in the face of patriarchy, economic inequality, and postcolonial cultural pressures.

Bibliography

- [1]Andriani, V., & Dewi, R. S. (2024). Feminism of the main character in the Bird Box movie. *Infinity: Professional Journal of English Education*, 7(4), 898–903.
- [2]Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.
- [3]Desmawati, E. (2018). *Analysis of feminism in the novel of Little Women by Louisa May Alcott. Journal of Language and Literature*, 6(2), 91–96. <https://doi.org/10.35760/jll.2018.v6i2.2487>.
- [4]Djajanegara, S. (2000). *Kritik sastra feminis: Sebuah pengantar*. Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama.
- [5]Jaggar, A. M. (1983). *Feminist politics and human nature*. Routledge, 110-112.
- [6]Kesuma, D., & Susilowati, E. (2018). An Analysis of Characterization and Liberal Feminism Value Of the Main Character “ BELLE ” In the Beauty and The Beast 2017 MOVIE. 2010, Ngudi Waluyo University,16–26.
- [7]Kothari, C. R. (2004). *Research methodology: Methods and techniques* (2nd ed.). New Age International Publishers.
- [8]Mardiyani, R., Tawami, T. (2022). Gender Inequality and Feminism in Arundhati Roy’S the God of Small Things. *MAHADAYA: Jurnal Bahasa, Sastra, Dan Budaya*, 2(2), 165–174
- [9]Mitchell, J. (1974). *Psychoanalysis and feminism: Freud, Reich, Laing and women*. Pantheon Books
- [10]Slimani, L. (2021). In the Country of Others (S. Harvey, Trans.). Faber & Faber
- [11]Tong, R. (2014). *Feminist thought: A more comprehensive introduction* (4th ed.). Westview Press
- [12]Üstün, K., & Süren, A. (2022). Feminism, historical origins of feminism and basic concepts. *Dünya İnsan Bilimleri Dergisi (World Journal of Human Sciences)*, 2022(2), 151–169. <https://doi.org/10.55543/insan.1127334>
- [13]Vinka, A., Ratna, D. S. (2024). Feminism of The Main Character in the Bird Box. 7(4), 898–903.
- [14]Wahyuni, S., El Firdausi, S., & Fitriyah, F. (2024). Analysis of the Main Character Using Feminism Approach in Film Enola Holmes 2. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*, 11(1), 1–17.